Fletcher 1844 George Fletcher, [Macbeth: Shakespearian criticism and acting], Westminster Review, March 1844, 1--72.

1

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Art. I. -- *Macbeth.* Knight's Cabinet Edition of Shakspere. No. XXX. Saturday, 12th August, 1843.

We select for notice this most perfect, as well as neatest and cheapest, of the cabinet editions that have yet appeared of *Shakespeare's own* 'Macbeth', because, amongst all the beautiful and valuable Shakespearian reprints which its publisher has given to the world, this is the one which, taken altogether, most strikingly illustrates the degree in which not only our theatrical interpretation, but our literary criticism of the great dramatic artist, with all their tendency to improvement in recent years, are still behind the results produced by the zeal and ability which have been exerted in facilitating general access to the pure *text* of his plays. On the one hand, such very serious moral considerations are involved in forming a right estimate of each of the two leading characters in this peculiarly romantic and terrific tragedy, and of their mutual relation; while, on the other, so much critical misconception has been circulated respecting them, and so much theatrical misrepresentation still daily falsifies them to the apprehension of the auditor; that, in "these time-bettering days," we might reasonably have expected to see a popular edition of 'Macbeth,' prepared, in other respects, with so much care and diligence, come forth accompanied by some editorial indication, at least, of that gross perversion of its most essential meaning, which critic and actor have so long concurred to fix in the public mind. No such indication, however, appears in the "Introductory Remarks" to the edition of this play issued at the very recent date above specified. Nor is this at all owing to the great abridgment which its editor's illustrative matter has undergone for the purpose of this cheaper publication. On turning to the 'Pictorial Shakspere' (Part XXXI, April 1842), we find him telling us, in the Supplementary Notice to 'Macbeth:' --

> "To analyse the conduct of the plot, to exhibit the obvious and the latent features of the characters, to point out the proprieties and the splendours of the poetical language, -- these are duties which, however agreeable they may be to ourselves, are scarcely demanded

2

by the nature of the subject; and they have been so often attempted, that there is manifest danger of being trite and wearisome if we should enter into this wide field. We shall, therefore, apply ourselves as strictly as possible to an inquiry into the nature of that poetical Art by which the horrors of this great tragedy are confined within the limits of pleasurable emotion."

And in the course of this examination, the writer, incidentally, yet very fully, expresses his concurrence in those established critical views respecting the characters and the moral of this drama, which we feel that such important reasons call upon us to controvert.

It is remarkable enough that, while it has been usual to judge, we think too harshly, regarding the moral dignity of a character such as Hamlet's for instance, a kind of sympathy has been got up for Macbeth, and a sort of admiration for his partner in iniquity, such as, we are well persuaded, the dramatist himself never intended to awaken. Misled in this direction, Hazlitt, for example, tells us, in the course of his rapid parallel between the character of Macbeth and that of Richard the Third: -- "Macbeth is full of 'the milk of human kindness,' is frank, sociable, generous. He is tempted to the commission of guilt by golden opportunities, by the instigations of his wife, and by prophetic warnings. Fate and metaphysical aid conspire against his virtue and his loyalty." Let us proceed to examine, by the very sufficient light of Shakespeare's text, and by that alone, how far this view of Macbeth's character is just, on the one hand, towards the hero himself and to the other leading personages of the drama, -- on the other, to the poet's own fame, whether as a dramatist or a moralist.

'Macbeth' is inspired by the very genius of the tempest. This drama shows us the gathering, the discharge, and the dispelling of a domestic and political storm, which takes its peculiar hue from the individual character of the hero. It is not in the spirit of mischief that animates the "weird sisters," nor in the passionate and strong-willed ambition of Lady Macbeth, that we find the main-spring of this tragedy, but in the disproportioned though poetically-tempered soul of Macbeth himself. A character like his, of narrow selfishness, with a most irritable fancy, must produce, even in ordinary circumstances, an excess of morbid apprehensiveness; which, however, as we see in him, is not inconsistent with the greatest physical courage, but generates of necessity the most entire moral cowardice. When, therefore, a man like this, ill enough qualified even for the honest and straightforward transactions of life, is tempted and induced to snatch at an ambitious object by the commission of

one great sanguinary crime, the new and false position in which he finds himself by his very success will but startle and exasperate him to escape, as Macbeth says, from "horrible imaginings," by the perpetration of greater and greater actual horrors, till inevitable destruction comes upon him, amidst universal execration. Such, briefly, are the story and the moral of 'Macbeth.' The passionate ambition and indomitable will of his lady, though agents indispensable to urge such a man to the one decisive act which is to compromise him in his own opinion and that of the world, are by no means primary springs of the dramatic action. Nor do the weird sisters themselves do more than aid collaterally in impelling a man, the inherent evil of whose nature has pre-disposed him to take their equivocal suggestions in the most mischievous sense. And, finally, the very thundercloud which, from the beginning almost to the ending, wraps this fearful tragedy in physical darkness and lurid glare, does

but reflect and harmonize with the moral blackness of the piece. Such is the magic power of creative genius -- such the unerring instinct of sovereign art!

The very starting-point for an inquiry into the real, inherent, and habitual nature of Macbeth himself, independent of those particular circumstances which form the action of the play, lies manifestly, though the critics have commonly overlooked it, in the question, -- With whom does the scheme of usurping the Scottish crown by the murder of Duncan actually originate? We sometimes find Lady Macbeth talked of as if she were the first contriver of the plot and suggester of the assassination; but this notion is refuted, not only by implication, in the whole tenor of the piece, but most explicitly by that particular passage where the lady, exerting "the valour of her tongue" to fortify her husband's wavering purpose, answers his objection --

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

by saying

> "What beast was it, then,
> *That made you break this enterprise to me?*
> ---------- Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, *and yet you would make both,*" &c.

More commonly, however, the *Witches* (as we find the "weird sisters" pertinaciously miscalled by all sorts of players and of critics) have borne the imputation of being the first to put this piece of mischief in the hero's mind. Thus, for instance, Hazlitt, in the account of this play from which we have already made one quotation, adopts Lamb's view of the relation between

Macbeth and the *witches,* as expressed in one of the notes to his 'Specimens of Early Dramatic Poetry.' "Shakespeare's witches," says Lamb, speaking of them in comparison with those of Middleton (that is, comparing two things between which there is neither affinity nor analogy), "originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination." Yet the prophetic words in which the attainment of royalty is promised him contain not the remotest hint as to the means by which he is to arrive at it. They are simply --

> "All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter;" --

an announcement which, it is plain, should have rather inclined a man who was *not* already harbouring a scheme of guilty ambition, to wait quietly the course of events, saying to himself, as even Macbeth observes, while ruminating on this prediction, --

> "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
> Without my stir."

So that, according to Macbeth's own admission, the words of the weird sisters on this occasion convey anything rather than an incitement to murder to the mind of a man who is not meditating it already. "This supernatural soliciting" is only made such to the mind of Macbeth by the fact that he is already occupied with a purpose of assassination. This is the true answer to the question which he here puts to himself: --

> "*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? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> *My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,*
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smothered in surmise; and nothing is,
> But what is not."

How, then, does Macbeth really stand before us at the very opening of the drama? We see in him a near kinsman of "the gracious Duncan," occupying the highest place in the favour and confidence of his king and relative, -- a warrior of the greatest prowess, employed in suppressing a dangerous rebellion and repelling a foreign invader, aided also by the treachery of that thane of Cawdor whose forfeited honours the grateful king bestows on his successful general. Yet all the while this man, so actively engaged in putting down other traitors, cherishes

against his king, kinsman, and benefactor, a purpose of tenfold blacker treason than any of those against which he has been defending him, -- the purpose, not suggested to him by any one, but gratuitously and deliberately formed within his own breast, of murdering his royal kinsman with his own hand, in order, by that means, to usurp his crown. With every motive to loyalty and to gratitude, yet his lust of power is so eager and so inordinate, as to overcome every opposing consideration of honour, principle, and feeling. To understand aright the true spirit and moral of this great tragedy, it is most important that the reader or auditor should be well impressed at the outset with the conviction how bad a man, independently of all instigation from others, Macbeth must have been, to have once conceived such a design under such peculiar circumstances.

The first thing that strikes us in such a character is, the intense selfishness -- the total absence both of sympathetic feeling and moral principle, -- and the consequent incapability of remorse in the proper sense of the term. So far from finding any check to his design in the fact that the king bestows on him the forfeited title of the traitorous thane of Cawdor, as an especial mark of confidence in his loyalty, this only serves to whet his own villainous purpose. The dramatist has brought this forcibly home to us, by one of his master-strokes of skill, in the passage where he makes Macbeth first enter the king's presence at the very moment when the latter is reflecting upon the repentant end of the executed thane: --

> "Duncan. There's no art

To find the mind's construction in the face;
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust."

Then to Macbeth, as he enters: --

"O worthiest cousin!
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before,
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks and payment
Might have been mine! -- only I have left to say,
More is thy due than more than all can pay.
Macb. The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part
Is to receive our duties: and our duties
Are to your throne and state, children and servants;
Which do but what they should, by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honour.

Dun. Welcome hither:
I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
To make thee full of growing.
---------- From hence to Inverness,
And bind us further to you.
Macb. The rest is labour, which is not used for you:
I'll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach;
So, humbly take my leave.
Dun. My worthy Cawdor!
Macb. (aside). 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. [Exit.
Dun. True, worthy Banquo; he is full so valiant;
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. Let us after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:
It is a peerless kinsman."

Here, surely, is a depth of cold-blooded treachery which is truly immeasurable -- seeing that the "peerless kinsman" is really gone before to "make joyful the hearing of his wife" with the news that they are to have immediately the wished-for opportunity of murdering their worthy kinsman and sovereign. It is from no "compunctious visiting of nature," but from sheer moral cowardice -- from fear of retribution in this life -- that we find Macbeth shrinking, at the last moment, from the commission of this enormous crime. This will be seen the more, the more attentively we consider his soliloquy: --

"If it were *done* when 'tis done, then 't were well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow

Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, --
We'd jump the life to come. But, in these cases,
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bare the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim horsed
Upon the sightless coursers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind."

Again, to Lady Macbeth:

"We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honoured me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon."

In all this we trace a most clear consciousness of the impossibility that he should find of masking his guilt from the public eye, -- the odium which must consequently fall upon him in the opinions of men, -- and the retribution which it would probably bring upon him. But here is no evidence of true moral repugnance -- and as little of any religious scruple: --

"We'd jump the life to come."

The dramatist, by this brief but significant parenthesis, has taken care to leave us in no doubt on a point so momentous towards forming a due estimate of the conduct of his hero. However, he feels, as we see, the dissuading motives of worldly prudence in all their force. But one devouring passion urges him on -- the master-passion of his life -- the lust of power:

"I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent; but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps its sell,
And falls on t'other side."

Still, it should seem that the considerations of policy and safety regarding this life would ever have withheld him from the actual commission of the murder, had not the spirit of his wife come in to fortify his failing purpose. At all events, in the

action of the drama it is her intervention, most decidedly, that terminates his irresolution, and urges him to the final perpetration of the crime which he himself had been the first to meditate. It therefore becomes necessary to consider Lady Macbeth's own character in its leading peculiarities.

It has been customary to talk of Lady Macbeth as of a woman in whom the love of power for its own sake not only predominates over, but almost excludes every human affection, every sympathetic feeling. But the more closely the dramatic development of this character is examined, the more fallacious, we believe,

this view of the matter will be found. Had Shakespeare intended so to represent her, he would probably have made her the first contriver of the assassination scheme. For our own part, we regard the very passage which has commonly been quoted as decisive that personal and merely selfish ambition is her all-absorbing motive, as proving in reality quite the contrary. It is true that even Coleridge/* desires us to remark that, in her opening scene, "she evinces no womanly life, no wifely joy, at the return of her husband, no pleased terror at the thought of his past dangers." We must, however, beg to observe, that she shows what she knows to be far more gratifying to her husband at that moment, the most eager and passionate sympathy in the great master wish and purpose of his own mind. Has it ever been contended that Macbeth shows none of the natural and proper feelings of a husband, because their common scheme of murderous ambition forms the whole burden of his letter which she has been perusing just before their meeting? In this epistle, be it well observed, after announcing to her the twofold prediction of the weird sisters, and its partial fulfilment, he concludes: -- "This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness; that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell." Can anything more clearly denote a thorough union between this pair, in affection as well as ambition, than that single expression, *My dearest partner of greatness?* And, seeing that his last words to her had contained the injunction to lay their promised greatness to her heart as her chief subject of rejoicing, are not the first words that she addresses to him on their meeting the most natural, sympathetic, and even obedient response to the charge which he had given her? --

> "Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
> Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> This ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in the instant!"

We do maintain that there is no less of affectionate than of ambitious feeling conveyed in these lines, -- nay more, that it is her prospect of *his* exaltation, chiefly, that draws from her this burst of passionate anticipation, breathing almost a lover's ardour. Everything, we say, concurs to show that, primarily, she cherishes the scheme of criminal usurpation as *his* object -- the attainment of which, she mistakenly believes, will render him happier as well as greater; -- for it must be carefully borne in

/* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii, p. 244.

mind that, while Macbeth wavers as to the adoption of the means, his longing for the object itself is constant and increasing, so that his wife sees him growing daily more and more uneasy and restless under this unsatisfied craving. His own previous words and conduct, as laid before us in the first scenes of the drama, prove the truth of her own statement of the matter in her first soliloquy: --

"Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have me;
And *that which rather thou dost fear to do*
Thou wishest should be undone.'"

Her sense of the miserable state of his mind, between his strengthening desire and his increasing irresolution, is yet more forcibly unfolded in that subsequent scene where she says to him: --

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

She is fully aware, indeed, of the moral guiltiness of her husband's design -- that he "would wrongly win;" and of the suspicion which they are likely to incur, but the fear of which she repels by considering "What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?" Nor is she inaccessible to remorse. The very passionateness of her wicked invocation, "Come, come, you spirits," &c., is a proof of this. We have not here the language of a cold-blooded murderess -- but the vehement effort of uncontrollable desire, to silence the "still, small voice" of her human and feminine conscience. This very violence results from the resistance of that very "milk of human kindness" in her own bosom, of which she fears the operation in her husband's breast: --

"Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it."

Of religious impressions, indeed, it should be carefully noted that she seems to have even less than her husband.

On the other hand, it is plain that she covets the crown for her husband even more eagerly than he desires it for himself. With as great or greater vehemence of passion than he, she has

none of his excitable imagination. Herein, we conceive, lies the second essential difference of character between them; from whence proceeds, by necessary consequence, that indomitable steadiness to a purpose on which her heart is once thoroughly bent, which so perfectly contrasts with the incurably fluctuating habit of mind in her husband. She covets for him, we say, "the golden round" more passionately even than he can covet it for himself; nay, more so, as it seems to us, than she would have coveted it for her own individual brows. Free from all the apprehensions conjured up by an irritable fancy -- from all the "horrible imaginings" that beset Macbeth; her promptness of decision and fixedness of will are proportioned to her intensity of desire; so that, although he has been the first contriver of the scheme, she has been the first to resolve immovably that it shall be carried into effect. From this moment the position of Macbeth's mind, as regards his own design, is entirely changed. His freedom of action ceases, and her will becomes a *fate* to him. He cannot help himself; she swears him to the deed: --

> "Had I so sworn,
> As you have done to this."

He could have broken his promise to himself again and again, but he cannot break that oath to her, the keeping of which, she well knows, is but the fulfilment of his own increasing desire.

Still, fearing that "his nature" will shrink at the moment of execution, she determines to commit the murder with her own hand. Hence her invocation to the "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts," to "unsex" her, &c.; and hence that part of her reply to Macbeth's announcement of Duncan's visit: --

> "He that's coming
> Must be provided for: and you shall put
> This night's great business into my despatch;
> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.
> ---------- Only look up clear;
> To alter favour ever is to fear:
> *Leave all the rest to me.*"

Yet, notwithstanding her invocation to the spirits of murder to fill her, "from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty;" -- notwithstanding her assurance to Macbeth --

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

yet we find her own hand shrinking at the last moment from the act which she had certainly sworn to herself to perform, -- and that from one of those very "compunctious visitings of nature" which she had so awfully deprecated in herself, -- awakened, too, by an image which, however tender, is less pathetic to

her woman's contemplation than the one presented by that extreme case which her last-cited speech supposes: --

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

So strong, after all, is "the milk of human kindness" against the fire of human passion and the iron of human will! And so the execution still devolves upon the wicked but irresolute hand of the original assassin, Macbeth himself.

And now it is that all his previous apprehensions of odium and of retribution rise up in his imagination against the deed, in more terribly vivid and concentrated array; to oppose which he feels within him no positive stimulant bit that of pure ambition. This finally proves insufficient; and he falls back to the counter-resolve, "We will proceed no further in this business." But it is now too late: there is that immovably planted behind him which he more dreads to encounter than all the dangers and censures in the world beside -- sarcastic reproof from the woman whom he loves, if he loves any human being, -- and, which makes it most formidable of all, from the woman who, he knows, devotedly *loves him.* It is plain that he has no retreat; "the valour of her tongue" *must* prevail over "all that impedes him from the golden round." Her exordium is formidable enough: --

"Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dressed yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such I account thy love."

Then comes the bitter imputation of moral cowardice: --

"Art thou afear'd
To be the same in thine own art and valour,
As thou art in desire?" &c.

And his effort to repel the charge --

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

only serves to bring upon him, most deservedly, the withering and resistless retort --

"What *beast* was it, then,
That *made you break this enterprise to me?*

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves -- and *that their fitness now*
Does unmake you."

This unanswerable sarcasm upon his (a man's and a soldier's)

irresolution, is driven home with tenfold force by the terrible illustration which she adds of her own (a woman's) inflexibility of will -- "I have given suck," &c. No longer daring to hint at compunction, Macbeth now falls back upon his last remaining ground of objection, the possibility that their attempt may not succeed --

"If we should fail?" --

Her quiet reply, "We fail!" is every way most characteristic of the speaker, -- expressing that moral firmness in herself which made her quite prepared to endure the consequences of failure; and, at the same time, conveying the most decisive rebuke of such moral cowardice in her husband as could make him recede from a purpose merely on account of the possibility of defeat -- a possibility which, up to the very completion of their design, seems never to have been absent from her own mind, although she finds it necessary to banish it from that of her husband: --

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

Up to this moment, let us observe, the precise mode of Duncan's assassination seems not to be determined on, but is now first proposed to the vacillating mind of Macbeth by his self-possessed lady: --

"When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a-fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?"

Macbeth receives this as a sort of blessed revelation, showing him the way out of his horrible perplexity. In admiration at his

wife's cool ingenuity, as contrasted with his own want of masculine resolution, he exclaims --

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

Feeling now that he must do the deed, and do it that night, he catches eagerly at her suggestion of the mode, and hurries on to the act, in order to escape from his "horrible imaginings;" --

"Will it not be received,

When we have marked with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber, and used their very daggers,
That they have done 't?
  Lady M. Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
Upon his death?
  Macb. I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat."

Still, he expects to be supported, in the act of murder, by her personal participation: -- "When *we* have marked with blood those sleepy two .... and used their very daggers," &c. But we learn, from her subsequent soliloquy, that when she had "drugged their possets," and "laid their daggers ready," her woman's nature shrunk at last from participation in the actual deed, finding or fancying that the sleeping king looked like her father, so that the sole performance of the assassination rests upon her husband. He has time, while waiting for the fatal summons which she is to give by striking on the bell, for one more "horrible imagining:" --

"Is this a dagger which I see before me? &c.
---------- There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes."

And no sooner is this vision dissipated, than his restless imagination runs on to picture most poetically the sublime horror of the present occasion: --

"Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead," &c.

The sound of the bell dismisses him from these horrible fancies, to that which, to his mind, is the less horrible fact: --

"I go, and it is done," &c.

It is done, indeed. But the "horrible imaginings" of his anti-

cipation are trivial compared to those which instantly spring from his ruminations on the perpetrated act: --

"Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more,*" &c.

Sleep no more. -- These brief words involve, we shall see, the whole history of our hero's subsequent career.

In proceeding to consider the second grand phasis in the mutual development of these remarkable characters, it is most important that we should not mistake the true nature of Macbeth's nervous perturbation while in the very act of consummating his first great crime.

The more closely we examine it, the more we shall find it to be devoid of all genuine compunction. This character, as we have said before, is one of intense selfishness, and is therefore incapable of any true moral repugnance to inflicting injury upon others:

it shrinks only from encountering public odium and the retribution which that may produce. Once persuaded that these will be avoided, Macbeth falters not in proceeding to apply the dagger to the throat of his sleeping guest. But here comes the display of the other part of his character, -- that extreme nervous irritability which, combined with active intellect, produces in him so much highly poetical rumination, and, at the same time, being unaccompanied with the slightest portion of self-command, subjects him to such signal moral cowardice. We feel bound the more earnestly to solicit the reader's attention to this distinction, since, though so clearly evident when once pointed out, it has escaped the penetration of some even of the most eminent critics. The poetry delivered by Macbeth, let us repeat, is not the poetry inspired by a glowing or even a feeling heart -- it springs exclusively from a morbidly irritable fancy. We hesitate not to say, that his wife mistakes, when she apprehends that "the milk of human kindness" will prevent him from "catching the nearest way." The fact is that, until after the famous banquet scene, as we shall have to show in detail, she mistakes his character throughout. She judges of it too much from her own. Possessing generous feeling herself, she is susceptible of remorse. Full of self-control, and afflicted with no feverish imagination, she is dismayed by no vague apprehensions, no fantastic fears. Consequently, when her husband is withheld from his crime simply by that fear of contingent consequences which his fancy so infinitely exaggerates, she, little able to conceive of this, naturally ascribes his repugnance to that "milk of human kindness," those "compunctious visitings of nature," of which she *can* conceive.

This double opposition between the two characters is yet

more strikingly and admirably shown in the dialogue between them which immediately follows the murder. So soon as Macbeth finds himself, for the moment, safe from discovery, he lapses into his old habit of ill-timed rumination upon the nature and circumstances of the act he has just committed, which touch his fearful fancy vividly enough, but his heart not at all. So long as the effect of the immediate shock continues, he runs on, luxuriating, as it were, in the most poetical view of his own atrocity -- the finest poetry that the fancy and the intellect can produce unaided by the heart, but not a jot more tending to affect his conduct for the future, or produce contrition for the past, than the ruminations of Hamlet, for instance, have power to stimulate his acts. On the other hand, it is interesting to see how Lady Macbeth takes to heart, as he delivers them, the considerations which merely serve as asort of grave amusement to his imagination. Impressed with the erroneous notion, drawn from the consciousness within her own breast, that he suffers real remorse, she at first endeavours to divert him from his reflections by assuming a tone of cool indifference. To his first exclamation, "This is a sorry sight!" she answers, "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight." And when he goes on -- "There's one did laugh in his sleep, and one cried, 'Murder!'" she merely observes, "There are two lodged together." But when, still running on, he says, --

"Listening their fear, I could not say, amen,
When they did say, God bless us," --

she, really touched by the words of compunction which he is only talking, is moved to say, "Consider it not so deeply." And when his runaway imagination, merely urged on by her attempts to check its career, has rejoined --

"But wherefore could not I pronounce amen?
I had most need of blessing, and amen
Stuck in my throat," --

his fancied and spoken remorse is felt by her so keenly as to make her exclaim --

"These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, *it will make us mad.*"

We shall find occasion, after a while, to revert to this remarkable presentiment of hers. Meanwhile, there is not really any danger that these ruminations will drive *Macbeth* mad. So soon as his inflamed imagination has exhausted its blaze, he will be cool and collected enough, until the next disturbing occasion sets it on fire again.

Through all the rest of this scene, however, he remains lost

in his profitless rumination, leaving the business but half executed, on the completion of which depends, not only the attainment of the object of his ambition, but even his escape from detection as the murderer. On the other hand, her consciousness of the imminent peril which hangs over them both, recals Lady Macbeth from that momentary access of compunction to all her self-possession. Finding her husband still "lost so poorly in his thoughts," quite beyond recovery, she snatches the daggers from his hands, with the famous exclamation, "Infirm of purpose!" And here, let us observe, is the point, above all others in this wonderful scene, which most strikingly illustrates the twofold contrast subsisting between these two characters. Macbeth, having no true remorse, shrinks not at the last moment from perpetrating the murder, though his nervous agitation will not let him contemplate for an instant the aspect of the murdered. Lady Macbeth, on the contrary, having real remorse, does recoil at the last moment from the very act to which she had been using such violent and continued efforts to work herself up; but, being totally free from her husband's irritability of fancy, can go deliberately to look upon the sanguinary work which her own hand had shrunk from performing.

The following scene shows us Macbeth when his paroxysm ensuing upon the act of murder has quite spent itself, and he is become quite himself again -- that is, the cold-blooded, cowardly, and treacherous assassin. Let any one who may have been disposed, with most of the critics, to believe that Shakespeare has delineated Macbeth as a character originally remorseful, well consider that speech of most elaborate, refined, and cold-blooded hypocrisy in which, so speedily after his

poetical whinings over his own atrocity in murdering Duncan, he alleges his motives for killing the two sleeping attendants: --

"Macbeth. O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.
Macduff. Wherefore did you so?
Macb. Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man:
The expedition of my violent love
Outran the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood;
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature,
For ruin's wasteful entrance: there the murderers,
Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breeched with gore. Who could refrain,
That had a heart to love, and in that heart
Courage to make his love known?"

No; a character like this, we cannot too often repeat, is one purely of the most cowardly selfishness and most remorseless treachery, which all its poetical excitability does but exasperate into the perpetration of more and more extravagant enormities.

How finely is the progressive development of such a character set before us in the course of the following act, in all that relates to the assassination of Banquo: and here, again, do we find the contrast between the moral natures of the husband and the wife brought out more completely than ever. The mind of Lady Macbeth, ever free from vague apprehensions of remote and contingent danger, seems oppressed only by the weight of conscious guilt; and fearful is the expression of that slow and cureless gnawing of the heart, which we find in her reflection, at the opening of the second scene, upon the state of her feelings under her newly-acquired royal dignity: --

"Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

Here is truly the groaning of "a mind diseased" -- the corroding of "a rooted sorrow."

Her very next words, addressed to her royal husband, whose presence she has requested apparently for this ong are exhibit at once the continued mistake under which she supposes the gloom and abstraction which she observes in Macbeth to proceed from the like remorse, and the magnanimity with which, hiding her own suffering, she applies herself to solace his: --

"How now, my lord? why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without remedy
Should be without regard: what's done, is done."

Here is still the language of a heart fully occupied with the

weight of guilt already incurred, and by no means contemplating a deliberate addition to its amount. But, alas: Macbeth's repentance for the crime committed has long been expended; his restless apprehensiveness is wholly occupied with the nearest danger that, he thinks, now threatens him; and to his exaggerating fancy the nearest danger ever seems close at hand. Most distinctly is this placed before us in his own soliloquy after parting with Banquo in the preceding scene -- for he, like Hamlet, is a great soliloquist: --

"To be thus, is nothing;
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo

Stick deep; and 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 rebuked; as, it is said,
Mark Antony's was by Cæsar."

So much for the moral cowardice which cannot resign itself to await some more definite cause of apprehension from a man than what is to be found in his habitual qualities, and in qualities, too, which are noble in themselves. Now, mark the intense selfishness implied in the following reflections: --

"He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him; then, prophet-like,
They hailed him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If it be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! --
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance!"

What a depth, we say, of the blackest selfishness is here disclosed! It is not enough for Macbeth to have realized so speedily all the greatness that the weird sisters had promised him, by virtue, as he supposes, of preternatural knowledge, unless he can prevent the accomplishment of the prediction which, by virtue of the very same knowledge, they have made in favour of the race of Banquo after Macbeth's own time. His desire to prevent even this remote participation of Banquo's issue in the greatness for which he thinks himself partly indebted to this "metaphysical aid," is so infatuatedly headstrong as to make him absolutely, as he says, enter the lists against fate.

And now we behold all the difference between the irresolution of this man in prosecuting an act from which his nervous apprehensions operated to deter him, and the unshrinking, unrelenting procedure of the same character in pursuit of a murderous purpose to which his fears impel him. Sure enough now of his own resolution, Macbeth feels no need of his wife's encourage-

ment to keep him to his object of assassinating Banquo: he does not even lose time in communicating it to her, before he gives his instructions to the murderers; wherein we must observe, the cool, ingenious falsehood with which he excites the personal rancour of these desperados against his intended victim, exhibits the inherent blackness of this character no less forcibly than it is shown in the speech above quoted, describing his murder of Duncan's chamberlains.

So far, then, from being in that compunctious frame of mind which his wife supposes when addressing to him the words of expostulation already cited, he is in the diametrically opposite mood, eagerly anticipating the execution of his second treacherous murder, instead of being contrite for the former. Her imputation of remorse, therefore, he finds exceedingly importunate; and answers it in terms not at all corresponding, but intended, on the contrary, to prepare her for the disclosure of his present design against Banquo: --

> "We have scotched the snake, not killed it;
> She'll close, and be herself; whilst our poor malice
> Remains in danger of her former tooth."

Here is not a syllable of remorse, but the earnest expression of conscious insecurity in his present position. The drift of his discourse, however, is not yet apparent. He proceeds: --

> "But let
> The frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of those terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly."

By dreams, indeed, they both are shaken; but Lady Macbeth's, as the dramatist most fully shows us afterwards, are exclusively dreams of remorse for the past; Macbeth's, of apprehension for the future. He continues: --

> "Better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstacy. Duncan is in his grave;
> After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
> Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
> Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
> Can touch him further!"

The lady's answer --

> "Come on,

Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks:
Be bright and jovial 'mong your guests to-night," --

shows us that she still has not the smallest glimpse of the real tendency of what he is saying to her, but supposes "the torture

of the mind" which he feels, is that same "compunctious visiting" which has made her exclaim to her own solitary heart --

"'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

Macbeth returns to the charge: he seizes on her last words --

"Be bright and jovial 'mong your guests to-night,"

in order to turn their conversation upon Banquo: --

"So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you:
Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence both with eye and tongue."

Having thus fixed her attention upon the primary importance to their safety, of Banquo's dispositions towards them, he now ventures the first step in the disclosure of his fears: --

"Unsafe the while that we
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams;
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are."

Still his lady takes not the smallest hint of his purpose, but refers all his uneasiness to regret for what is already committed, simply rejoining, "You must leave this." Macbeth, according to his nature, irritated at finding her so inaccessible to his meaning, can no longer control himself, but <>exclains at once: --

"O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives."

She simply answers,

"But in them nature's copy's not eterne."

This line has been interpreted by some critics as a deliberate suggestion, on Lady Macbeth's part, of the murder of Banquo and his son. This, however, we believe, will not appear to any one who shall have gone through the whole context as we have now laid it before the reader. The natural and unstrained meaning of the words is, at most, nothing more than this, that Banquo and his son are not immortal. It is not she, but her husband, that draws the practical inference from this harmless proposition --

"*There's* comfort yet; *they are assailable.*"

That "they are assailable" may be "comfort" indeed to him,

but it is evidently none to her, notwithstanding that he proceeds: --

"Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
His cloistered 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."

Still provokingly unapprehensive of his meaning, she asks him anxiously, "What's to be done?" But he, after feeling the way so far, finding her so utterly indisposed to concur in his present scheme, *does not dare* to communicate it to her in plain terms, lest she should chide the fears that prompt him to this new and gratuitous enormity, by virtue of the very same spirit that had made her combat those which had withheld him from the one great crime which she had deemed necessary to his elevation. Thus, at least, by all that has preceded, are we led to interpret Macbeth's rejoinder --

"Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed."

It is only through a misapprehension, which unjustly lowers the generosity of her character, and unduly exalts that of her husband, that so many critics have represented this passage as spoken by Macbeth out of a magnanimous desire to spare his wife all guilty participation in an act, which at the same time, they tell us, he believed would give her satisfaction. It is, in fact, but a new and signal instance of his moral cowardice. That, after his poetical invocation, "Come, seeling night," &c., she still sees not at all into his purpose, is evident from what he says at the end, "Thou marvell'st at my words," &c. And it is remarkable that, to the grand maxim with which he closes their dialogue, --

"Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill,"

she answers not a word.

We come now to consider the great banquet scene, which presents to us Macbeth's abstracted frenzy at its culminating point. This we must examine in elaborate detail, since it involves the consideration of one of the grossest brutalities that still disfigure the acting of Shakespeare on his native stage.

In order to understand clearly the nature and meaning of the apparition of Banquo to the eyes of his murderer, we should revert to that very distinct indication of the most marked peculiarity of all in Macbeth's character which is given us from his own mouth in the scene where he first encounters the weird sisters. Here we are first made acquainted with that morbidly and uncontrollably excitable imagination in him, the workings of which amount to absolute hallucination of the senses: --

"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? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:

22

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that *function*
Is smothered in surmise; and nothing is,
But what is not.
Banquo. Look, how our partner's rapt."

"Nothing is, but what is not;" that is, the images presented to him by his excited imagination are so vivid as to banish from him all consciousness of the present scene -- "function is smothered in surmise." The "horrid image," even in that vague and remote prospect, has such reality for him as to make his heart palpitate and his hair bristle on his head. No wonder, then, that when on the very point of realizing the murder hitherto but fancied, his vision should be beguiled by images yet more vivid and moving. He not only *sees* the air-drawn dagger which he tries to clutch -- he *sees* the spots of blood make their appearance on it while he is gazing. But he immediately recognizes the illusion: --

"There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes."

He becomes clearly conscious that this apparition is neither more nor less than

"A dagger of the mind; *a false creation,*
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain."

Nor are we aware that any manager has ever yet bethought himself of having an actual dagger suspended from the ceiling before the eyes of Macbeth's representative, by way of making this scene more intelligible to his audience.

So far, however, we have only had to consider Macbeth's horrors in anticipation of his first great crime. We come now to those of his retrospection; and here we find the disturbance of his senses to be equally great, and their hallucination equally decided -- only, this time, it is his ears instead of his eyes that "are made the fools of the other senses:" --

"Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more!*
Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast; --
Lady M. What do you mean?
Macb. Still it cried, *Sleep no more!* to all the house;
Glamis hath murdered sleep; and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!

23

Lady M. Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things."

When we consider how literally this fancied prediction of sleeplessness is fulfilled, as we hear from Lady Macbeth's own lips -- "You lack the season of all natures, sleep," while the stimulus to "the heat-oppressed brain" goes on so fearfully accumulating, is it wonderful that the very peculiar combination of circumstances under which, at his royal banquet, he proposes the health of his second victim, should irresistibly force upon his vision another "false creation" -- a Banquo "of the mind?" It would be absolutely inconsistent with all we have known of him before, that this should not be the case. He takes his seat at table in a state of the most anxiously excited, momentary expectation of receiving the news of that second assassination, which is to deliver him from "the affliction of those terrible dreams that shake him nightly" -- to "cancel and tear to pieces that great bond which keeps him pale." The news is brought him, and immediately his horrors of the other class, those of retrospection upon his own treacherous and sanguinary deed, assail him with redoubled force. However, with his usual over-eagerness to obviate suspicion, he ventures upon one of his speeches of double-refined hypocritical profession: --

"Here had we now our country's honour roofed,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present,
Whom may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance!"

Here the speaker miscalculates his powers of self-command. The very violence which the framing of this piece of falsehood compels him to do to his imagination, makes the image of the horrid fact rush the more irresistibly upon his "heat-oppressed brain." It could hardly be otherwise than that the effort to say, "Were the graced person of our Banquo present," &c., must force upon his very eyes the aspect of his victim's person as he now vividly conceived it from the murderer's description, with severed throat, and "twenty trenched gashes on his head." The complete hallucination by which Macbeth takes his own "false creation" for a real, objective figure, apparent to all eyes, is but a repetition, under more aggravated excitement than ever, of what, we have seen, had taken place in him several times before, in the previous course of the drama. In like manner, the second apparition in the course of the banquet is produced to Macbeth's vision by a second violent effort of his tongue to con-

tradict his feelings and the fact, with yet more subtle falsehood than before: --

"I drink to the general joy of the whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;
Would he were here!"

Again, we see, the apparition is no other than Macbeth's consciousness of the actual aspect of Banquo's corpse, as contrasted

with the living Banquo whose presence he affects to desire: --

"Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!"

How this public exhibition of his uncontrollable frenzy operates upon the state of Macbeth's fortunes, is admirably indicated in one of his own characteristic ruminations, at the end of his first paroxysm: --

"Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been performed,
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end: but now they rise again,
With *twenty mortal murders on their crowns,*
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murder is."

Herein we see expressed, at once, Macbeth's character and his destiny. Murderers before him had been able to keep their own counsel; but his feverish imagination does in effect raise his victim from under ground to push him from his stool, by letting the murder out through his own abstracted ravings. His lady has only just time to hurry out their guests, before he utters that concluding exclamation which does all but explicitly confess the fact of Banquo's assassination: --

"It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs, and understood relations, have,
By magot-pies, and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood."

This second paroxysm over, his very consciousness that his loss of self-possession has betrayed him into awakening general suspicion, excites his apprehensions of danger from others to the utmost pitch of exaggeration. He had said of Banquo, before giving orders for his murder, "There is none but he, whose

being I do fear." But now, he not only speaks of Macduff as the next great object of his distrust, --

"How sayst thou, that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?"

but he has begun to suspect everybody: --

"There's not a one of them, but in his house
I keep a servant feed."

Now, since Macbeth's grand maxim of security is, to destroy everybody whom he does suspect, he no longer limits his views to individual assassinations, but is launched at once upon an

ocean of sanguinary atrocity: --

"*For mine own good,*
All causes shall give way; I am in blood
Stept in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er:
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand;
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned."

The slaughter of Macduff's family in revenge for his own escape is only the first of these "strange things," the series of which is expressed in those words of Macduff to Malcolm: --

"Each new morn,
New widows howl; new orphans cry; new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland, and yell'd out
Like syllable of dolour;" --

and more particularly in those of Rosse to Macduff: --

"Alas, poor country;
Almost afraid to know itself! It cannot
Be called our mother, but our grave: where nothing,
But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile;
Where sighs, and groans, and shrieks that rend the air,
Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
A modern ecstacy; the dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd for whom; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere they sicken.
Macduff. O, relation
Too nice, and yet too true!"

And now comes the realization of Macbeth's own presentiment expressed in the soliloquy which precedes his final resolution to perpetrate the murder of Duncan: --

"But, in these cases,
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return

To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commands the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

The fulfilment, in his own case, is thus expressed in the words of one of his revolted thanes: ---

"Angus. Now does he feel
His secret murders sticking on his hands:
Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach;
Those he commands, move only in command,
Nothing in love: now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief;" --

while from abroad --

"The English power is near, led on by Malcolm,
His uncle Siward, and the good Macduff:
Revenges burn in them; for their dear causes
Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm
Excite the mortified man."

Finding himself almost bereft of human support in his usurped dominion, Macbeth, in his purely selfish clinging to self-preservation, is now thrown, for exclusive alliance, upon his "metaphysical aid" implied in the predictions of the weird sisters. Here, therefore, it becomes necessary to consider the nature and operation of that preternatural agency, the use of which by the poet stamps this drama with so peculiar a character.

In a merely picturesque and poetical view, the weird sisters, with their anonymous personality, their nameless deeds, and their equivocal oracles, -- with their wild, and withered, and lightning-blasted aspect, looking like something dropped from the thunder-cloud, -- form, as it were, a harmonizing link between the moral blackness of the principal subject and the tempestuous heaven that lours over it. But far more important as well as interesting it is, to trace the great moral purpose designed and effected by the dramatist, in developing by this means, more fully and strikingly than could have been done by merely human machinery, the evil tendencies inherent in the individual nature of his hero.

The first indications that are given us of the character of these mysterious beings, in the *living and speaking* drama, which is what we must constantly endeavour to keep before our mind's eye in studying the works of Shakespeare, we find in the external figure under which they present themselves to the spectator, amid thunder and lightning, at the opening of the

piece. This figure, in all its essentials, is indicated by the words of Banquo on first beholding them: --

"What are these,
So wither'd, and so wild in their attire;
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? -- You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so."

We see at once that these are no human beings at all -- no witches in the proper sense of the term -- but spirits of darkness clothed under an anomalously human appearance. The aspect corresponding to these indications, prepares us, at the rising of the curtain, for the first utterance of their grotesque and mysterious language --

"When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

wherein their essentially mischievous nature is denoted by their inseparable association with physical and material storm. The next words --

"When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won,"

begin to unfold to us the interest which these beings take in human discord and disaster.

"Where the place? Upon the heath.
There to meet with Macbeth."

Here we have the first intimation of that spirit of wickedness existing in Macbeth which developes itself in the progress of the piece. From this first moment, the reader or auditor should be strictly on his guard against the ordinary critical error of regarding these beings as the originators of Macbeth's criminal purpose. Macbeth attracts their attention and excites their interest, through the sympathy which evil ever has with evil -- because he already harbours a wicked design -- because mischief is germinating in his breast, which their influence is capable of fomenting. It is most important, in order to judge aright of Shakespeare's metaphysical, moral, and religious meaning in this great composition, that we should not mistake him as having represented that spirits of darkness are here permitted absolutely and gratuitously to seduce his hero from a state of perfectly innocent intention. It is plain that such an error at the outset

vitiates and debases the moral to be drawn from the whole piece. Macbeth does not project the murder of Duncan because of his encounter with the weird sisters; the weird sisters encounter him because he has projected the murder -- because they know him better than his gel master does, who tells us, "There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face." But these ministers of evil are privileged to see "the mind's construction" where human eye cannot penetrate -- in the mind itself. They repair to the blasted heath because, as their mistress Hecate says afterwards of Macbeth, "something wicked this way comes."

"I come, Graymalkin! --
Paddock calls. Anon!"

Here we feel the connection of these beings with the world invisible and inaudible to mortal senses. It is only through these mysterious answers of theirs that we know anything of the other beings whom they name thus grotesquely, sufficiently indicating spirits of deformity akin to themselves, and like themselves rejoicing in that elemental disturbance into which they mingle as they vanish from our view: --

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air."

The more, let us observe, that the wild, uncouth rhymings of Shakespeare's weird sisters are examined, the more deeply significant will they be found -- the more consistently expressive of that peculiar individuality which their creator has given them among the world of evil spirits. Not a word of merely random incoherence or unintelligibility, as would have been the case with any inferior artist. Thus, after the scene between kin Duncan and the messengers from the field of battle, which acquaints us with Macbeth's position at the outset of the drama as a victorious warrior, suppressing a rebellion and repelling an invasion, the "sisters" met at the appointed place upon the blasted heath, are allowed, before Macbeth's arrival, to disclose more particularly the character of their spiritual deformity, especially the one whose chief delight seems to be in sea-storm and shipwreck: --

"A sailor's wife had chesnuts in her lap," &c.

It is in the evening of the same stormy day on which the weird sisters make their first appearance, that they meet the fellow-captains, Macbeth and Banquo, returning from their victory. We are strikingly reminded of this by the first words of Macbeth to his companion as they enter --

"So foul and fair a day I have not seen;"

that is, fair in the success of their arms, and foul in its tempestuous weather. It is important to observe, that the expressions of enquiring surprise which escape from the chieftains on first beholding these apparitions, sufficiently show that Shakespeare conceived them as quite independent of anything which the superstition of the time in which the story is laid may be supposed to have imagined: they are as new and strange to the fancy as they are to the eyes of their beholders. It is instructive, also, to mark the first indications given us of the strong difference of character between Banquo and Macbeth, by the very different tone in which they address these novel personages. Banquo uses the language of cool and modest enquiry: --

"Live you? or are you aught
That man may question?" &c.

But Macbeth betrays at the very first his habit of selfish, headstrong wilfulness, and overbearing command: --

"Speak, if you can. What are you?"

Banquo continues in the same reasonable and moderate strain towards beings whom he feels to be exempt from his control: --

"I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show?"

It is not until they have already spoken to Macbeth that he

requests them to speak to himself: --

"My noble partner
Ye greet with present grace, and great prediction
Of noble having, and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal; to me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate."

But Macbeth persists in *commanding* them to speak: --

"Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more.
---------- Say, from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, *I charge you.*"

Yet, when first addressed by Banquo, they had given a distinct sign that they were not accessible to human questioning: --

"Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? -- You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips."

They return, indeed, no word of answer to either of their human interlocutors; their enigmatical announcements are clearly premeditated and purely gratuitous. Let us now mark the way in which these are respectively received by Macbeth and by his comrade. Banquo, indifferent to their speeches, neither hoping nor fearing anything from them, simply exclaims, in doubt whether his senses have not deceived him: --

"The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanish'd?
Were such things here, as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten of the insane root,
That takes the reason prisoner?"

But from the moment that their words point to the object upon which Macbeth's ambitious cupidity is already remorselessly bent, his coolness of judgment abandons him; he is no longer in a condition to speculate on the nature or the trustworthiness of these strange informants; but, as in every such case of absorbing, headlong desire, believes everybody and everything that <>foretels to him the attainment of what he so violently covets. At first, as Banquo tells us, "he seems rapt withal." Then he proceeds to demand more particular information from them, as if their testimony were of indubitable veracity. No matter that he sees them vanish at last "as breath into the wind;" still he says "Would they had staid!" and to the incredulous Banquo, "Your children shall be kings," as if to draw from him the flattering rejoinder, "*You* shall be king," which he earnestly follows up with saying --

"And thane of Cawdor, too -- went it not so?"

It is not surprising, then, that after the startling announcement of his being actually created thane of Cawdor, he should regard the weird sisters as undoubted prophetesses of truth, and their "shalt be king hereafter," as an encouragement to his guilty purpose by truly predicting its success: --

"Glamis, and thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind. --------
Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them? ---------
---------- Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme."

The same undoubting faith in these strange predictions appears in his letter to his wife: --

"They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the

perfectest report *they have more in them than mortal knowledge. . . .* This I have thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness; that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of *what greatness is promised thee.*"

Lady Macbeth's eagerness for the attainment of their common object being, as we have remarked already, yet more violent and passionate than her husband's, she is even less at leisure than he to deliberate as to the trustworthiness of such promises. She promptly echoes his expressions of belief: --

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised."

Again: --

"The golden round
Which *fate and metaphysical aid doth seem*
To have thee crown''d withal."

And once more, on first beholding Macbeth after this announcement: --

"Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!"

We have noticed already that fine illustration which the poet gives us of the operation of intense selfishness, incapable of veneration as of sympathy, in Macbeth's abortive endeavour to defeat that part of the preternatural prediction which relates to Banquo's posterity. Equally characteristic is the eagerness wherewith, after the grand banquet scene -- which has left him,

as he knows, an object of universal suspicion, who consequently suspects everyone, and distrusts all human support -- he repairs to consult those very mysterious informants whose oracles he has just been attempting to belie: --

"I will to-morrow
(Betimes I will) unto the weird sisters:
More *shall* they speak; for now I am bent to know,
By the worst means, the worst: *for mine own good*
All causes shall give way."

Well may their mistress, Hecate, say of him to the sisters: --

"All you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful; who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you."

Truly, Macbeth in his extremity shows little reverence for those whom he seems now to regard as his only protectors: --

"How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags?
What is't you do? ----
I conjure you, by that which you profess
(Howe'er you come to know it), answer me:

Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodg'd, and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces, and pyramids, do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germins tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you!"

This, surely, is the very sublimity of passionate and overbearing self-will. But Macbeth is now to be punished for his late attempt to cheat his infernal benefactors, as he supposes them to be. Says Hecate to her subordinates: --

"But make amends now: get you gone,
And at the pit of Acheron
Meet me i' the morning; thither he
Will come to know his destiny.
Your vessels, and your spells, provide,
Your charms, and everything beside:
I'm for the air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal, fatal end.
Great business must be wrought ere noon:
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:
And that, distill'd by magic sleights,
Shall raise such artificial sprights

As, by the strength of their illusion,
Shall draw him on to his confusion."

Let us observe, in corroboration of the view for which we have already contended -- that the weird sisters are not represented by Shakespeare as the original tempters of Macbeth, -- that Hecate here charges them, not as having presumed without her concurrence *to lead him into temptation,* but simply *to take part in his wicked intentions: --*

"How did you dare
To *trade and traffic with Macbeth*
In riddles and affairs of death;
And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never call'd to bear my part,
And show the glory of our art?"

In their first encounter with the murderer in intention, it will be remembered that the weird sisters refuse all answer to the enquiries of himself and his companion; but now that, under

their mistress's command, they are to go beyond mere equivocation, and administer direct instigation, they vouchsafe reply to his questions: --

"--------- Speak. -- Demand. -- We'll answer. --
Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,
Or from our masters'?"

To which Macbeth replies, in his usual imperious fashion, --

"Call them, let me see them."

And when the apparition of the armed head rises, he goes on in the same strain of presumptuous command, as if everything in heaven, earth, or hell, were bound to yield to his selfish will:

"Tell me, thou unknown power;" --

but is checked by one of the sisters --

"He knows thy thought;
Hear his speech, but say thou nought."

He knows thy thought. Herein, again, we see distinctly indicated the spirit of the interference which these evil agents are permitted to exercise. They do but flatter Macbeth in the thoughts he has already conceived -- they do but urge him along the course upon which he has spontaneously entered: --

"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! *beware Macduff --*
Beware the thane of Fife. -- Dismiss me: -- Enough."

Macbeth, however, is not to be so easily silenced: --

"Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution thanks;
Thou hast harp'd my fear aright. *But one word more.*"

Again he has to be told,

"He will not be commanded. Here's another,
More potent than the first."

The first words of counsel delivered by this apparition of the bleeding child -- "Be bloody, bold, and resolute," do but "harp" the eager predetermination of Macbeth, as the former apparition had "harped his fear." But now comes the really equivocal though seemingly plain assurance --

"Laugh to scorn the power of man,
For *none of woman born shall harm Macbeth.*"

He goes on with his interminable questioning: --

"What is this,
That rises like the issue of a king,
And wears upon his baby brow the round
And top of sovereignty?"

This time, to silence him, if possible, more effectually, the sisters all join in telling him: -- "Listen, but speak not." He has already, we see, received the assurance of *invulnerability* from personal attack: he now receives that of *invincibility* against conspiracy and invasion: --

"Be lion-mettled, proud; and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.
Macb. That will never be," &c.

Not satisfied, however, with these full assurances, as he considers them, of security to his life and to his rule, he continues:

"Yet my heart
Throbs to know one thing. Tell me (if your art
Can tell so much) shall Banquo's issue *ever*
Reign in this kingdom?"

And the admonition given him by the sisters, "Seek to know no more," only draws from him the ungrateful exclamation: --

"I *will* be satisfied. Deny me this,
And *an eternal curse fall on you!*"

Yet, when his demand is granted, and the shadowy procession of Banquo's royal descendants begins to pass before him, he cries out --

"Filthy hags!

Why do you show me this?"

and concludes with those words of selfish disappointment, "What, is this so?" It is the more necessary that we should cite the answer which one of the sisters makes to this query, because it is, now-a-days, unaccountably omitted on the stage, to the great damage of this scene, since it is not only remarkable as the final communication made by these evil beings to their wicked consulter, but is the most pointedly characteristic of their diabolical nature. It is the exulting mockery with which the fiend pays off the presumptuous criminal who has so insolently dared him: --

"Ay, sir, all this is so. But why
Stands Macbeth thus amazedly? --
Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprights,
And show the best of our delights;
I'll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antique round;
That this great king may kindly say,
Our duties did his welcome pay."

35

And so dancing they disappear.

"Macbeth. Where are they? Gone? Let this pernicious
hour
Stand aye accursed in the calendar! --
Come in, without there!
Enter Lenox.
Len. --------- What's your grace's will?
Macb. Saw you the weird sisters?
Len. ------- No, my lord.
Macb. Came they not by you?
Len. ------- No, indeed, my lord.
Macb. Infected be the air whereon they ride,
And damn'd all those that trust them!"

Yet he goes on trusting them, having lost all other reliance. Thus, finding his thanes all deserting him, he says: --

"Bring me no more reports -- let them fly all:
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequents, pronounced me thus: --
'Fear not, Macbeth; *no man that's born of woman,*
Shall e'er have power on thee.' Then fly, false thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures:
The mind I sway by, and the heart i bear,
Shall never sag with doubt, nor shake with fear."

Nevertheless, doubt and fear beset him at the entrance of the very next messenger of ill news: --

"The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!" &c.

And when the approach of the English force is announced to

him, forgetting his predicted safety, he says --

"This push
Will cheer me ever, *or disseat me now;*" --

and proceeds with the well-known anticipatory rumination: --

"I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf:
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, but dares not."

More *poetical whining,* we must observe, over his own most merited situation. Yet Hazlitt, amongst others, talks of him as "calling back all our sympathy" by this reflection. Sympathy, indeed! for the exquisitely refined selfishness of this most odious

personage! This passage is exactly of a piece with the famous one in which he envies the fate of his royal victim, and seems to think himself hardly used, that Duncan, after all, should be better off than himself: --

"Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further!"

Such exclamations, from such a character, are but an additional title to our contempt: the man who sets at nought all human ties should at least be prepared to abide in quiet the inevitable consequences. But the moral cowardice of Macbeth, we see, is consummate. He cannot resign himself to his fate. The more seemingly desperate his situation becomes, the more he clings to his sole remaining source of encouragement, shadowy as it is --

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

And when Birnam forest is actually come to Dunsinane, still he only "begins"

"To doubt the equivocation of the fiend,
That lies like truth."

Still he finds one reliance left, in that straw which, to his selfish, cowardly fears, looks like a staff of security: --

"What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none."

Nothing, again, can be more characteristic than the exclama-

tion when his castle is surrounded, and nothing is left him but his individual life: --

"Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them."

No, indeed! Macbeth is no Brutus! For a man to encounter the sword of his enemy, requires only physical courage; but to die upon his own, demands the highest moral resolution. And when Macduff appears before him, it is not compunction that draws from him the confession --

"Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back -- my soul is too much charg'd
With blood of thine already."

It is, that the words of the preternatural monitor are still ringing in his ear -- "Beware Macduff -- beware the thane of Fife."

Compelled to fight, he avails himself of the first pause, while he is yet unwounded, to persuade his antagonist of his invulnerability: --

"Thou losest labour:
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born."

When Macduff has acquainted him with the peculiarity of his own birth, there is no want of physical courage, we must observe, implied in Macbeth's declining the combat. He might well believe that now, more than ever, it was time to "beware Macduff." He is at length convinced that "fate and metaphysical aid" are against him; and, consistent to the last in his hardened and whining selfishness, his consciousness of the intense blackness of his own perfidy interferes not to prevent him from complaining of falsehood in those evil beings from whose very nature he should have expected nothing else: --

"And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense,
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope!"

There is no cowardice, we say, in his declining the combat under such a conviction. Neither is there any courage in his renewing it; for there is no room for courage in opposing evident fate. But the last word and action of Macbeth are an expression of the *moral* cowardice which we trace so conspicuously throughout his career; he surrenders his life that he may not "be baited with the rabble's curse." So dies Macbeth, shrinking from deserved opprobrium; but he dies, as he has lived, *remorseless.*

It is now time to follow out the development of the very different character of his lady, as shown in the very different end to which she is brought by purely mental suffering.

We have seen the passionate desire of Lady Macbeth for her husband's exaltation overbearing, but not stifling, her "compunctious visitings;" until she finds "the golden round" actually encircling the brow of her equally ambitious but more selfish consort. We have seen the stings of conscience assailing her with fresh violence so soon as that sustained effort ceased which she had felt to be necessary for going "the nearest way" to her lord's elevation and her own; but again, we have seen them silenced for the time in the new effort which she finds imposed upon her to soothe, as she supposes, those pangs of remorse in her husband's breast which are not only tormenting himself, but betraying his guilty consciousness to all the world. But the

close of the great banquet scene, which we have already considered, presents a new phasis of her feelings. She finds that her expostulations, whether in the strain of tenderness or of reproof, are alike powerless to restrain the workings of his "heat-oppressed brain." From the moment that she finds it necessary to say to their guests --

> "I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse;
> *Question enrages him;* at once, good night:
> Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once;" --

from that moment, we find her brief and quiet answers to his enquiries breathing nothing but the anxious desire to still his feverish agitation by what, she is now convinced, is the only available means -- the most compliant gentleness. Her observation --

> "You lack the season of all natures, sleep,"

expresses her deep conviction that, if any treatment can cure or assuage his mental malady, it must be a soothing one, and that alone. But his very reply to this gentle exhortation shows us that her power to me is fears, and consequently to control his excesses, is utterly at an end: --

> "My strange and self-abuse
> Is the initiate fear, that *wants hard use:*
> *We are yet but young in deed.*"

Up to this point, be it observed, she is ignorant of Banquo's assassination; neither has her husband acquainted her distinctly with his designs against Macduff; henceforth he has no confidants whatever but his preternatural counsellors, who spend no more advice upon him than is just sufficient to confirm him in his infatuated course. It seems to be only from common rumour that his lady learns the destruction of Macduff's family, and the career of reckless violence which it opens on her husband's part, to the utter contempt of all human opinion, and sundering of all human attachment to his person or his rule. Their first great criminal act, the murder of Duncan, she had fondly thought should

"to all their days and nights to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

Mistaking, as we have seen, her husband's character, she foresaw not at all that he would both hold and act upon the maxim that --

"Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill," --

that is, he would perversely make his very safety consist in

getting deeper into danger. But now she finds that the very deed which was to establish him for ever, has precipitated him into inevitable destruction; she feels that but for the incitement administered by her own unbending will, that deed would not have been committed; that consequently, that very pertinacity of his, which she expected was to make the lasting greatness of the man in whose glory all her wishes in this life were absorbed, had sealed his black, irrevocable doom. Nor is this all: the horrible undeception as to one part of his character involves a yet more cruel one respecting another part. To find that all she had mistaken in Macbeth for "the milk of human kindness" was but mere selfish apprehensiveness, involves the conviction that he is capable of no true affection, no thorough confidence, even towards *her.* From the moment that he fails, as we have seen, to gain her concurrence in his design against Banquo, he shuts up his counsels utterly from her, and leaves her to brood in solitude over her unimparted anguish; depriving her even of that diversion and solace which her own wretched thoughts would still have found in the endeavour to soothe and tranquillize *his* agitations. With awful truth does Malcolm's observation to Macduff come home to the case of this despairing lady: --

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

Sustained by the prosperity of her husband, or even by his confidence and sympathy in adversity, her mental resolution might long have been proof against those latent stings of remorse which we have shown to be ineradicably planted in her heart. But bereft alike of worldly hope and of human sympathy, the consciousness of ineffaceable guilt re-awakens with scorpion fierceness in her bosom; and now we have the awful comment upon that expression of forced indifference which she had uttered to her husband -- "A little water clears us of this deed" -- in her steep-walking exclamations, -- "Yet here's a spot. ---- Out, damned spot! out, I say! ---- What! will these hands ne'er be clean? ---- Here 's the smell of the blood still. -- All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. -- Oh! oh! oh!" Yes, *there* is the constant burden, the damned spot, the smell of the blood still, in the irrevocableness of the deed -- *her* deed in effect, though not in conception -- which has plunged them both into the deepest abyss of ruin. To that reflection her lonely heart is abandoned; to that it is chained, as on "a wheel of fire!" But around this central and predominant impression, we find, in the course of her brief and incoherent revelations, confusedly trans-

posed, like reflections from some shattered convex mirror, the

40

whole circle of circumstances conducing to or consequent on the great decisive act. First, there is her previous chiding of his nervous apprehensions, -- "Fye, my lord, fye! -- a soldier, and afear'd? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?" Then comes the horror of the murdering moment, -- "One, two! Why, then, 'tis time to do't. -- Hell is murky!" Then, her equally horrid reminiscence of the sanguinary spectacle which her lord's pusillanimity had compelled her to look upon, -- "Yet who would have thought the old man to have hac so much blood in him!" Then, the effort to tranquillize her husband's first agitation after the murder, -- "Wash your hands, put on your night-gown; look not so pale. ---- To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. ---- To bed, to bed, to bed." Then, her effort to still his supposed remorse, -- "What's done cannot be undone." Next, her chiding of his agitated behaviour in public, -- "No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that; you mar all with this starting." ---- "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave." And finally, that burst of mere helpless commiseration, -- "The thane of Fife had a wife -- where is she now?" Here, we say, is rapidly traced the whole dreadful series of consequences, from her own unshrinking instigation of the secret murder, to Macbeth's open launching upon the sea of boundless atrocity which is to overwhelm him. But all is retrospective -- all reduces itself to ruminating on the circumstances of the murder, and her subsequent endeavours to sustain and guide the spirit of her husband.

Macbeth, we must observe, is an habitual soliloquist; there was no need of any somnambulism to disclose to us his inmost soul. But it would have been inconsistent with Lady Macbeth's powers and habits of self-control, that her guilty consciousness should have made its way through her lips in her waking moments. Her sleep-walking scene, therefore, becomes a matter of physiological truth no less than of dramatic necessity. As the doctor himself here tells us: --

"Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets."

He reads despair in the language of this "slumbry agitation:" --

"More needs she the divine than the physician.
---------- Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her."

Again, in answer to Macbeth's enquiry, "How does your patient, doctor?" --

41

"Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest."

And, finally, that apprehension of the doctor's which had made him desire all instruments of violence to be removed out of her way, seems to be realized by Malcolm's concluding mention of her as one

"Who, as tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life."

On the other hand, nothing in Macbeth's demeanour is more strikingly characteristic than the manner in which he receives the intelligence of his lady's illness and her death. Nothing so thoroughly shows us that he had regarded her with no generous affection, but simply as a being exceedingly useful to him, whom, therefore, he could very ill afford to part with. The physician's intimation above cited, as to her "thick-coming fancies," draws from him not the smallest sign of sympathy or commiseration. He desires her preservation, indeed, as an article of utility; and in his usual irrationally imperious style, he commands the doctor to "cure her of that." Nothing but utter insensibility to her individual sufferings could permit him, at such a moment, to indulge in one of his selfish poetical abstractions: --

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

In like manner, his rejoinder te the physician's assurance, "Therein the patient must minister to himself," is purely self-regarding: --

"Throw physic to the dogs-- *I*'ll none of it."

And, in the same spirit, he continues: --

"Doctor, the thanes fly from me.
---------- If thou couldst, doctor, cast
The water of my land, find her disease,
And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo,
That should applaud again. --------
What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug
Would scour these English hence?"

When the queen's women are heard lamenting within the castle, the same self-absorption of her husband seems to prevent

him from at all divining the cause. He is occupied exclusively with ruminating upon his own sensations: --

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd

To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in't: I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me. -- Wherefore was that cry?"

When he is told, "The queen, my lord, is dead," his exclamation is one of anything but compassion -- he seems to think she has used him very ill by dying just then: --

"She *should* have died hereafter --
There *would* have been a time for such a word."

He requites her, however, by forgetting her utterly and finally in another of his grand self-regarding ruminations: --

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

We might here have closed our present notice of this great Shakespearian tragedy, leaving this full examination into the development of its two leading characters to make its unassisted impression upon the reader's mind. But the established *theatrical* treatment of the piece will by no means permit us to do so. Of all the great works of its author, this, we believe, is the one which, upon the whole, is most frequently exhibited on the stage; yet, of all others, it is the one which, by injurious omissions, by more injurious insertions, and by erroneous acting, is the most thoroughly falsified to the apprehension of the auditor. So that, although the view which we have presented of the mutual relation between those two characters, so different from the prevailing one, is drawn from the most severely attentive consideration of Shakespeare's text; yet we can scarcely anticipate a fair reception of it by the public at large, unless it be supported by a distinct exposition of the distortion and perversion which are still almost nightly inflicted upon this masterpiece of the greatest of dramatists, by that corrupted mode of represent-

ing it which prescription would seem to have almost irrevocably sanctioned.

First, as to omissions; in this, perhaps the most closely and rigidly coherent of all its author's compositions, and, consequently, that in which any curtailment most necessarily implies mutilation.

Passing over mere suppressions of detail, let us come to the comic scene of the porter, which immediately follows the murder scene between Macbeth and his lady, and respecting which we entirely dissent from the opinion so positively expressed by

Coleridge,/* that it was "written for the mob by some other hand." Coleridge himself, in the very next paragraph of these notes, alluding to a subsequent passage of this play, indicates the true spirit and bearing of this comic introduction. Shakespeare, he observes, never introduces the comic "but when it may re-act on the tragedy by harmonious contrast." Precisely so. The horror of this midnight assassination is thrown into the boldest possible relief by the fact of its being perpetrated under the mask of grateful, plenteous, jovial, and even riotous hospitality. As the murder scene receives its last heightening of effect from that wherein the guests are seen retiring to rest, and Banquo tells Macbeth --

> "The king's a-bed:
> He hath been in unusual pleasure, and
> Sent forth great largess to your officers:
> This diamond he greets your wife withal,
> By the name of most kind hostess; and shut up
> In measureless content;"—

so this same disputed passage of the drunken porter, wherein we are presented, as it were, with the last heavy, expiring fumes of the nocturnal entertainment, -- the touch of humorous colloquy between this drolly-moralizing domestic and the gentlemen who are up thus early to awaken the king for his intended journey, and are utterly unsuspecting of mischief, -- gives the more overpowering force to the burst of indignant horror produced by their discovery of the sanguinary fact. The interposing of this comic passage having, for this reason, we believe, been deliberately determined on by the dramatist, what more natural than that it should be made to issue chiefly from the mouth of the half-sobered porter? It is a most essential part of the dramatic incident, that the criminal pair should be startled in the very moment of completing their sanguinary deed, by those loyal followers who are come to awaken the sovereign whom

/* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii, p. 246.

their host and hostess have put to sleep for ever. They must be admitted, and the porter, of course, must make his appearance, -- the fittest representative, too, of the latest portion of the night's carousing, and the fittest, therefore, to give the dialogue a gravely comic turn. Another dramatic purpose, too, is served by the interposing of this interval in the chain of tragic circumstance -- the allowing of time for Macbeth, after retiring from the scene, "lost," as his lady tells him, "so poorly in his thoughts," to wash his hands, put on his night-dress, and assume that perfect self-possession, in speech at least, wherewith he comes forth to meet the early risers, Macduff and Lenox. The omission of the whole passage in acting, except a very few words, by bringing Macbeth forward again, cool and collected, so immediately after he has withdrawn in such confusion, destroys, in this important place, the coherence and probability of the incident. Modern decorum, no doubt, demands the omission of the greater part of the porter's share in the dialogue; but there seems no such reason for suppressing the "devil-porter" soliloquy, wherein

he "had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire," amongst whom a tells us of "an equivocator, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven."

The second theatrical mutilation that we have to notice, is the total omission of Lady Macbeth's appearance in the discovery scene. We hardly need point out the doubly gross improbability involved herein. On the one hand, the lady's clear understanding of the part it behoves her to act, and her perfect self-possession, must of themselves bring her forward, as the mistress of the mansion, to enquire --

> "What's the business,
> That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
> The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak."

On the other hand, her solicitude to see how her nervous lord conducts himself under this new trial of his self-possession, so vital to them both, must force her upon the scene. Strange, therefore, does it seem, that we should miss her altogether, as we do in the present mode of performance, from this critical passage of the incident. Assuredly, too, the dramatist had his reasons for causing Macbeth's hypocritically pathetic description of the scene of murder to be delivered thus publicly in the presence of her whose hands have had so large a share in giving it that particular aspect. It lends double force to this most characteristic trait of Macbeth's deportment, that he should not be moved even by his lady's presence from delivering his

affectedly indignant description of that bloody spectacle, in terms which must so vividly recal to her mind's eye the sickening objects which his own moral cowardice had compelled her to gaze upon: --

> "Here lay Duncan,
> His silver skin laced with his golden blood;
> And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature,
> For ruin's wasteful entrance."

And then, how marvellously the next sentence is contrived, so as to express, in one breath, the aspect of the guiltless attendants whom his wife's guilty hands had besmeared, and that which he and she, the real murderers now standing before us, had presented the moment after their consummation of the deed: ---

> "There, *the murderers,*
> *Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers*
> *Unmannerly breeched with gore.* Who could refrain,
> That had a heart to love, and in that heart
> Courage to make his love known?"

These words draw from Lady Macbeth the instant exclamation, "Help me hence, oh!" And shortly after she is carried out, still in a fainting state. The prevalent notion respecting this passage, grounded on the constantly false view of the lady's

character, is, that her swooning on this occasion is merely a feigned display of horror at the discovery of their sovereign's being murdered in their own house, and at the vivid picture of the sanguinary scene drawn by her husband. We believe, however, that our previous examination of her character must already have prepared the reader to give to this circumstance quite a different interpretation. He will bear in mind the burst of anguish which had been forced from her by Macbeth's very first ruminations upon his act: --

"These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; *so, it will make us mad.*"

Remembering this, he will see what a dreadful accumulation of horror is inflicted on her by her husband's own lips in the speech we have just cited. Not only does he paint in stronger, blacker colours than ever, the guilty horror of their common deed -- this her habitual power of self-command in the presence of others might just have enabled her to support -- but in the same breath comes upon her, like a thunder-stroke, his announcement of that second sanguinary crime which he has just added to the former. This latter is the blow that strikes her to the ground, the conviction darting at once across her clear appre-

hension, of the fatally intractable nature of the demon she herself has unwittingly unchained, in her husband's over-eagerness to obviate suspicion. She feels that by this rash act he has awakened the very suspicion which he dreads, or confirmed it where existing already. To his exclamation --

"O yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them"—

Macduff, in her hearing, replies significantly, "Wherefore did you so?" This, like a vivid lightning flash athwart the darkness, gives her a clear, far glimpse into the dismal future that awaits them. Even her indomitable resolution may well sink for the moment under a stroke so withering, for which, being totally unexpected, she came so utterly unprepared. It is remarkable that, upon her exclamation of distress, Macduff, and shortly after, Banquo, cries out, "Look to the lady;" but that we find not the smallest sign of attention paid to her situation by Macbeth himself, who, arguing from his own character to hers, would regard it merely as a dexterous feigning on her part. How much deep illustration of character, let us repeat, is lost by this one brief suppression, besides that it strikes out one complete link in the main dramatic interest.

A minor injury, but still injurious, is the omission, in the following scene, of the "old man," and of the dialogue which passes between him and Rosse outside the castle. It was plainly one deliberate aim of the great artist, to keep the association and affinity which he chose to establish between spiritual and material storm and darkness continually before us: --

"Old Man. Threescore and ten I can remember well;
Within the volume of which time I have seen

Hours dreadful, and things strange; but this sore night
Hath trifled former knowings.
  Rosse. Ah, good father,
Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock 'tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
Is it night's predominance, or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth intomb,
When living light should kiss it?
  Old M. 'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done," &c.

The next suppression, again, really mutilates the chain of dramatic interest -- depriving us, in the first place, of that beautifully-told history which Lenox, in conversation with another lord, gives us of the progress of suspicion and disaffection among Macbeth's own adherents: --

"My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,
Which can interpret further: only, I say,
Things have been strangely borne. The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth. -- Marry, he was dead.
And the right-valiant Banquo walk'd too late;
Whom, you may say, if it please you, Fleance kill'd,
For Fleance fled. -- Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought, how monstrous
It was for Malcolm, and for Donalbain,
To kill their gracious father? damned fact!
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight,
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink, and thralls of sleep?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too;
For 'twould have anger'd any heart alive,
To hear the men deny it. So that, I say,
He has borne all things well. And I do think
That, had he Duncan's sons under his key,
As, an't please heaven, he shall not) they should find
hat 'twere to kill a father; so should Fleance. --
But, peace! -- for from broad words, and 'cause he fail'd
His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear,
Macduff lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell
Where he bestows himself?"

The answer tells us the state of the rightful cause, of which Macduff is become the leader: --

"The son of Duncan,
From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
Lives in the English court; and is receiv'd
Of the most pious Edward with such grace,
That the malevolence of fortune nothing
Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy king, in his aid
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward;
That, by the help of these (with Him above
To ratify the work), we may again

Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights;
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives;
Do faithful homage, and receive free honours;
All which we pine for now. And this report
Hath so exasperate the king, that he
Prepares for some attempt of war.
Lenox. Sent he to Macduff?
Lord. He did: and with an absolute *Sir, not I,*
The cloudy messenger turns me his back,
And hums; as who should say, *You'll rue the time*
That clogs me with this answer.

Len. And that well might
Advise him to a caution, to hold what distance
His wisdom can provide. Some holy angel
Fly to the court of England, and unfold
His message ere he come; that a swift blessing
May soon return to this our suffering country
Under a hand accurs'd!
Lord. My prayers with him!"

This passage, at present wholly omitted on the stage, is clearly necessary in order to make us understand the full import of Macbeth's cruel revenge upon Macduff's family. But we find a much more important omission -- the most injurious of all -- in the entire suppression of the character of Lady Macduff, and of the scenes in Macduff's castle until his lady runs out pursued by the murderers. Here, indeed, is a mutilation quite unaccountable. It mars the whole spirit and moral of the play, to take anything from that depth and liveliness of interest which the dramatist has attached to the characters and fortunes of Macduff and his lady. They are the chief representatives in the piece, of the interests of loyalty and domestic affection, as opposed to those of the foulest treachery and the most selfish and remorseless ambition. After those successive gradations of atrocity, the treacherous murder of the king, the cowardly assassination of his chamberlains, and the flagitious taking-off of Banquo, -- the wanton, savage, and undisguised slaughter of the defenceless wife and children, brought to the very eyes and ears of the auditor, carries his indignation to that final pitch of intensity which is necessary to make him sympathize to the full in the aspiration of the bereaved husband and father: --

"Gentle heaven,
Cut short all intermission; front to front
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him too!"

It is not enough that we should hear the story in the brief words in which it is related to him by his fugitive cousin, Rosse. The presence of the affectionate family before our eyes, -- the timid lady's eloquent complaining to her cousin, of her husband's deserting them in danger, -- the graceful *badinage* with her boy, in which she seeks relief from her melancholy forebodings, --

and then, the sudden entrance of Macbeth's murderous ruffians, -- are all requisite to give that crowning horror, that consummately and violently revolting character to Macbeth's career, which Shakespeare has so evidently studied to impress upon it. Nothing

has more contributed to favour the false notion of a certain sympathy which the dramatist has been supposed to have excited for the character and fate of this most gratuitously criminal of all his heroes, than the theatrical narrowing of the space, and consequent weakening of the interest, which his unerring judgment has assigned in the piece to those representatives of the cause of virtue and humanity, for whom he has really sought to interest his audience. It is no fault of his, if Macbeth's heartless whinings have ever extracted one emotion of pity from reader or auditor, in lieu of that intensely aggravated disgust which they ought to awaken. Macduff himself speaks not merely the language of his individual resentment, not only the public opinion of his suffering country, but the voice of common reason and humanity, -- where he says to Malcolm, even before he is acquainted with the destruction of his own family: --

> "Not in the legions
> Of horrid hell, can come a devil more damn'd
> In evils, to top Macbeth."

Further omissions still, though of lesser consequence, are to be regretted in the latter part of the acting play, -- as that of the scene from which we have already quoted, wherein Macbeth's revolted subjects first appear in arms -- a necessary chapter in the history of his downfall, from which we cannot forbear citing the words in which Menteth so admirably characterizes the usurper's frantic state of mind --

> "Who then shall blame
> His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
> *When all that is within him does condemn*
> *Itself for being there.*"

Then, there is the death of young Siward by the hand of Macbeth, and his father's soldierly speech over him; which enhance the interest of the tyrant's combat with Macduff. To the alteration, in deference to modern taste, which makes Macbeth, in this conflict, fall and die upon the stage, we have nothing to object: only it is worth observing, that the very fact of Shakespeare's making Macduff, after killing his antagonist off the stage, re-enter with "the usurper's cursed head" upon a pole, is a final and striking indication that he meant Macbeth to die by all unpitied and abhorred.

The omission of Malcolm's concluding speech, however, seems to us to be alike needless and senseless. Shakespeare understood the art of appropriately closing a drama, no less than that of opening it happily. These lines from the restored prince not only draw together in one point, as is requisite, the several

surviving threads of interest, but show us decisively the predominant impression which the dramatist intended to leave on the minds of his audience. They are like a gleam of evening sunshine, bidding "farewell sweet," after "so fair and foul a day:" --

"We shall not spend a large expense of time,
Before we reckon with your several loves,
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour nam'd. What's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time, --
As calling home our exil'd friends abroad,
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny, --
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life; -- this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace
We will perform in measure, time, and place:
So, thanks to all at once, and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone."

One reason of theatrical necessity, we are aware, is likely to be alleged in defence of these mutilations -- the indispensability of shortening the performance, owing to the pressure of time occasioned by the modern arrangements of the stage. This plea might have been more readily admitted, were it not the fact that large insertions have been made and retained in the original play, which occupy full as much time upon the scene as the omitted passages would do. We must take it for granted, therefore, that both manager and audience, in retaining and sanctioning such a mass of alteration, believe that the piece gains more by the additions in question than it loses by the suppressions. Let us proceed to examine how far this opinion is well-grounded, by considering the history and the nature of these introductions by later hands into Shakespeare's drama.

It may clearly indicate the kind of taste which must have dictated these insertions, if we first of all mention that they date precisely from the period of the greatest degradation of the English theatre in general, whether in relation to art or to morality, and of the grossest and most audacious corruptions and profanations of the works of Shakespeare in particular. Among the heroes of this unenviable species of achievement, it was Davenant who undertook to improve and civilize 'Macbeth,' by metamorphosing it from the severest of tragedies into a sort of operatic medley. Not content with converting the anomalous,

discordant beings of Shakespeare's imagining into a set of melodious chanters, and surrounding them with a rabble rout of vulgar human figures and faces, he reformed the dialogue line by line, -- shifted the characters about in the most arbitrary way, -- introduced long rhyming scenes, the offspring of "his own pure brain," between Macduff and his wife, -- and added a grand piece of abusive scolding between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, representing the latter to be haunted by all manner of ghosts. It was

to the witch songs and choruses which Sir William inserted into this precious piece of work, that the fine music of Locke was composed, which has handed down these barbarous excrescences upon Shakespeare's drama to the present time. Seeing that all the rest of Davenant's abominable transformation has been repudiated ever since the days of Garrick, we will not waste our time and space upon considering it in detail: but the duty we have undertaken to discharge towards the fame and the genius of Shakespeare, imperatively demands that we should point out how utterly repugnant to the spirit of this great work are those presumptuous musical and scenic additions to it which are still retained in spite of all the zeal and enthusiasm for the redemption of our great dramatist from all manner of corruptions and perversions, which it is now so fashionable to profess.

First of all, then, we have the chain of interest which Shakespeare has so closely preserved between the completion of Macbeth's design against Duncan and the formation of that against Banquo, interrupted by Davenant's rabble rout, with their --

"Speak, sister, speak -- is the deed done?" &c.

We have shown that Shakespeare uses the presence and the agency of his weird sisters most sparingly -- only so far as is necessary to illustrate fully the headlong as well as headstrong nature of that selfish and violent cupidity which sways his hero. Their grotesquely and inharmoniously rhyming dialogues at the outset, are restricted to the narrowest space that could suffice to reveal to us a spirit in them of gratuitous and aimless mischief, corresponding to their anomalous exterior. The few brief words which they address to Macbeth and Banquo are just enough to serve the double purpose, -- on the one hand, of showing us the previous guilty intention in the hero, and that intense eagerness in pursuit of it which, as we have said before, causes him to interpret the very announcement that he was to be king in any case into an encouragement in that particular murderous design which he already harboured, -- and on the other, of setting in movement the action of the drama, by this very confirming of the traitor in his guilty purpose, and precipitating him towards

its execution. We see, also, that his lady is yet less disposed than himself to await the destined course of events, -- notwithstanding that his unexpected creation as thane of Cawdor should have led them both to expect, if anything could, that the royalty also would come to them, by some means or other, "without their stir." So long as Macbeth finds all-sufficient support in the encouragement and concurrence of his lady, there needs no intervention of the weird sisters to carry on the series of tragic incident, the precipitous course of which the dramatist had too high and instinctive a mastery of his art, to interrupt by introducing them merely by way of idle and unmeaning decoration. It is not until after the banquet scene, when Macbeth resorts to them as the only counsellors from whom he has now to look for any encouragement in the "strange things" which he has "in head," that Shakespeare finds it proper to bring them again before us. What, then, are we to think, when, instead of the suppressed

passage which we have already cited, so fitly describing the heavy, reluctant daybreak after such a night of horror, we see the stage deluged with Davenant's mob of bedeviled women, old and young, in every variety of St Giles's costume -- a very train of Comus vulgarized -- constantly exciting the involuntary laughter of the audience -- *laughter* on the very moment of the horrible discovery of Duncan's assassination, the moment of deepest horror in this deepest of tragedies! Seeing how general the misapprehension has been, we might show some lenity towards the false notion upon which this insertion is grounded, that the weird sisters had directly instigated the murder of Duncan; but how is it possible to forgive the disgusting violation of Shakespeare's own fundamental conception of their nature, which is involved in showing us these airy beings, whom the poet has imagined incapable of human intercourse or sympathy, actually *elbowed* by a vulgar human multitude, and sharing in their low gambols and grimaces? And how, we would ask, after such a scene, are we to resume the broken thread of our impressions, so as to follow with adequate interest the ensuing course of incident relating to the murder of Banquo?

Again, what a strange substitution for that other omitted passage which we have quoted above, describing the progress of disaffection among Macbeth's adherents after Banquo's murder, is that concert of melodious spirits which are made to attend on Shakespeare's discordant Hecate, and the conversion of the latter from a purely ethereal being of evil, into a mere flesh-and-blood, sensual witch, who talks of *anointing* herself

> "With new-fall'n dew
> From churchyard yew;"

and says, --

> "Oh, what a dainty pleasure's this,
> * * * * *
> To sing, to toy, to dance, and kiss!"

And finally, what a strange accompaniment are Davenant's rabble to Shakespeare's weird sisters and their mistress, in the incantation scene, the mysterious horror of which most especially demands the preservation of that immaterial, anomalous, and insulated character which their creator has assigned to them. This, we conceive, is the most villanous profanation of all.

The sole reason, we believe, that will now-a-days be alleged for retaining these monstrous blots upon so great a work of Shakespeare is, the merit and attraction of the music which accompanies them. These we fully admit. The compositions in question are not only the masterpiece of their author, but one of the most vigorous productions of native English musical genius. Let them be performed and enjoyed anywhere and everywhere but in the representation of the greatest tragedy of the world's great dramatist -- *for which representation,* let every auditor well observe, their author, Locke, *did not compose them.* For Davenant's abominable transformation were they written, and with that they ought to have been repudiated from the stage. The very restoration of Shakespeare's text in the rest of the perform-

ance, has but more glaringly brought out the shocking incongruity of these extraneous passages.

We come now to consider the other grand monstrosity which, introduced into this play, like the rest, by the men who had the forming of the stage of the Restoration, has, with them, been ever since retained -- the dragging of the murdered Banquo bodily before the eyes of Macbeth and of the audience, in the banquet scene. This was an idea worthy of Davenant and his compeers, and consistent with the gross, incongruous texture of his corrupted play: but here, again, the general restoration of the text brings out this other disfigurement before us in all its atrocious and insulting absurdity.

Having already shown, at length, how studiously Shakespeare has worked Macbeth's liability, under violent excitement, to perfect hallucination of the senses, not only as a chief source of the poetic colouring of this piece, but as a mainspring of the tragic action, we need not here repeat the argument. Indeed, we feel a sort of humiliation in reflecting that the inveterate attachment of managers and auditors to so glaring a perversion should compel us to insist for a single moment upon the fact, that so leading an intention of the dramatist, in this most conspicuous instance of its display, is not merely injured, but is

utterly subverted by placing before the hero's bodily eyes and ours an actual blood-stained figure; -- the result of which contrivance is, that so far from marvelling, as Shakespeare meant his audience to do, at the violence of imagination which could force so unreal an apparition upon Macbeth's "heat-oppressed brain," our wonder must be if he, or any man, were *not* to start and rave at the entrance of so strange a visitor; not to mention the precious outrage to our senses, in the visibility of this unaccountable personage to us, the distant audience, while he is invisible to every one of the guests who crowd the table at which he seats himself in the only vacant chair!

But, gross as these disfigurements are, of this grand work of the greatest of artists, even these are not the most essential perversions of its spirit that have descended to us among those traditions from a corrupt and degenerate stage, which, to this very hour, have resisted the growth amongst us of a profounder and more enlightened literary criticism of Shakespeare. The most hurtful of these traditionary notions respecting 'Macbeth,' are to be found in the radically false conception and representation of its two leading characters, which the actors of them have perpetrated through the whole modern era of our theatrical history. It is the more indispensable, before dismissing our present subject, to consider these histrionic misinterpretations, because, owing to the great frequency of representation which this piece has constantly maintained, this, we are persuaded, is one of the most signal instances of all in which the misconception of the actor has reacted upon the judgment of the critic, -- forcibly illustrating the importance even to a perfectly intelligent *reading* of Shakespeare, that the public mind should be disabused of erroneous prepossessions having their source wholly or partly in mere *theatrical* prescription.

We cannot here examine into the several varieties of expression which, in the representation of the hero, have marked

respectively the acting of a Garrick or a Kemble, a Kean or a Macready, resulting from their personal peculiarities, their particular mannerisms, or their different conceptions respecting matters of detail. We have to do at present only with the one grand misconception which has pervaded all these personations, -- that of regarding Macbeth as a man originally good, sympathetic, tender-hearted, generous, and grateful, until the ambitious and treacherous purpose of murdering his king is first suggested to him by the weird sisters, and then confirmed in him by the instigation of his wife. This capital error at the outset has betrayed the actors, like the critics, into mistaking the language of his selfish apprehensions for the expressions of com-

punction and remorse, and his equally selfish bewailings over his own difficulties and downfal, for generous effusions of sympathetic humanity. John Kemble's view of the matter, which we find recorded under his own hand, so fairly represents the constant stage notion upon the subject, that a general indication of it will suffice to show the still subsisting theatrical creed respecting Macbeth's character.

In the year 1785, then, the year in which Mrs Siddons first acted Lady Macbeth on the London stage, there appeared, in the form of an octavo pamphlet, a posthumous essay, from the pen of Mr Thomas Whately (father of the present Dr Whately, archbishop of Dublin), known also as the author of 'Observations on Modern Gardening,' -- under the title of 'Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare.' The piece itself, however, is but a fragment of a larger work which its author had projected, extending only to the completion of a running parallel between the character of Macbeth and that of Richard the Third. This essay, which acquired and has retained a high critical reputation, produced from John Kemble, in the following year, another pamphlet, inscribed to Edmund Malone, and entitled 'Macbeth Reconsidered; an Essay intended as an Answer to part of the Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare.' Mr Kemble, however, limits his strictures to a refutation, which we think just and conclusive, of Mr Whately's denial of personal courage as a quality inherent in Macbeth. To the rest of the essayist's argument he thus emphatically expresses his assent: -- "The writer of the above pages cannot conclude without saying, he read the 'Remarks on some of Shakespeare's Characters' with so much general pleasure and conviction, that he wishes his approbation were considerable enough to increase the celebrity which Mr Wheatley's [Whately's] memory has acquired from a work so usefully intended and so elegantly performed." In Mr Whately's view of the matter, then (which, indeed, we find still appealed to as an authority,) we shall see what was Kemble's "conviction" as to the essential qualities of Macbeth's character.

Having already argued the whole matter so elaborately from the simple evidence of Shakespeare's text, we shall here confine ourselves to citing from Mr Whately's pages those passages which most strikingly exhibit in his mind that leading view of Macbeth's qualities, the fallacy of which we have demonstrated at length in our foregoing examination. Mr Whately, then, tells us at the very outset: --

"The first thought of succeeding to the throne is suggested, and success in the attempt is promised, to Macbeth by the witches: he is therefore represented as a man whose natural temper would have

deterred him from such a design, if he had not been immediately tempted and strongly impelled to it.

"Agreeably to these ideas," he continues, "Macbeth appears to be a man not destitute of the feelings of humanity. His lady gives him that character:

> 'I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness,
> To catch the nearest way.' ----

Which apprehension was well founded; for his reluctance to commit the murder is owing, in a great measure, to reflections which arise from sensibility:

> 'He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject;
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself.' ----

Immediately after, he tells Lady Macbeth --

> 'We will proceed no further in this business;
> He hath honour'd me of late.' ----

And thus giving way to his natural feelings of kindred, hospitality, and gratitude, he for a while lays aside his purpose.

"A man of such a disposition will esteem, as they ought to be esteemed, all gentle and amiable qualities in another; and therefore Macbeth is affected by the mild virtues of Duncan, and reveres them in his sovereign when he stifles them in himself." -- Pp. 11, 12.

It is very curious to mark how this fallacious prepossession betrays the essayist into citing that very soliloquy respecting Banquo, which we have pointed out as peculiarly illustrating the dark intensity of Macbeth's apprehensive selfishness, -- as proving his humane and sympathetic nature: --

"The frequent reference to the prophecy in favour of Banquo's issue is another symptom of the same disposition; for it is not always from fear, but sometimes from envy, that he alludes to it: and being himself very susceptible of those domestic affections which raise a desire and love of posterity, he repines at the succession assured to the family of his rival, and which in his estimation seems more valuable than his own actual possession. He therefore reproaches the sisters for their partiality when

> 'Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. If 'tis so,
> For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind,

* * * * * * * * *
Rather than so, come, Fate, into the list," &c.

"Thus, in a variety of instances, does the tenderness in his character show itself; and one who has these feelings, though he may

have no principles, cannot easily be induced to commit a murder. The intervention of a supernatural cause accounts for his acting so contrary to his disposition. But that alone is not sufficient to prevail entirely over his nature; the instigations of his wife are also necessary to keep him to his purpose; and she, knowing his temper, not only stimulates his courage to the deed, but sensible that, besides a backwardness in daring, he had a degree of softness which wanted hardening, endeavours to remove all remains of humanity from his breast, by the horrid comparison she makes between him and herself: --

'I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I but so sworn,
As you have done to this.'

"The argument is, that the strongest and most natural affections are to be stifled upon so great an occasion; and such an argument is proper to persuade one who is liable to be swayed by them; but is no incentive either to his courage or his ambition." -- Pp. 13—15.

That Macbeth, indeed, is not naturally and inherently ambitious, we find Mr Whately continually urging. Thus, again (page 27): --

"The crown is not Macbeth's pursuit through life: he had never thought of it till it was suggested to him by the witches: he receives their promise, and the subsequent earnest of the truth of it, with calmness. But his wife, whose thoughts are always more aspiring, hears the tidings with rapture, and greets him with the most extravagant congratulations; she complains of his moderation; the utmost merit she can allow him is, that he is 'not without ambition.' But it is cold and faint," &c.

The essayist's determinedly erroneous bias regarding the alleged *tenderness* of Macbeth's nature, shows itself in no place more curiously than in the passage (p. 71) where he tells us of "the sympathy he expresses so feelingly when the diseased mind of Lady Macbeth is mentioned;" except, indeed, it be in that subsequent paragraph (p. 73) where he actually tells us of the hero at his last extremity: --

"The natural sensibility of his disposition finds even in the field an opportunity to work; where he declines to fight with Macduff, not from fear, but from a consciousness of the wrongs he had done to him: he therefore answers his provoking challenge, only by saying, --

'Of all men else I have avoided thee,' &c.

and then patiently endeavours to persuade this injured adversary to

desist from so unequal a combat; for he is confident that it must be fatal to Macduff, and therefore tells him, --

---- 'Thou losest labour,' &c."

The general adhesion to Mr Whately's views which we have cited above from Mr Kemble's pamphlet, is sufficiently explicit; but, although the body of the latter essay is occupied almost exclusively with asserting Macbeth's personal intrepidity against the former writer's opinion, yet, in the course of it, the great actor does incidentally show us in detail the coincidence which he avows in general terms, of his own leading conceptions of the character with those of Mr Whately. Thus, at the outset, he speaks (p. 5) of "the simple character of Macbeth, as it stands before any change is effected in it by the supernatural soliciting of the weird sisters." And respecting Macbeth's declining of the combat with Macduff, he mistakes even more elaborately than Mr Whately himself: --

"When," says Mr Kemble, "the thane of Fife encounters Macbeth in battle, the tyrant does not use the power upon his life which he believes himself possessed of, as instantly he would had he feared him; but, yielding to compunction for the inhuman wrongs he had done him, wishes to avoid the necessity of adding Macduff's blood to that already spilt in the slaughter of his dearest connexions, --

---- 'Get thee back.' &c.

Unmoved by Macduff's taunts and furious attack, Macbeth advises him to employ his valour where success may follow it, and generously warns him against persisting to urge an unequal combat with one whom destiny had pronounced invincible." -- P. 21.

In the same spirit the writer, closing his essay with comparing, like his precursor Mr Whately, the character of Macbeth with that of Richard, observes (p. 36): -- "Richard is only intrepid; Macbeth intrepid and feeling. . . . Macbeth, distracted by remorse, *loses all apprehension of danger in the contemplation of his guilt.*" We leave it, however, for such readers as may have followed us through our previous examination of the character and the piece, to determine for themselves, whether it would not much more nearly express the actual truth, were we to say, precisely reversing this last remark of Mr Kemble's, that Macbeth *loses all contemplation of his guilt in the apprehension of danger.*

The memory of every reader who has repeatedly witnessed the performance of this tragedy on the modern stage, will remind him how constantly, in all the impassioned passages of this part, the actor's tone and gesture, following Mr Kemble's notion of the character, falsify Shakespeare's own conception, -- how, in the

earlier scenes, the remorsefully reluctant, and in the later the repentant criminal, is continually substituted for that heartless slave of mere selfish apprehensiveness whom the dramatist has so distinctly delineated.

Mrs Siddons herself, then, may well be deemed excusable if, under the guidance of such respectable and respected authorities, she shared in the prevalent misapprehension as to the essential character of the hero in the very tragedy wherein she attained her proudest histrionic distinction. But so radical a misconception *there,* necessarily entailed a corresponding one of equal magnitude respecting the attendant character which she so powerfully personated; and this it is that we must now proceed to show from her own manuscript remarks upon Lady Macbeth, as laid before us by her last biographer.

Starting with the grand original error, that Macbeth had not imagined the murder of Duncan until it was suggested to him by the weird sisters, -- nor his lady until she received his letter communicating their prophecy, -- Mrs Siddons naturally falls into the common misinterpretation of the lady's soliloquy respecting her husband's character: --

> "Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness," &c.

This, which on the page of Shakespeare stands only as *Lady Macbeth's* idea of her husband's character at that particular time, the fair critic interprets as *the dramatist's own* conception of Macbeth's inherent nature. "In this development," says she, "we find that, though ambitious, he is yet amiable, conscientious -- nay, pious." And yet the concluding observation --

> "Thou 'dst have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, Thus thou must do, if thou have me,
> And that which *rather thou dost fear to do,*
> *Thou wishest should be undone,*" --

should show to any student of the part, that Lady Macbeth herself, with all her prepossession as to her husband's compunctious nature, is here led into a strong suspicion of what was his real character. What, indeed, are her words last cited, but an echo of Macbeth's previous exclamation --

> "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!*"

"All that impedes him from the golden round" is, not a shrinking from guilt, but the dread of consequences. Mrs Siddons, however, proceeding on the same false bias, imagines that

it is not merely his selfish fears, but his virtuous repugnance, that his lady is so eager to "chastise with the valour of her tongue." Somewhat strangely forgetting the concluding words

of Macbeth's letter, which she has just been quoting at length, she commits the oversight of Coleridge in interpreting that very exclamation of Lady Macbeth's -- "Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!" which shows her boundless devotion to her husband's wish and purpose, into a proof of purely selfish ambition in her own breast, and utter disregard of that husband's welfare. "Shortly," says Mrs Siddons, "Macbeth appears. He announces the king's approach; and she, insensible, it should seem, to all the perils which he has encountered in battle, and to all the happiness of his safe return to her, -- for not one kind word of greeting or congratulation does she offer, -- is so entirely swallowed up by the horrible design, which has probably been suggested to her by his letters, as to have entirely forgotten both the one and the other." The forgetfulness, however, as we have fully shown, is not in Lady Macbeth's mind on this occasion, but in that of her critical representative. So fully was the latter possessed with this notion, that she thus continues: -- "It is very remarkable that Macbeth is frequent in expressions of tenderness to his wife, while she never betrays one symptom of affection towards him, till, in the fiery furnace of affliction, her iron heart is melted down to softness." After all we have said already, we think it needless to insist further on the radical fallacy of this notion about Lady Macbeth's want of feeling for her husband; but we must here offer a word of illustration respecting Macbeth's "expressions of tenderness to his wife;" for in nothing, we conscientiously believe, has Shakespeare more admirably painted the fawning cowardice of the selfish man, than in the manner wherein these very expressions are introduced. It is not her need of aid or comfort that ever draws these marks of fondness from him; we find them, in every instance, produced by some pressure of difficulty or perplexity upon himself, which he feels his own resolution unequal to meet, and so flies for support to her superior firmness: he does not consult her as to the *formation* of his purposes -- he is too selfish and too headstrong for that; he simply uses her moral courage, as he seeks to use all other things, as an indispensable instrument to stay his own faltering steps, and urge on his hesitating march towards the attainment of a purpose *already formed.* Thus, the most remarkable of these fond appeals to his lady for moral support, bursts from him at the moment when he comes to announce to her the sudden arrival of the wished-for opportunity of executing their grand and long-meditated design: --

"*My dearest love,*
Duncan comes here to-night."

It is not that Macbeth wavers either in the desire of his object or in his liking for the means; but that, the more imminent he feels the execution to be, the more he shrinks from the worldly responsibility that may follow, and the more he is driven to lean for support on the moral resolution of his wife. At his parting with the king, after saying --

"I'll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach,"

immediately follows his eager exclamation, which the inveterate misapprehension on the subject compels us to repeat again and again: --

"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!"

After this it seems truly strange that such a critic as Coleridge, for instance, should suppose for a moment that Macbeth's very next words, "My dearest love, Duncan comes here to-night," may imply a relenting from his purpose -- how much soever they may indicate a faltering in its execution. His selfish pusillanimity is simply seeking to cast upon *her* the burden of the final decision as to the act of murder. When to her own suggestive query, "And when goes hence?" he answers, "To-morrow -- as he purposes," is it not most clear that, still avoiding an explicit declaration of his immediate wish, he persists in urging the first utterance of it from her own lips: --

"Oh, never
Shall sun that morrow see! ----
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: *look* like the innocent flower,
But *be* the serpent under it. He that's coming
Must be provided for; and you shall put
This night's great business into *my* despatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

This is exactly what her husband has been looking for: she has now taken the actual effort and immediate responsibility of the deed upon herself. Nevertheless, the selfishly covetous and murderous coward still affects to hesitate --

"We will speak further." ----

She knows his meaning, and rejoins; --

"Only look up clear; --
To alter favour, ever is to fear:
Leave all the rest to me.

And to her, well understanding her intention, Macbeth is well pleased so to leave it. Yet we find Mrs Siddons, misled by the critical oracles of her day, constantly talking as if, in all this, it were not merely selfish fear in Macbeth, but virtuous repugnance, that his lady is chiding -- as if she were not merely ministering to him the resolution to fulfil his own purpose, but urging upon him the purpose itself, as hers rather than his. Under this mistaken impression she proceeds: --

"On the arrival of the amiable monarch who had so honoured

him of late, *his naturally benevolent and good feelings* resume their wonted power. He then solemnly communes with his heart, and after much powerful reasoning upon the danger of the undertaking, calling to mind that Duncan his king, of the mildest virtues, and his kinsman, lay as his guest, -- all those accumulated determents, with the violated rights of sacred hospitality bringing up the rear, rising all at once in terrible array to his awakened conscience, he relinquishes the atrocious purpose, and wisely determines to proceed no further in the business. But now, behold, his evil genius, his grave-charm, appears; and by the force of her revilings, her contemptuous taunts, and, above all, by her opprobrious aspersion of cowardice, chases *the gathering drops of humanity* from his eyes, and drives before her impetuous and destructive career *all those kindly charities, those impressions of loyalty, and pity, and gratitude,* which, but the moment before, had taken full possession of his mind. . . . She makes her very virtues the means of a taunt to her lord: -- 'You have the milk of human kindness in your heart,' she says (in substance) to him, 'but ambition, which is my ruling passion, would be also yours if you had courage. With a hankering desire to suppress, if you could, all your weaknesses of sympathy, you are too cowardly to will the deed, and can only dare to wish it. You speak of sympathies and feelings: I too have felt with a tenderness which your sex cannot know; but I am resolute in my ambition to trample on all that obstructs my way to a crown. Look to me, and be ashamed of your weakness.'"

It is under this constantly false notion, that Lady Macbeth is instigating her husband's heart to the purpose, when she is only exciting his courage to the execution, that the great actress imagines the mental and personal graces of this heroine to have been such as alone "could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless, a character so *amiable,* so *honourable* as Macbeth -- to *seduce* him to brave all the dangers of the present and all the terrors of a future world;

and we are constrained, even whilst we abhor his crimes, to pity *the infatuated victim of such a thraldom.*" The same erroneous prepossession leads the fair critic into the common mistake of supposing that Lady Macbeth's remark respecting Banquo and Fleance,

"But in them nature's copy 's not eterne,"

is a conscious suggesting of their assassination; and upon this she grounds another very curious misconception: --

"Having, therefore, now filled the measure of her crimes, I have imagined that the last appearance of Banquo's ghost became no less visible to her eyes than it became to those of her husband. Yes, the spirit of the noble Banquo has smilingly filled up, even to overflowing, and now commends to her own lips, the ingredients of her poisoned chalice."

From all this it results, that Mrs Siddons endeavoured to act the earlier scenes of this great part too much as if she had to represent a woman inherently selfish and imperious, not de-

voted to the wish and purpose of her husband, but remorselessly determined to work him to the fulfilment of her own. This is confirmed by all records and reminiscences of her acting that we can collect. Yet it is remarkable that her last biographer objects to her Lady Macbeth as not being a sufficiently pure impersonation of selfish ambition. "By concentrating all the springs of her conduct into the one determined feeling of ambition," says Mr Campbell, "the mighty poet has given her character a *statue-like simplicity,* which, though cold, is spirit-stirring, from the wonder it excites." We shall not go again over the argument we have detailed already, that Lady Macbeth is *criminally* ambitious *for her husband,* even as Constance, in 'King John,' for example, is *virtuously* ambitious *for her son* -- that, with this modification only, conjugal affection is the mainspring of the former character, as maternal affection is of the latter. But Mr Campbell argues the matter in the following terms: --

"As to her ardent affections, I would ask, on what other object on earth she bestows them except the crown of Scotland? We are told, however, that her husband loves her, and that therefore she could not be naturally bad. But, in the first place, though we are not directly told so, we may be fairly allowed to imagine her a very beautiful woman; and, with beauty and superior intellect, it is easy to conceive her managing and making herself necessary to Macbeth, amen comparatively weak, and, as we see, facile to wickedness. There are instances of *atrocious* women having swayed the hearts of *more amiable* men."

After all that we have said before, it seems hardly necessary again to point out what a constant mistaking in all this there is,

of mere *moral cowardice* in Macbeth for *virtuous repugnance,* and what vital injustice to the character of his lady, in making her responsible, not merely, as is the fact, for holding him to the fulfilment of his own constant wish and purpose, but for inspiring him with the purpose itself. The same erroneous bias leads the same elegant critic into the following assertion of this heroine's utter want of sympathy and remorse: --

"It seems to me, also, to be far from self-evident that Lady Macbeth is not naturally cruel because she calls on all the demons of human thought to unsex her, or because she dies of what her apologist (Mrs Jameson) calls remorse. If by that word we mean true contrition, Shakspeare gives no proof of her having shown such a feeling. Her death is mysterious; and we generally attribute it to despair and suicide. Even her terrible and thrice-repeated sob of agony in the sleep-walking scene, shows a conscience haunted indeed by terrors, but not penitent; for she still adheres to her godless old ground of comfort, that *Banquo is in his grave.*"

Again --

"I am persuaded that Shakspeare never meant her for anything better than a character of superb depravity, and a being, with all her decorum and force of mind, naturally *cold* and *remorseless.* When Mrs Jameson asks us, What might not religion have made of such

a character? she asks a question that will equally apply to every other enormous criminal; for the worst heart that ever beat in a human breast would be at once rectified if you could impress it with a genuine religious faith. But if Shakspeare intended us to believe Lady Macbeth's nature a soil peculiarly adapted for the growth of religion, he has chosen a way very unlike his own wisdom in portraying her, for he exhibits her as a practical infidel in a simple age; and he makes her words sum up all the essence of that unnatural irreligion, which cannot spring up to the head without haying its root in a callous heart. She holds that

'The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures,'

and that

'Things without remedy
Should be without regard.'

There is something hideous in the very strength of her mind, that can dive down, like a wounded monster, to such depths of consolation."

Now, we must be permitted to point out the strange oversight committed by the writer of these paragraphs, in speaking of those maxims of consolation and tranquillization which Lady Macbeth addresses *for those especial purposes* to her agitated husband *under those peculiar circumstances,* as if, in her own breast, she held them for all-consolatory truths. Not only the very sleep-

walking scene in question, but various other passages which we have had occasion to cite in our preceding pages, prove abundantly that they are anything but satisfactory to her own conscience.

Mr Campbell thus concludes: --

"She is a splendid picture of evil, nevertheless, -- a sort of sister of Milton's Lucifer; and, like him, we surely imagine her externally majestic and beautiful. Mrs Siddons's idea of her having been a delicate and blonde beauty, seems to me to be a pure caprice. The public would have ill exchanged for such a representative of Lady Macbeth the dark locks and the eagle eyes of Mrs Siddons."

With all submission, however, to the biographer's judgment, this notion of the great actress as to Shakespeare's conception of Lady Macbeth's personal appearance, is anything but capricious; she assigns a valid reason for it. After imagining the heroine as one "in whose composition are associated all the subjugating powers of intellect, and all the charms and graces of personal beauty," she thus proceeds: --

"You will probably not agree with me as to the character of that beauty; yet, perhaps, this difference of opinion will be entirely attributable to the difficulty of your imagination disengaging itself from that idea of the person of her representative which you have been so long accustomed to contemplate. According to my notion,

it is of that character which I believe *is generally allowed to be most captivating to the other sex,* -- fair, feminine, nay, perhaps even fragile --

> 'Fair as the forms that, wove in Fancy's loom,
> Float in light visions round the poet's head.'

Such a combination only, respectable in energy and strength of mind, and captivating in feminine loveliness, could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless," **&c.**

Now, although the dramatist has clearly represented his hero and heroine as persons of middle age, and absorbed in an ambitious enterprise which little admits of any of the lighter expressions of conjugal tenderness, yet the words which drop from Macbeth -- "my dearest love," "dearest chuck," "sweet remembrancer," &c. -- do imply a very genuinely feminine attraction on the part of his wife. As for mere *complexion,* in this instance, as in most others, Shakespeare, perhaps for obvious reasons of theatrical convenience, appears to have given no particular indication; but that he conceived his Lady Macbeth as decidedly and even softly feminine in person, results not only from the language addressed to her by her husband, but from all that we know of those principles of harmonious contrast which Shakespeare

invariably follows in his greatest works. In the present instance it pleased him to reverse the usual order of things, by attributing to his hero what is commonly regarded as the feminine irritability of fancy and infirmity of resolution. To render this peculiarity of character more striking, he has contrasted it with the most undoubted physical courage, personal strength and prowess; -- in short, he has combined in Macbeth an eminently masculine person with a spirit in other respects eminently feminine, but utterly wanting the feminine generosity of affection. To this character, thus contrasted within itself, he has opposed a female character presenting a contrast exactly the reverse of the former. No one doubts that he has shown us in the spirit of Lady Macbeth that masculine firmness of will which he has made wanting in her husband. The strictest analogy, then, would lead him to complete the harmonizing contrast of the two characters, by enshrining this "undaunted mettle" of hers in a frame as exquisitely feminine as her husband's is magnificently manly. This was requisite, also, in order to make her taunts of Macbeth's irresolution operate with the fullest intensity. Such sentiments from the lips of what is called a masculine-looking or speaking woman, have little moral energy, compared with what they derive from the ardent utterance of a delicately feminine voice and feature. Mrs Siddons, then, we believe, judged more correctly in this matter than the public, who, as her biographer tells us, would have ill exchanged her "dark locks and eagle eyes" for such a Lady Macbeth as she herself imagined. In this particular her sagacious reading of Shakespeare is no less remarkable than her womanly candour; while the public, it is plain, have been led by nothing but that force of association which her own powerful personation had impressed upon them.

So powerful, indeed, was it, as to lead Mr Campbell, in conclusion, to tell us emphatically --

"In some other characters which Mrs Siddons performed, the memory of the old, or the imagination of the young, might possibly conceive her to have had a substitute; but not in *Lady Macbeth.* The moment she seized the part, she identified her image with it in the minds of the living generation."

The fact of this thorough identification in the public mind makes it incumbent on us to show the divergence of Mrs Siddons's embodiment of the character from Shakespeare's delineation of it, not only as we have done already, from the *a priori* evidence afforded by her own account of how she *endeavoured* to play it, but also from the most authentic traditions as to her *actual expression* of the part. In doing this, we must limit our examination of that great performance to these two particulars; -- first, the

fallacious impression given by the actress as to the moral relation in general subsisting between Lady Macbeth and her husband; and secondly, the like erroneous interpreting of the relation between the lady's own conscience and the great criminal act to which she is accessary.

All accounts, then, of Mrs Siddons's acting in the earlier scenes, concur in assuring us that she did most effectively represent the heroine as we have seen, from her written remarks upon the character, that she endeavoured to represent her, -- as a woman, we repeat, "inherently selfish and imperious -- not devoted to the wish and purpose of her husband, but remorselessly determined to work him to the fulfilment of her own." The three great passages which most prominently develope this conception, are, that in which Lady Macbeth takes upon herself the execution of the murderous enterprise; that where she banishes Macbeth's apprehensions of odium by her taunts, and his fears of retribution by suggesting the expedient of casting suspicion on the sleeping attendants; and finally, that in which she endeavours to calm his agitation after the murder. After perusing the passages above cited from Mrs Siddons's Remarks, we may well give credit, for instance, to Mr Boaden's assurance, in describing her first performance of Lady Macbeth in London, that she delivered the speec_

"Oh, never
Shall sun *that* morrow see," &c.,

in such a manner that "Macbeth himself (Smith) sank under her at once, and she quitted the scene with an effect which cannot be described;"/* -- that is, she assumed the tone and air, not of *earnest entreaty,* which alone Shakespeare's heroine could have employed on this occasion, but of *imperious injunction;* so that Macbeth's representative, instead of complacently acquiescing, as Shakespeare's conception requires, seemed to yield to her will in pure helplessness. So, again, in the scene where the lady overcomes her husband's apprehensive shrinking from the actual deed, the same theatrical historian informs us: --

"Filled from the crown to the toe with direst cruelty, the horror of the following sentence seemed bearable from its fitness to such a being. But I yet wonder at the *energy* of both utterance and action with which it was accompanied: --

> 'I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And *dash'd the brains out,* had I *so sworn* as you
> Have done to this.'

There was no *qualifying* with our humanity in the tone or gesture.

/* 'Memoirs of Mrs Siddons,' vol. ii, p. 136.

This really beautiful and interesting actress did not at all shrink from standing before us the true and perfect image of the greatest of all natural and moral depravations -- a *fiend-like woman.*"

Here, again, we trace the tones and gestures, not of vehement *expostulation,* but of overbearing *dictation;* not of earnest appeal to her husband's capability of being constant to his own purpose, but of *ruthless and scornful determination* to drive him on to the execution of hers. And once more, to reach the climax of this false interpretation, how intensely effective do we find the actress's expression to have been, of her mistaken conception that Lady Macbeth, all this while, regards her husband with *sincere* contempt: --

"Upon her return from the chamber of slaughter," says Mr Boaden, "after gilding the faces of the grooms, from the peculiar character of her lip she gave an expression of *contempt* more striking than any she had hitherto displayed."

The general character of this part of her performance is summed up to the like effect by an eloquent writer in a recent number of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' who, in recording his admiring reminiscences of Mrs Siddons's Lady Macbeth, assures us that, in the murder scene, "her acting was that of a triumphant fiend."/*

But, in examining the play, we have shown how Shakespeare exhibits the heroine as anything but *triumphant* in the perpetration of the deed, her husband's ruminations upon which draw from her an anticipation of that remorseful distraction which is destined to destroy her. We have shown, too, how remote she is from that *bitterness of contempt* which Mrs Siddons expressed with such intensity, but which policy no less than feeling must have banished from Shakespeare's heroine while she felt her very self-preservation to depend upon her *soothing* the nervous agitation of her husband. Shakespeare, in short, from the very commencement of Lady Macbeth's share in the action, has exhibited in her, not that "statue-like simplicity" of motive for which Mr Campbell contends, and which Mrs Siddons strove to render, but a continual *struggle,* between her compunction for the criminal act, and her devotion to her husband's ambitious purpose. This conscious struggle should give to the opening invocation --

"Come, come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts," &c. --

a *tremulous anxiety* as well as earnestness of expression, very

/* 'Marston; or, the Memoirs of a Statesman.' -- Blackwood's Magazine, June, 1843, p. 710.

different from what we find recorded respecting this part of Mrs Siddons's performance: --

"When the actress," says Mr Boaden, "invoking the destroying ministers, came to the passage --

'Wherever, in your sightless substances,
You wait on nature's mischief,'

the elevation of her brows, the full orbs of sight, the raised shoulders, and the hollowed hands, seemed all to endeavour to explore what yet were pronounced no possible objects of vision. Till then, I am quite sure, a figure so terrible had never bent over the pit of a theatre."

In all this we perceive the gesture of one, not *imploring* the spirits of murder, as Shakespeare's heroine does, but *commanding* them, according to Mrs Siddons's conception. *The action,* in short, *is not suited to the word.* The same must be said of her performance of the great sleep-walking scene, though regarded as Mrs Siddons's grandest triumph iu this part. Here, of all other passages in this personation, the actress's looking and speaking the heroine of antique tragedy was out of place. A somnambulist, from the workings of a troubled conscience, is a thing peculiar to the romantic drama, and impossible in the classic. A person such as Mrs Siddons's acting represented Lady Macbeth to be, would have been quite incapable of that "slumbry agitation" in which we behold Shakespeare's heroine. As little could the latter, while under its influence, have maintained the statue-like solemnity with which the actress glided over the stage in this awful scene. We have shown already that Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, so far from presenting, in this final passage, anything of the "unconquerable will" of a classic heroine, is, in her incoherent retrospection, the merely passive victim of remorse and of despair -- helplessly tremulous and shuddering. "But Siddons," says the writer in Blackwood already cited, "wanted the agitation, the drooping, the timidity. She looked a living statue. She spoke with the solemn tone of a voice from a shrine. She stood more the *sepulchral avenger* of regicide than the *sufferer* from its convictions. Her grand voice, her fixed and marble countenance, and her silent step, gave the impression of a supernatural being, the genius of an ancient oracle -- a tremendous Nemesis."

"She was a living Melpomene," says the same writer in conclusion; and this is evidently what Mr Campbell means by saying "she was Tragedy personified." But the muse of the classic tragedy, and the muse of the romantic, of which the Shakespearian

is the summit, are personages exceedingly different. They who cite Mrs Siddons's Lady Macbeth as exhibiting the highest de-

velopment of her histrionic powers, are perfectly right; but when they speak of it as transcendently proving her fitness for interpreting Shakespeare, they are as decidedly wrong. It is not "a *statue-like* simplicity," to repeat Mr Campbell's phrase, that makes the essence of the Shakespearian drama, but a *picturesque* complexity -- to which Mrs Siddons's massive person and sculptured genius were as essentially repugnant as they were akin to the spirit of the antique. Her genius, it has been somewhere well observed, was, in fact, as she herself seems to have been conscious, rather epic than tragic, rather didactic than dramatic, rather Miltonian than Shakespearian. Justice to Mrs Siddons, and justice to Shakespeare, alike demand that this should be clearly and universally understood. The best homage to genius like hers, as to genius like his, must be, to appreciate it, not only adequately, but *truly.*

After all that we have said, it may well be supposed that we have little desire to see or hear of any future representation of this play which shall not be conducted on the principle of thorough fidelity to the spirit of its great author. He, indeed, thought proper to exhibit in its hero the most poetical of selfishly ambitious assassins; but could little contemplate that his "black Macbeth" was destined to be converted into the sentimental villain of our modern stage -- a conception much more worthy of a Kotzebue than of a Skakespeare. It is high time that this national disgrace should be wiped away. The operatic insertions, founded, as we have seen, upon a total inversion of the dramatist's own meaning and purpose in the preternatural agency, must be utterly banished -- they are as insufferable here as they would be in 'Richard,' or in 'Othello,' or in 'Hamlet.' The suppressed scenes and passages must be restored. And, above all, the two leading characters must be truly personated. Then, but not till then, shall we see the moral of this great tragedy resume, in our theatres, its pristine dignity. Our sympathies will no longer be vulgarly and mischievously appealed to in behalf of a falsely-supposed passive victim of demoniacal instigations, but will find that natural and healthy channel into which the great moralist has really directed them. To return to the consideration with which we have opened the present paper, we shall see on the stage, as we do in the text of Shakespeare, that when a character of the highest nervous irritability, but utterly devoid of sympathy, is once stimulated to the pursuit of a selfishly and criminally ambitious object, its career will of necessity be as destructive to the nearest domestic ties as to political and social security. Lady Macbeth, in short, falls hardly less a victim of Macbeth's selfish cupidity than Lady Macduff herself.

Above all, we shall cease to have obtruded upon us that low and commonplace poetical justice which consists in making *every sort* of criminal be punished by *repentance* in this life. Shakespeare knew much better. It is one of his greatest titles to the gratitude of mankind, that he shrunk not from showing his audi-

tors that there are certain kinds of villains who can never know *remorse,* because they were born incapable of *sympathy.* One of these is, the *blunt, honest-looking* knave, whom he has portrayed in Iago: another is, the *poetically whining* villain, whom he has exhibited in Macbeth. The mighty artist wasted not his moralizing on persuading knaves to be honest; he expended it more profitably, in teaching the honest man to see through the subtlest and most impenetrable mask of the knave.

G.F.

*** We are the more encouraged to hope for a just theatrical rendering of this great creation, by the fact that we possess a rising Shakespearian actress of the highest promise. We allude to Miss Helen Faucit, the development of whose histrionic genius is one of the happiest results of Mr Macready's laudable and vigorous endeavour to restore the dignity of our metropolitan stage. Among the wide range of Shakespearian characters in which this young lady has already exhibited such various powers, it is her personation of the Lady Constance in the splendid revival of 'King John,' which made so large a figure in the last Drury-Lane season, that peculiarly demands attention in reference to our more immediate subject. In this part, as in that of Lady Macbeth, the most respectable efforts since Mrs Siddons's time had never amounted to anything beyond a vastly inferior expression of Mrs Siddons's conception of the character, to which the stage, as well as the audience, were accustomed to bow with a sort of religious faith and awe. What that conception was, and wherein it differed from the true Shakespearian idea, we find so distinctly stated in two recent numbers of 'The Athenæum,'/* that to them we take the liberty of referring our readers. The bias which the peculiar character of her genius gave to her personation of the heroine of 'King John' will be found strictly analogous to that which marked her representation of Macbeth's consort. She made strong-willed ambition the ruling motive of Constance, rather than maternal affection. But Miss Faucit, led, it should seem, by that intuitive sympathy of genius which has guided her happy embodiment of other Shakespearian creations, upon which the great actress of the Kemble school had not so powerfully set her stamp, has courageously but wisely disregarded theatrical prescription in the matter, -- has followed steadily the unsullied light of Shakespeare's words, and so has found for herself, and shown to her audience, that feeling, not pride, is the mainspring of the character. "The force which Shakespeare exhibits in the eloquence of Constance (we borrow the words of the writer last referred to) is not the hard force of an arrogant, imperious termagant, such as we see in his Queen Elinor, but the elastic force that springs from a mind and person having all the vigour of a character at once so intellectual, so poetical, and so essentially feminine as that of Constance. To the expression of this highest and most genuine tragic force, Miss Faucit shows her powers to be not only fully equal, but peculiarly adapted. She has that truest histrionic strength which consists in an ample share of physical

/* February 11th and 18th, 1843.

power in the ordinary sense, combined with exquisite modulation of tone and flexibility of feature -- by turns the firm and the variable expressiveness of figure, voice, and eye." The result has been, that her personation of this great character has been truer than that of her great predecessor to "that spirit of bold and beautiful contrast which is in the very essence of its development, as it is in that of the whole Shakespearian drama."

It would, therefore, be most interesting to see this rising actress exercise her unbiassed judgment and her flexible powers upon the personation of Lady Macbeth, in lieu of that mistaken interpretation which, in Mrs Siddons's hands, however objectionable as an illustration of Shakespeare, was

grand and noble in itself, but which, in those of her later imitators, has become merely harsh and disgusting. Nor would it be interesting only; it would be highly important towards disabusing the public mind of that vitiated moral with which the corrupt representation of this play has so long infected it. Herein we see the truly national importance of Shakespearian acting, no less than of Shakespearian criticism. How much our national reputation is concerned in a more intelligent cultivation of the latter, it is needless now to contend, as the fact is universally admitted. But the degree in which the current state of Shakespearian *acting* constantly operates, for good or for evil, in illustration or in perversion, upon the *reader* and the *literary critic* of Shakespeare, seems less generally understood. Yet this operation is not the less certain, nor is it difficult to assign its cause. We find it in the one great fact, "that the man who, of all men known to us, possessed the truest and most pervading insight into every condition of the human mind and heart, was trained in dramatic composition upon the very board -- that the great poet and the great manager grew as one -- that the great artist whom they combined to form, composed immediately for

'The very faculties of eyes and ears.'

How much this constant writing, or rather, we should say, creating, to a living and present audience, must have contributed to that wonderfully concentrated force, and that exquisite fitness for dramatic effect, which are found in every part of his action, character, and dialogue, it needs little reflection to discover." But the intense depth and subtlety of meaning -- the boundless pregnancy of indication -- the "too much conceiving," as Milton says -- which is consequently found in the written text, renders the thorough understanding of it the more dependent on the truth of theatrical interpretation. The case of the 'Macbeth,' as we have shown in the foregoing pages, illustrates this dependence most remarkably. It would have been utterly impossible that one critic after another should have perpetuated so false an interpretation of the great dramatist's meaning as we have shown them to have given, had they not come to the consideration of his text *prepossessed by the perverted stage impressions of their youth.*

On a future occasion we may trace out in detail the practical consequences of this significant proposition. For the present we must conclude with recommending briefly, but most earnestly, to the consideration of our readers, that the highest *literary* as well as dramatic honour of our nation demands, not only that histrionic genius such as we have here pointed out should receive the most liberal encouragement, but that our whole theatrical system, "as by law established," should be considered with a serious view to remove those barbarous obstacles which it confessedly opposes to a prosperous cultivation of Shakespearian acting.