LADY MACBETH.

Graoch, Lady Macbeth, was the wife of a renowned Scottish general in the royal army, of near kin to Duncan, the reigning king. Returning from victorious warfare against rebellious troops, in company with his comrade, Banquo, an officer of rank similar to his own, Macbeth was accosted by three witches, who prophesied that he should be king. This extraordinary good fortune—for witchcraft was then in high repute—he hastened to communicate to his wife, a woman of towering ambition, who immediately set about contriving the speediest plan to realize the promise of the weird sisters.

Chance rendered timely aid to her unscrupulous purpose. King Duncan, surnamed the Meek, for his amiable virtues, desiring to signally honor his faithful servant, made a visit to Macbeth's castle, accompanied by his two sons and gentlemen of the court. After the royal guest had retired for the night, his chamberlains having been drugged by Lady Macbeth, her husband, confirmed in his half-conceived treachery by the daring woman, murdered the good old king in his sleep.

The two princes fled for their lives—the one to England, the other to Ireland; and Macbeth, as next of kin, was proclaimed

King of Scotland; thus bringing to pass the witches' words, and realizing his wife's inordinate aspirations.

And now Macbeth remembered, how it had been promised to Banquo that his issue should succeed to the throne; and this thought so rankled in the minds of the guilty pair, that they determined to put to death Banquo and his son, to secure to their own posterity the honors for which they had paid so dearly. Accordingly Banquo was murdered by hired assassins, on his return from a grand feast given by his friend, King Macbeth; but his son Fleance escaped into a neighboring country; and from him eventually descended a long line of Scottish monarchs.

Thus, from one desperate crime to another the wretched king was impelled, by morbid fear of conspirators against his dignity or his life, till the people, exasperated, took violent measures to free themselves from his tyranny. Lady Macbeth died, an unpitied victim to "a mind diseased;" and her husband was killed in personal encounter with Macduff, a Scottish nobleman, whose wife and children had been inhumanly butchered by the usurper's order. Malcolm, the lawful successor of Duncan the Meek, was raised to the throne.

This is one of the many plays of Shakspeare in which the superstitious element constitutes a distinguishing feature; its supernatural effects are neither childish nor commonplace; they contribute in no small degree to the depicting of a terrible retribution, and are imbued with all the weirdness of the Black Art, in the days when the wisest believed in, and the boldest trembled before, its revelations.

Of all the Shakspearian Sisterhood, there is perhaps least unanimity of opinion as to the character of Lady Macbeth. She enjoys the distinction of being a successful puzzle to critics and commentators, who have exhausted even their ingenuity in attempting to deduce from her attributes any satisfactory conclusions. In the wide range of opinion she exists, successively: as a monstrous horror, delighting, vampire-like, in blood, for its own sake; a "pure demoniac," abstract incarnation of cruelty; a vulgar, vixenish fury; and a magnificent instance of the perversion, by one bad passion, of the rarest natural endowments—powerful intellect, marvellous force, and strong affections.

It is almost needless to say that the latter is the nearest approach to an intelligent appreciation of Lady Macbeth. Intellect and force we must all concede to her; and notwithstanding our first impulse to deny her any thing "pure womanly," her affections are as profound as may coexist with a mind exclusively masculine, and a heart fully possessed of a very devil of ambition.

It has been contended, with amiable plausibility, that this ambition was entertained only for her husband—that it was her complete identification of her own with his hopes and far-reaching aspirations which thus steeled her conscience, her woman's tenderness, her very physique, to an insane indifference to crimes, however revolting, so they but advanced his fortunes. But it is not easy to discover this absorbing passion for her husband in Lady Macbeth, or, indeed, any higher regard for him than the half-contemptuous, yet tenacious, affection almost always entertained by "strong-minded" women for men greatly inferior to themselves in force of character and intellect. On the other hand, Macbeth's implicit confidence in his wife, his boundless admiration of her courage, even in crime, his dependence upon her in every emergency to which he feels himself unequal, are but the tribute which every vacillating character, uncertain of its own powers, suspicious

of its best efforts, pays to a forcible, self-asserting nature, capable of swaying it at its own grand will.

The individualization of Lady Macbeth is almost independent of her social relations, of her sex even; she is that hateful accident, a masculine heart, soul, and brain, clothed with a female humanity. Even the few touches of pathos or tenderness, introduced to remind us of her sex, as it were, would be natural to any man not positively monstrous; and her final remorse, madness, and death, we cannot regard as the repentance, or even horror, of the soul for its own deeds, but simply as the consequences of an organization physically inadequate to the demands of a too vigorous intellect.

In the same manner, the almost diabolic nerve displayed by her on the night of the king's murder, and subsequently, is plainly a mental victory over a body as frail as becomes her sex; the moment her vigilance is relaxed, or the immediate necessity for its exercise is removed, the fragile structure gives way, and drags down to its pitiful level all the splendors which have glorified its weakness.

What we mean to say is: that a *man*, having had the wickedness to plan, the courage to dare, the nerve to execute, so revolting a crime as the murder of an anointed king, who was moreover an illustrious kinsman and a condescending guest, would have lived on to the end with as little remorse as Lady Macbeth really felt, and with none of the physical demonstrations which may easily be mistaken for it. Separate Lady Macbeth the individual, from Lady Macbeth the woman, and the mystery of her character is at once cleared—she is woman in her incarnation only.

The text, oddly enough, supports our theory, in not affording a single hint of her person, whether tall or short, dark or fair.

We are told by Mrs. Jameson that Mrs. Siddons "had an idea that she was a small, fair, blue-eyed woman, from her Celtic origin;" she adds, however, that she cannot help fancying Lady Macbeth dark, like Black Agnes of Douglas, which we imagine must agree with the popular notion of her person.

We take our leave of Lady Macbeth with the following soliloquies—both well known, and most characteristic. The first occurs on the receipt of her husband's letter, announcing the prophetic salutations of the three witches; the second on hearing that the king will sleep that night at the Castle:

Lady M. * * * * * *
* * * * * * * *
Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promis'd:—Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. Thou would'st be great,
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, *Thus thou must do, if thou have it;*
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

* * * * * * The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood!
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell!
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, *Hold, hold!*

For the somnambulic scene, that master-piece of physiological effect, which would suffer by mutilation, we refer our readers to the text.