

That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength—a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one! O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of—and, my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er and o'er.

Flor. What? like a corse?

Perd. No, like a bank, for love to lie and play on;
Not like a corse—or if, not to be buried,
But quick, and in mine arms!

The simple dignity and exquisite tenderness of Perdita are beautifully portrayed in one or two addresses to Florizel after his royal father has commanded them to part forever:

Even here undone!

I was not much afeard; for once or twice
I was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
The self-same sun that shines upon his court
Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
Looks on alike. Wilt please you, sir, begone?
I told you what would come of this. 'Beseech you,
Of your own state take care: this dream of mine—
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch further,
But milk my ewes, and weep.

HERMIONE.

CRITICALLY (though not popularly) considered, Hermione must ever occupy a position superior to Perdita in the charming story to which both contribute so much beauty.

Endowed with every virtue that helps to complete the perfect woman, Hermione is distinguished by her illustrious resignation under the most grievous wrongs that can befall an honored queen, and a devoted wife. Repudiated by her husband for senseless suspicions of her chastity, conceived without an excuse of foundation; thrown into prison, to give birth to a poor little princess; her first-born son dying of grief for his mother's disgrace; her infant condemned to death by its unnatural father; herself put to public shame—a second Grissel, Hermione endures all with scarce a murmur; not so much from patient love, however, as from an indomitable fortitude, a grand pride in her conscious innocence, which has all the exalting effect of martyrdom.

To Hermione, daughter of an emperor, wife to a king, and mother of a "hopeful prince," a serene, majestic composure belongs, as a birthright; and her soul is full of a repose as imperturbable as her bearing is royal. She has no passions: no violent demonstrations, no tears nor reproaches, resent her lord's injustice;

she is degraded, but in her ignominy she is still a queen. Absorbing as are her affections as wife and mother, the blow they suffer appears on the surface in no more accusing shape than a sublime, heroic patience; charged openly with adultery and treason, in the midst of the court where she has reigned a beloved and honored sovereign, her gracious lips can consent to frame no answer more ungentle than these touching words:

How will this grieve you,
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
You thus have publish'd me? Gentle my lord,
You scarce can right me thoroughly then, to say
You did mistake.

* * * * *

There's some ill planet reigns;

I must be patient, till the heavens look
With an aspect more favorable.—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 honorable grief, lodg'd here, which burns
Worse than tears drown.

Yet, though she can hide her bleeding heart away under the pall of a sorrow too grave for tears, though she can mourn her dearest loves as dead and make no sign, she may not thus proudly permit the filching of her good name—that inestimable dowry bestowed upon her by illustrious ancestors, a precious heritage to be transmitted to her children's children; and we feel that it is only in obedience to this lofty sense of duty that she condescends to justify herself—that she “stands to prate and talk before who please to come and hear.”

By a woman of common temper this accusation of infidelity would have been silently spurned, in the face of its terrible conse-

quences—the loss of her husband's love and the death of her children; but to the spotless majesty of Hermione's soul a charge of dishonor, which she is not able to disprove, is the very consummation of calamity; all the rest is but sorrow—this is shame.

The court scene, in the third act, of itself suffices to afford us a truthful conception of Hermione's character. At a time when, from merely physical causes, it would be natural to look for emotion even in her, this unhappy queen is as calm as if she were but a spectator, not the arraigned culprit, of the imposing concourse assembled to pronounce her sentence; her “nerves” are adamant; her whole bearing bespeaks the “queen o'er herself.” Only when the oracle has been flouted which declared her chaste, and the death of her son is announced, does the heroic lady sink under her weight of woes.

Her appeal, not for pity nor for life, but for the re-establishment of her honor, is a model of dignified eloquence:

* * * * *
* * * * * You, my lord, best know,
(Who least will seem to do so,) my past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,
As I am now unhappy—which is more
Than history can pattern, though devis'd,
And play'd, to take spectators; For behold me,—
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
A moiety of the throne, a great king's daughter,
The mother to a hopeful prince,—here standing,
To prate and talk for life and honor 'fore
Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it,
As I weigh grief, which I would spare; for honor—
'Tis a derivative from me to mine,
And only that I stand for.

* * * * *
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 favor,
 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 am barr'd, like one infectious; my third comfort,
 Star'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;—No! life,
 I prize it not a straw;—but for mine honor,
 (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 rigor, and not law.

That Hermione was a beautiful woman, of the regal, Juno-like type, is surely established by many passages let fall at random through the text. When a gentleman of the court enthusiastically extols Perdita's beauty, Paulina, champion of her mistress's memory as she ever has been zealous in her service, exclaims:

O Hermione,
 As every present time doth boast itself
 Above a better gone, so must thy grave
 Give way to what's seen now. Sir, you yourself
 Have said, and writ so, (but your writing now
 Is colder than that theme,) *She had not been,*
Nor was not to be, equal'd;—thus your verse
 Flow'd with her beauty once; 'tis shrewdly ebb'd,
 To say you have seen a better.

* * * * *

Leon. Good Paulina,—
 Who hast the memory of Hermione,
 I know, in honor,—O, that ever I
 Had squar'd me to thy counsel!—then, even now,
 I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,
 Have taken treasure from her lips,—

Paul. And left them
 More rich, for what they yielded.

* * * * *
 Leon. Stars, very stars,
 And all eyes else dead coals!—fear thou no wife;
 I'll have no wife, Paulina.

And that Hermione was as excellent as she was beautiful is as well attested by the enduring respect and affection with which she is held in remembrance by her servants, and above all by her husband. One of his courtiers urges Leontes to marry—"to bless the bed of majesty again with a sweet fellow to 't;" but the wretched king can bear to think of no wife, save the one "done to death by slanderous tongues:"

Whilst I remember
 Her, and her virtues, I cannot forget
 My blemishes in them, and so still think of
 The wrong I did myself: which was so much,
 That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and
 Destroy'd the sweet'st companion that e'er man
 Bred his hopes out of.

Paul. True, too true, my lord:
 If, one by one, you wedded all the world—
 Or, from the all that are took something good,
 To make a perfect woman—she you kill'd
 Would be unparallel'd.

Leon. I think so. Kill'd!
 She I kill'd? I did so; but thou strik'st me
 Sorely, to say I did; it is as bitter
 Upon thy tongue as in my thought.

* * * * *

Paul. There is none worthy,
Respecting her that's gone.

* * * * *

Leon. Thou speak'st truth :
No more such wives ; therefore, no wife.

The final, or "statue," scene—in which, after sixteen years of strict seclusion, she is restored to her husband, and the daughter who had been miraculously preserved to bless her patient heart—is one of the most effective in dramatic story.

If any thing could persuade us to forgive Leontes his unworthy doubts of such a woman as Hermione, it would be the sincere emotion he displays whilst gazing on what he believes to be the wondrous statue of his wife :

Her natural posture !—

Hide me, dear stone, that I may say, indeed,
Thou art Hermione ; or, rather, thou art she
In thy not chiding ; for she was as tender
As infancy and grace.—But yet, Paulina,
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged, as this seems.

Pol. O, not by much.

Paul. So much the more our carver's excellence,
Which lets go by some sixteen years, and makes her
As she liv'd now.

Leon. As now she might have done—
So much to my good comfort, as it is
Now piercing to my soul. O, thus she stood,
Even with such life of majesty, (warm life,
As now it coldly stands,) when first I woo'd her !
I am asham'd : Does not the stone rebuke me,
For being more stone than it ?—O, royal piece,
There's magic in thy majesty, which has
My evils conjur'd to remembrance, and
From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
Standing like stone with thee !

* * * * *

Leon. Do not draw the curtain.

Paul. No longer shall you gaze on 't, lest your fancy
May think anon it moves.

Leon. Let be, let be !

Would I were dead, but that, methinks, already—
What was he, that did make it ?—See, my lord,
Would you not deem it breath'd ? and that those veins
Did verily bear blood ?

Pol. Masterly done !

The very life seems warm upon her lip.

Leon. The fixture of her eye has motion in 't,
As we are mock'd with art.

Paul. I'll draw the curtain ;

My lord's almost so far transported that

He'll think anon it lives.

Leon. O sweet Paulina,

Make me to think so twenty years together ;

No settled senses of the world can match

The pleasure of that madness. Let 't alone.

Paul. I am sorry, sir, I have thus far stir'd you ; but
I could afflict you further.

Leon. Do, Paulina ;

For this affliction has a taste as sweet

As any cordial comfort.—Still, methinks,

There is an air comes from her : What fine chisel

Could ever yet cut breath ? Let no man mock me—

For I will kiss her.

Paul. Good my lord, forbear :

The ruddiness upon her lip is wet ;

You'll mar it, if you kiss it—stain your own

With oily painting : Shall I draw the curtain ?

Leon. No, not these twenty years.