

of his third period. It is a happy thing to observe that amid such tempests his inner convictions of religion and his practical good sense gained the complete victory; and he was thus enabled to attain to a peaceful and prosperous middle age.

Though he by no means won immediate appreciation from all his contemporaries, yet his great fellow-poet, Ben Jonson, wrote of him:—

“I confess thy writings to be such
As neither man nor muse can praise too much,”

and hazarded the prophecy which has been so amply fulfilled:—

“He was not of an age, but for all time!”

If in these papers I succeed in inspiring my readers with a deeper sense of the boundless wealth of wisdom that lies in those works of Shakespeare which, in these happy days, they may purchase for a few shillings, I shall have conferred on them an

unquestionable service, both positive and negative.

It will be a *positive* service, because if they learn the best lessons which perhaps the greatest of Englishmen of genius has to teach them, they may be—

“Richer possessing such a jewel
Than twenty seas though all their sands were pearl,
Their waters nectar, and their rocks pure gold.”

It will be a *negative* service, because they will certainly thus be weaned from attempting to circumnavigate “the shoreless lakes of human ditch-water,” and will find that they may gain an endowment of happiness, incomparably richer and more eternal, from the ennobling study of a few great books than from the frivolous triviality which wastes time over multitudes of worthless ones.

In my last paper I said something about Shakespeare in general, and pointed to the number of isolated passages that embalm

immortal truths in perfect utterance. In the next paper I will say something about one or two of his plays regarded as a whole. In the present paper, by way of specimen, I wish to call attention to the colossal force and deep meaning of a few separate scenes.

1. It should be observed that the glory and meaning of these scenes never result from their being dragged into the play by predetermination. The plays were not written for the sake of these scenes; but the scenes evolve themselves naturally and, so to speak, spontaneously from the progress of the drama. Shakespeare scarcely ever invented the main story of his plays. He usually borrowed it from existing materials — whether of history or of fiction. But, while he was frequently indebted to English or Italian predecessors for the general outlines of his dramas, he imagined for himself the characters of the men and women whose destinies he intended to illustrate. He was thus enabled, by his unparalleled insight

into the workings of the human heart, to leave these *Dramatis Personæ* to evolve the situations by which he carries out his proper functions as a poet and dramatist, which were “to hold as ’twere, the mirror up to nature.”

The men and women of Shakespeare move, act, and speak on his dramatic stage exactly as they would do on the stage of the world. We see in their self-determined destinies an epitome of life itself.

1. Let our first scene be taken from “Measure for Measure.” It illustrates with most salutary power the weakening, depraving, disintegrating effects of self-indulgence upon the mind of a youth whose training and moral instruction would, but for this evil bias, have made him capable of nobler things. It shows us also how, in a mind thus vitiated, the first natural instinct of nobler disdain for what is infamous is rapidly perverted by the soft pleadings of a sensual egotism. Claudio has impaired in himself the determination to do right, and at

all costs to shame the devil, partly because his lot is cast amid evil surroundings in Vienna, which has become a sink of iniquity, and partly because he has freely yielded to temptation. So necessary is the effort to ameliorate the condition of the perverted city that a law has been passed by the Duke which condemns sensual offenders to death. By this law Claudio is sentenced to forfeit his life. Angelo, the remorseless deputy, is impervious to every consideration of compassion for Claudio's youth, spent as it has been amid the universal atmosphere of the impurity to which he has succumbed. Claudio has a saintly sister named Isabella, who is about to enter a monastery; and "the precise Angelo" — whose mercilessness is only the cloak of a deeply seated hypocrisy — in spite of his reputation for stainless purity, offers her the dreadful alternative of saving her brother's life if she will sacrifice her own honor. This proposal she repudiates with indignant

horror, and having thus failed in her intercession, she goes to the prison to prepare her brother for immediate death. He has strung up his resolution to die bravely; but when he asks, "Is there *no* remedy?" she is obliged to tell him that there *is*, but that it is such a remedy "as to save a head would cleave a heart in twain." He could, indeed, in one way free himself from death, but only at the cost of fettering him to shame for life. He wants to know what the remedy is; and then Isabella's misgivings about him find expression. She tells him frankly that she fears lest the fond clinging to life should give a fatal bias to his moral judgment, and she bids him remember that "the sense of death is most in apprehension." This makes him indignant. He asks: —

"Why give you me this shame?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms."

“There spake my brother!” exclaims Isabella — rendered more confident by his asseveration — “there my father’s grave did utter forth a voice.” She tells him the alternative offered by Angelo; but alas! instead of blazing into indignation, he only expresses surprise, and with a deplorable giving way of every moral barrier, begins to minimize the heinousness of the sin, and to argue that, if Angelo proposed it, it cannot be so very terrible. Then he reverts at once to the awfulness of death; and when his sister reminds him that a shamed life is even more hateful, he gives rein to his imagination, and lets it revel in descriptions of the chill horribleness of the grave, and of all that lies beyond it. Finally he implores his sister to let him live, and basely argues that a vice almost becomes a virtue when it is committed to save a brother’s life. Then, indeed, all the pent-up shame and bitter disappointment of the holy maiden bursts forth! “O you beast!” she cries, —

“O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I’ll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.”

And in spite of his cry of anguish that she would stay and hear him, she rushes forth from the prison and leaves him.

But how thrilling an illustration does the scene supply of the rotting away and sapping of the soul by unlawful indulgence. Sins are never single; they are linked together by inextricable meshes. *Quem uno peccato contentum vidisti?* asks St. Augustine. The youth, who had already proved himself too weak to resist the voice of conscience, passes from the pusillanimity of self-indulgence to such base fear of death as makes him ready to clutch at any chance of life, even if it were at the expense of his sister’s ruin. What a lurid warning have we here to bring home to us that he who wilfully makes but “a little nick” in his

conscience, will not be long ere, under the stress of temptation, he is prepared to murder it forever by a deadly gash! The *one* devil which a youth has willingly admitted into his soul, even if for a moment it seem to be ejected, is certain to return into the empty shrine in the company of seven other devils more wicked than itself, so that unless he be seriously on his guard, the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

2. The next scene which we will notice is Shakespeare's study of the beginnings of drunkenness, and of the ruin which it works. And though in the absence of "ardent spirits," which had not yet been discovered, the state of things in Shakespeare's days was not one hundredth part so disgraceful as it is in ours, yet Shakespeare keenly felt the shame of drunkenness as a national vice. He makes Iago say that "your German, your Dane, and your swag-bellied Hollander" are not nearly so "potent in potting" as your Englishman; and this

he says although he makes Hamlet remark of the Danes: —

"They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase,
Soil our additions."

But before I point the moral of this particular scene, let me pause to sweep away the silly and superficial error that Shakespeare thought lightly of intemperance. Again and again, and in many different ways, he shows us that he was well aware of its deadliness and loathsomeness. No wise man regards total abstinence as a fetish, but only as a special duty of patriotism and charity in his own particular case, because he specially desires to help in awakening the national conscience, and because he hopes by the force of his own example to save and strengthen other individual souls which have got entangled in the snare of the fowler. But many an ignorant denouncer of total abstinence thinks that he has quite crushed its defenders when he has

quoted from Shakespeare the words, "Because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?" Well, but in whose mouth does Shakespeare put that quite irrelevant jibe? Into the mouth of a helpless and imbecile drunkard, the most absolutely contemptible character whom he has ever attempted to set forth, — Sir Toby Belch! Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are, as their names intimate, two wretched and deplorable sots. Sir Toby is a cousin of Olivia, the heroine; and in her conversation with Viola she describes the abyss of worthlessness into which her cousin has fallen, and agrees with the Clown that a drunken man is like a drowned man, a fool, and a madman.

If there be any who are content to leave England to her national curse and her national crime without one effort to save her, such persons find a worthy advocate in the paltry creature who represents the very draff and dregs of human nature in its low-

est humiliation. They will also find that Shakespeare puts "the good creature of God" argument into the mouth of his vilest criminal, Iago, and the plea for "freedom" into that of the half-human monster, Caliban.

Again and again Shakespeare shows on which side his sympathies would have lain had he lived in our day. When in "As You Like It" the aged Adam, in his robust and ruddy health, offers his services to his master, Orlando, he says:—

"Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty,
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility.
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly."

And Henry V., the chief hero of Shakespeare's historical plays, was so afraid of having drunken soldiers, that he wished every vine in France might be cut down.

Nor must any one be misled as to Shake-

speare's feelings on the subject by the wit of Falstaff. Genial as the fat old knight was, and much as Shakespeare evidently delighted in evolving his witty utterances, he is yet represented as a hopeless reprobate, — a cheat, a coward, a liar, an intriguer. In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" every species of scorn and contumely is heaped upon him; and he meets with his deserved retribution when the Prince — who has tolerated and been amused by his humors, and by whom, on his accession to the kingdom, Falstaff expects to be promoted and enriched — turns upon him with the grave rebuke: —

"I know thee not, old man! fall to thy prayers!
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old and so profane,
But being awaked I do despise my dream."

Then first the gray-haired sinner realizes that there is to be no more boon companionship between him and the hero-king!

The wit of Falstaff did not atone for his radical despicableness in the eyes of the Prince, who stands as Shakespeare's ideal of practical manliness, and who expresses the sentiments of the poet himself.

But I will pass to the special scene which I meant to bring forward. Iago, being a determined villain, has made up his mind to take revenge upon Othello, and if possible utterly to ruin him. This intended vengeance is based upon the false and foul suspicion of an intrigue of which Othello is entirely innocent, and which has no existence except in the diseased brain of Iago, who has sold himself to do iniquity. He is also determined to further his miserable chances of promotion by casting suspicion on Cassio, who holds a higher office than himself. He thus tries to entrap Cassio in a very stake-net of hell. His object is to create in the mind of Cassio a guilty love for Desdemona; and if Cassio is too faithful and noble for such a crime, yet to

awaken a jealous rage against him in the rash and simple soul of Othello. Meanwhile, *pour passer le temps*, he is determined to snare him into drunkenness. He has a stoup of wine, and invites Cassio to drink to Othello's health. But Cassio is no drunkard; he has a dread of intemperance, and answers, "Not to-night, good Iago! I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy would invent some other way of entertainment." As Iago still presses him, he says he has drunk but one cup, and it has already produced on his brain more disorder than he likes. "I am," he says, "unfortunate in my infirmity, and dare not task my weakness any more." But Iago tells him it is a night of revels, and, with weak complaisance, Cassio at last yields. Iago knows that now he has him in his power; for he has already caused some young Cyprian gallants to be flushed with wine, and has so managed that, when once Cassio has become intoxicated, a quarrel is

certain to ensue. So he sings his hilarious drinking-songs, and keeps calling for more wine, till Cassio has reached first the silly and then the quarrelsome stage of drunkenness. He then maligns Cassio to Montano, and in the ensuing disturbance Cassio wounds Montano. Othello appears on the scene in high indignation at such an unseemly disturbance in a town of war. He hears a garbled account of what has occurred, and then and there dismisses Cassio from his office of lieutenant. The blow and the disgrace have sobered Cassio; and he wails to Iago that in losing his reputation he has "lost the immortal part of himself, and that which remains is bestial." In terrible remorse, utterly ashamed of himself, he cries, "Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be called by, let us call thee — devil." And again, "O God, that men should put an

enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasure, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts." "To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblest, and the ingredient a devil!"

Was ever a stronger temperance sermon preached than this? This is what Shakespeare thought of the evil of drink, and the warning is all the more intense because the gallant soldier who has thus fallen and been ruined is naturally an honorable and noble man. Cassio has not sought the temptation, but been seduced into it by a semblance of good fellowship, and because he has not had the strength of mind to utter, and persist in, a hearty "No." Every custom which destroyed the weak under the semblance of sociability was in Shakespeare's opinion —

"A custom
More honored in the breach than in the
observance,"

as he makes Hamlet say of the boisterous health-drinking of the Danish Court. He would undoubtedly have said from his own experience, as good Father Mathew said, "Through drink I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the cedars of Lebanon laid low."

3. In Macbeth we have the lesson of a soul's destruction inculcated with unparalleled power. When the play opens Macbeth is a successful and loyal warrior. The witches hail him as Thane of Cawdor, and as one who shall be "king hereafter." The first prophecy is immediately fulfilled, and the seed of evil ambition is at once implanted in the warrior's mind. The thought that he may become king by murdering the gracious Duncan presents itself to him, and he cries, —

"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?"

The only safety would have been imperiously to reject the execrable temptation, and resolutely to trample it out of his soul. Not so Macbeth! He tampers and dallies with it. When Duncan appoints his heir Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth is goaded on the career of criminal purpose by regarding this as a stumbling-block in the path of his ambition. The evil suggestion which is gradually rooting itself in his soul springs into full life in the mind of Lady Macbeth. She, at least, is determined that no scruples shall hinder her, but that she will at once "catch the nearest way." Then, as always, the tempting opportunity leaps up face to face with the susceptible disposition. For she has scarcely formed her deadly purpose when the announcement is brought that the king proposes to stay at the castle of Macbeth as his guest. And very soon the temptation sweeps all before it, in spite of the murderer's hesitations. Macbeth is ready indeed, "upon the brink and shoal of

time," to "jump the life to come." But he is well aware that —

"In this case
We still have judgment *here*;"

and that —

"Even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice
To our own lips."

Yet, in spite of these twinges of remorse and spasms of fear, the warrior has so readily suffered the evil thought to become the evil wish and the evil purpose, and to seize him with irresistible dominion, that, goaded on by the stronger determination of his wife, he at last, with open eyes, commits the criminal, irrevocable deed. Surely no concrete warning could more powerfully enforce the lesson, "Resist the beginnings of evil," and the truth that "the beginning of sin is as the letting out of water." But further, Shakespeare illustrates the words of Christ, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts;" and then — as if the floodgates of sin had been opened wide —