SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF HAMLET

HUDSON

HAMLET

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TRAGEDY OF HAMLET.

WITH

INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL.

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSES.

BY THE

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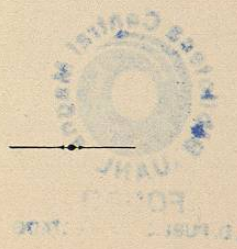

BOSTON, U.S.A.:
GINN & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
1902

TYPOGRAPHY BY J. S. CUSHING & CO., BOSTON, U.S.A
PRESSWORK BY GINN & CO., BOSTON, U.S.A.

PREFACE.

SINCE the first volume of my *School Shakespeare* made its appearance, which was about nine years ago, very considerable advances have been made in the way of furniture and preparation needful or desirable for such a work. This is especially the case with the play here presented in a new dress. And my own long and constant occupation in teaching classes in Shakespeare has, I would fain hope, now brought me a somewhat larger and riper fitness for doing what is requisite in this particular field. Moreover the stereotype plates of this play, as also of some others, have been so much and so often used for the pamphlet sections of the volume, that they have become not a little worn and defaced. These are the principal reasons for setting forth the present edition.

I still adhere to my old plan of foot-notes, instead of massing the annotation all together at the end of the play. This is because ample experience has assured me, beyond all peradventure, that whatever of explanation young students need of Shakespeare's text — and they certainly need a good deal — is much better every way when placed directly under the eye, so that they can hardly miss it; and because at least nineteen in twenty of such pupils will pass over an obscure word or phrase without understanding it, rather than stay to look up the explanation in another part of the volume. In this instance, however, I have meant to exclude from the foot-notes all matter but what appeared fairly needful or useful

for a proper understanding of the Poet's language and meaning. As will readily be seen from some of the foot-notes, I am indebted to Mr. JOSEPH CROSBY, of Zanesville, O., for most valuable aid towards this part of my task. The matter so used has been communicated to me in a private correspondence with that gentleman, running through several years, and extending over the whole field of Shakespeare, and throwing more light on dark and difficult passages than I have received from any other living commentator on the Poet.

Another advantage of the method of foot-notes is, that it operates as a wholesome restraint against overdoing the work of annotation. And surely, if we may judge from what has been done, it is so much easier to multiply superfluous notes than to keep within the bounds of what is fairly needful in this kind, that some such restraint seems eminently desirable. Shakespeare, it scarce need be said, has suffered a great deal from this sort of exegetical incontinence. And perhaps the tendency is stronger now then ever before to smother his workmanship beneath a mass of needless and even obstructive annotation. An inordinate fecundity of explanation is quite too much the order of the day. There have been divers instances, of late, where we find the gloss, I cannot say out-weighing, but certainly far out-bulking, the text. Surely it is better to leave students a little unhelped than thus to encumber them with superfluous help. These burdens of unnecessary comment are really a "weariness of the flesh"; and even hungry minds may well be repelled from a feast so overlaid with quenchers of the appetite. Nor have the Poet's editors yet got their minds untied from the old vice of leaving many of his darkest things unexplained, and of explaining a multitude of things that were better left to

take care of themselves. For pupils ought not to be put to studying Shakespeare at all, until they have grown to such a measure of intelligence, that they may be safely presumed to know several things without being told.

Such being the case, or at least my view of the case, I am not without apprehension, that some excess may be justly charged upon what is here done. Self-restrained and sparing as I have meant to be, still there is a considerable addition to the number of notes given in my former edition. But, in the matter of annotation, it is not easy to strike just the right medium between too much and too little. Here, again, I have been mainly guided by the results of my own experience in teaching; aiming to give such and so many notes as I have found needful or conducive to a fair understanding of the Poet's thought.

In the present stage of Shakespearian study, I suppose it would hardly do, even in a book designed for school use, to leave the matter of textual comment and textual correction altogether untouched. Accordingly there will be found, at the end of the play, a body of CRITICAL NOTES, wherein I have drawn together whatever seemed necessary or desirable to be said in the way of textual criticism, and of comment on such particulars of textual correction as are here admitted. In doing this, I have almost unavoidably been led to note a few instances of different readings.

These few cases excepted, I have purposely, and with full deliberation, abstained from every thing in the line of variorum comment and citation. For, indeed, such matter, however right and good in its place, can hardly be of any use or interest save to those who are making or intending to make a specialty of Shakespearian lore. But, of the pupils and even the teachers in our schools and colleges, probably

not one in five hundred has, or ought to have, any thought of becoming a specialist in Shakespeare, or a linguistic antiquary in any department of study. To such students, a minute discussion or presentation of various readings must needs be a stark impertinence; and its effect, if it have any, can hardly be other than to confuse and perplex their thoughts. In this, as in other walks of human service, the processes of elaborate study are of very limited use, and may well be confined to a few; while the last results of such study are or may be highly useful to all. I hold, indeed, that Shakespeare ought to be made much more of than he is in our higher education: not, however, with the view of fitting people to be editors and critics; but that they may have their minds and hearts rightly attuned to the delectations of his poetry and eloquence and wisdom; and that they may carry from the study some fair preparation of liberal thought and culture and taste into the common pursuits and interests of life. The world is getting prodigiously overstocked with authors; so many are aspiring to gain a living by their wits, that the thing is becoming a dreadful nuisance: and it really seems full time that we should begin to take more thought how a condition of "plain living" may be sanctified with the grace of "high thinking"; and how even the humbler and more drudging forms of labour may be sweetened by the pure and ennobling felicities of unambitious intelligence.

A question has lately been raised, and is still pending, as to the comparative value of verbal and of what is called æsthetic criticism; and some have spoken disparagingly, not to say contemptuously, of the latter, as a mere irrelevancy, which they would fain be rid of altogether. Verbal criticism certainly has its place, and in its place is not to be dispensed with; and it has at least this advantage over the

other, that it is strictly necessary in the study of such authors as Shakespeare, who abounds in words and phrases which, to common readers, are quite unintelligible without such help. This, however, may easily be overdone, and in fact sometimes has been hugely overdone, insomuch as to become little better than a sheer incumbrance; nevertheless, on the whole, it has been of incalculable service. But the other, I must think, has done good service too, and has fairly justified its claims to a high estimate in Shakespearian lore: albeit I have to confess that some discredit has of late come upon it, from the fact that, in divers cases, it has taken to very odd and eccentric courses, and has displayed an ill-starred propensity to speculate and subtilize the Poet's workmanship clean out of its natural propriety. Transcendental metaphysics, whether applied to science, to philosophy, to art, or to whatsoever else, of course loves to "reason high, and finds no end, in wandering mazes lost." Whatever it takes in hand, it can easily discover any meaning it wants, and as easily argue away any meaning not in accordance with its idealistic predilections; so using its alchemy as to "extract sunbeams from cucumbers," or to resolve gold into vapour, just as it happens to list. But these abuses may very well be struck off without casting away the thing itself. And the æsthetic criticism of Coleridge, Schlegel, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, and Mrs. Jameson, has probably done more to diffuse and promote the study of Shakespeare, than all the verbal criticism in the world put together.

The *Introduction* here given, as also some of the foot-notes, is mainly occupied with matter in this line; the aim being, to aid such students as may care to be aided, towards what may be termed the *interior* study of Shakespeare's characters. Ordinarily, in books designed for such use as the

present, I deem it better to reproduce extracts from approved masters in critical discourse than to obtrude any judgments of my own. But my views of Hamlet are so different from those commonly put forth, that in this case I judged it best to set them aside, and to occupy the limited space at my disposal with a presentation of my own thoughts. In this part of the work, I have derived much furtherance from Professor Karl V. erder's able essay on Hamlet, portions of which, very choicely translated, are given in Mr. H. H. Furness's great and admirable work, the variorum edition of the play. My own views were indeed substantially the same long before I had any knowledge of the German Professor, and even before his essay was written; but I would not if I could, and certainly could not if I would, disguise that I am indebted to him for much aid, and more encouragement, towards a full statement and expression of them.

The occasion moves me to protest, with all possible earnestness, against the course now too commonly pursued in our studying and teaching of English literature. We seem indeed to have got stuck fast in the strange notion, that children are never learning any thing unless they are *conscious* of it: and so we are sparing no pains to force in them a premature and most unhealthy consciousness of learning. Nothing is left to the free and spontaneous vitalities of Nature. Things have come to such a pass with us, that a pupil must live,

> Knowing that he grows wiser every day,
> Or else not live at all, and seeing too
> Each little drop of wisdom as it falls
> Into the dimpling cistern of his heart.

Hence our education is kept at a restless fever-heat of am-

bition and emulation; and this naturally involves an incessant urging of high-pressure methods. We have no faith in any sowing, save where the seeds "forthwith spring up, because they have no deepness of earth." So eager and impatient are we for immediate results, that the conditions and processes of inward growth are, as far as possible, worked off and got rid of. But the results attained by this straining and forcing are necessarily false and delusive; and presently wither away, because they have no root.

Thus in our hot haste to make the young precociously intellectual, we are just burning real health and vigour of intelligence out of them; or, at all events, the best that can be gained by such a course is but what Wordsworth justly deprecates as "knowledge purchased with the loss of power." For, in truth, when people, of whatever age, see themselves growing from day to day, they are not really growing at all, but merely bloating; — a puffing-up, not a building-up. And we shall assuredly find, in due time, nay, we are already finding, that those who get ripe before they are out of their teens begin to rot before passing their twenties. For such a forced and premature action of the mind can only proceed by overtaxing and exhausting other parts of the system; and must needs be followed by a collapse of the mind itself equally premature. In other words, where the brain is built up at the expense of the stomach, the brain itself must soon break down. And, as "the child is father of the man," so of course the smart boys of our educational hot-beds can only blossom out into grown-up intellectual manikins.

Now, in opposition to all this, be it said, again and again, that the work of education is necessarily secret and unconscious just in proportion as it is deep and generative. For

the mind is naturally conscious only of what touches its surface, rustles in its fringes, or roars in its outskirts; while that which works at its vital springs, and feeds its native vigour, is as silent as the growing of the grass, as unconscious as the assimilation of the food and the vitalizing of the blood. When its springs of life are touched to their finest issues, then it is that we are least sensible of the process So it is rightly said, "the gods approve the depth and not the tumult of the soul." Only the dyspeptic are conscious of their gastric operations: the eupeptic never think of their stomachs, are not even aware that they have any.

One would suppose that a little reflection on the workings of the infant mind might teach us all this. For children, during their first five years, before they can tell any thing about it, or make any show of it in set recitations, and while they are utterly unconscious of it, do a vast amount of studying and learning; probably storing up more of real intelligence than from any subsequent ten years of formal schooling. And such schooling is no doubt best and wisest when it continues and copies, as far as may be, those instinctive methods of Nature. But the pity of it is, that our education, as if "sick of self-love," appears to spurn the old wisdom of Nature, preferring to take its rules and measures from a proud and arrogant intellectualism.

In the mental and moral world, as in the physical, the best planting is always slow of fruitage: generally speaking, the longer the fruit is in coming, the sounder and sweeter when it comes; an interval of several years, perhaps of ten, or even twenty, being little time enough for its full and perfect advent. For growth is a thing that cannot be extemporized; and, if you go about to extemporize it, you will be sure to cheat or be cheated with a worthless surface imitation: that it is to say, in place of a growth, which is slow and silent, but full of juice and taste withal, will be substituted a swift, loud, vapid manufacture.

What a teacher, therefore, most especially needs (and parents need it too) is the faith that knows how to work and wait; — to work diligently, carefully, earnestly; to wait calmly, patiently, hopefully; — that faith which, having its eye on the far-off future, does not thirst for present rewards,

> Nor with impatience from the season ask
> More than its timely produce.

For Nature, the honest old Mother, is far better, stronger, richer, than our busy and meddlesome intellectualists, who are straining so hard to get ahead of her, have the heart to conceive. Human wisdom may indeed aid and further her processes; but it is stark folly to think of superseding them. And the forcing system now so much in vogue is essentially a levelling system; though, to be sure, it can only level downwards: perhaps, indeed, the circumstance of its looking to a compelled equality is what makes it so popular; — a thing sure to issue in a manifold spuriousness! For its estimate of things is, for the most part, literally preposterous. Minds of a light and superficial cast it over-stimulates into a morbid quickness and volubility, wherein a certain liveliness and fluency of memory, going by rote, parrot-like, enables them to win flashy and vainglorious triumphs by a sort of cheap and ineffectual phosphorescence; thus making them, as Professor Huxley says, "conceited all the forenoon of their life, and stupid all its afternoon": while, upon minds of a more robust and solid make, which are growing too much inwardly to do any shining outwardly, it has a disheartening and depressing effect. Thus the system operates

to quench the deeper natures, while kindling false fires in the shallower.

Hence, no doubt, the feeling, which can hardly be new to any thoughtful teacher or parent, that "strongest minds are often those of whom the noisy *school* hears least." For, under the system in question, modest vigour is naturally eclipsed by pert and forward imbecility, — the proper characteristic of minds that have not strength enough to keep still. But minds thus heated into untimely efflorescence can hardly ripen into any thing but sterility and barrenness: before the season of fruitage, the sap is all dried out of them. To quote Professor Huxley again: "The vigour and freshness, which should have been stored up for the hard struggle for existence in practical life, have been washed out of them by precocious mental debauchery, — by book-gluttony and lesson-bibbing: their faculties are worn out by the strain upon their callow brains, and they are demoralized by worthless, childish triumphs before the real work of life begins." Of those who are so incessantly driving on this bad system, we may well ask, with Wordsworth, —

> When will their presumption learn,
> That in th' unreasoning progress of the world
> A wiser spirit is at work for us,
> A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
> Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
> Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

Now, Shakespeare, above all other authors, should be allowed to teach as Nature teaches, else he ought not to be used as a text-book at all. And here, I suspect, the great danger is, that teachers, having too little faith in the spontaneous powers of Nature, will undertake to do too much, will keep thrusting themselves, their specialties and

artificial preparations, between the pupil and the author. With average pupils, if of sufficient age, Shakespeare will make his way, slowly and silently indeed, but effectively, provided his proper efficacy be not strangled and defeated by an excess of learned verbalism. For his great superiority lies very much in this, that he writes close to facts as they are: no cloud of words, nothing, stands between his vision and the object. Hence with him, pre-eminently, language is used as a transparent, invisible vehicle of thought and matter; so that the mind, if rightly put in communication with him, thinks not of his expression at all, but loses sight of it, in the force and vividness of what is expressed. Beautiful his speech is indeed; but its beauty lies in this very thing, that it is the crystal shrine, itself unseen, of the speaking soul within. The less, therefore, the attention of students is diverted from his matter to his language by external calls, the quicker and stronger will be their interest in him; — an interest free, natural, and unconscious indeed, but all the better for that: so that the teacher will best further it by letting it alone; will most effectively help it by leaving it unhelped. For the learning of words is a noisy process; whereas the virtue of things steals into the mind with noiseless step, and is ever working in us most when we perceive it least. And so, when Shakespeare is fairly studied in the manner here proposed, the pupil will naturally be drawn to forget himself; all thought of the show he is to make will be cheated into healthful sleep; unless, ay, unless —

> Some intermeddler still is on the watch
> To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray,
> Within the pinfold of his own conceit.

Not, however, but that something of special heed should

be given to the Poet's language, and his use of words; for many of these are either unfamiliar or used in unfamiliar senses: but this part of the study should be kept strictly subordinate to the understanding of his thought and meaning, and should be pushed no further than is fairly needful to that end. But I have ample cause for saying, that in many cases, if not in most, altogether too much time and strength are spent in mere word-mongering and lingual dissection; a vice as old indeed as Cicero's time, who pointedly ridicules it in describing one as "a chanter of formulas, a bird-catcher of syllables." In fact, as we are now chiefly intent on educating people into talkers, not workers, so the drift of our whole education is, to make language an ultimate object of study, instead of using it as a medium for converse with things: for we all know, or ought to know, that the readiest and longest talkers are commonly those who have little or nothing to say. On every side, teachers are to be found attending very disproportionately, not to say exclusively, to questions of grammar, etymology, rhetoric, and the mere technicalities of speech; thus sticking for ever in the husk of language, instead of getting through into the kernel of matter and thought.

Now, as before implied, Shakespeare, least of all, ought to be taught or studied after this fashion. A constant dissecting of his words and syllables just chokes off all passage of his blood into the pupil's mind. Our supreme master in the knowledge of human nature, it is little less than downright sacrilege to be thus using him as the raw material of philological exercitations. In the degree that it is important people should acquire a taste for him and learn to love him, just in that degree is it a sin to use him so; for such use can hardly fail to breed a distaste for him and an aversion to

him. Doubtless there is a time for parsing, as there is for other things; but people cannot parse themselves or be parsed into a relish for Shakespeare's workmanship, or into a fruitful converse with his treasures of wisdom and power.

And with the young, especially, the study of vernacular authors should be prosecuted in entire subservience to the knowledge of things: if turned into a word-mongering process, it touches no free and natural springs of interest, and so becomes tedious and dull,—just the thing to defeat all that pleasure which is the pulse of mental life. For the proper business, as also the healthy instinct of young minds is, to accumulate and lay in stores of matter: the analytic and discriminative processes naturally belong to a later period; and to anticipate the proper time of them is a very bad mistake. But the knowledge of things proceeds too slowly and too silently for the ends of school-room show. Boys in school and college shine chiefly by the knowledge of words, for this is the mere work of memory; but, in practical life, men are useful and successful in proportion to their knowledge of things: which knowledge proceeds, to be sure, by the measures of *growth*, and therefore is far less available for competitive examinations and exhibitory purposes. And so, forsooth, our children must be continually drilled in a sort of microscopic verbalism, as if we had nothing so much at heart as to make them learned in words, ignorant of things. Hence, too, instead of learning how to *do* some one thing, or some few things, they must learn how to smatter of all things: instead, for example, of being taught to sing, they must be taught to prate scientifically about music.

Thus our educational methods are all converging to the one sole purpose of generating a depurated and conceited intellectualism; which is just about the shallowest, barrenest,

windiest thing in the whole compass of man's intellectual globe. But, what is strangest of all, so becharmed are we with our supposed progress in this matter, as not to see, what is nevertheless as plain as the Sun at midday, that we are taking just the right course to stunt and thwart the intellect itself. For the several parts of the mind must grow in proportion, keeping touch and time together in the unity of a common sap and circulation, else growth itself is but decay in disguise. And when the intellectual man, through pride of self-sufficingness, sequesters itself from its natural commerce and reciprocation with the moral, emotional, and imaginative man, the intellect must needs go into a dry-rot.

I was convinced long ago, and further experience has but strengthened that conviction, that in the study of English authors the method of recitations is radically at fault, and ought seldom if ever to be used. For that method naturally invites, and indeed almost compels, the pupil to spend all his force on those points only which are, or may be made, available for immediate recitational effect. But, if the author be really worth studying, all, or nearly all, that is best in him escapes through the fingers of this process, and is left behind; the pupil having no occasion for attending to it, nor any strength of attention to spare for it. He does nothing but skip lightly over the surface of what is before him, picking up such small items as the tongue and memory can handle; but remaining quite innocent of all its deeper efficacies, which would indeed be rather an incumbrance than a help in reference to what he has in view. For the best thing that the best authors can do is to quicken and inspire the student's mind: but quickening and inspiration are nowise things to be recited; their natural effect is to prevent glib-

ness of memory and tongue: and, while the pupil is intent only on what he can recite, the author's quickening and inspiring power has no chance to work; and he just runs or slides over it without being touched by it, or catching any virtue from it. It is just the difference of mere acquirement and culture: for what the mind gains in the way of acquirement merely, is lost almost as quickly as it is got; but whatever of culture is gained abides as an inseparable part of the mind itself. Thus the same rule holds here as in so many other things, that, when pupils are studying merely or mainly for effect, all the best effect of the study is inevitably missed.

For these reasons, I have never had and never will have any thing but simple exercises; the pupils reading the author under the teacher's direction, correction, and explanation; the teacher not even requiring, though usually advising, them to read over the matter in advance. Thus it is a joint communing of teacher and pupils with the author for the time being; just that, and nothing more. Nor, assuredly, can such communion, in so far as it is genial and free, be without substantial and lasting good; far better indeed than any possible cramming of mouth and memory for recitation. The one thing needful here is, that the pupils rightly understand and feel what they read: this secured, all the rest will take care of itself; because, when this is gained, the work is, not indeed done, but fairly and effectively begun; and what is once so begun, will be ever after in course of doing, never done. For people cannot dwell, intelligently and with open minds, in the presence of "sweetness and light," or within the sound of wisdom and eloquence, without being enriched, —enriched secretly, it may be, but permanently; for the enrichment is in the shape of germs, which have in them the virtue of perennial growth. And when I find the pupils

taking pleasure in what they are about, entering into it with the zest and spirit of honest delight, then I know full well that they are drinking in the author's soul-power, and that what they are drinking in is going to the right spot. For, to find joy and sweetness in the taste of what is pure and good, is the strongest pledge that things are going well. And such a communing of youthful minds with genius and mellow wisdom has something of mystery and almost of magic in it. Rather say, it is a holy sacrament of the mind. As beautiful too as it is beneficent: in this naughty-lovely, or this lovely-naughty, world of ours, I hardly know of a lovelier sight. There is, be assured there is, regeneration in it.

INTRODUCTION.

History of the Play.

"THE Revenge of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, as it was lately acted by the Lord Chamberlain's Servants," was registered at the Stationers' on the 26th of July, 1602. This entry undoubtedly refers to Shakespeare's tragedy, and is the first we hear of it. The tragedy was printed in 1603. It was published again in 1604; and in the title-page of that issue we have the words, "enlarged to almost as much again as it was." This latter edition was reprinted in 1605, and again in 1611; besides an undated quarto, which is commonly referred to 1607, as it was entered at the Stationers' in the Fall of that year. These are all the issues known to have been made before the play reappeared in the folio of 1623. The quartos, all but the first, have a number of highly important passages that are not in the folio; while, on the other hand, the folio has a few, less important, that are wanting in the quartos.

It is generally agreed that the first issue was piratical. It gives the play but about half as long as the later quartos, and carries in its face abundant evidence of having been greatly marred and disfigured in the making-up. Mr. Dyce says, "It seems certain that in the quarto of 1603 we have Shakespeare's first conception of the play, though with a text mangled and corrupted throughout, and perhaps formed on