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V. ON THE PORTER IN MACBETH.

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(Read at the Fifth Meeting of the Society, held May 22, 1874.)

"I pray you remember the Porter." -- ii. 3.

AS is well known, the earliest extant copy of the play of Macbeth is that of the Folio of 1623. Perhaps the earliest allusion to the play occurs, as Mr. Halliwell points out, in the year 1607, in the /1 Puritan (iv. 3); where the words "We'll ha' the ghost i' th' white sheet sit at upper end o' th' table," seem distinctly to refer to the apparition of Banquo. So that Macbeth had been exhibited at least 16 years before its publication in the first Folio. And it has been suspected that in more than one part the play is not preserved in the Folio in the exact shape in which it left the hand of its creator. Thus the passage in the 3rd scene of the 4th act, where the touching for the 'King's evil' is described, has been supposed to be an interpolation, and it certainly has the air of being so. In the preface of the Clarendon press edition of the play, many other passages are mentioned which the editors, rightly or wrongly, incline to believe were written by Middleton. Amongst the passages that have been doubted are the soliloquy of the Porter, and the short dialogue that follows between the Porter and Macduff. And the doubts concerning it deserve all consideration, because they were supported, if not originated, by the best Shaksperian critic this country has yet produced. "The low soliloquy of the Porter," says Coleridge, "and his few speeches afterwards, I believe to have been written for the mob by some other hand, perhaps with Shakespeare's consent; and, finding it take, he, with the remaining ink of a pen otherwise employed, just

/1 See Hazlitt's Shakspeare's Plays and Poems, vol. v. p. 293, ed. 1852. Hazlitt's note is: -- "Dr. Farmer thinks this was intended as a sneer at Macbeth."

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interpolated the words, 'I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.' Of the rest not one syllable has the ever-present being of Shakespeare." -- (Literary Remains, ii. 246-7.) Coleridge is not to be followed implicitly, because he has in other Shaksperian matters erred strangely;/1 but yet this doom of his cannot be lightly disregarded. It cannot be said, however, to have convinced the world. Many editors do not even acknowledge that a doubt should exist. Gervinus does go just so far. "Coleridge and Collier," he says, "are in favour of this omission, as they consider his [the Porter's] soliloquy to be the unauthorized interpolation of an actor. It may be so." And then he proceeds, in fact, to show how it may not be so.

I propose in this paper to consider whether the Porter is not after all a genuine offspring of Shakspeare's art. It is possible to show beyond controversy, that he is an integral part of the original play; and therefore we must conclude, if he is not the creation of Shakspeare,

that the play was originally the fruit of a joint authorship, and not merely amended by some reviser. But if, in addition to this, it can be shown that his appearance is in accordance with the artistic system by which Shakspeare worked, that it relieves the awful intensity of the action, and permits the spectator to draw breath, -- further, that he satisfies that law of contrast which rules, not unfrequently in a manner that perplexes and astonishes, the undoubted compositions of Shakspeare -- that his speech has a certain dramatic pertinence, and is by no means an idle outflow of irrelevant buffoonery; -- if such theses can be maintained, then certainly the Porter is the result of Shakspeare's direct dictation, if not his own manufacture. Lastly, if his particular style and language prove to be Shaksperian, it must surely be a confirmed hypersceptic that persists in believing that he is not of the family of Shakspeare, but begotten by some skilful mimic. Certainly these are the five points which should be thoroughly considered before any final verdict is pronounced. On each one of them

/1 Thus, in 1802, he places "The London Prodigal" amongst Shakspeare's plays, The Merchant of Venice after Henry V, &c.; in 1810, The Tempest in the 2nd Period, Othello amongst the latest plays; in 1819, The Tempest in the same epoch with The Merchant of Venice, &c. See Literary Remains, ii. 86-91.

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I shall try to offer a few suggestions. For the sake of clearness I recapitulate them:

- (i.) That a Porter's speech is an integral part of the play.
- (ii.) That it is necessary as a relief to the surrounding horror.
- (iii.) That it is necessary according to the law of contrast elsewhere obeyed.
- (iv.) That the speech we have is dramatically relevant.
- (v.) That its style and language are Shaksperian.

(i.) That a Porter's speech is an integral part of the play. This is a very simple matter. No one will deny that the knocking scene is an integral part of the play. In the whole Shaksperian theatre there is perhaps no other instance where such an awful effect is produced by so slight a means, as when, the deed of blood accomplished, in the frightful silence that the presence of death under any circumstances ever imposes on all around it, when the nerves of Macbeth are strained to the uttermost, and without any external provocation he hears an unearthly voice crying "Sleep no more" --

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

at this ghastly moment there is a knocking heard. The spiritual and the material seem merged; and one half fancies that it is Conscience herself that has taken a bodily form, and is beating on the gate, or that Vengeance has already arisen and is clamorous for its victim.

"Whence is that knocking?" cries Macbeth.
"How is't with me, when every noise appals me?"

It comes again, and his wife now hears it, and recognizes it as made at the south entry. For her matter-of-fact nature it is intelligible enough; but even for her how terrible, and, as in due time appears, how burnt in on the memory this first arrival of the outer world, now that the old conditions of her life are all deranged and convulsed.

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I hear a knocking
At the South entry; retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed;
How easy is it then! your constancy
Hath left you unattended. [Knocking within]
Hark! more knocking.
Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us,
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts.
Macbeth. To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.
[Knocking within]
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

And then, as he leaves the stage, "Enter a Porter," the knocking continuing with slight intermissions; and at last, when the door is opened, Macduff interrogates the opener as to his lying so late. And when Macbeth appears, after whom he is at the moment inquiring, he says,

"Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes."

Later on in the play, when Lady Macbeth's overtasked physique gives way under the pressure of vast and truceless anxieties, and reason dethroned, we see something of the impressions which, in spite of herself, have been stamped and branded upon her mind, we learn how that knocking thrilled and pierced her too. "To bed, to bed!" she exclaims, in the awful scene of the delirium; "there's knocking at the gate; come, come, come, give me your hand."

The knocking scene, then, is of no trivial importance.^{/1} But with the knocking the Porter is inseparably associated. If we retain it, we must retain him. And if we retain him, he must surely make a speech of some sort; or are we to picture to ourselves a profoundly dumb functionary? Are we to conceive him as crossing the stage, thinking a great deal but saying nothing? -- nodding perhaps with all the amazing volubility of Sheridan's Lord Burleigh, or brandishing his keys with a mysterious cunning, or perhaps rushing head-

^{/1} See On the knocking at the gate in Macbeth, De Quincey's Works, xiii. 192-8, ed. 1863.

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long to his post as if his life was at stake, but with his tongue fast tied and bound? There is probably no student of Shakspeare who is prepared to accept such a phenomenon. Clearly, then, the Porter speaks, to whatever effect.

(ii.) That some speech of a lighter kind is necessary to relieve the surrounding horror. In the scene that includes the enactment of Duncan's murder, the latter part of which has already been dis-

cussed and quoted, the intensity of the Tragedy reaches the highest possible point of endurance. Such is the mighty power of the dramatist, that we find ourselves transported into the midst of the scenes he portrays. They are not images for us, but realities. We verily see Macbeth pass into the King's chamber, and share his frightful excitement. "The owls scream, and the crickets cry." And we hear one "laugh in 's sleep," and one cry "Murder." And the wild weird fancies that overcome him are vivid with us too, and the air is filled with ominous visions and ghastly voices, and the shadows of horror encompass us round as with a cloak. We reach the ne plus ultra of dramatic terror. Nature can bear no more. We cannot breathe in so direful an atmosphere. The darkness is crushing us like a weight. "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon us; and a horrible dread" threatens to "overwhelm us."

As between the sublime and the ridiculous, so between pleasure and pain there is but one step. But the great artist never takes this step. The pleasure he imparts is often strange and inexplicable, and not to be defined; but it is pleasure. When we speak of his moving terror in us, we use the word in a modified sense. It is an inferior and a coarser art that thrills with positive fear and affright. If the old story is true that the Furies of Æschylus were so /1 dreadful

/1 They might well be so if they answered to the Priestess' description of them: --

πρόσθεν δέ τάνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος
 εὔδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος.
 οὔτοι γυναῖκας ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω,
 οὐδ' αὐτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.
 εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
 δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἅπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
 αὗται, μέλαιναι δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι·
 ρέγκουσι δ' οὐ πλάτοῖσι φυσιάμασιν·
 ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα·

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to see that women in his audience were thrown into fits and convulsions, then the representation was not truly artistic, but rude. Certainly Shakspeare does not ever so miscomprehend his craft. He has the strength of a giant, but he does not use it as a giant. He understands and he observes the proper limits within which his power may be exercised. There was a certain profound humanity in him which forbade all idle torturing of those whom his irresistible fascination placed at his mercy. And so in his excitement of the feelings he knew when to stay his hand, and he acted faithfully according to his knowledge. He does not turn pleasure into pain by an excessive prolongation of any state of extreme emotion.

Now if ever in the plays of Shakspeare some relaxation is needed for the nerves tense and strained to the utmost; if ever some respite and repose are due to prevent the high mysterious delight which it is the province of the artist to kindle within us, corrupting into a morbid panic; if ever, as we read or listen, one's heart threatens to suspend its beating, and a very palsy seems imminent, should the awful suspense be protracted, it is so in the terrible scene now before us. In Davenant's version of the play, in which all the vigour of the context is miserably weakened and diluted, no such imperious necessity exists. But I submit that any one of imagination, who studies this scene as we have it with all his power, who realizes it in all its

finished terribleness, and is keenly sensible of the darkness of it as of a darkness that may be felt, will be truly thankful for a temporary release and diversion.

Neque semper arcum
Tendit Apollo.

A monotony of horror cannot be sustained. In that appalling night scene the very air seems poisoned; and any disturbance of it

καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα
φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ' ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας. κ.τ.λ. -- Eum. 46--56.

'The appearance they have in Æschylus was more or less retained by the poets of later times. . . . On the stage, however, and in works of art, their fearful appearance was greatly softened down,' &c. See art. "Eumenides" in Smith's Dict. of Greek and Roman Biog. and Myth., vol. ii.

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is infinitely welcome. The sound of a fresh voice, after we have listened so long to that guilty conference, is a very cordial. If it would be going too far to say, with an important alteration of the poet's words, that

We must laugh or we must die,

one may fairly maintain that the terror must be drawn out no further, or our sensibilities will be either numbed and stupefied, or roused into a wild fever of excitation.

That this view -- that some relief is indispensable -- is not an idle conjecture, founded on an exaggerated estimate of the fearfulness of the murder scene, is curiously illustrated by the experience of one who attempted to thoroughly study that scene apart from its surroundings. Mrs. Siddons, so studying it, found the horrors of it completely overcome her. The following is the account she herself gives of the result of such an isolation: --

"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that on which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up, as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of Lady Macbeth. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life had scarcely entered my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure in the silence of the night (a night I can never forget) till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table

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without the power of putting the candle out; and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes."/1

(iii.) Some lighter speech is necessary according to the law of contrast elsewhere observed by Shakspeare. Perhaps there is no characteristic of the Romantic drama more striking than the frequent or rather the habitual, juxta-position of opposites. It delights in the meeting of extremes. The Tragi-Comedy, or Comi-Tragedy, was a form of its own peculiar invention. The Mask had its Antimask. This law of contrast may seem at first sight identical with the law of relief just discussed. But it is not so. It springs not from the practical restraints of the drama in its demands upon human endurance, as does that law of relief, but from far wider considerations. It springs from the grand ambition of Teutonic art to embrace in its representation life in all its length and breadth. This art is not content with a mere excerpt from life, a mere fragment, a single side of life, as the phrase is. It yearns to comprehend life in its totality. It would put its arms round the whole world -- a girdle around the entire earth. The artist, if you think of him as a reaper going forth with his scythe, will not be confined to this single acre or that. He must have free scope, and he will gather his harvest everywhere. Of an audaciously aspiring soul, he will not acknowledge the artificial barriers that are reared around him. And as he gazes at life as a whole, he sees it full of amazing contrasts, and the most fantastic paradoxes, and he aims at portraying life, this oxymoron life, as the grammarians might call it, so bitter-sweet, so teeming with strange reverses, so dull and so bright, so low and so lofty, so mean, so noble. To the true humorist these various shades and colours are inextricably interwoven. He cares nothing for the superficial distinctions that pass current around him. For him there is a transcendent unity that binds all things together. He does not trouble himself about the labels that are placed by conventional persons on the various departments of existence. He laughs everywhere, and he cries everywhere. It is all infinitely sad, and infinitely comic. Heraclitus and Democritus meet in him. As you look at him you cannot say whether his eyes are filled with tears or

/1 See Campbell's Life of Mrs. Siddons, ed. 1839, p. 184. The passage may also be found in Knight's Cabinet Edition of Shakspeare, ix. 4.

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with smiles. The beauty of summer and the bleakness of winter, the gaiety of youth and the torpor of age, the gladness of life and the dullness of death -- these are omnipresent with him. And so to him there is nothing shocking or abhorrent in the inter-proximities of things apparently alien to each other. For him the very jaws of death are capable of laughter.

And so in the Shaksperian drama we find strange neighbourhoods. Jestors and jestings in the midst of that stupendous storm in King Lear!/1 In Hamlet the gravedigger is one with the clown! In Othello, amidst all its bitter earnest, there are foolings and railleries. In fact, Macbeth would be unique amongst the tragedies of Shakspeare if the comic element were utterly absent from it.

This law of contrast might be supported also from a purely aesthetic point of view, no less than that of truthfulness to nature; and we might see in this matter as in others how

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty -- that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know;"

and be reminded of that fine mandate delivered to poets by one, herself, of no mean poetic rank:

"Hold, in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth, the fairest Beauty."

(iv.) The Speech of the Porter is dramatically relevant. In order to justify this speech as it stands, it is not enough to point out, as I have tried to do, the general laws of relief and contrast by which Shakspeare works. For in his modes of providing relief and contrast he does not proceed recklessly. He does not ignore harmony when he aims at securing variety. There is a real concord in the seeming discord. All things work together to one general effect. Amidst apparent confusion and chaos there is absolute subordination and symmetry.

/1 "He complained of the Fool in Lear. I observed that he seemed to give a terrible wildness to the distress; but still he complained." See Wordsworth's Notes of his conversations with Klopstock. Wordsworth's Memoirs, i. 130, or Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Satyrane's Letters, iii. p. 172 of the one-volumed edition.

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Many things, having full reference
To one consent, may work contrariously:
As many arrows loosed several ways
Come to one mark; as many ways meet in one town;
As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea;
As many lines close in the dial's centre.

Now, is the Porter's speech incurably discrepant and incongruous with the play of which it is a part?

"After all," says Bodenstedt, "his uncouth comicality has a tragic background; he never dreams, while imagining himself a porter of hell-gate, of how near he comes to the truth. What are all these petty sinners, who go to the everlasting bon-fire, compared with those great criminals whose gates he guards!"

"Yet, at all events," says Gervinus of this soliloquy, after mentioning, as we have seen above, the theory of those who would excise it, "it is not inappropriate; there is an uncomfortable joviality which by way of contrast is very suitable to the circumstances, when the drunken warder, whom Duncan's gifts or festivities of the evening have left in a state of excitement, calls his post 'hell-gate,' in a speech in which every allusion bears point."

Surely what these two comments put forward must have occurred to every thoughtful reader. The whole speech of the Porter is in fact a piece of powerful irony. "If a man were porter of hell-gate." But is this man not so? What then is hell? and where are its gates? and what is there within them? What of the "Scorpions," of which Macbeth's mind is presently full? Knowing what we know of the hideous transactions that night has witnessed in his castle, may we not well say: "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of the devil, and this is the gate of hell?"

It may be well to notice here that the Porter of Hell was a not unfamiliar figure in the old Mysteries. We find in Virgil, indeed,

what might have suggested some such official to the medieval mind, if any suggestion was necessary. Virgil speaks of Cerberus as "janitor" (*Æn.* vi. 400) and as "janitor Orci." (*Ib.* viii. 296.) So Silius after him speaks of the "Stygian Janitor" (*Punic.* iii. 35)_

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and so Fletcher in his *Honest Man's Fortune* (III. ii.) of "hell's three-headed porter." But no classical suggestion was necessary for such a creation. It was natural enough, when so much was talked of St Peter with his keys keeping the gate of Heaven, that there should be conceived an infernal counterpart of that celestial functionary. In the *Coventry Mysteries*, Belial seems serving in this capacity; at least it is he who, when the "Sowle," "Anima Christi," "goth to helle gatys, and seyth, 'Attolite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini, portae eternelles, et introibit Rex Glorie.'" --

Ondothe youre gatys of sorwatorie!
On mannys sowle I haue memorie
Here comyth now the kynge of glorye,
 These gates for to breke!
Ye develys that arn here withinne,
Helle gatys ye xal unpynne,
I xal delyvere mannys kynne;
 From wo I wole hem wreke. --

It is "Belyalle" who on this summons exclaims:

Alas! alas! out & harrow!
Onto thi byddyng must we bow;
That thou art God now do we know;
 Of the had we grett dowte.
Agens the may no thyng stonde;
Alle thyng obeyth to thyn honde;
Bothe hevyn & helle, watyr & londe,
 Alle thyng most to the lowte."

Belial, perhaps, is "the other devil" in the Porter's speech. In a print engraved for Hearne from an old drawing we have a portrait of this gate-keeper. It represents that Harrowing of Hell which is dramatized in the *Coventry Mysteries*. Christ is in the act of releasing various souls from the mouth of "the pit," to the extreme disgust of the appointed Custodian, who appears to be blowing a horn as a signal of alarm. Above his head is the legend, "Out

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out aroynt."/1 In Heywood's *Four P's* the Pardoner tells how he was anxious to find out in what estate stood the soul of a female friend who had died suddenly. His knowledge of her, as it would seem, not leading him to look for her in Paradise, he proceeded to Purgatory, and not finding her there he went to Hell.

And first to the devil that kept the gate
I came, and spake after this rate:
"All hail, Sir Devil," and made low courtesy;
"Welcome," quoth he thus smilingly.
He knew me well, and I at last

Remembered him since long time past:
 For as good hap would have it chance,
 This devil and I were of old acquaintance;
 For oft in the play of Corpus Christi
 He hath played the devil at Coventry.
 By his acquaintance and my behaviour
 He showed to me a right friendly favour;
 And to make my return the shorter,
 I said to the devil, "Good Master Porter
 For all old love, if it be in your power
 Help me to speak with my lord and your.
 "Be sure," quoth he, "no tongue can tell
 What time thou couldst have come so well;
 For as on this day Lucifer fell,
 Which is our festival in hell.
 Nothing unreasonable craved this day
 That shall in hell have any nay.
 But yet beware thou come not in
 Till time thou may thy passport win,/2 &c.

/1 A reprint of this grotesque picture may be seen in Hone's Ancient Mysteries described.

/2 See Hazlitt's Dodsley's Old Plays, i. 373-4; see also, ib. ii. 171, The Nice Wanton: --

I would not pass
 So that I might bear a rule in hell by the mass,
 To toss firebrands at these pennyfathers' pates
 I would be porter, and receive them at the gates;
 In boiling lead and brimstone I would seeth them each one.

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(v.) Are the style and language of the Porter's speech Shaksperian?

Surely the fancy, which is the main part of the Porter's speech, must be allowed to be eminently after the manner of Shakspeare. He was well acquainted with the older stage, as his direct references to it show, as those to the Vice in Twelfth Night, IV. ii.; 1 Henry IV, II. iv.; 2 Henry IV, III. ii.; Richard III, III. i.; Hamlet, III. iv.; and this conception of an infernal janitor is just such a piece of antique realism as he would delight in. He has it elsewhere; see Othello, IV. ii. 90, where Othello cries out to Emilia:

You, mistress,
 That have the office opposite to St. Peter,
 And keep the gate of hell.

The manner in which Macduff "draws out" the Porter is exactly like that of Shakspeare in similar circumstances elsewhere. "What three things does drink especially provoke?" says Macduff; and then the Porter delivers himself of his foolery, which is coarse enough, and to our taste highly offensive, it must be allowed. Compare the way in which Orlando is made to elicit the wit of Rosalind in As You Like It, III. ii. 323, et seq., &c. If this likeness of manner has no great positive, yet it has some negative value. We see that the manner is not un-Shaksperian, if it cannot be pronounced definitely Shaksperian; and we need not go to Middleton's plays for an illustration

of it.

The passage is written in the rhythmic, or "numerous," prose, that is so favourite a form with Shakspeare. Compare it in this respect, for instance, with Mrs. Quickly's account of Falstaff's end. See *Hen. V*, II. iii. 9-28.

And so for the language, there is certainly nothing in it un-Shaksperian. The use of "old" in "old turning of the key" occurs in 2 *Henry IV*, II. iv. 21, "old Vtis;" *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I. iv. 5, "an old abusing of God's patience and the king's English;" *Much Ado about Nothing*, V. ii. 98, "yonder's old coil at home;" equivocation in *Hamlet*, V. i. 149; *French Hose* in *Henry V*, III. vii. 56; comp. *Merchant of Venice*, I. ii. 80. Devil-porter it is accord-

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ing to a very frequent Shaksperian construction, as "prince it," in *Cymbeline*, III. iii. 85; "dukes it," in *Measure for Measure*, III. ii. 100. Compare, especially, "I cannot daub it farther," in *King Lear*, IV. i. 54; and "I'll queen it no inch farther," in *Winter's Tale*, IV. iv. 460.

The most striking phrase in the passage is certainly "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire;" and in *Hamlet* (I. iii. 50) Ophelia speaks of "the primrose path of dalliance."

I have not been careful to allude in this Paper to what is commonly said as to the disputed passage by those who allow it to be by Shakspeare, that it was inserted for the sake of the groundlings, or the gods, as we should say, because I am not inclined to think that Shakspeare would have made any undue sacrifice to that part of his audience. They were certainly to be considered by a theatrical writer, and certainly Shakspeare did not forget them. But to suppose that he would have glaringly disfigured -- if the passage is to be regarded a disfigurement -- one of the greatest passages of his art from any such consideration, is surely audacious and extravagant. Moreover, is it so certain that such an interruption of the terror would have gratified the 'groundling'? Would not the genuine animal -- and individuals of his species were and are to be found in other parts of the theatre besides that from which he derives his name -- have preferred that

"On horror's head horror" should "accumulate"? --

that the darkness should be deepened, his blood yet more severely chilled, his every hair made to stand on end? The thorough-bred sensationalist would surely vote the Porter to be an obnoxious intrusion. He would long for a draught of raw terror, and it is from such a potation that the Porter debars him.

The argument on which the rejectors of the passage take their stand is the intrinsic inferiority of it. An unsatisfactory argument. It involves two questions: First, is the inferiority of it so signal and admitted? and, secondly, if it is so, yet is the passage therefore not by Shakspeare? As to the former question, without contending that the soliloquy is a masterpiece of comedy, and the following dialogue a supreme flight of wit, yet surely the Porter holds his own well

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enough as compared with corresponding persons in other plays. Is the wit of the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, for example, so very superior?

Again, have those who thus condemn him taken well into account that coherence of his speech with the main action of the drama, which has been dwelt upon above? With regard to the second question, suppose the inferiority of the Porter be conceded, are we to believe that Shakspeare is always equal to himself -- that he is always at his best, and never slumbers nor sleeps? "Interdum dormitat Homerus." Homer is sometimes caught napping. But Shakspeare never? No one would deliberately say so; and yet perpetually critics argue on this presumption. If anything distinctly un-Shaksperian, or thought to be un-Shaksperian, can be pointed out either in the language or the style or the thought or the connection, then of the authenticity of the passage containing it our suspicions may be justly encouraged. But we cannot be too cautious in condemning a passage simply because it seems to us comparatively weak and forceless. Our eyes may not be good. And, if they are ever so good, yet it must be remembered that in Shakspeare's life, no less than in the lives of lesser men, there must have been times when all the wheels of his being were slow, when the "nimble spirits" seemed /1 prisoned up in the arteries, and the divine energy of his genius fainted and languished.

The general conclusion justified by what has been advanced in the course of this paper seems to me to be this: that the Porter is undoubtedly a part of the original play, and that the general conception of his speech is certainly Shakspeare's: with regard to the expression, that part of it is most certainly Shakspeare's, and, for the rest, no sufficient reason has yet been urged to countenance any doubt that it too is by Shakspeare.

/1 "Poysons up," in the 1623, Fol.