

Cast off and struck on the heart by another, he flies with still greater confidence to the third. Though proofs that she too has fallen off are multiplied upon him, still he cannot give her up, cannot be provoked to curse her; he *will* not see, will not own to himself the fact of her revolt.

When, however, the truth is forced home, and he can no longer evade or shuffle off the conviction, the effect is indeed terrible. So long as his heart had something to lay hold of and cling to and rest upon, his mind was the abode of order and peace. But, now that his feelings are rendered objectless, torn from their accustomed holdings, and thrown back upon themselves, there springs up a wild chaos of the brain, a whirling tumult and anarchy of the thoughts, which, till imagination has time to work, chokes down his utterance. Then comes the inward, tugging conflict, deep as life, which gradually works up his imaginative forces, and kindles them to a preternatural resplendence. The crushing of his aged spirit brings to light its hidden depths and buried riches. Thus his terrible energy of thought and speech, as soon as imagination rallies to his aid, grows naturally from the struggle of his feelings, — a struggle that seems to wrench his whole being into dislocation, convulsing and upturning his soul from the bottom. Thence proceeds, to quote Mr. Hallam, “that splendid madness, not absurdly sudden, as in some tragedies, but in which the strings that keep his reasoning powers together give way one after the other in the frenzy of rage and grief.”

In the transition of Lear's mind from its first stillness and repose to its subsequent tempest and storm; in the hurried revulsions and alternations of feeling, — the fast-rooted faith in filial virtue, the keen sensibility to filial ingratitude, the mighty hunger of the heart, thrice repelled, yet ever strength-

ened by repulse; and in the turning-up of sentiments and faculties deeply imbedded beneath the incrustations of time and place; — in all this we have a retrospect of the aged sufferer's whole life; the abridged history of a mind that has passed through many successive stages, each putting off the form, yet retaining and perfecting the grace of the preceding.

### Lear's Madness.

As to the picture here given of madness, it is such that I scarce dare undertake to speak of it in any words of my own. And probably the best I can do is by saying, what is indeed true, that men of the solidest science are accustomed to hold it as an authority in questions of that kind, consulting it and quoting it, as they would the history of an actual case. Nor am I aware of its having ever been faulted as untrue to nature in a single point. Of course there can be nothing stronger or more decisive than this as to the merit of the workmanship: the praise implied is almost too great to be inherited by a man. That the Poet should have entered so perfectly into the consciousness of insanity as thus to project, not a mere likeness of the thing, but the very thing itself, is perhaps the greatest mystery of his genius. No philosophy has yet explained or begun to explain the secret of it. To be sure, the same holds true of his other representations of madness. But this of Lear is in some respects the most wonderful of them all: for it is the resurgence of a decayed intellect, with the faculties wrenched into unhingement, and thrown into exorbitancy, by the fearful violence that has evoked them from their repose.

I must add somewhat touching the methods used for recovering the old King. — Cordelia asks the Physician, “What

can man's wisdom in the restoring his bereavèd sense?" and he replies, —

There is means, madam :  
Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,  
The which he lacks ; that to provoke in him  
Are many simples operative, whose power  
Will close the eye of anguish.

"This reply," says Dr. Kellogg, "is significant, and worthy of careful attention, as embracing a brief summary of almost the only true principles recognized by modern science, and now carried out by the most eminent physicians in the treatment of the insane." So, again, in the directions for preventing a relapse : —

Be comforted, good madam : the great rage,  
You see, is cured in him ; and yet 'tis danger  
To make him even o'er the time he has lost.  
Desire him to go in : trouble him no more  
Till further settling.

The late Dr. Brigham, a high authority in such matters, remarks that, "although near two centuries and a half have passed since Shakespeare wrote this, we have very little to add to his method of treating the insane as thus pointed out. To produce sleep, to quiet the mind by medical and moral treatment, to avoid all unkindness, and, when the patients begin to convalesce, to guard, as he directs, against every thing likely to disturb their minds and cause a relapse, is now considered the best and nearly the only essential treatment."

Thus it appears that in this most difficult field of inquiry Shakespeare anticipated the ripest conclusions of scientific study and experience : which is the more remarkable inasmuch as the learned intellect of his age was still prepossessed with a mass of superstitious trumpery concerning

magic, witchcraft, and demonology ; and in the true spirit of that old system of thought insanity in all its forms was held to proceed from Satanic possession : charms, talismans, and exorcisms were the most approved remedies ; while any thing like a rational and scientific treatment of the disease was commonly regarded as atheistic and profane. To question the doctrine of supernatural agency in the business, was little better than flat heresy. The whole matter was thus invested with religious terrorism and mystical predominance ; the current and traditionary ideas being sanctioned by the Church, inculcated by the Clergy, and moulded into the very substance of the popular faith ; the learned and the vulgar alike sharing in the old patrimony of delusion which taught that the world was full of malignant demons, whose pastime it was to *inspire* people with madness, and who were to be controlled by magic rites and muttered invocations. Even the best philosophy of the time was unable to shake off that ancient spell ; Bacon himself being to the last an avowed disciple of the popular creed. So it was too with the best medical science of the time ; Sir Theodore Mayence, who was physician to Queen Elizabeth and King James, expressly adhering to the received doctrine touching both the cause and the cure of mental disease.

If it be asked how Shakespeare, while the human mind all about him was thus enthralled to superstitious illusions and unrealities, came to work so near the soul of Nature and see things as they are, I can only point to the record, and leave the matter unexplained. But indeed this is only one of many proofs that, through some original and inherent virtue, his genius dwelt at "Nature's inner shrine, where she works most when we perceive her least." And perhaps he grew to a living fellowship with the true springs of intellectual light

all the better for his little acquaintance with what had been delivered in books. His mind was evidently at home with the works of Nature and the words of Scripture, whose deeper meanings seem to have been the clearer to him, that his vision was undimmed with scholastic and theological mists.

Much ingenuity has been spent in trying to argue his works away from him, on the ground that a mind so little imbued with learning, as his is acknowledged to have been, could not possibly be so deep and clear in the truth of things. I notice the point now, merely to remark that no amount of imported assistance would really do any thing towards explaining such an intellectual phenomenon. For the very character of his works stands in an original, first-hand knowledge, such as could only come by talking with Nature face to face; and such native powers as he must have had, in order to do what he did, would have been rather encumbered and obscured than otherwise, by "all the learnings that his time could make him the receiver of." Had he been more addicted to looking at Nature through "the spectacles of books," or through other men's eyes, he would probably have seen less of her inward meaning, and been less happy and less idiomatic in his translation of it. Ben Jonson magnificently apostrophizes him as "Soul of the Age": and the supremacy of his genius lies in nothing else so much as in this, that he was indeed the soul of that age, with his forces working free and clear from "the recollected terms" and musty obstructions of a former age.

It is true that, like other builders of the highest order, he "buildd better than he knew"; but this was because he followed the motions of an inward, living law, and not the set rules of a dead or expiring letter. Intellectual modesty

in the highest degree, without a particle of imitative timidity, is the proper style of his workmanship. And as the spirit of a new era was to have its largest and clearest expression through him, so it behoved that his mind should take its growth apart from the influences of a superannuated erudition. If, for instance, his thoughts had been steeped in the current teachings on this very subject of madness, is it likely that he would have gone so far beyond his time in the real science of the thing? The armour that helped the knights of the Middle Ages would only oppress and hinder the modern warrior. And so the best help that Shakespeare could have in his intellectual walk was the being left to walk unhelped by any thing but the mental electricity with which his native atmosphere of thought was so highly charged.

#### Cordelia.

In the trial of professions, there appears something of obstinacy and sullenness in Cordelia's answer, as if she would resent the old man's credulity to her sisters' lies by refusing to tell him the truth. But, in the first place, she is considerably careful and tender of him; and it is a part of her religion not to feed his dotage with the intoxications for which he has such a morbid craving. She understands thoroughly both his fretful waywardness and their artful hypocrisy; and when she sees how he drinks in the sweetened poison of their speech, she calmly resolves to hazard the worst, rather than wrong her own truth to cosset his disease. Thus her answer proceeds, in part, from a deliberate purpose of love, not to compete with them in the utterance of pleasing falsehoods.

In the second place, it is against the original grain of her nature to talk much about what she feels, and what she in-