

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

they are thrown, like rockets into a midnight tempest, or with the undercurrent of deep tragic thoughtfulness out of which they falteringly issue and play.

Our estimate of this drama as a whole depends very much on the view we take of the Fool; that is, on how we interpret his part, or in what sense we understand it. Superficially considered, his presence and action can hardly seem other than a blemish in the work, and a hindrance to its proper interest. Accordingly he has been greatly misunderstood, indeed totally misconstrued by many of the Poet's critics. And it must be confessed that the true meaning of his part is somewhat difficult to seize; in fact, is not to be seized at all, unless one get just the right point of view. He has no sufferings of his own to move us, yet, rightly seen, he does move us, and deeply too. But the process of his interest is very peculiar and recondite. The most noteworthy point in him, and the real key to his character, lies in that while his heart is slowly breaking he never speaks, nor even appears so much as to think of his own suffering. He seems indeed quite unconscious of it. His anguish is purely the anguish of sympathy; a sympathy so deep and intense as to induce absolute forgetfulness of self; all his capacities of feeling being perfectly engrossed with the sufferings of those whom he loves. He withdraws from the scene with the words, "And I'll go to bed at noon"; which means simply that the dear fellow is dying, and this too, purely of others' sorrows, which he feels more keenly than they do themselves. She who was the light of his eyes is gone, dowered with her father's curse and strangered with his oath; Kent and Edgar have vanished from his recognition, he knows not whither, the victims of wrong and crime; the wicked seem to be having all things their own

way; the elements have joined their persecutions to the cruelties of men; there is no pity in the Heavens, no help from the Earth; he sees nothing but a "world's convention of agonies" before him; and his straining of mind to play assuagement upon others' woes has fairly breached the citadel of his life. But the deepest grief of all has now overtaken him; his old master's wits are all shattered in pieces: to prevent this, he has all along been toiling his forces to the utmost; and, now that it has come in spite of him, he no longer has any thing to live for: yet he must still mask his passion in a characteristic disguise, and breathe out his life in a play of thought. I know not whether it may be rightly said of this hero in motley, that he

hopes, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.

Need it be said that such ideas of human character could grow only where the light of Christianity shines? The Poet's conceptions of virtue and goodness, as worked out in this drama, are thoroughly of the Christian type, — steeped indeed in the efficacy of the Christian Ideal. The old Roman conception of human goodness, as is well known, placed it courage, patriotism, honesty, and justice, — very high and noble indeed; whereas the proper constituents of the Christian Ideal are, besides these, and higher than these, mercy, philanthropy, self-sacrifice, forgiveness of injuries, and loving of enemies. It is in this sense that Shakespeare gives us the best expressions of the Christian Ideal that are to be met with in Poetry and Art. I am really unable to say what divines may have interpreted more truly or more inspiringly the moral sense, the *ethos* of our religion.

Kent and Edgar.

If the best grace and happiness of life consist, as this play makes us feel that they do, in a forgetting of self and a living for others, Kent and Edgar are those of Shakespeare's men whom one should most wish to resemble. Strikingly similar in virtues and situation, these two persons are notwithstanding widely different in character. Brothers in magnanimity and in misfortune; equally invincible in fidelity, the one to his King, the other to his father; both driven to disguise themselves, and in their disguise both serving where they stand condemned; Kent, too generous to control himself, is always quick, fiery, and impetuous; Edgar, controlling himself even because of his generosity, is always calm, collected, and deliberate. For, if Edgar be the more judicious and prudent, Kent is the more unselfish of the two: the former disguising himself for his own safety, and then turning his disguise into an opportunity of service; the latter disguising himself merely *in order* to serve, and then perilling his life in the same course whereby the other seeks to preserve it. Nor is Edgar so lost to himself and absorbed in others but that he can and does survive them; whereas Kent's life is so bound up with others, that their death plucks him after. Nevertheless it is hard saying whether one would rather be the subject or the author of Edgar's tale:—

Whilst I was big in clamour, came there a man
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fasten'd on my neck, and bellow'd out
As he'd burst heaven; threw him on my father;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received; which in recounting,

His grief grew puissant, and the strings of life
Began to crack: twice then the trumpet sounded,
And there I left him tranced.

Albany.

But who was this?

Edgar. Kent, sir, the banish'd Kent; who in disguise
Follow'd his enemy King, and did him service
Improper for a slave.

It is rather curious to note how the characteristic traits of these two men are preserved even when they are acting most out of character: so that, to us who are in the secret of their course, they are themselves and not themselves at the same time. For example, in Kent's obstreperous railing at the Steward, and his saucy bluntness to Cornwall and Regan, we have a strong relish of the same impulsive and outspoken boldness with which he beards the old King when the latter is storming out his paroxysm against Cordelia, and meets his threats by daring him to the worst: "Do; kill thy physician, and the fee bestow upon the foul disease." Of course, in those transports of abusive speech and of reckless retort, he is but affecting the slang-whanger as a part of his disguise: moreover he wants to raise a muss, and embroil Lear with his two daughters, and thereby draw the latter into a speedy disclosure of what he knows to be in their hearts; because his big manly soul is still on fire at the wrong Lear has done to Cordelia, and he would fain hasten that repentance which he knows must sooner or later come: still it is plain enough to us that his tumultuous conduct is but an exaggerated outcome of his native disposition; or, in other words, that he is truly himself all the while, only a good deal more so; a hiding of his character in a sort of overdone caricature. So too the imitative limberness and versatility which carry Edgar smoothly through so many abrupt shiftings of his masquerade are in perfect