Gentleman 1770 Francis Gentleman, The dramatic censor; or, critical companion, vol. I (London, 1770). Setting A

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THE
DRAMATIC CENSOR;
OR,
CRITICAL COMPANION.

---- Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti: si non, his utere mecum.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

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UNKNOWN,
And wishing personally to remain so,
The DRAMATIC CENSOR,
As a mark of perfect esteem,
And a natural tribute to the most powerful, universal abilities that ever graced the English stage,
Thus dedicates,
On most disinterested principles,
His First Volume of Critical Observations,
TO
David Garrick, Esq;

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MACBETH.

Written by **Shakespeare.**

Preternatural beings afford the widest, most luxuriant field for genius to sport, and ideas to vegitate in; of this being truly sensible, and willing to give his muse of fire unlimited scope, Shakespeare has in several pieces availed himself, but in none more powerfully than the tragedy now before us; however, though critically we must admire that characteristic peculiarity of sentiment and expression which distinguish the Witches, it is nevertheless necessary to remark, that exhibiting such personages and phantoms, as never had any existence but in credulous or heated imaginations, tends to impress superstitious feelings and fears upon weak minds; for which reason, I consider every dramatic piece which treats the audience with a ghost, fairy or witch, as improper for young, unexperienced spectators in particular; if, as is well known, old womens stories of such, impress a timidity upon every child who hears their terrifying tales, a timidity which lasts to the conclusion of life; may we not infer apprehensions of their having a more forceable effect from being realized on the stage.

It may be said; that interdicting such poetical auxiliaries would cramp genius, and deprive us of many unparalleled beauties; to this the answer is plain, that nothing which has not a good effect, or

at least an inoffensive tendency should be deemed beautiful, or stand in estimation.

From what is thus premised, we hope, no other charge will be laid against Shakespeare, than the barbarous and credulous taste of the times in which he wrote, and to which he submitted, with possibly an oblique design of flattering the favourite opinion of James the first; yet allowing this to be really the case, it cannot exculpate his preternatural beings, as such, from rational censure for the reasons assigned above, notwithstanding the author had historical tradition to countenance his introduction of them; after this general, and, we hope, just objection against the weird sisters, we are

to take the piece as it stands, and consider distinctly its several component parts.

Macbeth commences with all the apparatus of terror -- a storm! a desart! and three withered hags of little less than infernal appearance; their short conference is full of meaning, and a kind of oracular obscurity; their sudden disappearance gains a desire in the spectators to see them again, and to know in what sort of business such extraordinary agents are to be employed; but I know not why they should sink under the stage, immediately after pronouncing these words, "*Hover* through the fog and filthy air."

The King's appearance to hear an account of the battle; that account, related by a wounded officer, with such energy of description, and so much to the honour of Duncan's generals; are good preparations to possess us of the heroic

part of Macbeth's character -- but why this express of victory should be sent by so imperfect a messenger as one, whose wounds, yet green, wanted the assistance of a surgeon, I cannot think; if the whole relation had come from Rosse, it would have been rather more suitable, and would have given his character somewhat more importance.

The witches, at their next meeting, question each other concerning their several employments, and the replies shew them pregnant with that diabolic malevolence which is charged against them; the threats vented against the sailor, whose wife had refused one of them chesnuts, strike every feeling mind with sympathetic terror; their preparation for Macbeth has something mystically solemn in it.

The notice taken of these odd appearances by Banquo, is such as would naturally occur to a man of sense and spirit; and their alternate climax of congratulation to Macbeth much in character; him they hail in plain and positive terms of prophecy, which throws him, very judiciously, into a state of silent and confused reflection; the author well knew, that no words at this period would equal the more suitable speech of countenance and action; therefore makes Banquo, whose open, disinterested heart takes no alarm, fill up a well-adapted pause of the principal character, by questioning the sisters concerning himself; their replies to him are flatter-

ing, but ænigmatical, and seem to rouse Macbeth to a curiosity of further information, which, however, is properly checked, for this time, by the departure of the Witches: in his speech to them,

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there appears an observation inconsistent with what is mentioned in the preceding scene; Macbeth says,

> But how of Cawdor? The thane of Cawdor lives
> A *prosperous* gentleman.

An unsuccessful rebel taken prisoner, as Cawdor must be, by Duncan's sentencing of him to death, could not justly be called *prosperous*, especially by the general who has lately overthrown him, but this is by no means a material lapse; what we find a little further on, shews more strange confusion, when Macbeth observes, that Cawdor lives, and asks,

> Why do you dress me in his borrow'd robes?

Angus makes this reply,

> ------ Who was the thane yet lives,
> But under heavy judgment bears that life,
> Which he deserves to lose -- whether he was
> Combin'd with Norway, or did line the rebel
> With hidden help and 'vantage; or, that with both
> He labour'd in his country's wreck, I know not;
> But treasons capital, confess'd, and prov'd,
> Have overthrown him.

It is worthy of remark, that Angus was present when Rosse particularised Cawdor's rebellious conduct to the king, notwithstanding he here expresses such ignorance of the cause of his impeachment.

Macbeth's feelings upon this unexpected acquisition, verifying in part the prediction which has been so lately pronounced to him, the dawnings of ambition which break out upon his unconnected meditation, are extremely natural; but his adverting to murther, for obtaining the state of royalty in

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view, shew him much too susceptible of villainous

impressions.

There are many circumstances and events to bring about the most unthought of changes in human affairs, wherefore that man who premiditates the worst means at first, must have by nature a deep depravation of heart; and such Macbeth will appear infected with from the whole of that speech which begins "Two truths are told," &c. notwithstanding somewhat like palliation is offered in two or three lines; indeed his conclusion seems to banish what he beautifully stiles *fantastical murther*; but cannot banish from spectators his barbarous ideas so suddenly conceived; I have dwelt upon this circumstance to strengthen my opinion, that the author meant to draw him a detestable monster, which some critics have rather disputed, allowing him a generous disposition, which we find no instance of; even the conscientious struggles which we shall presently find him engaged with, might arise in the most villainous nature -- he who does a bad action precipitately, or without knowing it to be such, may stand in some measure excuseable; but when a man has scrupulously weighed every relative circumstance in the nicest scale of reflection; and after all determines upon what nature, gratitude and justice, would avoid, he must be composed of the worst materials.

To corroborate the general idea of Macbeth's character, which I have here offered, and which will be enlarged upon when we go through the whole piece; let us view him in the very next scene, where

after a most cordial reception from the king, with unbounded promises of future favours, he is so possessed of his base purpose, that, void of even common gratitude, he replies, upon Duncan's appointing Malcolm prince of Cumberland,

> The prince of Cumberland! that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap:
> For in my way it lies -- Stars hide your fires,
> Let not night see my black and deep desires;
> The eye wink at the †end -- yet let that be,
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

From this passage it appears, that not content with the simple idea of regicide, he determines to cut off the whole family, in return for being loaded with honours by royal favour; and at the very in-

stant, when this unsuspecting monarch and friend places himself upon his hospitable reception; if this does not prove Macbeth an exception to the satirist's remark, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, I do'nt know what can.

Lady Macbeth, and her husband's letter, are judiciously introduced, but sure such sympathetic barbarity was never in nature, as suddenly, on the instant, breaks out in these words,

> Glamis thou art and Cawdor -- and shalt be
> What thou art promised.

What follows accuses Macbeth of a milky softness in his nature, of which he does not seem at all possessed; for unsuccessful struggles of conscience cannot justly be called so; however, that he may not have the whole load of aggravated guilt to bear alone, our author has made this matchless lady -- I lament so detestable, though a possible picture of the

fair sex -- exert uncommon talents of temptation; on hearing of the king's visit, with most unrelenting precipitation of thought, she dooms the royal visitant -- Her invocation to spirits of evil influence is worthy of a powerful imagination, and Macbeth's interruptive entrance, extremely well timed, but we must offer some doubt whether the word *blanket* of the dark, does not convey a low and improper idea.

Macbeth's mention of Duncan's approach without making any previous reply to his wife's cordial reception, is a natural effect of what sits nearest his heart; and her coming to the main point at once, is well devised for working him up to her great purpose; her confining the sentiment of murther in less than a line, and warning him to disguise those looks which appear too intelligible, impress us with a strong idea of her policy, as does her second hint of Duncan's death, and promising to take a great part of the dreadful business on herself.

The short scene before the castle has nothing material in it, except the following truly poetical remark made by Banquo;

> ---- This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his lov'd masonry, that heav'n's breath

Smells wooingly here -- No jutting freeze,
Buttrice, nor coigne of 'vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed, and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd,
The air is delicate.

Lady Macbeth's strained compliment to the king has also merit, as being natural, no truth being

more certain that treacherous hypocrisy ever strives to wear the fairest smiles.

In such a state of guilty perturbation as Macbeth now appears, no mode of expression could be so suitable as that of soliloquy; it were to be wished, however, that our great author, pursuing energy, had not in some sentences border'd upon obscurity, especially if we consider those passages as only repeated on the stage, where the ear must inevitably be too quick for conception: in an alteration of this play, which has been often played, there are some attempts to render the lines I speak of more intelligible, but, like most other paraphrases, they destroy the essential spirit.

The reflection, that if he could but gain ease even in this life, he would jump the life to come, is rather wildly impious; but the inevitable temporal punishment of a conscience loaded with guilt is very well and commendably inculcated; the arguguments for declining the murther are so forceable, that nothing but the most hardened heart, under such conviction, would proceed -- Where he personifies pity, and mounts her astride on the *blast*, fancy takes a very vigorous flight, nor does expression fall beneath, yet I am afraid they leave propriety behind, the following lines are in my opinion very exceptionable.

---- I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'er-leaps itself
And falls on the other.

To embody *intention*, that *ambition* may be a *spur* to prick its sides, leans towards the burlesque; and then turning the *spur* into another body, that it may vault over, instead of gaining the *saddle* of

intent, corroborates this idea; indeed this speech should always end at

> The deep damnation of his taking off.

For pity -- heaven's cherubim and ambition, all upon the full gallop, are strained figures at least; not at all adapted to a man deliberating upon one of the foulest, most important murthers he could commit.

Lady Macbeth comes to speak in rather plainer terms; yet, unless we allow great latitude of expression, what follows evidently admits of objection.

> ------ Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you drest yourself? Hath it slept since,
> And wakes it now to look so pale and sickly.

Suppose we pass over the literal acceptation of *hope* being drunk, surely we must blame a lady of high rank for descending to such a vulgar and nauseous allusion as the paleness and sickness of an inebriated state; nor is her comparison of the cat in the adage much more the effect of good breeding.

Macbeth's reply to the very gross rebuff he has just received is as concise, significant and noble a one as ever was uttered; but his bloody-minded virago's next speech, towards the conclusion, wounds humanity with such a sentiment as no woman should utter, nor any rational being hear;

yet that strange, horrid picture of dashing a smiling infant's brains out, and laying a plan for complicated destruction, occasions Macbeth to say

> Bring forth men children only,
> For thy undaunted metal should compose
> Nothing but males.

Should he not rather have said,

> Bring forth fierce tygers only,
> For thy relentless nature should compose
> Nothing but beasts.

If it should be urged, that such characters have been, and may be; I still contend, that they are among the

frightful deformities and essential concealments of nature, which should be excluded from the stage.

The midnight interview of Macbeth and Banquo at the beginning of the second act, very properly ushers in the dreadful business then in agitation; that prophetic heaviness of heart mentioned by the former, his presenting a fresh mark of favour from the king to lady Macbeth, his speaking of the three weird sisters, and Macbeth's affecting to slight the remembrance of them, tho' not very obvious, are yet considerable beauties: I could heartily wish this passage did not occur

------ There's husbandry in heaven,
Their *candles* are all out ------

What a poverty of idea and expression! yet we find the stars called *candles* by our author, in his Romeo and Juliet also -- how much more worthy of himself and of his subject, is what Lorenzo calls them in the Merchant of Venice, *pattens of bright gold*?

In Macbeth's soliloquy, where a visionary dagger strikes his mind's eye, the abrupt introduction of that alarming object is very judicious and beautiful; nor can any thing be more natural than the effect it has on Macbeth, which is most admirably described, and strongly impressed by a nervous succession of breaks, which, for a dozen or fourteen lines, rise into a powerful climax of confusion -- the momentary pause of unclouded reason which relieves imagination from her painful load, and the quick return of coward conscience diversify the sentiment and action in a most interesting manner; the picture of midnight, as favouring witchcraft, rapes and murther, concludes this inimitable soliloquy with a due solemnity of terror; a soliloquy of such unspeakable merit, that, like charity, it may apologize for a multitude of faults.

Lady Macbeth, at her entrance, gives us a piece of information not very defensible, unless it is meant as some palliation of her character -- the false fire of liquor, for which she seems to have very little occasion, must be, in her situation, rather a dangerous resource: the remainder of her speech is happily disjointed by earnest expectation and jealous apprehension. -- The remark, that a likeness of her father in Duncan's sleeping appearance, prevented

her from doing the business herself, lets in a gleam of humanity upon this female fiend.

The entrance of Macbeth, his high-wrought confusion, and every syllable of the ensuing scene, exhibit an unparallelled combination of judgment and genius, calculated to awake the drowsiest feel-

ings, and to alarm the most resolute heart -- the picture of the grooms crying out in disturbed dreams -- one "Heaven bless us, and amen the other," with the inimitable description of sleep, and the idea of nature's general friend being murthered in that sleep, are astonishing efforts of mental ability, and, for so much, certainly place Shakespeare beyond any degree of comparative merit.

The refusal of Macbeth to go again into the scene of blood, is an apt stroke of well-timed remorse; indeed his bringing the daggers from the place they should have been left in, is an extreme well-judged mark of confusion; however, I would rather have forfeited that instance of judgment, than have heaped such savage inhumanity upon the female; her boast of having hands crimsoned like those of her husband, carries the offensive colouring still higher: what succeeds, on the interruption of knocking, is expressed very characteristically.

To what end Shakespeare could introduce so incongruous a character as the porter, who is commendably omitted in representation, I believe no mortal can tell; at such an interesting period, to turn the most serious feelings into laughter, or rather into distaste, by a string of strained quibbles is an insult upon judgment, and must fill the imagination with a chaos of idea -- Some more suitable pause might have been made to give Macbeth time for composing his ruffled figure; the short scene between him, Macduff and Lenox, is well calcu-

lated; Lenox's remarks upon the night are very consistent with those surperstitious principles, on which this play is chiefly founded; and Macduff's exclamatory entrance discovers Duncan's murther properly.

The successive entrances and exits of various characters, the real grief of some, and the feigned sorrow of others, Macbeth's apology for his political stroke of killing the grooms, by an affecting picture of Duncan's situation, and the rapid resolution of enquiring judicially into so unaccountable an event, are all well arranged and happily expressed; but the amazing precipitate flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, without any apology, except the paltry one of instantaneous fear, places these sprigs of royalty in a contemptible light, and its effect on the stage proves the justice of this remark; for when one says, "I'll to England," and the other comically replies, "To Ireland I," nine times out of ten, the audience are thrown into a horse-laugh. -- I could wish this circumstance was altered, as it easily might be, by giving a few speeches of spirit and dutiful affection to one or both the princes, expressive of their particular determination to discover, and revenge their father's death; which might be over-ruled by Macduff's representation of the danger they stand exposed to, and that for their greater security it would be better to retire, till the unavoidable convulsions of state were subsided, or till proper measures could be taken to establish the legal succession; this, I apprehend, would have carried them off with some

grace, whereas in their present disposition they make such a wretched figure, that we can scarce forget it, when Malcolm appears to assert his right at the head of an army.

The continuation of omens between Rosse and the old man seems to have little meaning unless to keep reflection in an unremitted state of terror; and unusual events are carried to a very strange pitch indeed, when Rosse asserts that he was eye-witness of Duncan's horses eating one another.

Macduff's account that Macbeth is already named and gone to Scone to be invested with royalty, is a great trespass on time, their being but twenty lines, or thereabouts, from the *stealing* away of the princes, as it is properly phrased, and his account of every thing being thus settled in consequence of their supposed criminal escape.

Introducing the witches at the end of the second act is a very seasonable relief to a feeling mind,

from the painful weight of horror which some preceding scenes must have laid upon it; and, in suitable music, they continue the story predictively as a kind of chorus; their rejoicing in the mischief already done, and that which yet lies in the womb of time, shews a disposition worthy such agents as the subordinate fiends of darkness.

Banquo's reflections, with which the third act begins, are well adapted to the circumstances; and and his doubts of Macbeth's elevation by honourable means, natural; as is also his adverting to the prophecy in favour of his own posterity; the new king's fresh professions of friendship to, and hospi-

table invitation of his former colleague and friend, fix, if possible, a deeper stamp of baseness on his character; but at the same time exhibit strength of policy; and the succeding soliloquy points out, nervously, motives for a fresh instance of barbarity; the firm untainted dignity of Banquo's nature, joined to the prediction of his childrens succession to the throne, are strong motives of jealousy to rouse the blood-stained usurper's unrelenting disposition, which takes the sure, though meanest method of removing his fears, by assassination.

In respect of Macbeth's scene with the murderers, I apprehend he uses too much circumlocution, especially as we perceive, by what he says at their entrance, that those ruffians have been made acquainted with a main part of the affair, Banquo's oppression of them; being possessed of this, does it not seem more natural, that the tyrant would after this line, "We are men, my liege," immediately come to, "Both of you know, Banquo is your enemy;" than run into the unessential, digressive, though just comparison of men and dogs? I know it may be urged, that murtherous intentions are communicated with slow and jealous caution; this is undoubtedly the case in particular characters and circumstances. -- It is masterly to make king John wind about the disposition of Hubert gradually, he being a person of some consideration and doubtful principles; but for Macbeth to expatiate so much at large, with such fellows as he seems to pick out, appears a waste of

words; had there been any passage to indulge the author's fancy, or to favour the performer's action and utterance, then a little superfluity would stand particularly excuseable with an audience; and find some indulgence even from a critical reader; as the scene stands, I have ever observed it to pall in representation.

What succeeds between Macbeth and his lady is well adapted to their unavoidable perturbation; but would have fallen in better as a continuation, than making two distinct scenes; Macbeth's exit, after the murtherers have left him is superfluous; every thing he advances, in this short conference, shews a striking, poetical, yet natural picture of mental gloom and heart-felt agony; his invocation of night, and description of its solemn approach, are pleasing effusions of genius.

The scene of the murtherers, Banquo's fall, and Fleance's escape, is partly trifling, partly shocking, and seldom fails of proving laughable; I wish something better had been substituted, and the circumstance referred to a relation of it by the murtherer, I could also wish, that decorum had not suffered by such a ragamuffin's entrance into a room of state, amidst the whole court; I apprehend no necessity for this, and am therefore induced to blame it.

Considering the place, hurry of spirits, &c. I am bold to censure all the following speech, except the first hemistich, and the last, marked in Italics; they are much certainly as any man, so situated,

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would have said, therefore what comes between is surperflous.

> *Then comes my fit again* -- (I had else been perfect,
> Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
> As free and general as the casing air;
> But now I'm cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in
> To saucy doubts and fears.) -- *But Banquo's safe.*

Had the affair been communicated in a proper place, the disappointed usurper might have thrown out much more extended, spirited remarks on the ill-boding failure of his foremost wish; reproaches on the murtherer for executing his charge imper-

fectly; execrations against fortune, for throwing any painful rubs in his way; with other matters which might have been suggested, would have added much, at least to the acting merit of his character.

Banquo's ghost, which, without being too ludicrous, we may call the raw-head-and-bloody-bones of tragedy, is nevertheless well introduced to throw Macbeth into those violent agitations which nature must feel, and such as furnish extensive powers an almost unlimited scope to shew themselves; the words of both Macbeth and his lady are beautifully applicable through the whole scene, which concludes, so far as the ghost is concerned, with as forceable a climax of impassioned terror as ever any author penned; the reflections which follow, in the conclusive part of the scene, are such as naturally arise from the subject, and are nervously expressed; Macbeth's determination to consult the witches, plainly indicates the agitation and weak-

ness of a guilty heart and a superstitious head; I should be glad to know how he is so well acquainted with their places of rendezvous, as to know exactly the spot of consultation.

The witches receive, in the following scene, a sharp rebuke from their superior, Hecate, for dealing in any mischief which did not originally spring from her; she delivers herself in a fanciful stile, and opens with propriety their business at the pit of Acheron.

That remarkable incantation, which begins the fourth act; the mysterious ceremony practised; the emblematic ingredients collected for enchantment, and the arrangement of them, shew a more peculiar luxuriance of fancy than any other author ever compacted into such narrow bounds; the music also, as in two former scenes, has a very just and pleasing effect.

Macbeth's mode of addressing the witches seems too much of the compulsive; influenced by, and giving credit to such beings, we may naturally enough suppose his approach would have been in a milder strain; however, he brings to view a number of striking images respecting their power.

A number of strange, indeed very strange apparitions, or sucking ghosts, present themselves, and

deliver flattering, dubitable predictions, well calculated to mislead credulity; and Macbeth's eagerly catching at the most favourable interpretation, shews coward conscience, like a drowning man, catching at every broken reed for support; the long train of shades, representing the succession of

royalty, is well enough calculated to impress additional uneasiness upon the tyrant; but such a superabundance and variety of spectres, palls even terror, fatigues imagination, and offends sight: a dance is very well introduced here to relieve attention.

One would naturally suppose, that Macbeth had enjoyed a full sufficiency of such agreeable company, yet we find him rather displeased that they are gone; the intelligence of Macduff's flight to England is well thrown in to give spirit and an opening of business; his wife and children being devoted to destruction in consequence, we might reasonably expect from what has been already shewn of Macbeth's jealous, impatient cruelty.

The next scene of Macduff's lady and son, where murtherers come and demolish the latter in view of the audience, is, if I can be allowed the phrase, farcically horrid; as disgraceful an oddity, as ever invaded Shakespeare's muse, and therefore with great justice omitted in representation.

The scene between Malcolm and Macduff is very happily conducted; a politic suspicion makes the former reprobate himself, that he may come more perfectly at the thane of Fife's real disposition; whose honest, patriot principles must ever warm and please attention; those reflections he throws out on vices which shame and endanger royalty, are instructive and beautiful; his short picture of the late king Duncan and his queen, to rouse the prince, their son to emulation, nobly pathetic; and this proving the key to unlock Malcolm's reserve,

shews great judgment. -- A doctor, brought in merely to introduce mention of English Edward's power to cure by a touch -- that very dubitable circumstance of tradition -- is at best trifling, or a paltry compliment to the reigning monarch; nothing

at all to the matter in question, and only breaks in abruptly upon a very interesting continuation, I mean, the heart-felt intelligence that Rosse brings of the fatal tragedy acted in Macduff's family; his first speaking of general griefs, the miseries of Scotland, is a well-judged preparative for a more confined and peculiar concern, relative to one of the characters present; indeed, Macduff's enquiry for Scotland, before his wife and children, shews great magnanimity of mind; and Rosse's diffident manner of revealing their lamentable fall is sensibly humane; hence the scene, by degrees of most exact proportion, presents a climax of grief which never fails to work a general and suitable effect, and concludes with a pleasing, spirited denunciation of revenge against the blood-stained usurper; thus the fourth act terminates, leaving, as every fourth act in particular should do, an impatient expectation impressed upon the audience for what must follow.

Lady Macbeth's physician, and one of the ladies of her bedchamber, begin the fifth act, with a few preparatory and pertinent speeches, for a circumstance not expected; the tormenting effects of a thorny conscience galling that female fiend beyond all power of disguise or composure, a circumstance the more pleasing; as it approaches us unawares, and

beautifully vindicates the justice of providence, *even here upon this bank and shoal of time.*

Walking and speaking, while actually asleep, has been verified by many hundred instances, therefore her ladyship is brought to view in as justifiable and affecting a situation as could possibly have been imagined -- her disjointed mode of speaking, the imaginary spot on her hand -- the confused apprehensions of Macbeth's timidity, similar to what she expressed at the time the action was really committed; and the explanation thrown in by the attendants are admirably combined; we may also venture to pronounce the heavy sigh she vents, on despairing to clear herself of blood, a striking effusion of a guilty heart; her departure is finely and most naturally precipitated by acting over again the confusion which arose from knocking at the gate.

Four loyal leaders appear next, as on their way to join the lawful prince; their conversation has little

material in it, save properly acquainting the audience that the tyrant coops himself in Dunsinane castle, beleagured with his crimes more painfully and closely than by his foes.

Macbeth's expressions at his entrance most plainly evince a disturbed brain and forced resolution; flying for safety to the prediction of the witches is a well-timed, additional proof of that superstitious weakness, which, stimulated by ambition, has hurried him into all his guilt and consequent misfortunes.

The expressions he uses to the servant or officer who enters with intelligence of the English army are low

and gross, far beneath even a private gentleman; and why Shakespeare should make a monarch run into such vulgarisms is not easy to guess; for the rage or grief of a king should always preserve peculiar dignity, without which the author cannot boast a chaste preservation of character; the following speech, however, makes full amends for a thousand venial slips; the breaks in the two first lines afford a beautiful variety of action, tones of voice and countenance -- those which succeed are as fine declamatory reflections arising from the consciousness of guilt and general dislike, in a sensible man, as severest criticism could relish; nor is it easy to determine which claims preference the sentiment or versification.

> Take thy face hence -- Seyton -- I am sick at heart
> When I behold -- Seyton, I say -- This push
> Will chear me ever or disease me now.
> I have lived long enough; my May of life
> Is fallen 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 dare not.

Macbeth's reply to the physician, on hearing of his lady's strong mental indisposition, is no less worthy of capital genius, no less satisfactory in speaking, hearing or reading:

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;

Raze out the written troubles of the brain;

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And, with some sweet, oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous load,
Which weighs upon the heart.

Nothing could be more happily introduced from the morals they inculcate, and the pause they give to Macbeth's rage, than the two foregoing speeches; they are a timely relief to the performer's expression, which otherwise must have been kept too much on the strain, and a delicious treat to every intelligent mind amongst an audience.

The scene which follows, so indeed every intermediate scene of this act appears, only serves to bring the catastrophe nearer to view, and to circumscribe the principal character within narrower bounds; that expectation of his fate may take wing amongst the audience -- they express a firmer, tho' not so outrageous a spirit in the assailing party, and therefore appear as a natural contrast to the defensive side.

Macbeth, at his next appearance, again breaks out with flashes of false fire, vaunting the impregnable strength of his fortress. -- Notwithstanding we have expressed, and really entertain a dislike of frequent quotation, yet so strong a temptation lies here in our way we cannot resist it; and the more readily give way, being sensible that every reader of refined conception will rather thank us, than pass any censure. -- Besides, having pointed out several passages which, we apprehend, of a contrary nature -- it seems a necessary point of justice to the author. -- Upon hearing a scream of women, Macbeth observes,

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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 it -- I have †slept full with horrors --
Direness, familiar to my slaught'rous thoughts,
Cannot once start me -- Wherefore was that cry!
Seyt. The queen, my lord, is dead.
Macb. She should have dy'd hereafter. --
There would have been a time for such a word.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
Creeps in †a 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 ideot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing! --

The foregoing speech has the first principle of intrinsic merit to an eminent degree, moral instruction; an equal number of lines never yet exhibited a fuller, more compleat picture of the vanity of human life; and our author has, with great address, again used the method of realizing his character, by making Macbeth speak of the player as a fictitious, transitory representative -- The transition upon a messenger's entrance, who mentions Birnham-wood as moving, is truly fine; Macbeth has rested his security upon the sandy foundation of equivocal promises, and now, the broken reeds falling away one by one, he plunges gradually into the rage and depths of desperation; his resolution to

sally out seems rather the effect of fatal, inevitable destruction than real courage.

The business now encreases, and justly hurries on to a rapidity of material events; the tyrant is, as himself aptly expresses it, tied to a stake, and therefore through compulsion must fight; as to the combat, wherein that unfledged warrior, young Siward, falls, it seems to have very little business in the piece, unless to encrease a torrent of blood already exceeding all due bounds.

Macduff's encounter with Macbeth raises expectation to the very top of its bent; and justice sits trembling in every humane bosom for so essential a sacrifice to her as the tyrant; the introduction of Macbeth's sole remaining hope, that of being invulnerable to any person born of woman, shews great judgement, and his feelings, on being told the fallacy of his charm, are expressed in very apt terms. -- Why the author chose to execute so great a culprit behind the scenes, thereby depriving the audience of a most satisfactory circumstance is not easy to imagine; death certainly is made, in this

instance, too modest; and the bringing on a head defeats every trace of the author's new-born false delicacy -- the present mode of representation is much better.

What follows Macbeth's fall is, like the remainder of every tragedy when the plot is revealed, and the principal characters are disposed of, a matter of very little consequence; therefore is confined, as it ought to be, within the bounds of judicious brevity; Malcolm, however, gives a piece

of historic information concerning the first institution of earldoms in Scotland, which a tythe of every audience would not else know.

As Macbeth, in representation, dies before the audience, it appeared necessary, according to dramatic custom, to give him some conclusive lines, which Mr. **Garrick**, as I have been told, has happily supplied, as nothing would be more suitable or striking, as to make him mention, with dying breath, his guilt, delusion, the witches, and those horrid visions of future punishment, which must ever appall and torture the last moments of such accumulated crimes.

It has been already hinted, and may be laid down as an irrefragable maxim, that moral tendency is the first great and indispensible merit of any piece written for the stage; in which light I am afraid the tragedy before us, though a favourite child of genius, will not hold a very distinguished place; fate, necessity, or predestination has embarrassed the most inqisitive philosophers, the most painful theologists, and still remains matter of much perplexity to those who endeavour to develope it; **Shakespeare** therefore, who was no doubt, an able moralist, should have declined any subject which glanced an eye that way, yet we find his Macbeth strongly inculcates power of prediction, even in the worst and most contemptible agents; inculcates a supernatural influence of one mortal being over another: It is but a very weak defence to say he only wrote according to the accepted notions of those times from whence he drew his plot -- admitted --

but whatever tends to weaken reason, to mislead the

understanding, and intimidate the heart, should not be used as a subject for dramatic composition, which adorns fiction with her most persuasive charms; weak minds are ever more liable to receive prejudicial, than advantageous impressions; wherefore, any character, incidents, or sentiments, which may work the former effect, should be industriously avoided; if the stage, upon some occasions does not improve, it should at least leave an audience no worse than it finds them, equally avoiding vice and credulity.

That I do not charge our author with promulging principles of fatalism without reason, let me produce two passages, exclusive of the prophecies, which are derived from that source -- at the end of Lady Macbeth's first soliloquy, she says

> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which *fate* and *metaphysical* aid doth seem
> To have crowned thee with.

Macbeth also, just before the murderers are introduced to him in the third act, expresses him self thus

> To make them kings! the seed of Banquo kings!
> Rather than so, come *fate* into the list,
> And champion me to the utterance. --

The very word fate, if it has any meaning at all, can boast but an unfavourable one to moral fitness; it is a term crept into common use, and established by custom; how frequently do we hear, upon the accidental or violent death of any person, this absurd remark made -- it was his or her *fate* -- a minute investigation of this point would run me into an unpardonable digression from my proposed sub-

ject, wherefore I have only started some hints for abler critics to elucidate or set aside, as may seem fit; and shall only add, that the plot of Macbeth, though the unities of time and place are much infringed upon, does not strike in representation with any offensive ideas of improbability; but rises by very just degrees to a catastrophe, which is well wrought up; the moral is the same as that of Richard the Third, shewing that a guilty conscience is a constant tormentor, and that a royal, as well as a private murderer is obnoxious to punishment.

Among the natural characters, if Macbeth and his lady deserve such an epithet, there is very little variety or contrast; all the men, except the principal, are tolerably honest; as to the heroine, she stands alone.

To delineate Macbeth is not easy; the author seems like Prometheus, to have made a man of his own, but to have stolen his animation rather from Hell than Heaven: by the account we hear of him, previous to his entrance, magnanimity and courage appear conspicuous in his conduct; yet, no sooner does he present himself, but with all the weakness of unpractised youth, he receives a strong impression from old women's prognostications; and with all the aptness of a studied villain suggests the most pernicious practices, which from that moment, with a very few slight intervals, take entire possession of his heart; from his future proceedings, we perceive him more actuated by jealous apprehensions than sound policy; more influenced by rage and desparation, than any degree of natural resolution; cre-

dulous, impatient, vindictive, ambitious without a spark of honour; cruel without a gleam of pity -- in short, as compleat a tool for ministers of temptation to work upon, as ever fancy formed, and too disgraceful for nature to admit amongst her works.

However considered in the view of theatrical action, there is not one personage to be found in our English drama, which more strongly impresses an audience, which requires more judgment and greater powers to do it justice; many passages are intricate, some heavy, but for the greater part, powerfully impassioned; the mental agitation he is thrown into, requires expression peculiarly forcible, of action, look and utterance, even so far as to make the hearts of spectators shrink, and to thrill their blood; indeed, every assistance from externals is given the actor, such as daggers, bloody hands, ghosts, &c. but these must be treated judiciously, or the effect, as I have sometimes seen it, may take a ludicrous turn.

Through all the soliloquies of anxious reflections in the first act; amidst the pangs of guilty apprehensions and pungent remorse in the second; through all the distracted terror of the third; all the impetuous curiosity of the fourth, and all the despara-

tion of the fifth, Mr. **Garrick** shews uniform, unabating excellence; scarce a look, motion, or tone, but takes possession of our faculties: and leads them to a just sensibility.

As **Shakespeare** rises above himself in many places, so does this his greatest and best commentator, who not only presents his beautie_ to the imagina-

tion, but brings them home feelingly to the heart: among a thousand other instances of almost necromantic merit; let us turn our recollection only to a few in the character of Macbeth; who ever saw the *immortal actor* start at, and trace the imaginary dagger previous to Duncan's murder, without embodying by sympathy, unsubstantial air into the alarming shape of such a weapon? Whoever heard the low, but piercing notes of his voice when the *deed is done*, repeating those inimitable passages which mention the sleeping grooms and murder of sleep, without feeling a vibration of the nerves? Who ever saw the guilty distraction of features he assumes on Banquo's appearance at the feast, without sacrificing reason to real apprehension from a mimic ghost; who has heard his speech, after receiving his death wound, uttered with the utmost agony of body and mind, but trembles at the idea of future punishment, and almost pities the expiring wretch, though stained with crimes of the deepest die?

Theatrical performance to most spectators appears a mechanical disposition of limbs, and a parotted mode of speech; so indeed it really is too often, but intrinsic merit soars far beyond such narrow, barren limits, she traces nature through her various windings, dives into her deepest recesses, and snatches ten thousand beauties which plodding method can never display; the dullest comprehension may be taught to enter on this side or that; to stand on a particular board; to raise the voice here,

and fall it there; but unless motion and utterance are regulated by a cultivated knowledge of life, and self born intelligent feelings, no greater degree of excellence can be attained than unaffecting propriety; like a fair field whose native fertility of soil pro-

duces a beauteous luxuriant crop of spontaneous vegetation, which art can only regulate, not enrich; Mr. **Garrick**'s matchless genius not only captivates our sportive senses, but also furnishes high relished substantial food for our minds to strengthen by.

Mr. **Quin**, whose sole merit in tragedy was declamation or brutal pride, was undescribably cumbersome in Macbeth; his face, which had no possible variation from its natural grace, except sternness and festivity, could not be expected to exhibit the acute sensations of this character; his figure was void of the essential spirit, and his voice far too monotonous for the transitions which so frequently occur; yet, wonderful to be told, he played it several years with considerable applause.

Mr. **Sheridan** shewed more variety of acting in this part than any other, and made an astonishing good use of his limited powers; without any exaggeration of compliment to that gentleman, we must place him in a very reputable degree of competion with Mr. **Garrick** in the dagger scene, and at the same time confess a doubt, whether any performer ever spoke the words, "*this is a sorry sight*," better -- as to the third, fourth, and fifth acts, his meaning well, was all we could ever perceive to recommend him.

Mr. **Barry** as a capital acter -- indeed a very capital one in his proper cast, made, in our comprehension, but a lukewarm affair of Macbeth, his amorous harmony of features and voice, could but faintly, if at all, describe passions incident to a tyrant, in such circumstances as he is placed; his commanding figure, and other requisites preserved him from being insipid, though far beneath himself.

Mr. **Powell** -- light lie the ashes of the respectable dead -- was beyond doubt, partially received in this tragedy; the requisite force of expression and a proper disposition of features were wanting; after the murder, his feelings dwindled into a kind of boyish whimpering, and his countenance rather described bodily than mental pain; in the third act, he seemed unequal to the arduous task of describing extreme horror, and in the fifth, Macbeth's weight of desparation bore him down; even the soliloquies appeared too sententiously heavy for his ex-

pression; as his playing the part was certainly matter of choice; I am sorry he ever mistook his own abilities so much, notwithstanding he met public indulgence, a compliment, in some measure, due even to the failings of a performer, who displayed so much intrinsic merit as he did on more suitable occasions.

Mr. **Holland**, that industrious, useful, laborious, imitative actor, idolized his great instructor too much to be any thing original; in Macbeth we deem him particularly unhappy; aiming to be great, he frequently lost all trace of character: un—

tunably stiff in all his declamation; mechanical in action; ungracious in attitude; affected in feeling; unharmonious in tones; irregular in emphasis; and wild in passion; yet having an agreeable person, significant aspect, and powerful voice, he often pleased his audience, and kept attention awake, while judgment was obliged to slumber, or seek safety in silence from popular prejudice.

Among many theatrical circumstances much to be lamented, is that terrible necessity which forces Mr. **Smith** into an undertaking so opposite to every one of his requisites, except figure; we are confident his good sense agrees with us, that saddling him with the part is an imposition upon that good nature and integrity which stimulate him to work through thick and thin, for the support of Covent Garden house.

Macduff is a part of no great action, except on discovery of the King's murder, and the fourth act scene; Messrs. **Ryan** and **Havard** both did him great justice, yet we must be of opinion that Mr. **Reddish** depicts him with superior strength and beauty; his feelings are manly, yet tender; spirited without excess; and to us convey whatever an author intended, or an audience can wish.

Banquo's chief merit is as a ghost; here Mr. **Ross** made the most striking, picturesque appearance we have ever seen, and with peculiar grace even beautified horror: All the rest of the men in this play are unworthy notice.

Lady Macbeth, as to the detestable composition of her character, has been sufficiently animadverted

on, therefore little more is necessary than to observe, that though there does not appear much call for capital merit, yet several first-rate actresses have made but a languid figure in representing her.

Notwithstanding Mrs. **Woffington** was extremely well received, and really did the part as well as her deplorable tragedy voice would admit; we must place Mrs. **Pritchard** foremost; who made a very just distinction, in the scene where Banquo's ghost appears; between reproving Macbeth's behaviour with passion, or the anxiety of apprehension, lest he should betray his guilt; this latter method she happily pursued, and here, as well as in the sleeping scene, gained manifest superiority. Mrs. **Yates**, at present, comes nearest the point of praise, but certainly displays no very conspicuous merit in the character; and to mention Mrs. **Barry** would be to injure her, as it certainly does not at all coincide with her capabilities.

The witches I should take no notice of, but for a supposed amendment in speaking and dressing those characters at Covent Garden; as beings out of the course of nature, **Shakespeare** furnished them with a peculiarity of style, why then should we not suppose he meant a peculiarity of deportment and utterance? He certainly did, as much as for Caliban; a languid propriety of natural expression destroys in them, pleasing and characteristic oddity -- as to dressing them in the Sybillic taste, it makes them rather Roman than Scots witches, and sacrifices established national ideas, at the shrine of false decorum, sor-

did appearance, ugly features, and advanced age, dubbed any female a witch in the times of credulity; even now, a very disagreeable woman, bent with age, and wrapped in filthiness, is stigmatized with that title, though not so seriously, north of the Tweed; nay, Macbeth himself stiles them *filthy* hags, most certainly alluding to personal appearance. -- If an alteration of dress is to take place in this
play, I could wish the characters were dressed in habits of the times, which would be pleasing, and we apprehend necessary.

Macbeth, for its boldness of sentiment, strength

of versification, variety of passions and preternatural beings, deserves to be esteemed a first rate tragedy, containing a number of beauties never exceeded, and many blemishes very censurable; dangerous in representation, as has been said, to weak minds; unintelligible to moderate conceptions in many places, upon perusal; therefore, chiefly calculated for sound understanding, and established resolution of principles, either on the stage or in the study.

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Having through an unaccountable lapse of memory forgot to mention Mr. **Mossop**, both in this tragedy and Macbeth; it is hoped the reader will accept our opinion of that gentleman here; though not in the regular course of our plan -- no performer in our remembrance possesses a voice of more strength and variety than Mr. **Mossop**, and we believe he understands his author as well as any one, yet an insuperable aukwardness of action, and a most irksome laboriousness of expression, render him peculiarly offensive to chaste judgment in Macbeth; a number of unlucky attempts at attitude, ungraceful distortions of feature, an overstrained affectation of consequence, and many ill-applied painful pauses, banishing nature, loudly proclaim the mere actor -- in Othello, though liable to several of the same objections, we deem him much happier, the Moor's wildness of passion he describes extremely well, and under all disadvantages most certainly stands second to, though far beneath Mr. **Barry**.