

extreme artfulness on her part ; for even so to an ill-disposed mind perfect innocence is apt to give an impression of consummate art. A passion thus groundless and self-generated might well be full-grown as soon as born. The more greedy and craving, too, that it has nothing real to eat ; it therefore proceeds at once to "make the meat it feeds on," causing him to magnify whatever he sees, and to imagine many things that are not. That jealousy, however, is not the habit of his mind, appears in that it finds him unprepared, and takes him by surprise ; insomuch that he forthwith loses all self-control, and runs right athwart the rules of common decency and decorum, so that he becomes an object at once of pity, of hatred, and scorn.

I think the Poet hardly anywhere shows a keener and juster insight of nature than in the behaviour of this man while the distemper is upon him. He is utterly reason-proof, and indeed acts as one literally insane. For the poison infects not only his manners, but his very modes of thought : in fact, all his rational and imaginative forces, even his speech and language, seem to have caught the disease. And all the loathsome filth which had settled to the bottom of his nature is now shaken up to the surface, so that there appears to be nothing but meanness and malignity and essential coarseness in him. Meanwhile an instinctive shame of his passion and a dread of vulgar ridicule put him upon talking in dark riddles and enigmas : hence the confused, broken, and disjointed style, an odd jumble of dialogue and soliloquy, in which he tries to jerk out his thoughts, as if he would have them known, and yet not have them known. I believe men generally credit themselves with peculiar penetration when they are in the act of being deluded, whether by themselves or by others. Hence, again, the strange and even ludicrous conceit in which

Leontes wraps himself. "Not noted, is't," says he, referring to the Queen's imaginary crime,

not noted, is't,
But of the finer natures ? by some severals
Of head-piece extraordinary ? lower messes,
Perchance, are to this business purblind.

Thus he mistakes his madness for a higher wisdom, and clothes his delusion with the spirit of revelation ; so that Camillo rightly says,

You may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the Moon
As or by oath remove or counsel shake
The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
Is piled upon his faith.

I must note one more point of the delineation. When Leontes sends his messengers to Delphos, he avows this as his reason for doing so :

Though I am satisfied, and need no more
Than what I know, yet shall the Oracle
Give rest to th' minds of others.

Which means simply that he is not going to let the truth of the charge stand in issue, and that he holds the Divine authority to be a capital thing, provided he may use it, and need not obey it ; that is, if he finds the god agreeing with him in opinion, then the god's judgment is infallible ; if not, then, in plain terms, he is no god. And they who have closely observed the workings of jealousy know right well that in all this Shakespeare does not one whit "overstep the modesty of Nature."

The Poet manages with great art to bring Leontes off from the disgraces of his passion, and repeal him home to our sympathies, which had been freely drawn to him at first by his generosity of friendship. To this end, jealousy is repre-

sented as his only fault, and this as a sudden freak, which passes on directly into a frenzy, and whips him quite out of himself, temporarily overriding his characteristic qualities, but not combining with them; the more violent for being unwonted, and the shorter-lived for being violent. In his firm, compact energy of thought and speech, after his passion has cleared itself, and in his perennial flow of repentance after his bereavement, are displayed the real tone and texture of his character. We feel that, if his sin has been great, his suffering is also great, and that if he were a greater sinner, his suffering would be less. Quick, impulsive, headstrong, he admits no bounds to anger or to penitence; condemns himself as vehemently as he does others; and will spend his life in atoning for a wrong he has done in a moment of passion: so that we are the more willing to forgive him, inasmuch as he never forgives himself.

Hermione.

The old poets seem to have contemplated a much wider range of female excellence than it has since grown customary to allow; taking for granted that whatsoever we feel to be most divine in man might be equally so in woman; and so pouring into their conceptions of womanhood a certain *manliness* of soul, wherein we recognize an union of what is lovely with what is honourable,—such a combination as would naturally inspire any right-minded man at the same time with tenderness and with awe. Their ideas of delicacy did not preclude strength: in the female character they were rather pleased than otherwise to have the sweetness of the violet blended with the grandeur of the oak; probably because they saw and felt that woman might be big-hearted and brave-minded, and yet be none the less womanly; and that

love might build all the higher and firmer for having its foundations laid deep in respect. This largeness of heart and liberality of thought often comes out in their writings, and that too whether in dealing with ideal or with actual women; which suggests that in what they chose to create they were a good deal influenced by what they were accustomed to see. For, in a thing that works so much from the sympathies, it could hardly be but that they reflected the mind and spirit of their age. Of this the aptest illustration that my reading has lighted upon is in Ben Jonson's lines on the Countess of Bedford, describing "what kind of creature I could most desire to honour, serve, and love":

I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise,
Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great;
I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,
Nor lend like influence from his lucent seat:
I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,
Hating that solemn vice of greatness, pride;
I meant each softest virtue there should meet,
Fit in that softer bosom to reside:
Only a learnèd and a manly soul
I purposed her; that should with even powers
The rock, the spindle, and the shears control
Of Destiny, and spin her own free hours.

That Shakespeare fully shared in this magnanimous bravery of sentiment, we need no further proof than is furnished in the heroine of this play. We can scarce call Hermione sweet or gentle, though she is both; she is a *noble* woman,—one whom, even in her greatest anguish, we hardly *dare* to pity. The whole figure is replete with classic grace, is shaped and finished in the highest style of classic art. As she acts the part of a statue in the play, so she has a statue-like calmness and firmness of soul. A certain austere and solid sweetness pervades her whole de-

meanour, and seems, as it were, the essential form of her life. It is as if some masterpiece of ancient sculpture had warmed and quickened into life from its fulness of beauty and expression.

Appearing at first as the cheerful hostess of her husband's friend, and stooping from her queenly elevation to the most winning affabilities, her behaviour rises in dignity as her sorrow deepens. With an equal sense of what is due to the King as her husband, and to herself as a woman, a wife, and a mother, she knows how to reconcile all these demands; she therefore resists without violence, and submits without weakness. And what her wise spirit sees to be fit and becoming, that she always has strength and steadiness of character to do: hence, notwithstanding the insults and hardships wantonly put upon her, she still preserves the smoothness of peace; is never betrayed into the least sign of anger or impatience or resentment, but maintains, throughout, perfect order and fitness and proportion in act and speech: the charge, so dreadful in itself, and so cruel in its circumstances, neither rouses her passions, as it would Paulina's, nor stuns her sensibilities, as in the case of Desdemona; but, like the sinking of lead in the ocean's bosom, it goes to the depths without ruffling the surface of her soul. Her situation is indeed full of pathos,—a pathos the more deeply-moving to others, that it stirs no tumults in her; for her nature is manifestly fitted up and furnished with all tender and gentle and womanly feelings; only she has the force of mind to control them, and keep them all in the right place and degree. "They are the patient sorrows that touch nearest." And so, under the worst that can befall, she remains within the region of herself, calm and serenely beautiful, stands firm, yet full of grace, in the austere strengths

of reason and conscious rectitude. And when, at her terrible wrongs and sufferings, all hearts are shaken, all eyes wet, but her own, the impression made by her stout-hearted fortitude is of one whose pure, tranquil, deep-working breast is the home of sorrows too big for any eye-messengers to report:

Calm pleasures there abide, majestic pains.

The delineation keeps the same tone and texture through all its parts, but the sense of it is specially concentrated in what she says when the King winds up his transport of insane fury by ordering her off to prison:

Good my lords,
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have
That honourable grief lodged here which burns
Worse than tears drown. 'Beseech you all, my lords,
With thoughts so qualified as your charities
Shall best instruct you, measure me; and so,
The King's will be perform'd! — 'Beseech your Highness,
My women may be with me; for, you see,
My plight requires it. — Do not weep, good fools;
There is no cause: when you shall know your mistress
Has deserved prison, then abound in tears
As I come out. — . . . Adieu, my lord:
I never wish'd to see you sorry; now,
I trust, I shall.

And her character is answerably reflected in the minds of the King's chief counsellors, whose very swords seem stirring with life in the scabbards, and yearning to leap forth and vindicate the honour of their beloved Queen, but that awe of the crown restrains them.

Her last speech at the trial is, I am apt to think, the solidest piece of eloquence in the language. It is like a piece of the finest statuary marble, chiselled into perfect form; so

compact of grain, that you cannot crush it into smaller space; while its effect is as wholesome and bracing as the atmosphere of an iced mountain when tempered by the Summer sun. The King threatens her with death, and she replies,

Sir, spare your threats:

The bug which you would fright me with I seek,
To me can life be no commodity:
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
But know not how it went: my second joy,
And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
I'm barr'd like one infectious: my third comfort,
Starr'd most unluckily, is from my breast,
The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
Haled out to murder: myself on every post
Proclaim'd a strumpet; with immodest hatred,
The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
To women of all fashion: lastly, hurried
Here to this place, i' the open air, before
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
That I should fear to die. Therefore, proceed,
But yet hear this; mistake me not: My life,
I prize it not a straw; but for mine honour,
Which I would free, if I shall be condemn'd
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you,
'Tis rigour, and not law.

Noble simplicity of the olden time, when the best and purest of women, with the bravest men in presence, thought no shame to hear themselves speaking such plain honest words as these!

The Queen's long concealing of herself has been censured by some as repugnant to nature. Possibly they may think it somewhat strained and theatrical, but it is not so: the woman is but true to herself, in this matter, and to the solid

and self-poised repose in which her being dwells. So that the thing does not seem repugnant to nature as individualized by her reason and will; nor is her character herein more above or out of nature than the proper ideal of art abundantly warrants. For to her keen sensibility of honour the King's treatment is literally an *infinite* wrong; nor does its cruelty more wound her affection, than its meanness alienates her respect; and one so strong to bear injury might well be equally strong to remember it. Therewithal she knows full well that, in so delicate an instrument as married life, if one string be out of tune the whole is ajar, and will yield no music: for her, therefore, all things must be right, else none are so. And she is both too clear of mind and too upright of heart to put herself where she cannot be precisely what the laws of propriety and decorum require her to seem. Accordingly, when she does forgive, the forgiveness is simply *perfect*; the breach that has been so long a-healing is at length *completely* healed; for to be whole and entire in whatever she does, is both an impulse of nature and a law of conscience with her. When the King was wooing her, she held him off three months, which he thought unreasonably long; but the reason why she did so is rightly explained when, for his inexpressible sin against her, she has locked herself from his sight sixteen years, leaving him to mourn and repent. Moreover, with her severe chastity of principle, the reconciliation to her husband must begin there where the separation grew. Thus it was for Perdita to restore the parental unity which her being represents, but of which she had occasioned the breaking.

Such is Hermione, in her "proud submission," her "dignified obedience," with her Roman firmness and integrity of soul, heroic in strength, heroic in gentleness, the queenliest of women, the womanliest of queens. She is perhaps the

Poet's best illustration of the great principle, which I fear is not so commonly felt as it should be, that the highest beauty always has an element or shade of the terrible in it, so that it awes you while it attracts.

Paulina.

If I prove honey-mouth'd, let my tongue blister,
And never to my red-look'd anger be
The trumpet any more.

Good Queen, my lord, good Queen; I say, good Queen,
And would by combat make her good, so were I
A man, the worst about you.

For ever

Unvenerable be thy hands, if thou
Takest up the Princess by that forcèd baseness
Which he has put upon't.

Such are some of the words that boil over from the stout heart of Paulina,—the noblest and most amiable terma-gant we shall anywhere find,—when, with the new-born babe in charge, she confronts the furious King. He threatens to have her burnt, and she replies instantly,

I care not:
It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in't.

If her faults were a thousand times greater than they are, I could pardon them all for this one little speech; which proves that Shakespeare was, I will not say a Protestant, but a true Christian, intellectually at least, and far deeper in the spirit of his religion than a large majority of the Church's official organs were in his day, or, let me add, have been any day since. And this was written, be it observed, at a time when the embers of the old ecclesiastical fires were not yet wholly extinct, and when many a priestly bigot was de-

ploring the lay ascendancy which kept them from being rekindled.

Paulina makes a superb counterpart to Hermione, heightening the effect of her character by the most emphatic contrast, and at the same time reflecting it by her intense and outspoken sympathy. Without any of the Queen's dignified calmness and reserve, she is alive to all her inward beauty and greatness: with a head to understand and a heart to reverence such a woman, she unites a temper to fight, a generosity to die for her. But no language but her own can fitly measure the ardour with which she loves and admires and even adores her "dearest, sweetest mistress," whose power has indeed gone all through her, so that every part of her nature cannot choose but speak it, when the occasion kindles her. Loud, voluble, violent, and viraginous, with a tongue sharper than a sword, and an eloquence that fairly blisters where it hits, she has, therewithal, too much honour and magnanimity and kind feeling either to use them without good cause, or to forbear using them at all hazards when she has such cause. Mrs. Jameson classes her, and justly, no doubt, among those women—and she assures us there are many such—who seem regardless of the feelings of those for whom they would sacrifice their life.

"I thought she had some great matter there in hand; for she hath privately, twice or thrice a day, ever since the death of Hermione, visited that removed house." Such is the speech of one gentleman to another, as the royal party and all the Court are going to Paulina's house to see the mysterious workmanship of Julio Romano. Nothing could better suggest the history of that quiet, placid intercourse, with its long record of patient, self-rewarding service; a fellowship in which little needed to be said, for each knew

what was in the other's mind by a better language than words. It is such an idea of friendship as it does the heart good to rest upon. Just think of those two great manly souls, enshrined in womanly tenderness, thus communing together in secret for sixteen long years! And what a powerful charm of love and loyalty must have been cast upon Paulina's impulsive tongue, that she should keep so reticent of her dear cause through all that time! To play the woman after that fashion would not hurt any of us.

The Fourth and Fifth Acts.

During the first three Acts the interest of this play is mainly tragic; the scene is densely crowded with incidents; the action hurried, abrupt, almost spasmodic; the style quick and sharp, flashing off point after point in brief, sinewy strokes; and all is rapidity and despatch: what with the insane fury of the King, the noble agony of the Queen, the enthusiasm of the Court in her behalf, and the King's violence towards both them and her, the mind is kept on the jump: all which, if continued to the end, would generate rather a tumult and hubbub in the thoughts, than that inward music which the title of the play promises; not to say, that such a prolonged hurry of movement would at length become monotonous and wearisome. Far otherwise the latter half of the play. Here the anticipations proper to a long, leisurely winter evening are fully met; the general effect is soothing and composing; the tones, dipped in sweetness, fall gently on the ear, disposing the mind to be still and listen and contemplate; thus making the play, as Coleridge describes it, "exquisitely respondent to the title." It would seem, indeed, that in these scenes the Poet had specially endeavoured how much of silent effect he could produce, without diverging

from the dramatic form. To this end, he provides resting-places for thought; suspending or retarding the action by musical pauses and periods of lyrical movement, and breathing-in the mellowest strains of poetical harmony, till the eye is "made quiet by the power of beauty," and all tumult of mind is hushed in the very intensity of feeling.

In the last two Acts we have a most artful interchange and blending of romantic beauty and comic drollery. The lost Princess and the heir-apparent of Bohemia, two of the noblest and loveliest beings that ever fancy conceived, occupy the centre of the picture, while around them are clustered rustic shepherds and shepherdesses amid their pastimes and pursuits, the whole being enlivened by the tricks and humours of a merry pedler and pickpocket. For simple purity and sweetness, the scene which unfolds the loves and characters of the Prince and Princess is not surpassed by any thing in Shakespeare. Whatsoever is enchanting in romance, lovely in innocence, elevated in feeling, and sacred in faith, is here concentrated; forming, all together, one of those things which we always welcome as we do the return of Spring, and over which our feelings may renew their youth for ever. So long as flowers bloom and hearts love, they will do it in the spirit of this scene.

It is a pastoral frolic, where free thoughts and guileless hearts rule the hour, all as true and pure as the tints and fragrances with which field and forest and garden have beautified the occasion. The neighbouring swains and lasses have gathered in, to share and enhance the sport. The old Shepherd is present, but only as a looker-on, having for the nonce resigned the command to his reputed daughter. Under their mutual inspiration, the Prince and Princess are each in the finest rapture of fancy, while the surrounding

influences of the rustic festival are just enough to enfranchise their inward music into modest and delicate utterance. He has tastefully decked her person with flowers, till no traces of the shepherdess can be seen, and she seems herself a multitudinous flower; having also attired himself "with a swain's wearing," so that the prince is equally obscured.

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Do give a life: no shepherdess; but Flora,
Peering in April's front. This your sheep-shearing
Is as a meeting of the petty gods,
And you the queen on't.

Thus he opens the play. And when she repeats her fears of the event:

Thou dearest Perdita,
With these forced thoughts, I pr'ythee, darken not
The mirth o' the feast: or I'll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father's; for I cannot be
Mine own, nor any thing to any, if
I be not thine: to this I am most constant,
Though destiny say no.

The King and Camillo steal upon them in disguise, and while they are present we have this:

Perdita. Come, take your flowers:
Methinks I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun pastorals: sure, this robe of mine
Does change my disposition.

Florizel. What you do
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever: when you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so; so give alms;
Pray so; and, for the ordering your affairs,
To sing them too: when you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own
No other function. Each your doing is
So singular in each particular,

Crowning what you have done i' the present deed,
That all your acts are queens.

Perdita. O Doricles!
Your praises are too large: but that your youth,
And the true blood that peeps so fairly through't,
Do plainly give you out an unstain'd shepherd,
With wisdom I might fear, my Doricles,
You woo'd me the false way.

Florizel. I think you have
As little skill to fear as I have purpose
To put you to't. But come; our dance, I pray.

Polix. This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the green-sward: nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself, —
Too noble for this place.

Camil. He tells her something
That makes her blood look out: good sooth, she is
The queen of curds and cream.

Polix. Pray you, good shepherd, what fair swain is this
Which dances with your daughter?

Shep. They call him Doricles; and boasts himself
To have a worthy feeding: I but have it
Upon his own report, and I believe it;
He looks like sooth. He says he loves my daughter:
I think so too; for never gazed the Moon
Upon the water, as he'll stand, and read,
As't were, my daughter's eyes: and, to be plain,
I think there is not half a kiss to choose
Who loves another best.

Polix. She dances featly.
Shep. So she does any thing, though I report it,
That should be silent.

The Princess.

Perdita, notwithstanding she occupies so little room in the play, fills a large space in the reader's thoughts, almost disputing precedence with the Queen. And her mother's best native qualities reappear in her, sweetly modified by pastoral associations; her nature being really much the same, only it

has been developed and seasoned in a different atmosphere ; a nature too strong indeed to be displaced by any power of circumstances or supervenings of art, but at the same time too delicate and susceptible not to take a lively and lasting impress of them. So that, while she has thoroughly assimilated, she nevertheless clearly indicates, the food of place and climate, insomuch that the dignities of the princely and the simplicities of the pastoral character seem striving which shall express her goodliest. We can hardly call her a poetical being ; she is rather poetry itself, and every thing lends and borrows beauty at her touch. A playmate of the flowers, when we see her with them, we are at a loss whether they take more inspiration from her or she from them ; and while she is the sweetest of poets in making nosegays, the nosegays become in her hands the richest of crowns. If, as Schlegel somewhere remarks, the Poet is " particularly fond of showing the superiority of the innate over the acquired," he has surely nowhere done it with finer effect than in this unfledged angel.

There is much to suggest a comparison of Perdita and Miranda ; yet how shall I compare them ? Perfectly distinct indeed as individuals, still their characters are strikingly similar ; only Perdita has perhaps a sweeter gracefulness, the freedom, simplicity, and playfulness of nature being in her case less checked by external restraints ; while Miranda carries more of a magical and mysterious charm woven into her character from the supernatural influences of her whereabouts. So like, yet so different, it is hard saying which is the better of the two, or rather one can hardly help liking her best with whom he last conversed. It is an interesting fact also, for such it seems to be, that these two glorious delineations were produced very near together, perhaps both the same year ; and this too when

Shakespeare was in his highest maturity of poetry and wisdom ; from which it has been not unjustly argued that his experience both in social and domestic life must have been favourable to exalted conceptions of womanhood. The Poet, though in no sort a bigot, was evidently full of loyal and patriotic sentiment ; and I have sometimes thought that the government of Elizabeth, with the grand national enthusiasm which clustered round her throne and person, may have had a good deal to do in shaping and inspiring this part of his workmanship. Be that as it may, with but one great exception, I think the world now finds its best ideas of moral beauty in Shakespeare's women.

The Prince.

Florizel's character is in exquisite harmony with that of the Princess. To be sure, it may be said that if he is worthy of her, it is mainly her influence that makes him so. But then it is to be observed, on the other hand, that as in such cases men find only what they bring the faculties for finding, so the meeting with her would not have elicited such music from him, had not his nature been originally responsive to hers. For he is manifestly drawn and held to her by a powerful instinct of congeniality. And none but a living abstract and sum-total of all that is manly could have so felt the perfections of such a woman. The difference between them is, that she was herself before she saw him, and would have been the same without him ; whereas he was not and could not be himself, as we see him, till he caught inspiration from her ; so that he is but right in saying,

I bless the time
When my good falcon made her flight across
Thy father's ground.

Nevertheless it is a clear instance of the pre-established harmony of souls: but that his spirit were akin to hers, he could not have recognized his peer through such a disguise of circumstances. For any one to be untouched and unsweetened by the heavenly purity of their courtship, were indeed a sin almost too great to be forgiven.

Shakespeare knew, — none better, — that in order to be a lover in any right sense of the term, one must first be a man. He therefore does not leave the Prince without an opportunity to show that he is such. And it is not till after the King has revealed himself, and blown up the mirth of the feast by his explosion of wrath, that the Prince displays his proper character in this respect. I need not stay to remark how well the Poet orders the action for that purpose; suffice it to say that the Prince then fully makes good his previous declaration:

Were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
 Thereof most worthy; were I the fairest youth
 That ever made eye swerve; had force and knowledge
 More than was ever man's; I would not prize them,
 Without her love; for her employ them all;
 Commend them, or condemn them, to her service,
 Or to their own perdition.

Autolycus and Camillo.

The minor characters of this play are both well conceived and skilfully disposed, the one giving them a fair personal, the other a fair dramatic interest. The old Shepherd and his clown of a son are near, if not in, the Poet's happiest comic vein. Autolycus, the "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," is the most amiable and ingenious rogue we should desire to see; who cheats almost as divinely as those about him

love, and whose thieving tricks the very gods seem to crown with thrift in reward of his wit. His self-raillery and droll soliloquizing give us the feeling that his sins are committed not so much for lucre as for fun. — The Poet was perhaps a little too fond of placing his characters in situations where they have to be false in order to be the truer; which no doubt sometimes happens; yet, surely, in so delicate a point of morality, some care is needful, lest the exceptions become too much for the rule. And something too much of this there may be in the honest, upright, yet deceiving old lord, Camillo. I speak this under correction; for I know it is not safe to fault Shakespeare's morals; and that they who affect a better morality than his are very apt to turn out either hypocrites or moral coxcombs. As for the rest, this Camillo, though little more than a staff in the drama, is nevertheless a pillar of State; his integrity and wisdom making him a light to the counsels and a guide to the footsteps of the greatest around him. Fit to be the stay of princes, he is one of those venerable relics of the past which show us how beautiful age can be, and which, linking together different generations, form at once the salt of society and the strength of government.