

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-

tends. Where her feelings are deepest, there her tongue is stillest. She "cannot heave her heart into her mouth," for the simple reason that she has so much of it. And there is a virgin delicacy in genuine and deep feeling, that causes it to keep in the back-ground of the life; to be heard rather in its effects than in direct and open declarations. They love but little who can tell how much they love, or who are fond of prating about it. To be staling itself with verbal protestations seems a kind of sacrilege and profanation. Thus love is apt to be tongue-tied; and its best eloquence is when it disables speech, and when, from very shame of being seen, it just blushes itself into sight.—Such is the beautiful instinct of true feeling to embody itself sweetly and silently in deeds, lest from showing itself in words it should turn to matter of pride and conceit. For a sentimental coxcombry is the natural issue of a cold and hollow heart.

It is not strange, therefore, that Cordelia should make it her part to "love and be silent." Yet she is in no sort a pulpy structure, or one whom it is prudent to trifle with, where her forces are unrestrained by awe of duty: she has indeed a delectable smack of her father's quality; as appears in that glorious flash of womanhood, when she so promptly switches off her higgling suitor:—

Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that respects of fortune are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

Mrs. Jameson rightly says of Cordelia that "every thing in her lies beyond our view, and affects us in such a manner that we rather feel than perceive it." And it is very remarkable that, though but little seen and heard, she is nevertheless a sort of ubiquity in the play. All that she utters is but about a hundred lines; yet I had read the play occasion-

ally for several years before I could fully realize but that she was among the principal speakers; and even to this day I carry to the reading a vague impression that her speech and presence are to fill a large part of the scene.

It is in this remoteness, I take it, this gift of presence without appearance, that the secret of her power mainly consists. Her character has no foreground; nothing outstanding, or that touches us in a definable way: she is all perspective, self-withdrawn; so that she comes to us rather by inspiration than by vision. Even when she is before us we rather feel than see her; so much more being meant than meets the eye, that we almost lose the sense of what is shown, in the interest of what is suggested. Thus she affects us through finer and deeper susceptibilities than consciousness can grasp; as if she at once both used and developed in us higher organs of communication than the senses; or as if her presence acted in some mysterious way directly on our life, so as to be most operative within us when we are least aware of it. The effect is like that of a voice or a song kindling and swelling the thoughts that prevent our listening to it. In like sort, my hearing has often been so haunted with certain strains of music as to turn every stray sound into an image thereof; so that

The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

The point is well illustrated in the case of the Gentleman whom Kent despatches to Cordelia with letters informing her of what has befallen her father. After watching her movements while reading the letters, and though she utters nothing in his presence but sighs and tears, the Gentleman returns mad with eloquence and poetry; as if Heaven had been opened upon him through her, and he

Had gazed and gazed, but little thought
 What wealth to him the show had brought.

What I have said of Cordelia's affection holds true of her character generally. For she has the same deep, quiet reserve of thought as of feeling; so that her mind becomes conspicuous by its retiringness, and draws the attention by shrinking from it. Though she nowhere says any thing indicating much intelligence, yet she always strikes us, somehow, as being very intelligent; and even the more so, that her intelligence makes no special report of itself. It is as if she knew too much to show her knowledge. For the strongest intellects are by no means the most demonstrative; often they are the least so. And indeed what Cordelia knows is so bound up with her affections, that she cannot draw it off into expression by itself: it is held in perfect solution, so to speak, with the other elements of her nature, and nowhere falls down in a sediment, so as to be producible in a separate state. She has a deeper and truer knowledge of her sisters than any one else about them; but she knows them by heart rather than by head; and so can *feel* and *act*, but not *articulate*, a prophecy of what they will do. Ask her, indeed, what she thinks on any subject, and her answer will be that she thinks, — nay, she cannot *tell*, she can only show you what she thinks. For her thinking involuntarily shapes itself into life, not into speech; and she uses the proper language of her mind when, bending over her "child-changed father," she invokes restoration to "hang his medicine on her lips"; or when, kneeling before him, she entreats him to "hold his hands in benediction o'er her." Here, again, "her mouth is much too narrow for her heart"; — it is indeed a small heart that the mouth is not too narrow for: — she remembers with inexpressible sorrow the curse he had pro-

nounced upon her, — for a father's curse is a dreadful thing to a soul such as hers; — and her first concern is to have that curse replaced with a benediction.

All which shows a peculiar fitness in Cordelia for the part she was designed to act; which was to exemplify the workings of filial piety, as Lear exemplifies those of paternal love. To embody this sentiment, the whole character in all its movements and aspects is made essentially religious. For filial piety is religion acting under the sacredest of human relations. And religion, we know, or ought to know, is a life, and not a language; and life is the simultaneous and concurrent action of *all* the elements of our being. Which is perfectly illustrated in Cordelia; who, be it observed, never thinks of her piety at all, because her piety keeps her thoughts engaged upon her father. And so she reveals her good thoughts by veiling them in good deeds, as the spirit is veiled and revealed in the body; nay, has to be so veiled in order to be revealed; for, if the veil be torn off, the spirit is no longer there, but hides itself at once in immateriality.

Therefore it is that Cordelia affects us so deeply and so constantly without our being able to perceive how or why. And she affects those about her in the same insensible way; that is, she keeps their thoughts and feelings busy, by keeping her own hidden beneath what she does: an influence goes forth from her by stealth, and stealthily creeps into them; an influence which does not appear, and yet is irresistible, and irresistible even because it does not appear; and which becomes an undercurrent in their minds, circulates in their blood, as it were, and enriches their life with a beauty that seems their own, and yet is not their own: so that she steals upon us through them; and we think of her the more because they, without suspecting it, remind us of her.

Powers there are,
That touch each other to the quick in modes
Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
No soul to dream of.

No one can see Cordelia, and be the same he was before, though unconscious the while of taking any thing from her. It is as if she secretly deposited about his person some mysterious, divine aroma which, when he is remote from her and not thinking of her, keeps giving out its perfume, and testifying, though he knows it not, that he has been with her.

Accordingly her father loves her most, yet knows not why; has no conscious reasons for the preference, and therefore cannot reason it away. Having cast her off from his bounty, but not out of his heart, he grows full of unrest, as if there were some secret power about her, like magic, which he cannot live without, though he did not dream of its existence when she was with him. And "since her going into France the Fool has much pined away"; as though her presence were necessary to his health: so that he sickens upon the loss of her, yet suspects not wherefore, and knows but that she was by and his spirits were nimble, she is gone and his spirits are drooping.

Such is the proper influence of a right-minded and right-mannered woman on those about her: she knows it not, they know it not; her influence is all the better and stronger that neither of them knows it: she begins to lose it directly she goes about to use it and make them sensible of it: with noiseless step it glides into them unnoticed and unsuspected, but disturbs and repels them as soon as it seeks to make itself heard. For indeed her power lies not in what she values herself upon, and voluntarily brings forward, and makes

use of, but in something far deeper and diviner than all this, which she knows not of and cannot help.

Finally, I know of nothing with which to compare Cordelia, nothing to illustrate her character by. An impersonation of the holiness of womanhood, herself alone is her own parallel; and all the objects that lend beauty when used to illustrate other things seem dumb or ineloquent of meaning beside her. Superior, perhaps, to all the rest of Shakespeare's women in beauty of character, she is nevertheless second to none of them as a living and breathing reality. We see her only in the relation of daughter, and hardly *see* her even there; yet we know what she is or would be in every relation of life, just as well as if we had seen her in them all. "Formed for all sympathies, moved by all tenderness, prompt for all duty, prepared for all suffering," we seem almost to hear her sighs and feel her breath as she hangs, like a ministering spirit, over her reviving father: the vision sinks sweetly and quietly into the heart, and, in its reality to our feelings, abides with us more as a remembrance than an imagination, instructing and inspiring us as that of a friend whom we had known and loved in our youth.

After all, I am not sure but it were better to have emphasized her character with the single remark of Schlegel: "Of Cordelia's heavenly beauty of soul I do not dare to speak."

It is an interesting feature of this representation, that Lear's faith in filial piety is justified by the event, though not his judgment as to the persons in whom it was to be found. Wiser in heart than in understanding, he mistook the object, but was right in the feeling. In his pride of sovereignty he thought to command the affection of his children, and to purchase the dues of gratitude by his bounty to them; but he is at last indebted to the unbought

grace of Nature for that comfort which he would fain owe to himself; what he seeks, and even more than he seeks, coming as the free return of a love that thrives in spite of him, and which no harshness or injustice of his could extinguish. Thus the confirmation of his faith grows by the ruin of his pride. Such is the frequent lesson of human life. For the Fall has not more defaced the beauty of human character than it has marred our perception of what remains; and not the least punishment of our own vices is, that they take from us the power to discern the virtue of others. In passing from this part of the subject, need I add how, with what healing discipline, and what accessions of moral strength, we are here brought to converse with

Sorrow, that is not sorrow, but delight;
 And miserable love, that is not pain
 To hear of, for the glory that redounds
 Therefrom to human kind, and what we are?

All this is indeed putting the great forces of tragic representation to their rightful service.

The Fool.

There is a strange assemblage of qualities in the Fool, and a strange effect arising from their union and position, which I am not a little at a loss how to describe. It seems hardly possible that Lear's character should be properly developed without him: indeed he serves as a common gauge and exponent of all the characters about him, — the mirror in which their finest and deepest lineaments are reflected. Though a privileged person, with the largest opportunity of seeing and the largest liberty of speaking, he everywhere turns his privileges into charities, making the immunities of the clown subservient to the noblest sympathies of the man

He is therefore by no means a mere harlequinian appendage of the scene, but moves in vital intercourse with the character and passion of the drama. He makes his folly the vehicle of truths which the King will bear in no other shape, while his affectionate tenderness sanctifies all his nonsense. His being heralded by the announcement of his pining away at the banishment of Cordelia sends a consecration before him: that his spirit feeds on her presence hallows every thing about him. Lear manifestly loves him, partly for his own sake, and partly for hers: for we feel a delicate, scarce-discernible play of sympathy between them on Cordelia's account; the more so perhaps, that neither of them makes any explicit allusion to her; their very reserve concerning her indicating that their hearts are too full to speak.

I know not, therefore, how I can better describe the Fool than as the soul of pathos in a sort of comic masquerade; one in whom fun and frolic are sublimed and idealized into tragic beauty; with the garments of mourning showing through and softened by the lawn of playfulness. His "labouring to outjest Lear's heart-struck injuries" tells us that his wits are set a-dancing by grief; that his jests bubble up from the depths of a heart struggling with pity and sorrow, as foam enwreaths the face of deeply-troubled waters. So have I seen the lip quiver and the cheek dimple into a smile, to relieve the eye of a burden it was reeling under, yet ashamed to let fall. There is all along a shrinking, velvet-footed delicacy of step in the Fool's antics, as if awed by the holiness of the ground; and he seems bringing diversion to the thoughts, that he may the better steal a sense of woe into the heart. And I am not clear whether the inspired antics that sparkle from the surface of his mind are in more impressive contrast with the dark tragic scenes into which