

keeping with the cool considerateness which enables him to hold himself so firmly in hand when he goes to assume the style of a wandering Bedlamite. He acts several widely different parts, but the same conscious self-mastery and the same high-souled rectitude of purpose, which form the backbone of his character, are apparent in them all.

In Kent and Oswald we have one of those effective contrasts with which the Poet often deepens the harmony of his greater efforts. As the former is the soul of goodness clothed in the assembled nobilities of manhood; so the latter is the very extract and embodiment of meanness; two men than whom "no contraries hold more antipathy." To call the Steward wicked were a waste of language: he is absolutely beneath the sense of that term; one of those convenient pack-horses whereon guilt often rides to its ends. Except the task of smoothing the way for the passions of a wicked mistress, no employment were base enough for him. None but a reptile like him could ever have got hatched into notice in such an atmosphere as Goneril's society: were he any thing else, there could not be sympathy enough between them to admit the relation of superior and subaltern.

General Remarks.

This play has many scenes and passages well worth our special noting. I must content myself with glancing at two or three.

The scene of Edgar and the eyeless Gloucester, where the latter imagines himself ascending the chalky cliff at Dover, and leaping from it, is a notable instance of the Poet's power to overcome the inherent incredibility of a thing by his opulence of description. Great as is the miracle of Gloucester's belief, it is in some sort authenticated to our feel-

ings by the array of vivid and truthful imagery which induces it. Thus does the Poet, as occasion requires, enhance the beauty of his representation, so as to atone for its want of verisimilitude.

Some of Lear's speeches amid the tempest contain, I think, the grandest exhibition of creative power to be met with. They seem spun out of the very nerves and sinews of the storm. It is the instinct of strong passion to lay hold of whatever objects and occurrences lie nearest at hand, and twist itself a language out of them, incorporating itself with their substance, and reproducing them charged with its own life. To Lear, accordingly, and to us in his presence, the storm becomes all expressive of filial ingratitude; seems spitting its fire, and spouting its water, and hurling its blasts at his old white head. Thus the terrific energies and convulsions of external nature take all their meaning from his mind; and we think of them only as the glad agents or instruments of his daughters' malice, leagued in sympathy with them, and taking their part in the controversy. In this power of imagination thus seizing and crushing the embattled elements into its service, there is a sublimity almost too vast for the thoughts. Observe, too, how the thread of association between moral and material nature conducts Lear to the strain of half-insane, half-inspired moralizing, which he closes with the pathetic exception of himself from the list of those to whom the tempest speaks as a preacher of repentance and "judgment to come."

The surpassing power of this drama is most felt in the third and fourth Acts, especially those parts where Lear appears. The fierce warring of the elements around the old King, as if mad with enmity against him, while he seeks shelter in their strife from the tempest within him; his pre-

ternatural illumination of mind when tottering on the verge of insanity ; his gradual settling into that unnatural calmness which is more appalling than any agitation, because it marks the pause between order gone and anarchy about to begin ; the scattering-out of the mind's jewels in the mad revel of his unbound and dishevelled faculties, till he finally sinks, broken-hearted and broken-witted, into the sleep of utter prostration ; — all this joined to the incessant groanings and howlings of the storm ; the wild, inspired babblings of the Fool ; the desperate fidelity of Kent, outstripping the malice of the elements with his ministries of love ; the bedlamitish jargon of Edgar, whose feigned madness, striking in with Lear's real madness, takes away just enough of its horror, and borrows just enough of its dignity, to keep either from becoming insupportable ; — the whole at last dying away into the soft, sweet, solemn discourse of Cordelia, as though the storm had faltered into music at her coming ; and winding up with the revival of Lear, his faculties touched into order and peace by the voice of filial sympathy : — in all this we have indeed a masterpiece of art, of which every reader's feelings must confess the power, though perhaps no analysis can ever fathom the secret.

In conclusion, I must refer briefly to the *improvement* which this mighty drama has suffered at the hands of one Nahum Tate ; an improvement inflicted for the purpose, as would seem, of dwarfing and dementing the play down to the capacity of some theatrical showman. A part of Tate's work lay in rectifying the catastrophe, so as to have Lear and Cordelia come off triumphant, thus rewarding their virtue with worldly success. The cutting-out of the precious Fool, and the turning of Cordelia into a love-sick hypocrite, who feigns indifference to her father, in order to cheat and enrage

him, and thus make him abandon her to a forbidden match with Edgar, completes this execrable piece of profanation. Tate improve *King Lear* ! Set a tinker at work, rather to improve Niagara !

Charles Lamb has a strain of criticism on *King Lear*, so rich and just in thought, and so happily expressed, that it probably ought always to go with the play, and at all events may fitly close this review. It is from his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage-representation" : —

"To see Lear acted, — to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter, and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear : they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual : the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano : they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on ; even as he himself neglects it.

"On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage : while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, — we are in his mind, we are

sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms : in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty, irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when, in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds that 'they themselves are old'? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things?

"But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show : it is too hard and stony ; it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter ; she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his fellows, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. A happy ending ! — as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, — the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation, — why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station, — as if, at his years and with his experience, any thing was left but to die."

THE TRAGEDY OF KING LEAR.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

LEAR, King of Britain.	A Doctor.
KING OF FRANCE.	A Fool.
DUKE OF BURGUNDY.	OSWALD, Steward to Goneril.
DUKE OF ALBANY.	An Officer employed by Edmund.
DUKE OF CORNWALL.	A Gentleman, attendant on Cordelia.
EARL OF KENT.	A Herald.
EARL OF GLOSTER.	Servants to Cornwall.
EDGAR, Son to Gloster.	
EDMUND, Bastard Son to Gloster.	GONERIL, } Daughters to Lear.
CURAN, a Courtier.	REGAN, }
An old Man, Tenant to Gloster.	CORDELIA, }
	Knights attending on the King, Officers, Messengers, Soldiers, and Attendants. SCENE, <i>Britain</i> .

ACT I.

SCENE I. — *A Room of State in LEAR'S Palace.*

Enter KENT, GLOSTER, and EDMUND.

Kent. I thought the King had more affected¹ the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Glos. It did always seem so to us : but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most ; for equalities are so weigh'd, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.²

¹ To *affect* a thing is to be *inclined* to it, to have an *affection* for it.

² *Moiety* properly means *half*, but was used for any part or portion. So Hotspur calls his *third* of the kingdom a *moiety*. — *Curiosity* is *scrupulous*