

*A History of*  
**SHAKESPEARIAN  
CRITICISM**

*By*  
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## Chapter XXIII

### ENGLAND 1879-1885

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#### I

THE Cowden Clarkes<sup>1</sup> have worked well in the cause of Shakespeare's art. They have discovered meaning and subtle intention in many things which the reader takes for granted. They point out, for instance, how he makes subordinate incidents and inculcated lesson reinforce the main events and precept. The casket scenes of the *Merchant* involve chance and right judgement; and this combined chance and judgement reappears in the legal quirk which saves Antonio's life. At the opening of *Hamlet*, Horatio's incredulity is admirably contrived; it forestalls the reader's, and makes the after-effect on his mind excite an equal impression of reality and awe on theirs.

Their most important section is 'Dramatic Time', where they discover in the plays a system of combined long and short time. As an instance we will give *Hamlet*:

Here the lapses of time before the play are stressed, e.g. allusions to Ghost's previous appearance; to the interval since Hamlet's father died; to the period of Hamlet's attachment to Ophelia, friendship for Horatio, predilection for the players, boyish affection for Yorick. But Shakespeare has counteracted an over-protracted effect by accompanying touches of speed: the embassy to Norway, Laertes' journey to France, Hamlet's to England. He also keeps reiterated tokens of Present Time and Short Time well before the mind, and so contains the incidents of the drama within the bounds of a feasibly beheld transaction.

Short Time: 'I think I hear them.' 'Peace! break thee off' (i. i). 'A little month. . . . A beast would have mourned longer' (i. ii). 'I came to see your father's funeral.' 'I think it was to see my mother's wedding' (i. ii). 'I will watch to-night.' 'Would the night were come' (i. ii). 'The actors are come hither' (ii. ii). 'The bark is ready and the wind at help' (iv. iii). 'I am set naked on your kingdom.' 'One woe doth tread upon another's heel' (iv. vii).

Long Time: 'Has this thing appeared again to-night?' 'So nightly toils the subject of the land' (i. i). 'He hath wrung from me my slow leave by laboursome petition' (i. ii). 'But two months dead!' 'We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart' (i. ii). 'He hath of late made

<sup>1</sup> *The Sh. Key*, by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, 1879.

many tenders' (I. iii). 'Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned' (I. iv). 'That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court' (II. ii). 'Even those you were wont to take delight in' (II. ii). ' . . . your tardy son to chide' (III. iv). 'They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy' (IV. vi). 'Since he went into France I have been in continual practice' (V. ii).

## II

THE subject of Dramatic Time is continued by Edward Rose,<sup>1</sup> with the result of accumulating proof of Shakespeare's conscious and laborious art. Indeed he concludes that Shakespeare horrified Voltaire and Corneille, yet their plays appear inartistic and improbable beside his. The plays contain conflicting and irreconcilable time, especially the tragedies, because the hurry of passion is needed to sweep us along, but we need months and years for growth and change of character. The histories irrefutably prove double time; their unifying element is a rough unity of time. Eighty-three years are dramatized, and we feel a great period does pass, yet taking all the indications of Short Time, every connecting link of day and hour, these half-dozen reigns are compressed into four years and two months. Double Time is of most use in fitting for the stage an undramatic plot. *Henry IV* is a series of unsuccessful and unremarkable rebellions; and to bind these together as a drama Shakespeare has set them in a comedy— itself a succession of scenes united by closely continuing time. We follow Falstaff and Hal from morning to night, almost from hour to hour. The affairs of Hotspur demand some weeks of interval, but the two scenes are in a Falstaffian framework.

## III

SWINBURNE<sup>2</sup> says that a poet should be studied in his verse—and that is no question of mechanical metrical tests but a study by the ear alone of Shakespeare's metrical progress, and thence, by the light of this knowledge, of the corresponding progress within, which found expression in the outward changes. From the first plays we see Shakespeare's evil angel rhyme yielding step by step to his better genius. Those scenes of vehement passion in *R. and J.* reveal the novice; the beautiful scenes deal with simple emotions of meeting and parting. As the tragedy of *Richard II* gathers speed the temptation to rhyme grows weaker. The bonds of rhyme are fairly broken in *Richard III*. In the *Errors* rhyme shows itself a good instrument for romantic comedy. Marlowe's divine tragic instrument has found its new sweet use in *L.L.L.* The blank verse and rhyme of *M.N.D.* have equal merit.

<sup>1</sup> *Inconsistency of Time in Sh.'s Plays*, 1880 (New Sh. Soc.'s Transactions).

<sup>2</sup> *A Study of Sh.*, 1880.

Shakespeare's second period is that of his perfect comic and historical style—the most limpid language, purest style, most transparent thought, matter not yet too great to be uttered perfectly. In this stage he appears serenely able to fathom the else unfathomable depths of spiritual nature. John tempts Hubert in words that touch a subtler string in man's tragic nature than any poet has struck since Dante. In the first stage of simple emotion Shakespeare had not excelled Marlowe. Romeo and Juliet were lovers only, types of a single passion. Antony and Cleopatra are first lovers—but the thought of their love and its tragedy recalls all the forces and fortunes of mankind. Indignation at her cousin's wrong transfigures Beatrice, and brings a new element of variety in unity. Brutus is the noblest figure of a typical and ideal republican in the world's literature.

*Hamlet* is the bridge between the middle and last period. Shakespeare revised it to satisfy himself and make it worthy of him, not for mere stage effect. Hamlet was not over-irresolute; at times he acted with unscrupulous resolution. A real doubter would not have suspected his own weakness, and he would have doubted Horatio: whereas for long he does not doubt Ophelia. *Lear* is Shakespeare's nearest work to Aeschylus—the one tragic poet on any side greater than himself. It treats the deepest thing of nature and highest of Providence—from the roots that no God waters to the stars which give no man light—over a world full of death and life without resting-place or guidance. He is a darker fatalist than Aeschylus; we see no twilight of atonement on the horizon of tragic fatalism. The most terrible work of human genius, it reveals nature as unnatural. Othello is Shakespeare's noblest man, and Iago is an inarticulate poet—almost as far above vice as beneath virtue. The text of *Macbeth* is mutilated, especially the early scenes, but not the witch scenes. Cleopatra best shows how Shakespeare not only achieved the right thing but abstained from the wrong. He set her off by no lesser means than all the glory of the world and its empires. Elsewhere in Shakespeare we see the perfect mother, wife, &c.—here the perfect and everlasting woman.

In this third period beauty and melody are transfigured into harmony and sublimity; but in one stage humour and reality are supplanted by realism and obscenity. *T. and C.* is a hybrid, hundred-faced, hydra-headed prodigy that defies comment. In *M. for M.* justice is outraged. In the *Kinsmen* we do catch the note of Shakespeare's very voice. The *W. Tale* brings us within the very circle of Shakespeare's culminant and crowning constellation. *Cymbeline* contains tragic beauty and passion, terror, love, pity, subtly sweet and bitter truth, delight and glory of life, and grace of nature—with Shakespeare's most heavenly triad of human figures. . . .

Swinburne did not suffer fools gladly, and he is at times guilty of critical incivility. Throughout his critical writings there is a

displeasing controversial note; he writes with a sore feeling for those who have expressed contrary opinions to his own in the past, and for the unborn 'criticasters' who will do so in the future. At the outset he lodges a double claim for his superior worth—his ear—and the fact that from the first years he has made the study of Shakespeare his chief intellectual business and spiritual delight. These claims are well founded, but we take exception to the manner in which they are advanced. Moreover, the presence here, as in all his prose-writings, of what we cannot but call 'bad temper' detracts from his splendid eloquence. The two things do not mix, and the result is a divided total expression. Aeschylus, whom at times he worshipped even above Shakespeare, describes the confused state of Troy when the Greeks possessed it—like oil and vinegar in the same vessel, unfriendly and separated.<sup>1</sup>

Each critic creates Shakespeare in his own image, and it is only natural that Swinburne, who had one of the finest ears in the history of English prosody, should stress his metrical supremacy. It has been too often overlooked—especially by the Germans—that Shakespeare was first of all a poet—and he does well to concentrate on this. On the other hand, his interpretation is inclined to be narrowly lyrical. The object of the drama is to display character in action, and successful plays have been written by men who were not poets in the pure sense. Shakespeare combined all the qualities of the dramatist, and critics have pointed out the mighty effect of his simple stage-direction, 'Enter Lear, with Cordelia dead in his arms'. In fine, the key to the individual character is through his emotions suggested by the music of the verse, but whether the whole body of the drama can be thus disintegrated is a question that we would rather raise and abandon than attempt to solve. However, Swinburne does much to show how musical speech can express thought.

Myers once said that no poetry can ever appeal to the world again like the great passages in Homer, because the language was the most perfect in which man has ever worked. Beside it Virgil's language sounds elaborate and Dante's crabbed and Shakespeare's barbarous. Perhaps this explains Swinburne's reason for preferring Aeschylus to Shakespeare. He concentrated on the verse and extracted deeper meaning from the richer Greek harmonies. He is often at his best in comparing the two dramatists—notably in the sphere of fate. His remarks on *T. and C.*, that it is the play whose best things lose least by extraction, vindicate, in the light of modern criticism, his method of studying Shakespeare. The part played by his magnificent praise in attuning the reader's soul to Shakespeare must not be forgotten. When about to treat of the great tragedies he leads us to 'the entrance of the heavenly quadrilateral, or under the rising dawn of the four fixed

<sup>1</sup> *Agamemnon*, 320-3.

stars which compose our Northern Cross'. 'Beyond these again we see a second group arising, the supreme starry trinity of the *W. Tale*, the *Tempest*, and *Cymbeline*.'

## IV

WORTHY of mention is James Spedding's essay,<sup>1</sup> because it states clearly one of the leading difficulties in Shakespearian criticism—the relation between Shakespeare's life and works. Like all written by Spedding it has the stamp of a wise and impartial mind.

He writes to disprove what he calls the 'hook and eye' criticism of Furnivall, and the assumption that the plays taken in their right order contain the true history of the growth and progress of Shakespeare's soul. He maintains that the changes follow the natural law of a man's tastes as he grows older. First come farce and tragedy of the bowl and dagger kind; secondly, the richer and more delicate humours of high comedy and historical tragedy; thirdly, the great passions which disclose the heights and depths of humanity; and fourthly, the calmer and more soothing pathos of autumnal days. Furnivall mistakenly separated the broad natural divisions into subordinate groups according to the particular prominent feature. The latter would depend on many things besides the writer's state of mind—the story, the requirements of the theatre, the public taste, the actors. Every man has some power to imagine a situation he has not experienced; and this power is said to be the special gift of poets, and above all of Shakespeare. How are we to reconcile Furnivall's theory with the fact that good and bad states of mind are delineated with equal depth and greatness in the same play, e.g. *Isabella* and *Claudio*? Shakespeare could have imagined both but not been both. If his imagination could not transcend his experience, whence came his insight into the souls of Brutus, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Lear and his daughters? The mysteries of passion in them lie beyond any possible personal experiences of Shakespeare.

Spedding concludes by saying that if Shakespeare had undergone perturbations he had risen above them; and he is right to point out the error of connecting Shakespeare's life and works in the obvious way that Furnivall and some others have done. But the question remains whether he leaves too wide a gap between Shakespeare's moral nature and his imagination. Can imagination satisfy that is not based on reality—on the emotional experience of life of its possessor?

## V

J. A. SYMONDS<sup>2</sup> points out that Shakespeare's greatness lay in bringing the type established by his predecessors to artistic ripeness; and he describes the state of England and of the drama at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> 'Why did Sh. write Tragedies' (*Cornhill*, August 1880).

<sup>2</sup> *Sh.'s Predecessors in the Eng. Drama*, 1883.



of his career. He found a spirit of civil and religious freedom, and of nationality. Loyalty to the Queen's person coincided with a sense of national independence. This powerful grasp on life's realities was compatible with romantic fancy and imaginative fervour. Feudalism and Ecclesiasticism belonged to the past, Puritanism was not yet. Men did not curb their passions and superstitions but gloried in them. They passed abruptly from good to bad, from vice to virtue. The drama requires a national public—complete sympathy between playwrights and nation. This existed in England, but not in Italy, France, or Spain. Poetry was the only art in England, and language the one means of expressing passion. At every epoch of the world man has penetrated more deeply than at others into some particular subject. Intuition into human character was the virtue of the Elizabethan age.

From the mediæval Miracle the drama inherited some well-defined characters and situations, a popular type of comedy, plebeian melodrama, widely diffused dramatic customs. The Morality developed true types of character, and made the drama self-conscious. It is not necessary to follow Symonds through his account of the rise of Comedy, Tragedy, and Romance, but we pause for a moment over the Historical play. Shakespeare, he says, glorified but did not metamorphose his historical heroes. He revived real persons and raised them to poetic level without changing their characteristics. He could flatter without being a sycophant, and reveal the dark places of the soul without prejudice. Lyly made important discoveries, but it was Marlowe who perceived the capacities for noble art in the Romantic drama. He adopted the romantic and rejected the classic drama, but took blank verse from the classic. He transfigured the right dramatic metre and the right dramatic stuff. From the first Shakespeare deigned to tread in Marlowe's footsteps.

## VI

WITH much that Symonds said about the Elizabethan age, J. W. Hales<sup>1</sup> agrees. To him the Gunpowder plotters were typical of the age. Passion, free play of life, unfettered movement of nature favoured the growth of art in Shakespeare's day. Old things had passed away, and all was becoming new. Not only were the barriers of the earth widened, but spiritual barriers had passed away: the mind wandered free in the universe of thought. The choruses of *Henry V* show how Shakespeare could rely on his audience. The Elizabethan drama was created by its circle—the whole nation; and it was the one literature of its day, the centre of English art and thought.

The porter scene in *Macbeth* gives scope to Hales for some valuable remarks on the Romantic drama. It contained frequent juxtaposition of opposites—the meeting of extremes. This is not the law of relief,

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Essays on Sh.*, 1884.

but the ambition of the Teutonic drama to embrace the whole of life. The true humorist delighted in amazing contrasts and fantastic paradoxes.

Elsewhere Hales is at his best in comparative criticism. Shakespeare and Chaucer, he says, excel in character-drawing because of their reverence for Nature. Both are realistic, and prove the intense realism at the basis of the Low German mind. He contrasts the liberties which Dickens took with human nature, and the mere trick of Sterne's pathos. Could Shakespeare have saved Cordelia he would have done so. The keenest eyes see infinite nobleness in the world, but also more meanness. Shakespeare, like all the supremest writers, has no heroes in the usual sense. Also he faithfully follows his originals—especially Plutarch—and yet subtly transforms and ennobles them. By an inscrutable magic the same words breathe a new life, and the whole scene is transferred into a new air.

Hales's criticism of *Lear* deserves a glance. He dwells on the heathen atmosphere of the play due to Shakespeare's deliberate choice of dark and barbarous ages. Passion is lord of all, and man scarcely separated from brute. Lear is of Celtic race; the Teutonic mind can scarcely follow the rapid revolutions of his fiery spirit. Cordelia also has Celtic impulsiveness. Yet the play deals with natural man as opposed to artificial. The passions walk abroad—greed, lust, wrath, but also love. In the end good prevails, and evil consumes itself. . . .

Hales speaks of the 'Celtic' Lear incomprehensible to the Teutonic mind: and yet Dowden described the play as the greatest single achievement of the northern or Teutonic genius. The play no doubt is one of passion, but at the deliberately chosen barbarous ages we partially protest—having in mind Lear's outpourings against the official classes, and the scene where he wakes and recognizes Cordelia. The age of Homer was thought to be primitive till it was pointed out that primitive men do not speak of their gods like Homer. We may say of the critics as Theseus said of the actors, 'The best are shadows': or as Byron said of men in general—they mark the earth with ruin, but their control stops on the shore of the Shakespearian ocean.

## VII

A. S. G. CANNING<sup>1</sup> cannot be called an inspiring critic of Shakespeare. He rather reverts to an earlier kind of criticism which assumes Shakespeare to be a great poet, but judges his poetry as a splendid robe cast over all characters alike whose doings are tested by obvious moral or prudential standards. He is a stranger to the imaginative world which their reactions should create in the reader's mind. Thus he says that Shakespeare does not make Octavia as interesting as he might have done, considering her amiable, virtuous, and forgiving character

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts on Sh.'s Historical Plays*, 1884.

as recorded by history. Cleopatra fears to lose Antony, because through him she rules Egypt; and her whole object was to live in voluptuous enjoyment. None of the persons in *Macbeth*, except a few in name, have any Scottish characteristic. Lady Macbeth's love for her husband is little to be commended, because she will gain by his increasing power, owing to her influence over him. Shakespeare's noble language alone dignifies a base, shameless character. The two run no risk, because Duncan is killed in his sleep, and Banquo and Lady Macduff by hired assassins—yet they exhort and animate each other in grand language worthy of a true hero and heroine. Falstaff never shows a good quality, being a compound of self-indulgence, falsehood, licentiousness, and shameless roguery. The Prince makes no promises, while getting full amusement from Falstaff's wit and profligacy. The rebel leaders—Hotspur, Worcester, Mortimer, Glendower—are none of them equal to Henry IV in combined valour and politic wisdom. Falstaff is bored by Shallow and Silence, but he is too shrewd to offend people if he can help it. The final scene between the King and Prince did much to produce the change in the latter. It was unlikely, if not impossible, that ruffians like Dighton and Forrest, in *Richard III*, should use such language or feel such emotions.

Perhaps Canning rises above himself in analysing Richard III's soliloquy after the apparitions. It reveals, he says, his mental power, vivid fancy, and deep remorse, without real penitence, and seems to arise more from dreamy recollections of his many victims and vague terror at their menaces than from any sense of personal responsibility to a higher power.

## VIII

WE cannot accept the theory of Jacob Feis,<sup>1</sup> that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* to refute Montaigne, but it is here included because the comparison throws interesting side-lights on Hamlet's character. After affirming that Shakespeare did not exclude direct teaching in his plays, e. g. *John* reveals the soul of the age that had conquered the Armada—the Roman plays show his dislike of divided dominion—he proceeds to say that in *Hamlet* he made his profession of faith. The first English translation of Montaigne's essays was published in 1603, and all the additions to the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* refer to Montaigne's philosophy. Montaigne preached the rights of nature and yet clung to dogmatic tenets. He yearned for laws and religions drawn from universal reason, and yet he was a Romanist. Shakespeare was a humanist, whose religion was natural, not transcendental,<sup>2</sup> and he wished to counteract this pernicious influence. Montaigne disturbs the mind and does not clear it, but produces despair. Hamlet, who represents Montaigne, likes humanistic studies—Wittenberg—but

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. and Montaigne*, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Birch, Watkiss Lloyd, and Wordsworth.

also adheres to old dogmas—'unhousel'd. . .'. Montaigne says man has no fixed point in himself, yet he revered ceremonial, e.g. the sign of the cross. Hamlet's soul-struggle is from a divided mind—'nothing either good or bad'. His incessant thoughts of death are the same as Montaigne's, and Shakespeare makes it clear that they come from superstitious Christianity, not the free use of reason. This inner discord—superstition and humanism—makes Hamlet turn to Horatio.

Montaigne was a new and strange phenomenon in Shakespeare's energetic age—a nobleman letting himself be driven about rudderless by his feelings and even boasting of this mental disposition—who would be a humanist, yet retains the reasoning of Loyola. Hamlet has been called a philosopher with energy paralysed by thinking too much. This endangers the sovereignty of human reason. We owe everything great in the world to a full and free use of reason. Thought and action go hand in hand, and action is useless without thought. Bacon was showing that the mind can only progress if it discards transcendental dogmas and inquires into nature. Hamlet is unconcerned by the murder of Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and his arguments would palliate any tyranny. His final vengeance is done in blind passion; and Montaigne says that the most beautiful actions of the soul proceed from the impulse of passion. Shakespeare wished to warn contemporaries that to try and reconcile two opposite ideas—Nature, and superstitious dogma which declares human nature sinful—will produce deeds of madness. . . .

The defect of the above is that it ignores the historical side of the play—the material which Shakespeare incorporated from his sources. It also ignores the disturbing influence on Hamlet's mind of the events before the action opens—his father's death and his mother's remarriage. Also it is obvious that the writer is prejudicial against what he calls 'transcendental dogmas'.

## IX

THE critic has many disagreeable duties to perform, and not the least is to report unfavourably on a work inspired by true enthusiasm for its subject. No one will dispute that R. G. Moulton<sup>1</sup> is a genuine Shakespearian lover, and yet his essay in scientific criticism is doomed by its very nature to fail. It profits little to gain the world of knowledge and lose the soul of art. At the best his comments are like objects in a museum; they are facts and they are there because they have served a purpose, but they will never be used again. They do not make our sense breed, as Angelo's did at the words of Isabella. For instance, it is true, but in an infertile abstract fashion, that unstable moral equilibrium is at the root of the main plot of *Lear*—unnatural

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. as a Dramatic Artist*, 1885.

distribution of power set up by *Lear*, of which the whole tragedy is a rebound.

The object with which he sets out is to present dramatic criticism as a regular inductive science. Judicial criticism compares a new work with those that exist already. Criticism of investigation does the same, but it also differentiates and registers a new type. No one now tests exclusively by classical models, yet the idea of testing is still the root idea. Sympathy is the grand interpreter, and the judicial attitude is a barrier to it. Admiration for the past paralyses faith in the future. One should analyse literature as it stands, discover its laws in itself. The inductive critic asks what view best fits with the details as they stand in actual fact. Subjective impressions produce the literary effect, but the objective details are the *limit* on the variability of the subjective impressions. Truth of interpretation is tested by the degree of completeness with which it explains the details of a literary work as they stand. Inductive criticism is concerned with differences of kind, not degree; it distinguishes literary species. The laws of the Shakespearian drama are those of dramatic practice derived from analysis of his actual works.

Character, passion, plot are the grand divisions of dramatic criticism. The leading interest of character is interpretation—turning from concrete to abstract. Richard III is ideal villainy; Bassanio may appear unworthy of Portia, if we compare their parts in the drama—but note the force with which his personality sways all those who approach him. Portia and Nerissa illustrate character-contrast, and Macbeth character-development. Passion divides into unity, complexity, movement. As regards complexity, Shakespeare and his contemporaries produced stirring new passion-effects by mixing serious and comic. When light and serious passions alternate we call it tone-play; the porter scene in *Macbeth* is an example of tone-relief; the comic irony of the trial in the *Merchant* is tone-clash; and the centre of *Lear* rises to tone-storm. Plot is the intellectual side of action. When mutual relation of parts is considered by itself, as abstract interest of design, human life being only the material to which this design is applied, then we get interest of plot. This reduction to order is where science and art meet. Criticism must analyse a complex action into constituent single actions. The enveloping action links with wider interest, e.g. the Wars of the Roses in *Richard III*—the supernatural in *Macbeth* where the human workings of the play are wrapped in a deeper working out of destiny—the passions of the mob in *J.C.*—the French war in *Lear*. The latter is outside the main issues, yet loosely connects itself with every phase of the movement, and finally breaks out as the reality in which the whole action of the play merges. Economy of plot is the perfection of design which lies midway between incompleteness and waste. It brings the various bonds

between actions into a common system; the more the separateness of different interests are reduced, the richer will be the economy of design: Bassanio is a link between persons; Gloucester's story seems to spring out of Lear's. Symmetry—balance of actions—is Shakespeare's most important economic form: *Lear* is the most intricate and most symmetrical play.

Movement is the real basis of distinction between the two main classes of Shakespearian dramas, not tragedy and comedy. In the *Merchant* the leading interest is in the complication of Antonio's fortunes and its resolution by Portia's device. In the tragedies there is no such return from distraction to recovery; our agitation is relieved only by the emotion of pathos or despair. The impression, therefore, is the sense of intellectual or emotional unity in the movement, i.e. Action-movement or Passion-movement. For Tragedy and Comedy, therefore, we substitute Passion-drama and Action-drama.

Such, in outline, are Moulton's most general ideas; it remains to give some instances of the way in which he applied them to particular plays. The *Merchant* embodies the idea of Nemesis—the artistic bond between sin and retribution. Each detail of vindictiveness in the first half is matched by a corresponding detail in the second. Shylock appeals to the written law, and this leads to the recalling of an old law which crushes him. Shakespeare leads up to the bond by a discussion on interest. The contradiction is between flesh and barren metal. To resolve the law difficulties, Shakespeare retains the traditional plea as to blood, but puts it into the mouth of an amateur lawyer, and then before we feel the injustice, follows up this brilliant evasion by a sound legal plea. In *Richard III* the transcendental is made possible by method of treatment. The incident of the wooing of Lady Anne might be impossible alone, but becomes possible through others it is associated with. Richard passes through a career of sin without taint of distortion of the intellect, and with the calm of innocence; and thus he convinces us that he is irresistible. Each minor interest is a Nemesis, and all are linked. Those who triumph in one become victims of the next—Clarence, the King, Hastings, Buckingham.

In *Macbeth* sin and retribution are equal. Macbeth succeeds till the mid-point when Fleance escapes, and then he declines. Banquo's murder unmasks former crimes, and the action is a complete Nemesis—a career of sin in which the last sin secures the punishment of all. The apparent checks to destiny become the means by which destiny chooses to fulfil itself. Macbeth is practical and natural; he reflects current thought and goodness as they appear from the outside. He is almost childish in his spiritual struggles: he could not say Amen! Lady Macbeth, on the contrary, is accustomed to moral loneliness and at home in mental struggles. To her the sleeping and the dead

are pictures, and she has conquered the superstitions of the age. *J.C.* gives the antithesis of charity and political science. When these clash, outer and inner life conflict; and in Rome the individual existed for the State. In Brutus the antithesis of the outer and inner life disappears; he is evenly developed on both sides, does not deceive himself, and preserves his moral sense. But the antithesis reappears in action: he admits that Caesar has done no wrong, but slays him for what he might do. This conscious sacrifice of justice and friendship to policy is a fatal error which produces the whole tragedy. Caesar is practical like Macbeth, and perfect to the point where his own personality is engaged. The tasks of the soldier and statesman are imposed from without, but at last he comes to a crisis that involves his personality. He attempts a task imposed on him by his own ambition, and needs self-knowledge which he lacks. From the swimming match with Cassius we see that he lacks passive courage born of the inner life which gives strength to submit to the inevitable. He calls for rescue, and so when he is sick with fever. The plot is symmetrical, the whole balanced about the turning-point in the middle. Passion gathers round the conspirators, and rises to a great climax like an arch. Then it declines, since it is an error to ignore justice and humanity. Outraged human sympathy asserts itself, after Caesar's death, in the passions of the mob. . . .

Moulton assumes that economy, &c., of plot is a means to make Shakespeare's poetic genius more effective, but he does not convince. Neither do we share his belief that Shakespeare consciously directed his plots in the manner he describes. It remains to ask whether Shakespeare intuitively practised the scientific plot-building which Moulton attributes to him. The critic should explore his subject's mind, and not the least interesting of his duties is to discriminate between its conscious and unconscious working. We feel that Moulton is outside Shakespeare's mind, and like the scientist reconstructing from the rocks his story of the past. His terms are too empty of emotional content by the time they reach us to stimulate our power to understand and admire Shakespeare. Between the impression and its utterance there exists a scientific No-man's-land where the aesthetic sense dies; and thus the critic uses other faculties than those which recorded his impressions to body forth his doctrine.

Yet it is fair to add that once or twice when Moulton writes in an impressionistic manner he holds us. We may not agree with his opinions on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, or Brutus and Caesar, yet the light is so directed as to make darkness visible. And in a tract which he published the following year,<sup>1</sup> he makes some discoveries which we would not willingly let die. In *Henry V* the true punishment of the conspirators is Henry's outpouring of soul which

<sup>1</sup> *On Character-Development in Sh. &c.*, 1886 (New Sh. Soc. Trans.).

turns the light of heroism on to the sin of treason. All Henry's heart-searching and doubt has no effect but to draw every fibre of his soul on to the task before him. Macbeth's practical nature, as the part of him most highly developed, will be, when he surrenders himself to evil, the seat of his susceptibility to crime. But this same nature will be hindered by want of the self-discipline needed for periods of indecision. His imagination at first restrained him from sin, but later became the Nemesis which betrayed him to the supernatural visitations that ruined him. . . . In all these we feel that the 'economy' of which Moulton speaks is more moral and psychological and less mechanical than we have been sometimes inclined to admit.

## X

RICHARD GRANT WHITE'S<sup>1</sup> point of view is that Shakespeare was an unconscious genius, who wrote easily, and whose object was to produce a suitable play for the Globe stage, with neither 'philosophy' nor 'central idea', nor even art-purpose after his earliest essays. He worked up old plays and stories and made them immortal by his psychological insight and magic style. He warns the reader against the critics, even Coleridge, and especially the Germans, and thinks that those who understand Shakespeare best read the plain text and do not use critical editions. We will pass in review some of his typical sayings and note how far they help us according as they are true to his theory.

The persons of *L. L. L.* show germs of character or imperfect outlines rather than character. The thought of the *Errors* is of lighter weight than elsewhere, yet nothing like Adriana's jealousy had been written in a modern play. *M. N. D.* shows a great advance, both in poetry and human interest. *Verona* is one of the weakest plays, written under the influence of the prose-romances of Shakespeare's early day, yet the first comedy of society in our literature which represents tolerably the daily intercourse of real human beings. *Richard III* is the poorest and thinnest in thought, the least free and harmonious in rhythm—the least Shakespearian. *Richard II* is rather a tragic dramatic poem, but the best passages show Shakespeare attaining free and independent action.

Shakespeare had no system of dramatic art: *John* presents the events of a whole reign. He showed things as he saw them, thoughtless as to the past, except as it gave material for dramatic treatment. *Henry IV* presents the social life of his own day, and contains his highest humour. He knew that Falstaff was morally vile, but as dramatist he was intellectually indifferent to the character of the person by whom he effected his dramatic purpose. In the *Merchant* there is great advance

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Sh.*, 1885.



of character and dramatic construction. *R. and J.* is the freshest, sweetest breath of life's spring-time that a poet's lips ever uttered. Like the hack playwright of to-day he dramatized an old ballad to make a play, to please his audience, but it just happened that he was William Shakespeare who had a peculiar way of doing such things.

In *T. and C.* the individual, mental, and moral traits of the persons are not distinguished, but it is Shakespeare's wisest play in the way of worldly wisdom. It utters the Ulyssean way of life, and Shakespeare is Ulysses. Lady Macbeth is cruel, remorseless, unimaginative; but, like the tigress, she has sexual and maternal instincts. That Hamlet should spare the King at prayer reveals a fiendish malignity of purpose, if any purpose at all—but it reveals only his lack of purpose.

Rosalind had not only wit but humour, which few women have. Her character revealed under her strange circumstances makes her Shakespeare's most charming woman except Imogen. Jaques's melancholy was what we now call cynicism. The sight of so much real happiness at the end was more than he could bear, and he withdrew to a hermit's cell to hide his chagrin.

*Lear, M. for M., Timon* contain more revolting and alarming truths than all the other plays together. It is hard to trace Shakespeare in his plays, but we cannot but conclude that something in his experience of life caused him to produce three such plays within three years. What a marvellous, untraceable touch of art is that by which he conveys to us that Lear, in casting off Cordelia, is half conscious that he is doing wrong! His insanity he brings upon himself, for he is not driven out into the storm or driven out at all. Goneril and Regan at first are not without reason, and up to the time when Lear rushes out into the storm he cannot be justified. Strangest of all is the sustained royalty of his madness, for mad or sane, he is always kingly. The wisdom of the Fool has come from long experience of the world without responsible relations to it. He justly disappears when Lear sinks from frenzy to forlorn imbecility, because his utterances would have jarred upon our ears. The situation becomes too grandly pathetic to admit the presence of a jester, who is nothing if not professional. Even Shakespeare could not make sport with the great primal elements of woe.

Iago's character, both strong and complex, is hardly inferior to any in Shakespeare. He had little spontaneous malice, and unless for a good reason would rather serve than injure those around him. Honesty and a warm heart were his external traits; he was popular with all. His inner nature, till he was tempted to reveal it, was possibly but half known to himself. He was selfish and unscrupulous, but not disposed to malice or mischief—only cruelly heartless. Until some one barred his way, he was as free from personal malice as the man who makes