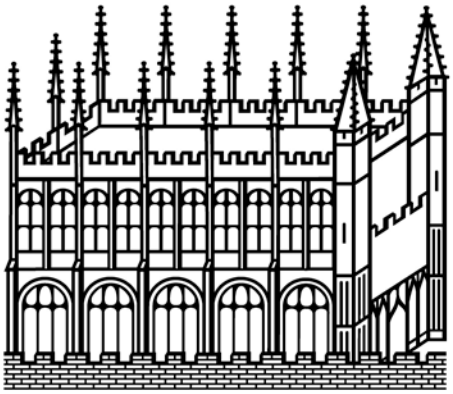

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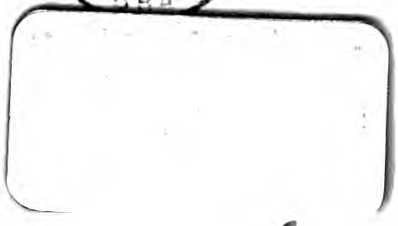

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CHARACTERISTICS

OF

WOMEN.

Moral, Poetical, and Historical.

WITH

Illustrations from the Author's Designs.

BY MRS. JAMESON,

AUTHOR OF "MEMOIRS OF FEMALE SOVEREIGNS;" "LEGENDS OF THE MADONNA;" "SACRED AND LEGENDARY ART;" "LEGENDS OF THE MONASTIC ORDERS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

New Edition.

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1858.

To
Fanny Kemble
this little work
is
Dedicated

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Introduction.

SCENE—A LIBRARY.

ALDA.

YOU will not listen to me?

MEDON.

I do, with all the deference which befits

a gentleman when a lady holds forth on the virtues of her own sex.

> He is a parricide of his mother's name,
> And with an impious hand murders her fame,
> That wrongs the praise of women; that dares write
> Libels on saints, or with foul ink requite
> The milk they lent us.
> Yours was the nobler birth,
> For you from man were made—man but of earth—
> The son of dust.

ALDA.

What's this?

MEDON.

"Only a rhyme I learned from one I talked withal;" 'tis a quotation from some old poet that has fixed itself in my memory —from Randolph, I think.

ALDA.

'Tis very justly thought, and very politely quoted, and my best curtsey is due to him and to you:—but now will you listen to me?

MEDON.

With most profound humility.

ALDA.

Nay, then! I have done, unless you will lay aside these mock airs of gallantry, and listen to me for a moment! Is it fair to bring a second-hand accusation against me, and not attend to my defence?

MEDON.

Well, I will be serious.

ALDA.

Do so, and let us talk like reasonable beings.

MEDON.

Then tell me, (as a reasonable woman you will not be affronted with the question) do you really expect that any one will read this little book of yours?

ALDA.

I might answer, that it has been a great source of amusement and interest to me for several months, and that so far I am con-

tent: but no one writes a book without a hope of finding readers, and I shall find a few. Accident first made me an authoress; and not now, nor ever, have I written to flatter any prevailing fashion of the day for the sake of profit, though this is done, I know, by many who have less excuse for thus coining their brains. This little book was undertaken without a thought of fame or money: out of the fulness of my own heart and soul have I written it. In the pleasure it has given me, in the new and various views of human nature it has opened to me, in the beautiful and soothing images it has placed before me, in the exercise and improvement of my own faculties, I have already been repaid: if praise or profit come beside, they come as a surplus. I should be gratified and grateful, but I have not sought for them, nor worked for them. Do you believe this?

MEDON.

I do: in this I cannot suspect you of affectation, for the profession of disinterest-

edness is uncalled for, and the contrary would be too far countenanced by the custom of the day to be matter of reserve or reproach. But how could you (saving the reverence due to a lady-authoress, and speaking as one reasonable being to another) choose such a threadbare subject?

ALDA.

What do you mean?

MEDON.

I presume you have written a book to maintain the superiority of your sex over ours; for so I judge by the names at the heads of some of your chapters; women fit indeed to inlay heaven with stars, but, pardon me, very unlike those who at present walk upon this earth.

ALDA.

Very unlike the fine ladies of your acquaintance, I grant you; but as to maintaining the superiority, or speculating on the rights of women — nonsense! why

should you suspect me of such folly?—it is quite out of date. Why should there be competition or comparison?

MEDON.

Both are ill-judged and odious; but did you ever meet with a woman of the world, who did not abuse most heartily the whole race of men?

ALDA.

Did you ever talk with a man of the world who did not speak with levity or contempt of the whole race of women?

MEDON.

Perhaps I might answer like Voltaire—"Hélas! ils pourraient bien avoir raison tous deux." But do you thence infer that both are good for nothing?

ALDA.

Thence I infer that the men of the world and the women of the world are neither of them—good for much.

MEDON.

And you have written a book to make them better?

ALDA.

Heaven forbid! else I were only fit for the next lunatic asylum. Vanity run mad never conceived such an impossible idea.

MEDON.

Then, in few words, what is the subject, and what the object of your book?

ALDA.

I have endeavoured to illustrate the various modifications of which the female character is susceptible, with their causes and results. My life has been spent in observing and thinking; I have had, as you well know, more opportunities for the first, more leisure for the last, than have fallen to the lot of most people. What I have seen, felt, thought, suffered, has led me to form certain opinions. It appears to me that the condition of women in society, as at present constituted, is false in itself, and injurious

to them,—that the education of women, as at present conducted, is founded in mistaken principles, and tends to increase fearfully the sum of misery and error in both sexes; but I do not choose presumptuously to fling these opinions in the face of the world, in the form of essays on morality, and treatises on education. I have rather chosen to illustrate certain positions by examples, and leave my readers to deduce the moral themselves, and draw their own inferences.

MEDON.

And why have you not chosen your examples from real life? you might easily have done so. You have not been a mere spectator, or a mere actor, but a lounger behind the scenes of existence—have even assisted in preparing the puppets for the stage: you might have given us an epitome of your experience, instead of dreaming over Shakspeare.

ALDA.

I might so, if I had chosen to become a female satirist, which I will never be.

MEDON.

You would at least stand a better chance of being read.

ALDA.

I am not sure of that. The vile taste for satire and personal gossip will not be eradicated, I suppose, while the elements of curiosity and malice remain in human nature; but as a fashion of literature, I think it is passing away;—at all events it is not my *forte*. Long experience of what is called "the world," of the folly, duplicity, shallowness, selfishness, which meet us at every turn, too soon unsettles our youthful creed. If it only led to the knowledge of good and evil, it were well; if it only taught us to despise the illusions and retire from the pleasures of the world, it would be better. But it destroys our belief—it dims our perception of all abstract truth, virtue, and happiness; it turns life into a jest, and a very dull one too. It makes us indifferent to beauty, and incredulous of

goodness; it teaches us to consider *self* as the centre on which all actions turn, and to which all motives are to be referred.

MEDON.

But this being so, we must either revolve with these earthly natures, and round the same centre, or seek a sphere for ourselves, and dwell apart.

ALDA.

I trust it is not necessary to do either. While we are yet young, and the passions, powers, and feelings, in their full activity, create to us a world within, we cannot look fairly on the world without:—all things then are good. When first we throw ourselves forth, and meet burrs and briars on every side, which stick in our very hearts; —and fair tempting fruits which turn to bitter ashes in the taste, then we exclaim with impatience, all things are evil. But at length comes the calm hour, when they who look beyond the superficies of things begin to discern their true bearings; when

the perception of evil, or sorrow, or sin, brings also the perception of some opposite good, which awakens our indulgence, or the knowledge of the cause which excites our pity. Thus it is with me. I can smile, —nay, I can laugh still, to see folly, vanity, absurdity, meanness, exposed by scornful wit, and depicted by others in fictions light and brilliant. But these very things, when I encounter the reality, rather make me sad than merry, and take away all the inclination, if I had the power, to hold them up to derision.

MEDON.

Unless, by doing so, you might correct them.

ALDA.

Correct them! Show me that one human being who has been made essentially better by satire! O no, no! there is something in human nature which hardens itself against the lash—something in satire which excites

only the lowest and worst of our propensities. That avowal in Pope—

> I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God, afraid of me!

—has ever filled me with terror and pity—

MEDON.

From its truth perhaps?

ALDA.

From its arrogance,—for the truth is, that a vice never corrected a vice. Pope might be proud of the terror he inspired in those who feared no God; in whom vanity was stronger than conscience: but that terror made no individual man better; and while he indulged his own besetting sin, he administered to the malignity of others. Your professed satirists always send me to think upon the opposite sentiment in Shakspeare, on "the mischievous foul sin of chiding sin." I remember once hearing a poem of Barry Cornwall's (he read it to me), about a strange winged creature that,

having the lineaments of a man, yet preyed on a man, and afterwards coming to a stream to drink, and beholding his own face therein, and that he had made his prey of a creature like himself, pined away with repentance. So should those do, who having made themselves mischievous mirth out of the sins and sorrows of others, remembering their own humanity, and seeing within themselves the same lineaments—so should *they* grieve and pine away, self-punished.

MEDON.

'Tis an old allegory, and a sad one—and but too much to the purpose.

ALDA.

I abhor the spirit of ridicule—I dread it and I despise it. I abhor it because it is in direct contradiction to the mild and serious spirit of Christianity; I fear it, because we find that in every state of society in which it has prevailed as a fashion, and has given the tone to the manners and literature, it

marked the moral degradation and approaching destruction of that society; and I despise it, because it is the usual resource of the shallow and the base mind, and, when wielded by the strongest hand with the purest intentions, an inefficient means of good. The spirit of satire, reversing the spirit of mercy which is twice blessed, seems to me twice accursed;—evil in those who indulge it—evil to those who are the objects of it.

MEDON.

"Peut-être fallait-il que la punition des imprudens et des faibles fut confiée à la malignité, car la pure vertu n'eût jamais été assez cruelle."

ALDA.

That is a woman's sentiment.

MEDON.

True—it *was;* and I have pleasure in reminding you that a female satirist by profession is yet an anomaly in the history

of our literature, as a female schismatic is yet unknown in the history of our religion. But to what do you attribute the number of satirical women we meet in society?

ALDA.

Not to our nature; but to a state of society in which the levelling spirit of *persiflage* has been long a fashion; to the perverse education which fosters it; to affections disappointed or unemployed, which embitter the temper; to faculties misdirected or wasted, which oppress and irritate the mind; to an utter ignorance of ourselves, and the common lot of humanity, combined with quick and refined perceptions and much superficial cultivation; to frivolous habits, which make serious thought a burthen, and serious feeling a bane if suppressed, if betrayed, a ridicule. Women, generally speaking, are by nature too much subjected to suffering in many forms—have too much of fancy and sensibility, and too much of that faculty which some philosophers call *veneration,* to be

naturally satirical. I have known but one woman eminently gifted in mind and person, who is also distinguished for powers of satire as bold as merciless; and she is such a compound of all that nature can give of good, and all that society can teach of evil—

MEDON.

That she reminds us of the dragon of old, which was generated between the sunbeams from heaven and the slime of earth.

ALDA.

No such thing. Rather of the powerful and beautiful fairy Melusina, who had every talent and every charm under heaven; but once in so many hours was fated to become a serpent. No, I return to my first position. It is not by exposing folly and scorning fools, that we make other people wiser, or ourselves happier. But to soften the heart by images and examples of the kindly and generous affections—to show how the human soul is

disciplined and perfected by suffering—to prove how much of possible good may exist in things evil and perverted—how much hope there is for those who despair —how much comfort for those whom a heartless world has taught to contemn both others and themselves, and so put barriers to the hard, cold, selfish, mocking, and levelling spirit of the day——O would I could do this!

MEDON.

On the same principle, I suppose, that they have changed the treatment of lunatics; and whereas they used to condemn poor distempered wretches to straw and darkness, stripes and a strait waistcoat, they now send them to sunshine and green fields, to wander in gardens among birds and flowers, and soothe them with soft music and kind flattering speech.

ALDA.

You laugh at me! perhaps I deserve it.

MEDON.

No, in truth; I am a little amused, but most honestly attentive: and perhaps wish I could think more like you. But to proceed: I allow that with this view of the case, you could not well have chosen your illustrations from real life: but why not from history?

ALDA.

As far as history could guide me, I have taken her with me in one or two recent publications, which all tend to the same object. Nor have I here lost sight of her; but I have entered on a land where she alone is not to be trusted, and may make a pleasant companion but a most fallacious guide. To drop metaphor: history informs us that such things have been done or have occurred; but when we come to inquire into motives and characters, it is the most false and partial and unsatisfactory authority we can refer to. Women are illustrious in history, not from what they have been in themselves, but generally in proportion

to the mischief they have done or caused. Those characters best fitted to my purpose are precisely those of which history never heard, or disdains to speak; of those which have been handed down to us by many different authorities under different aspects we cannot judge without prejudice; in others there occur certain chasms which it is difficult to supply: and hence inconsistencies we have no means of reconciling, though doubtless they *might* be reconciled if we knew the whole, instead of a part.

MEDON.

But instance—instance!

ALDA.

Examples crowd upon me; but take the first that occurs. Do you remember that Duchesse de Longueville, whose beautiful picture we were looking at yesterday?—the heroine of the Fronde?—think of that woman—bold, intriguing, profligate, vain, ambitious, factious!—who made men rebels

with a smile;—or if that were not enough, the lady was not scrupulous,—apparently without principle as without shame, nothing was *too* much! And then think of the same woman protecting the virtuous philosopher Arnauld, when he was denounced and condemned; and from motives which her worst enemies could not malign, secreting him in her house, unknown even to her own servants—praparing his food herself, watching for his safety, and at length saving him. Her tenderness, her patience, her discretion, her disinterested benevolence, not only defied danger (that were little to a woman of her temper), but endured a lengthened trial, all the ennui caused by the necessity of keeping her house, continual self-control, and the thousand small daily sacrifices which to a vain, dissipated, proud, impatient woman, must have been hard to bear. Now if Shakspeare had drawn the character of the Duchesse de Longueville, he would have shown us the same individual woman in both situations:—for the same being, with the same faculties,

and passions, and powers, it surely was: whereas in history, we see in one case a fury of discord, a woman without modesty or pity; and in the other an angel of benevolence, and a worshipper of goodness; and nothing to connect the two extremes in our fancy.

MEDON.

But these are contradictions which we meet on every page of history, which make us giddy with doubt or sick with belief; and are the proper subjects of inquiry for the moralist and the philosopher.

ALDA.

I cannot say that professed moralists and philosophers did much to help *me* out of the dilemma; but the riddle which history presented I found solved in the pages of Shakspeare. There the crooked appeared straight; the inaccessible, easy; the incomprehensible, plain. All I sought, I found there; his characters combine history and real life; they are complete individuals,

whose hearts and souls are laid open before us: all may behold, and all judge for themselves.

MEDON.

But all will not judge alike.

ALDA.

No; and herein lies a part of their wonderful truth. We hear Shakspeare's men and women discussed, praised and dispraised, liked, disliked, as real human beings; and in forming our opinions of them, we are influenced by our own characters, habits of thought, prejudices, feelings, impulses, just as we are influenced with regard to our acquaintances and associates.

MEDON.

But we are then as likely to misconceive and misjudge them.

ALDA.

Yes, if we had only the same imperfect

means of studying them. But we can do with them what we cannot do with real people: we can unfold the whole character before us, stripped of all pretensions of self-love, all disguises of manner. We can take leisure to examine, to analyse, to correct our own impressions, to watch the rise and progress of various passions—we can hate, love, approve, condemn, without offence to others, without pain to ourselves.

MEDON.

In this respect they may be compared to those exquisite anatomical preparations of wax, which those who could not without disgust and horror dissect a real specimen, may study, and learn the mysteries of our frame, and all the internal workings of the wondrous machine of life.

ALDA.

And it is the safer and the better way—for us at least. But look—that brilliant rain-drop trembling there in the sunshine suggests to me another illustration. Pas-

sion, when we contemplate it through the medium of imagination, is like a ray of light transmitted through a prism; we can calmly, and with undazzled eye, study its complicate nature, and analyse its variety of tints; but passion brought home to us in its reality, through our own feelings and experience, is like the same ray transmitted through a lens,—blinding, burning, consuming where it falls.

MEDON.

Your illustration is the most poetical, I allow; but not the most just. But tell me, is the ground you have taken sufficiently large?—is the foundation you have chosen strong enough to bear the moral superstructure you raise upon it? You know the prevalent idea is, that Shakspeare's women are inferior to his men. This assertion is constantly repeated, and has been but tamely refuted.

ALDA.

Professor Richardson?—

MEDON.

He is as dry as a stick, and his refutation not successful even as a piece of logic. Then it is not sufficient for critics to assert this inferiority and want of variety: they first assume the fallacy, then argue upon it. Cibber accounts for it from the circumstance that all the female parts in Shakspeare's time were acted by boys—there were no women on the stage; and Mackenzie, who ought to have known better, says that he was not so happy in his delineations of love and tenderness, as of the other passions; because, forsooth, the majesty of his genius could not stoop to the refinements of delicacy;—preposterous!

ALDA.

Stay! before we waste epithets of indignation, let us consider. If these people mean that Shakspeare's women are inferior in power to his men, I grant it at once; for in Shakspeare the male and female charaters bear precisely the same relation to each other that they do in nature and in

society—they are not equal in prominence or in power—they are subordinate throughout. Richardson remarks, that "if situation influences the mind, and if uniformity of conduct be frequently occasioned by uniformity of condition, there *must* be a greater diversity of male than of female characters,"—which is true; add to this, our limited sphere of action, consequently of experience,—the habits of self-control rendering the outward distinctions of character and passion less striking and less strong—all this we see in Shakspeare as in nature; for instance, Juliet is the most impassioned of his female characters, but what are *her* passions compared to those which shake the soul of Othello?

> "Even as the dew-drop on the myrtle-leaf
> To the vex'd sea."

Look at Constance, frantic for the loss of her son—then look at Lear, maddened by the ingratitude of his daughters; why it is the west wind bowing those aspen tops that wave before our window, compared to

the tropic hurricane, when forests crash and burn, and mountains tremble to their bases!

MEDON.

True; and Lady Macbeth, with all her soaring ambition, her vigour of intellect, her subtlety, her courage, and her cruelty —what is she, compared to Richard III.?

ALDA.

I will tell you what she is—she is a woman. Place Lady Macbeth in comparison with Richard III., and you see at once the essential distinction between masculine and feminine ambition—though both in extreme, and overleaping all restraints of conscience or mercy. Richard says of himself, that he has "neither pity, love, nor fear:" Lady Macbeth is susceptible of all three. You smile! but that remains to be proved. The reason that Shakspeare's wicked women have such a singular hold upon our fancy, is from the consistent preservation of the feminine character, which renders them more terrible, because more

credible and intelligible—not like those monstrous caricatures we meet with in history—

MEDON.

In history?—this is new!

ALDA.

Yes! I repeat, in history, where certain isolated facts and actions are recorded, without any relation to causes or motives, or connecting feelings; and pictures exhibited, from which the considerate mind turns in disgust, and the feeling heart has no relief but in positive and, I may add, reasonable incredulity. I have lately seen one of Correggio's finest pictures, in which the three Furies are represented, not as ghastly deformed hags, with talons, and torches, and snaky hair, but as young women, with fine luxuriant forms and regular features, and a single serpent wreathing the tresses like a bandeau—but *such* countenances!—such a hideous expression of malice, cunning, and cruelty!

and the effect is beyond conception appalling. Leonardo da Vinci worked upon the same grand principle of art in his Medusa—

> Where it is less the horror than the grace
> Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone—
>
> * * * * *
>
> 'Tis the melodious tints of beauty thrown
> Athwart the hue of guilt and glare of pain,
> That humanise and harmonise the strain.

And Shakspeare, who understood all truth, worked out his conceptions on the same principle, having said himself, that "proper deformity shows not in the fiend so horrid as in woman." Hence it is that whether he portrayed the wickedness founded in perverted power, as in Lady Macbeth; or the wickedness founded in weakness, as in Gertrude, Lady Anne, or Cressida, he is the more fearfully impressive, because we cannot claim for ourselves an exemption from the same nature, before which, in its corrupted state, we tremble with horror or shrink with disgust.

MEDON.

Do you remember that some of the commentators of Shakspeare have thought it incumbent on their gallantry to express their utter contempt for the scene between Richard and Lady Anne, as a monstrous and incredible libel on your sex?

ALDA.

They might have spared themselves the trouble. Lady Anne is just one of those women whom we see walking in crowds through the drawing-rooms of the world—the puppets of habit, the fools of fortune, without any particular inclination for vice, or any steady principle of virtue; whose actions are inspired by vanity, not affection, and regulated by opinion, not by conscience: who are good while there is no temptation to be otherwise, and ready victims of the first soliciting to evil. In the case of Lady Anne, we are startled by the situation: not three months a widow, and following to the sepulchre the remains of a husband and a father, she is met and

wooed and won by the very man who murdered them. In such a case it required perhaps either Richard or the arch-fiend himself to tempt her successfully; but in a less critical moment, a far less subtle and audacious seducer would have sufficed. Cressida is another modification of vanity, weakness, and falsehood, drawn in stronger colours. The world contains many Lady Annes and Cressidas, polished and refined externally, whom chance and vanity keep right, whom chance and vanity lead wrong, just as it may happen. When we read in history of the enormities of certain women, perfect scarecrows and ogresses, we can safely, like the Pharisee in Scripture, hug ourselves in our secure virtue, and thank God that we are not as others are:—but the wicked women in Shakspeare are portrayed with such perfect consistency and truth, that they leave us no such resource—they frighten us into reflection—they make us believe and tremble. On the other hand, his amiable women are touched with such exquisite simplicity—they have so

little external pretension—and are so unlike the usual heroines of tragedy and romance, that they delight us more "than all the nonsense of the beau-idéal!" We are flattered by the perception of our own nature in the midst of so many charms and virtues: not only are they what we could wish to be, or ought to be, but what we persuade ourselves we might be, or would be, under a different and a happier state of things, and, perhaps, some time or other *may* be. They are not stuck up, like the cardinal virtues, all in a row, for us to admire and wonder at—they are not mere poetical abstractions—nor (as they have been termed) mere abstractions of the affections,—

> But common clay ta'en from the common earth,
> Moulded by God, and tempered by the tears
> Of angels, to the perfect form of—*woman*.

MEDON.

Beautiful lines!—Where are they?

ALDA.

I quote from memory, and I am afraid inaccurately, from a poem of Alfred Tennyson's.

MEDON.

Well, between argument, and sentiment, and logic, and poetry, you are making out a very plausible case. I think with you, that, in the instances you have mentioned (as Lady Macbeth and Richard, Juliet and Othello, and others), the want of comparative power is only an additional excellence; but to go to an opposite extreme of delineation, we must allow that there is not one of Shakspeare's women that, as a dramatic character, can be compared to Falstaff.

ALDA.

No; because anything like Falstaff in the form of woman—any such compound of wit, sensuality, and selfishness, unchecked by the moral sentiments and the affections, and touched with the same vigorous painting, would be a gross and

monstrous caricature. If it could exist in nature we might find it in Shakspeare; but a moment's reflection shows us that it would be essentially an impossible combination of faculties in a female.

MEDON.

It strikes me, however, that his humorous women are feebly drawn, in comparison with some of the female wits of other writers.

ALDA.

Because his women of wit and humour are not introduced for the sole purpose of saying brilliant things, and displaying the wit of the author; they are as I will show you, real, natural woman, in whom *wit* is only a particular and occasional modification of intellect. They are all, in the first place, affectionate, thinking beings, and moral agents; and *then* witty, as if by accident, or as the Duchesse de Chaulnes said of herself, "par la grâce de Dieu." As to humour, it is carried as far as pos-

sible in Mrs. Quickly; in the termagant Catherine; in Maria, in "Twelfth Night;" in Juliet's nurse; in Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page. What can exceed in humorous naïveté, Mrs. Quickly's upbraiding Falstaff, and her concluding appeal—"Didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings?" Is it not exquisite—irresistible? Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page are both "merry wives," but how perfectly discriminated! Mrs. Ford has the most good-nature—Mrs. Page is the cleverer of the two, and has more sharpness in her tongue, more mischief in her mirth. In all these instances I allow that the humour is more or less vulgar; but a humorous woman, whether in high or low life, has always a tinge of vulgarity.

MEDON.

I should like to see that word *vulgar* properly defined, and its meaning limited—at present it is the most arbitrary word in the language.

ALDA.

Yes, like the word romantic, it is a convenient "exploding word," and in its general application signifies nothing more than "see how much finer I am than other people!"[1] but in literature and character I shall adhere to the definition of Madame de Staël, who uses the word *vulgar* as the reverse of *poetical.* Vulgarity (as I wish to apply the word) is the *negative* in all things. In literature, it is the total absence of elevation and depth in the ideas, and of elegance and delicacy in the expression of them. In character, it is the absence of truth, sensibility, and reflection. The vulgar in manner, is the result of vulgarity of character; it is grossness, hardness, or affectation.—If you would see how Shakspeare has discriminated, not only different degrees, but different kinds of plebeian vulgarity in women, you have only to compare the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet

[1] See Foster's Essay on the application of the word *romantic.*—*Essays,* vol. i.

with Mrs. Quickly. On the whole, if there are people who, taking the strong and essential distinction of sex into consideration, still maintain that Shakspeare's female characters are not, in truth, in variety, in power, equal to his men, I think I shall prove the contrary.

MEDON.

I observe that you have divided your illustrations into classes; but shades of character so melt into each other, and the various faculties and powers are so blended and balanced, that all classification must be arbitrary. I am at a loss to conceive where you have drawn the line; here at the head of your first chapter I find "Characters of Intellect"—do you call Portia intellectual, and Hermione and Constance not so?

ALDA.

I know that Schlegel has said that it is impossible to arrange Shakspeare's characters in classes: yet some classification was

necessary for my purpose. I have therefore divided them into characters in which intellect and wit predominate; characters in which fancy and passion predominate; and characters in which the moral sentiments and affections predominate. The historical characters I have considered apart, as requiring a different mode of illustration. Portia I regard as a perfect model of an intellectual woman, in whom wit is tempered by sensibility, and fancy regulated by strong reflection. It is objected to her, to Beatrice, and others of Shakspeare's women, that the display of intellect is tinged with a coarseness of manner belonging to the age in which he wrote. To remark that the conversation and letters of high-bred and virtuous women of that time were more bold and frank in expression than any part of the dialogue appropriated to Beatrice and Rosalind, may excuse it to our judgment, but does not reconcile it to our taste. Much has been said, and more might be said on this subject—but I would rather not discuss

it. It is a mere difference of manner which is to be regretted, but has nothing to do with the essence of the character.

MEDON.

I think you have done well in avoiding the topic altogether; but between ourselves, do you really think that the refinement of manner, the censorious, hypocritical, verbal scrupulosity, which is carried so far in this "picked age" of ours, is a true sign of superior refinement of taste, and purity of morals? Is it not rather a whiting of the sepulchre? I will not even allude to individual instances whom we both know, but does it not remind you, on the whole, of the tone of French manners previous to the revolution—that "décence," which Horace Walpole so admired,[1] veiling the moral degradation, the inconceivable profligacy of the higher classes?—Stay—I have not yet done—not to you, but *for* you, I will add thus much:—our modern

[1] Correspondence, vol. iii.

idea of delicacy apparently attaches more importance to words than to things—to manners than to morals. You will hear people inveigh against the improprieties of Shakspeare, with Don Juan, or one of those infernal French novels—I beg your pardon—lying on their toilet table. Lady Florence is shocked at the sallies of Beatrice, and Beatrice would certainly stand aghast to see Lady Florence dressed for Almack's; so you see that in both cases the fashion makes the indecorum. Let her ladyship new model her gowns!

ALDA.

Well, well, leave Lady Florence—I would rather hear you defend Shakspeare.

MEDON.

I think it is Coleridge who so finely observes, that Shakspeare ever kept the high road of human life, whereon all travel, that he did not pick out by-paths of feeling and sentiment; in him we have no

moral highwaymen, and sentimental thieves and rat-catchers, and interesting villains, and amiable, elegant adulteresses—*à-la-mode Germanorum*—no delicate entanglements of situation, in which the grossest images are presented to the mind disguised under the superficial attraction of style and sentiment. He flattered no bad passion, disguised no vice in the garb of virtue, trifled with no just and generous principle. He can make us laugh at folly, and shudder at crime, yet still preserve our love for our fellow beings, and our reverence for ourselves. He has a lofty and a fearless trust in his own powers, and in the beauty and excellence of virtue; and with his eye fixed on the lode-star of truth, steers us triumphantly among shoals and quicksands, where with any other pilot we had been wrecked:—for instance, who but himself would have dared to bring into close contact two such characters as Iago and Desdemona? Had the colours in which he has arrayed Desdemona been one atom less transparently bright and pure, the charm had been lost;

she could not have borne the approximation: some shadow from the overpowering blackness of *his* character must have passed over the sunbright purity of *hers*. For observe that Iago's disbelief in the virtue of Desdemona is not pretended, it is real. It arises from his total want of faith in all virtue; he is no more capable of conceiving goodness, than she is capable of conceiving evil. To the brutish coarseness and fiendish malignity of this man, her gentleness appears only a contemptible weakness; her purity of affection, which saw "Othello's visage in his mind," only a perversion of taste; her bashful modesty, only a cloak for evil propensities; so he represents them with all the force of language and self-conviction, and we are obliged to listen to him. He rips her to pieces before us—he would have bedeviled an angel! yet such is the unrivalled, though passive delicacy of the delineation, that it can stand it unhurt, untouched! It is wonderful!—yet natural as it is wonderful! After all, there are people in the world,

whose opinions and feelings are tainted by an habitual acquaintance with the evil side of society, though in action and intention they remain right; and who, without the real depravity of heart and malignity of intention of Iago, judge as he does of the characters and productions of others.

ALDA.

Heavens bless me from such critics! yet if genius, youth, and innocence could not escape unslurred, can I hope to do so? I pity from my soul the persons you allude to—for to such minds there can exist few uncontaminated sources of pleasure, either in nature or in art.

MEDON.

Ay—"the perfumes of Paradise were poison to the Dives, and made them melancholy."[1] You pity them, and they will sneer at you. But what have we here?—"Characters of Imagination—Juliet—Viola;"—

[1] An Oriental proverb.

are these romantic young ladies the pillars which are to sustain your moral edifice? Are they to serve as examples or as warnings for the youth of this enlightened age?

ALDA.

As warnings of course—what else?

MEDON.

Against the dangers of romance?—but where are they? "Vraiment," as B. Constant says, "je ne vois pas qu'en fait d'enthousiasme, le feu soit à la maison." Where are they—these disciples of poetry and romance, these victims of disinterested devotion and believing truth, these unblown roses — all conscience and tenderness—whom it is so necessary to guard against too much confidence in others, and too little in themselves—where are they?

ALDA.

Wandering in the Elysian fields, I presume, with the romantic young gentlemen who are too generous, too zealous in de-

fence of innocence, too enthusiastic in their admiration of virtue, too violent in their hatred of vice, too sincere in friendship, too faithful in love, too active and disinterested in the cause of truth—

MEDON.

Very fair! But seriously, do you think it necessary to guard young people, in this selfish and calculating age, against an excess of sentiment and imagination? Do you allow no distinction between the romance of exaggerated sentiment, and the romance of elevated thought? Do *you* bring cold water to quench the smouldering ashes of enthusiasm? Methinks it is rather superfluous; and that another doctrine is needed to withstand the heartless system of expediency which is the favourite philosophy of the day. The warning you speak of may be gently hinted to the few who are in danger of being misled by an excess of the generous impulses of fancy and feeling; but need hardly, I think, be proclaimed by sound of trumpet amid the

mocks of the world. No, no; there are young women in these days, but there is no such thing as youth—the bloom of existence is sacrificed to a fashionable education, and where we should find the rosebuds of the spring, we see only the full-blown, flaunting, precocious roses of the hot-bed.

ALDA.

Blame then that *forcing* system of education, the most pernicious, the most mistaken, the most far-reaching in its miserable and mischievous effects, that ever prevailed in this world. The custom which shut up women in convents till they were married, and then launched them innocent and ignorant on society, was bad enough; but not worse than a system of education which inundates us with hard, clever, sophisticated girls, trained by knowing mothers, and all-accomplished governesses, with whom vanity and expediency take place of conscience and affection—(in other words, of romance)—"frutto senile in sul giovenil

fiore;" with feelings and passions suppressed or contracted, not governed by higher faculties and purer principles; with whom opinion—the same false honour which sends men out to fight duels—stands instead of the strength and the light of virtue within their own souls. Hence the strange anomalies of artificial society—girls of sixteen who are models of manner, miracles of prudence, marvels of learning, who sneer at sentiment, and laugh at the Juliets and the Imogens; and matrons of forty, who, when the passions should be tame and wait upon the judgment, amaze the world and put us to confusion with their doings.

MEDON.

Or turn politicians to vary the excitement.—How I hate political women!

ALDA.

Why do you hate them?

MEDON.

Because they are mischievous.

ALDA.

But why are they mischievous?

MEDON.

Why!—why are they mischievous? Nay, ask them, or ask the father of all mischief, who has not a more efficient instrument to further his designs in this world, than a woman run mad with politics. The number of political intriguing women of this time, whose boudoirs and drawing-rooms are the *foyers* of party-spirit, is another trait of resemblance between the state of society now, and that which existed at Paris before the revolution.

ALDA.

And do you think, like some interesting young lady in Miss Edgeworth's tales, that "women have nothing to do with politics?" Do you mean to say that women are not capable of comprehending the principles of legislation, or of feeling an interest in the government and welfare of their country, or of perceiving and sympathizing in the pro-

gress of great events?—That they cannot feel patriotism? Believe me, when we do feel it, our patriotism, like our courage and our love, has a purer source than with you; for a man's patriotism has always some tinge of egotism, while a woman's patriotism is generally a sentiment, and of the noblest kind.

MEDON.

I agree in all this; and all this does not mitigate my horror of political women in general, who are, I repeat it, both mischievous and absurd. If you could but hear the reasoning in these feminine coteries!—but you never talk politics.

ALDA.

Indeed I do, when I can get any one to listen to me; but I prefer listening. As for the evil you complain of, impute it to that imperfect education which at once cultivates and enslaves the intellect, and loads the memory, while it fetters the judgment. Women, however well read in

history, never generalize in politics: never argue on any broad or general principle; never reason from a consideration of past events, their causes and consequences. But they are always political through their affections, their prejudices, their personal *liaisons*, their hopes, their fears.

MEDON.

If it were no worse, I could stand it; for that is at least feminine.

ALDA.

But most mischievous. For hence it is that we make such blind partisans, such violent party women, and such wretched politicians. I never heard a woman *talk* politics, as it is termed, that I could not discern at once the motive, the affection, the secret bias, which swayed her opinions and inspired her arguments. If it appeared to the Grecian sage so "difficult for a man not to love himself, nor the things that belong to him, but justice only?"—how much more for a woman!

MEDON.

Then you think that a better education, based on truer moral principles, would render women more reasonable politicians, or at least give them some right to meddle with politics?

ALDA.

It would cease in that case to be *meddling*, as you term it, for it would be legitimized. It is easy to sneer at political and mathematical ladies, and quote Lord Byron—but O leave those angry commonplaces to others!—they do not come well from you. Do not force me to remind you, that women have achieved enough to silence them for ever;[1] and how often must that truism be repeated, that it is not a woman's attainments which make her amiable or unamiable, estimable or the contrary, but her qualities? A time is

[1] In our own time, Madame de Staël, Mrs. Somerville, Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Marcet; we need not go back to the Rolands and Agnesi, nor even to our own Lucy Hutchinson.

coming, perhaps, when the education of women will be considered, with a view to their future destination as the mothers and nurses of legislators and statesmen, and the cultivation of their powers of reflection and moral feelings supersede the exciting drudgery by which they are now crammed with knowledge and accomplishments.

MEDON.

Well—till that blessed period arrives, I wish you would leave us the province of politics to ourselves. I see here you have treated of a very different class of beings, "*women in whom the affections and the moral sentiments predominate.*" Are there many such, think you, in the world?

ALDA.

Yes, many such; the developement of affection and sentiment is more quiet and unobtrusive than that of passion and intellect, and less observed; it is more common, too, therefore less remarked: but in women it generally gives the prevailing tone to the

character, except where vanity has been made the ruling motive.

MEDON.

Except! I admire your exception! You make in this case the rule the exception. Look round the world.

ALDA.

You are not one of those with whom that common phrase "the world" signifies the circle, whatever and wherever that may be, which limits our individual experience —as a child considers the visible horizon as the bounds which shut in the mighty universe. Believe me, it is a sorry, vulgar kind of wisdom, if it be wisdom—a shallow and confined philosophy, if it be philosophy —which resolves all human motives and impulses into egotism in one sex, and vanity in the other. Such may be the way of *the world*, as it is called—the result of a very artificial and corrupt state of society, but such is not general nature, nor female nature. Would you see the kindly, self-

sacrificing affections developed under their most honest but least poetical guise—displayed without any mixture of vanity, and unchecked in the display by any fear of being thought vain?—you will see it, not among the prosperous, the high-born, the educated, "far, far removed from want, and grief, and fear," but among the poor, the miserable, the perverted — among those habitually exposed to all influences that harden and deprave.

MEDON.

I believe it—nay, I know it; but how should *you* know it, or anything of the strange places of refuge which truth and nature have found in the two extremes of society?

ALDA.

It is no matter what I have seen or known; and for the two extremes of society, I leave them to the author of Paul Clifford, and that most exquisite painter of living manners, Mrs. Gore. St. Giles's is no more *nature* than St. James's. I wanted

character in its essential truth, not modified by particular customs, by fashion, by situation. I wished to illustrate the manner in which the affections would naturally display themselves in women—whether combined with high intellect, regulated by reflection, and elevated by imagination, or existing with perverted dispositions, or purified by the moral sentiments. I found all these in Shakspeare; his delineations of women, in whom the virtuous and calm affections predominate, and triumph over shame, fear, pride, resentment, vanity, jealousy,—are particularly worthy of consideration, and perfect in their kind, because so quiet in their effect.

MEDON.

Several critics have remarked in general terms on those beautiful pictures of female friendship, and of the generous affection of women for each other, which we find in Shakspeare. Other writers, especially dramatic writers, have found ample food for wit and satiric delineations in the littleness of feminine spite and rivalry, in the

mean spirit of competition, the petty jealousy of superior charms, the mutual slander and mistrust, the transient leagues of folly or selfishness miscalled friendship—the result of an education which makes vanity the ruling principle, and of a false position in society. Shakspeare, who looked upon women with the spirit of humanity, wisdom, and deep love, has done justice to their natural good tendencies and kindly sympathies. In the friendship of Beatrice and Hero, of Rosalind and Celia; in the description of the girlish attachment of Helena and Hermia, he has represented truth and generous affection rising superior to all the usual sources of female rivalry and jealousy; and with such force and simplicity, and obvious self-conviction, that he absolutely forces the same conviction on us.

ALDA.

Add to these the generous feeling of Viola for her rival Olivia; of Julia for her rival Sylvia; of Helena for Diana; of the old Countess for Helena, in the same play;

and even the affection of the wicked queen in Hamlet for the gentle Ophelia, which prove that Shakspeare thought—(and when did he ever think other than the truth?)—that women have by nature "virtues that are merciful," and can be just, tender, and true to their sister women, whatever wits and worldlings, and satirists and fashionable poets, may say or sing of us to the contrary. There is another thing which he has most deeply felt and beautifully represented—the distinction between masculine and feminine *courage*. A man's courage is often a mere animal quality, and in its most elevated form a point of honour. But a woman's courage is always a virtue, because it is not required of us, it is not one of the means through which we seek admiration and applause; on the contrary, we are courageous through our affections and mental energies, not through our vanity or our strength. A woman's heroism is always the excess of sensibility. Do you remember Lady Fanshawe putting on a sailor's jacket, and his "blue thrum cap,"

and standing at her husband's side, unknown to him, during a sea-fight? There she stood, all bathed in tears, but fixed to that spot. Her husband's exclamation when he turned and discovered her—"Good God, that love should make such a change as this!" is applicable to all the acts of courage which we read or hear of in women. This is the courage of Juliet when, after summing up all the possible consequences of her own act, till she almost maddens herself with terror, she drinks the sleeping potion; and for that passive fortitude which is founded in piety and pure strength of affection, such as the heroism of Lady Russell and Gertrude de Wart, he has given us some of the noblest modifications of it in Hermione, in Cordelia, in Imogen, in Katherine of Arragon.

MEDON.

And what do you call the courage of Lady Macbeth?—

> My hands are of your colour, but I shame
> To wear a heart so white.

And again,

> A little water clears us of this deed,
> How easy is it then!

If this is not mere masculine indifference to blood and death, mere firmness of nerve, what is it?

ALDA.

Not *that*, at least, which apparently you deem it; you will find, if you have patience to read me to the end, that I have judged Lady Macbeth very differently. Take these frightful passages with the context—take the whole situation, and you will see that it is no such thing. A friend of mine truly observed, that if Macbeth had been a ruffian without any qualms of conscience, Lady Macbeth would have been the one to shrink and tremble; but that which quenched *him* lent her fire. The absolute necessity for self-command, the strength of her reason, and her love for her husband, combine at this critical moment to conquer all fear but the fear of detection, leaving

her the full possession of her faculties. Recollect that the same woman who speaks with such horrible indifference of a little water clearing the blood stain from her hand, sees in imagination that hand for ever reeking, for ever polluted: and when reason is no longer awake and paramount over the violated feelings of nature and womanhood, we behold her making unconscious efforts to wash out that "damned spot," and sighing, heart-broken, over that little hand which all the perfumes of Arabia will never sweeten more.

MEDON.

I hope you have given her a place among the women in whom the tender affections and moral sentiments predominate.

ALDA.

You laugh; but, jesting apart, perhaps it would have been a more accurate classification than placing her among the historical characters.

MEDON.

Apropos to the historical characters, I hope you have refuted that *insolent* assumption (shall I call it?), that Shakspeare tampered inexcusably with the truth of history. He is the truest of all historians. His anachronisms always remind me of those in the fine old Italian pictures; either they are insignificant, or, if properly considered, are really beauties; for instance, every one knows that Correggio's St. Jerome presenting his books to the Virgin, involves half-a-dozen anachronisms, — to say nothing of that heavenly figure of the Magdalen, in the same picture, kissing the feet of the infant Saviour. Some have ridiculed, some have excused this strange combination of inaccuracies; but is it less one of the divinest pieces of sentiment and poetry that ever breathed and glowed from the canvass? You remember too the famous nativity by some Neapolitan painter, who has placed Mount Vesuvius and the bay of Naples in the back-ground? In these and a hundred other instances no one seems to

feel that the apparent absurdity involves the highest truth, and that the sacred beings thus represented, if once allowed as objects of faith and worship, are eternal under every aspect, and independent of all time and all locality. So it is with Shakspeare and his anachronisms. The learned scorn of Johnson and some of his brotherhood of commentators, and the eloquent defence of Schlegel, seem in this case both superfluous. If he chose to make the Delphic oracle and Julio Romano contemporary—what does it signify? he committed no anachronisms of character. He has not metamorphosed Cleopatra into a turtle-dove, nor Katherine of Arragon into a sentimental heroine. He is true to the spirit and even to the *letter* of history; where he deviates from the latter, the reason may be found in some higher beauty and more universal truth.

ALDA.

I have proved this, I think, by placing parallel with the dramatic character all the

historic testimony I could collect relative to Constance, Cleopatra, Katherine of Arragon, &c.

MEDON.

Analysing the character of Cleopatra must have been something like catching a meteor by the tail, and making it sit for its picture.

ALDA.

Something like it, in truth; but those of Miranda and Ophelia were more embarrassing, because they seemed to defy all analysis. It was intercepting the dew-drop or the snow-flake ere it fell to earth, and subjecting it to a chemical process.

MEDON.

Some one said the other day that Shakspeare had never drawn a coquette. What is Cleopatra but the empress and type of all the coquettes that ever were—or are? She would put Lady —— herself to school. But now for the moral.

ALDA.

The moral!—of what?

MEDON.

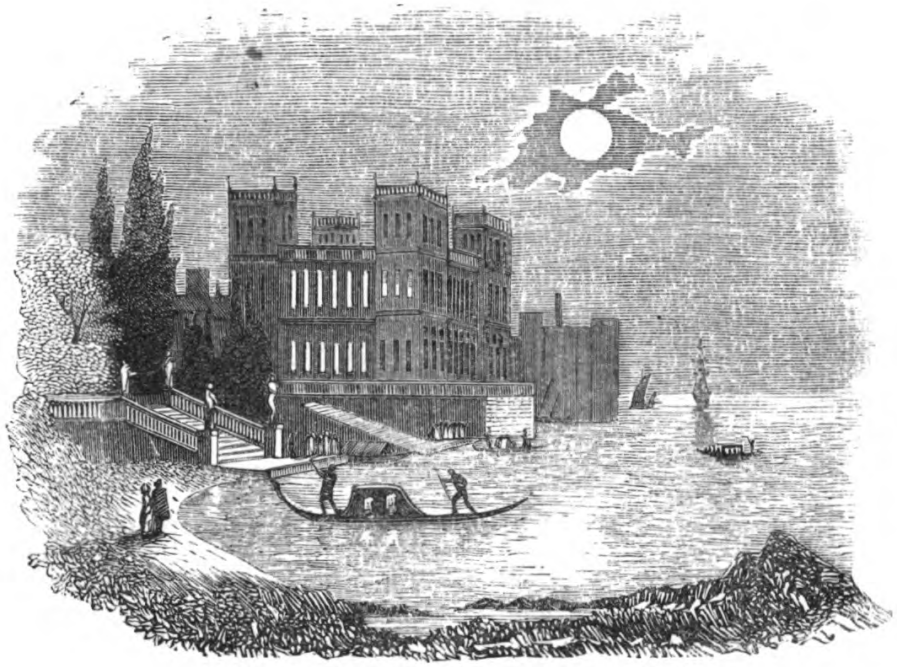
Of your book. It has a moral, I suppose.

ALDA.

It has indeed a very deep one, which those who seek will find. If now I have answered all your considerations and objections, and sufficiently explained my own views, may I proceed?

MEDON.

If you please—I am now prepared to listen in earnest:



Characters of Intellect.

PORTIA.

We hear it asserted, not seldom by way of compliment to us women, that intellect is of no sex. If this mean that the same faculties of mind are common to men and women, it is true; in any other signification it appears to me false, and the reverse of a compliment. The intellect of woman bears the same relation to that of man as her physical organization; — it is inferior in

power, and different in kind. That certain women have surpassed certain men in bodily strength or intellectual energy, does not contradict the general principle founded in nature. The essential and invariable distinction appears to me this: in men the intellectual faculties exist more self-poised and self-directed—more independent of the rest of the character, than we ever find them in women, with whom talent, however predominant, is in a much greater degree modified by the sympathies and moral qualities.

In thinking over all the distinguished women I can at this moment call to mind, I recollect but one, who, in the exercise of a rare talent, belied her sex, but the moral qualities had been first perverted.[1] It is from not knowing, or not allowing, this

[1] Artemisia Gentileschi, an Italian artist of the seventeenth century, painted one or two pictures, considered admirable as works of art, of which the subjects are the most vicious and barbarous conceivable. I remember one of these in the gallery of Florence, which I looked at once, but once, and wished then, as I do now, for the privilege of burning it to ashes.

general principle, that men of genius have committed some signal mistakes. They have given us exquisite and just delineations of the more peculiar characteristics of women, as modesty, grace, tenderness; and when they have attempted to portray them with the powers common to both sexes, as wit, energy, intellect, they have blundered in some respect; they could form no conception of intellect which was not masculine, and therefore have either suppressed the feminine attributes altogether and drawn coarse caricatures, or they have made them completely artificial.[1] Women distinguished for wit may sometimes appear masculine and flippant, but the cause must be sought elsewhere than in nature, who disclaims all such. Hence the witty and intellectual ladies of our comedies and novels are all in the fashion of some particular time; they

[1] Lucy Ashton, in the Bride of Lammermoor, may be placed next to Desdemona; Diana Vernon is (comparatively) a failure, as every woman will allow; while the masculine lady Geraldine, in Miss Edgeworth's tale of Ennui, and the intellectual Corinne, are consistent, essential women: the distinction is more easily felt than analysed.

are like some old portraits which can still amuse and please by the beauty of the workmanship, in spite of the graceless costume or grotesque accompaniments, but from which we turn to worship with ever new delight the Floras and goddesses of Titian—the saints and virgins of Raffaelle and Domenichino. So the Millamants and Belindas, the Lady Townleys and Lady Teazles are out of date, while Portia and Rosalind, in whom nature and the feminine character are paramount, remain bright and fresh to the fancy as when first created.

Portia, Isabella, Beatrice, and Rosalind, may be classed together, as characters of intellect, because, when compared with others, they are at once distinguished by their mental superiority. In Portia it is intellect, kindled into romance by a poetical imagination; in Isabel, it is intellect elevated by religious principle; in Beatrice, intellect animated by spirit; in Rosalind, intellect softened by sensibility. The wit which is lavished on each is profound, or pointed, or sparkling, or playful — but

always feminine; like spirits distilled from flowers, it always reminds us of its origin; it is a volatile essence, sweet as powerful; and to pursue the comparison a step further, the wit of Portia is like attar of roses, rich and concentrated; that of Rosalind, like cotton dipped in aromatic vinegar; the wit of Beatrice is like sal volatile; and that of Isabel, like the incense wafted to heaven. Of these four exquisite characters, considered as dramatic and poetical conceptions, it is difficult to pronounce which is most perfect in its way, most admirably drawn, most highly finished. But if considered in another point of view, as women and individuals, as breathing realities, clothed in flesh and blood, I believe we must assign the first rank to Portia, as uniting in herself in a more eminent degree than the others, all the noblest and most loveable qualities that ever met together in woman; and presenting a complete personification of Petrarch's exquisite epitome of female perfection:

Il vago spirito ardento,
E'n alto intelletto, un puro core.

It is singular, that hitherto no critical justice has been done to the character of Portia; it is yet more wonderful, that one of the finest writers on the eternal subject of Shakspeare and his perfections, should accuse Portia of pedantry and affectation, and confess she is not a great favourite of his—a confession quite worthy of him, who avers his predilection for servant-maids, and his preference of the Fannys and the Pamelas over the Clementinas and Clarissas.[1] Schlegel, who has given several pages to a rapturous eulogy on the merchant of Venice, simply designates Portia as a "rich, beautiful, clever heiress:"—whether the fault lie in the writer or translator, I do protest against the word clever.[2] Portia *clever!* what an epithet to apply to this heavenly compound of talent, feeling, wisdom, beauty, and gentleness! Now would it not be well, if this common and comprehensive word

[1] Hazlitt's Essays, vol. ii., p. 167.

[2] I am informed that the original German word is *geistreiche,* literally, *rich in soul or spirit,* a just and beautiful epithet. *2nd. Edit.*

were more accurately defined, or at least more accurately used? It signifies properly, not so much the possession of high powers, as dexterity in the adaptation of certain faculties (not necessarily of a high order) to a certain end or aim—not always the worthiest. It implies something commonplace, inasmuch as it speaks the presence of the *active* and *perceptive*, with a deficiency of the *feeling* and *reflective* powers: and applied to a woman, does it not almost invariably suggest the idea of something we should distrust or shrink from, if not allied to a higher nature? The profligate French women, who ruled the councils of Europe in the middle of the last century, were clever women; and that *philosopheress* Madame du Châtelet, who managed, at one and the same moment, the thread of an intrigue, her cards at piquet, and a calculation in algebra, was a very clever woman! If Portia had been created as a mere instrument to bring about a dramatic catastrophe —if she had merely detected the flaw in Antonio's bond, and used it as a means to

baffle the Jew, she might have been pronounced a clever woman. But what Portia does, is forgotten in what she *is*. The rare and harmonious blending of energy, reflection, and feeling, in her fine character, make the epithet *clever* sound like a discord as applied to *her*, and place her infinitely beyond the slight praise of Richardson and Schlegel, neither of whom appear to have fully comprehended her.

These and other critics have been apparently so dazzled and engrossed by the amazing character of Shylock, that Portia has received less than justice at their hands; while the fact is, that Shylock is not a finer or more finished character in his way, than Portia is in her's. These two splendid figures are worthy of each other; worthy of being placed together within the same rich framework of enchanting poetry, and glorious and graceful forms. She hangs beside the terrible, inexorable Jew, the brilliant lights of her character set off by the shadowy power of his, like a magnificent beauty-breathing Titian by the side of a gorgeous Rembrandt.

Portia is endued with her own share of those delightful qualities, which Shakspeare has lavished on many of his female characters; but besides the dignity, the sweetness, and tenderness which should distinguish her sex generally, she is individualized by qualities peculiar to herself; by her high mental powers, her enthusiasm of temperament, her decision of purpose, and her buoyancy of spirit. These are innate; she has other distinguishing qualities more external, and which are the result of the circumstances in which she is placed. Thus she is the heiress of a princely name and countless wealth; a train of obedient pleasures have ever waited round her; and from infancy she has breathed an atmosphere redolent of perfume and blandishment. Accordingly there is a commanding grace, a high-bred, airy elegance, a spirit of magnificence in all that she does and says, as one to whom splendour had been familiar from her very birth. She treads as though her footsteps had been among marble palaces, beneath roofs of fretted gold, o'er cedar floors and

pavements of jasper and porphyry—amid gardens full of statues, and flowers, and fountains, and haunting music. She is full of penetrative wisdom, and genuine tenderness, and lively wit; but as she has never known want, or grief, or fear, or disappointment, her wisdom is without a touch of the sombre or the sad; her affections are all mixed up with faith, hope, and joy; and her wit has not a particle of malevolence or causticity.

It is well known that the Merchant of Venice is founded on two different tales; and in weaving together his double plot in so masterly a manner, Shakspeare has rejected altogether the character of the astutious lady of Belmont with her magic potions, who figures in the Italian novel. With yet more refinement, he has thrown out all the licentious part of the story, which some of his cotemporary dramatists would have seized on with avidity, and made the best or the worst of it possible; and he has substituted the trial of the

caskets from another source.[1] We are not told expressly where Belmont is situated; but as Bassanio takes ship to go thither from Venice, and as we find them afterwards ordering horses from Belmont to Padua, we will imagine Portia's hereditary palace as standing on some lovely promontory between Venice and Trieste, overlooking the blue Adriatic, with the Friuli mountains or the Euganean hills for its back-ground, such as we often see in one of Claude's or Poussin's elysian landscapes. In a scene, in a home like this, Shakspeare, having first exorcised the original possessor, has placed his Portia: and so endowed her, that all the wild, strange, and moving circumstances of the story, become natural, probable, and necessary in connexion with her. That such a woman should be chosen by the solving of an enigma, is not surprising: herself and all around her, the scene,

[1] In the "Mercatante di Venezia" of Ser. Giovanni, we have the whole story of Antonio and Bassanio, and part of the story but not the character of Portia. The incident of the caskets is from the Gesta Romanorum.

the country, the age in which she is placed, breathe of poetry, romance and enchantment.

> From the four quarters of the earth they come
> To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint.
> The Hyrcanian desert, and the vasty wilds
> Of wide Arabia, are as thoroughfares now,
> For princes to come view fair Portia;
> The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
> Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
> To stop the foreign spirits; but they come
> As o'er a brook to see fair Portia.

The sudden plan which she forms for the release of her husband's friend, her disguise, and her deportment as the young and learned doctor, would appear forced and improbable in any other woman; but in Portia are the simple and natural result of her character.[1] The quickness with which she perceives the legal advantage which may be taken of the circumstances; the spirit of adventure with which she

[1] In that age, delicate points of law were not determined by the ordinary judges of the provinces, but by doctors of law, who were called from Bologna, Padua, and other places celebrated for their legal colleges.

engages in the masquerading, and the decision, firmness, and intelligence with which she executes her generous purpose, are all in perfect keeping, and nothing appears forced—nothing as introduced merely for theatrical effect.

But all the finest parts of Portia's character are brought to bear in the trial scene. There she shines forth all her divine self. Her intellectual powers, her elevated sense of religion, her high honourable principles, her best feelings as a woman, are all displayed. She maintains at first a calm self-command, as one sure of carrying her point in the end; yet the painful heart-thrilling uncertainty in which she keeps the whole court, until suspense verges upon agony, is not contrived for effect merely; it is necessary and inevitable. She has two objects in view; to deliver her husband's friend, and to maintain her husband's honour by the discharge of his just debt, though paid out of her own wealth ten times over. It is evident that she would rather owe the safety of Antonio to anything rather than

the legal quibble with which her cousin Bellario has armed her, and which she reserves as a last resource. Thus all the speeches addressed to Shylock in the first instance, are either direct or indirect experiments on his temper and feelings. She must be understood from the beginning to the end, as examining with intense anxiety the effect of her own words on his mind and countenance; as watching for that relenting spirit, which she hopes to awaken either by reason or persuasion. She begins by an appeal to his mercy, in that matchless piece of eloquence, which, with an irresistible and solemn pathos, falls upon the heart like "gentle dew from heaven:" —but in vain; for that blessed dew drops not more fruitless and unfelt on the parched sand of the desert, then do these heavenly words upon the ear of Shylock. She next attacks his avarice:

> Shylock, there's *thrice* thy money offered thee!

Then she appeals, in the same breath, both to his avarice and his pity:

Be merciful!
Take thrice thy money. Bid me tear the bond.

All that she says afterwards—her strong expressions, which are calculated to strike a shuddering horror through the nerves—the reflection she interposes—her delays and circumlocution to give time for any latent feeling of commiseration to display itself—all, all are premeditated and tend in the same manner to the object she has in view. Thus—

You must prepare your bosom for his knife.

Therefore lay bare your bosom!

These two speeches, though addressed apparently to Antonio, are spoken *at* Shylock, and are evidently intended to penetrate *his* bosom. In the same spirit she asks for the balance to weigh the pound of flesh; and entreats of Shylock to have a surgeon ready—

Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your charge,
To stop his wounds lest he do bleed to death!

SHYLOCK.
Is it so nominated in the bond?

PORTIA.

It is not so expressed—but what of that?
'Twere good you do so much, for *charity*.

So unwilling is her sanguine and generous spirit to resign all hope, or to believe that humanity is absolutely extinct in the bosom of the Jew, that she calls on Antonio, as a last resource, to speak for himself. His gentle, yet manly resignation—the deep pathos of his farewell, and the affectionate allusion to herself in his last address to Bassanio—

Commend me to your honourable wife;
Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death, &c.—

are well calculated to swell that emotion, which through the whole scene must have been labouring suppressed within her heart.

At length the crisis arrives, for patience and womanhood can endure no longer; and when Shylock, carrying his savage bent "to the last hour of act," springs on his victim—"A sentence! come, prepare!" then the smothered scorn, indignation, and disgust, burst forth with an impetuosity

which interferes with the judicial solemnity she had at first affected;—particularly in the speech—

> Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh.
> Shed thou no blood; nor cut thou less, nor more,
> But just the pound of flesh: if thou tak'st more,
> Or less than a just pound,—be it but so much
> As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,
> Or the division of the twentieth part
> Of one poor scruple; nay, if the scale do turn
> But in the estimation of a hair,—
> Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

But she afterwards recovers her propriety, and triumphs with a cooler scorn and a more self-possessed exultation.

It is clear that, to feel the full force and dramatic beauty of this marvellous scene, we must go along with Portia as well as with Shylock; we must understand her concealed purpose, keep in mind her noble motives, and pursue in our fancy the under current of feeling, working in her mind throughout. The terror and the power of Shylock's character,—his deadly and inexorable malice,—would be too oppressive;

the pain and pity too intolerable, and the horror of the possible issue too overwhelming, but for the intellectual relief afforded by this double source of interest and contemplation.

I come now to that capacity for warm and generous affection, that tenderness of heart, which render Portia not less loveable as a woman, than admirable for her mental endowments. The affections are to the intellect, what the forge is to the metal; it is they which temper and shape it to all good purposes, and soften, strengthen, and purify it. What an exquisite stroke of judgment in the poet, to make the mutual passion of Portia and Bassanio, though unacknowledged to each other, anterior to the opening of the play! Bassanio's confession very properly comes first:—

BASSANIO.

In Belmont is a lady richly left,
And she is fair, and fairer than that word,
Of wond'rous virtues; sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages;

* * * *

and prepares us for Portia's half betrayed, unconscious election of this most graceful and chivalrous admirer—

NERISSA.

Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar, and a soldier, that came hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?

PORTIA.

Yes, yes, it was Bassanio; as I think, so he was called.

NERISSA.

True, madam; he of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady.

PORTIA.

I remember him well; and I remember him worthy of thy praise.

Our interest is thus awakened for the lovers from the very first; and what shall be said of the casket scene with Bassanio, where every line which Portia speaks is so worthy of herself, so full of sentiment and beauty, and poetry and passion? Too naturally frank for disguise, too modest to confess her depth of love while the issue of the trial remains in suspense, the conflict

between love and fear, and maidenly dignity, cause the most delicious confusion that ever tinged a woman's cheek, or dropped in broken utterance from her lips.

I pray you, tarry, pause a day or two,
Before you hazard; for in choosing wrong,
I lose your company; therefore, forbear awhile;
There's something tells me (but it is not love),
I would not lose you; and you know yourself,
Hate counsels not in such a quality:
But lest you should not understand me well
(And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought),
I would detain you here some month or two
Before you venture for me. I could teach you
How to choose right,—but then I am forsworn;—
So will I never be: so you may miss me;—
But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin,
That I had been forsworn. Beshrew your eyes,
They have o'erlooked me, and divided me;
One half of me is yours, the other half yours,—
Mine own, I would say; but if mine, then yours,
And so all yours!

The short dialogue between the lovers is exquisite.

BASSANIO.

Let me choose;
For, as I am, I live upon the rack.

PORTIA.

Upon the rack, Bassanio? Then confess
What treason there is mingled with your love.

BASSANIO.

None, but that ugly treason of mistrust,
Which makes me fear the enjoying of my love.
There may as well be amity and life
'Tween snow and fire, as treason and my love.

PORTIA.

Ay! but I fear you speak upon the rack,
Where men enforced do speak anything.

BASSANIO.

Promise me life, and I'll confess the truth.

PORTIA.

Well then, confess, and live.

BASSANIO.

Confess and love
Had been the very sum of my confession!
O happy torment, when my torturer
Doth teach me answers for deliverance!

A prominent feature in Portia's character is that confiding, buoyant spirit, which mingles with all her thoughts and affections. And here let me observe, that I never yet met in real life, nor ever read in tale or

history, of any woman, distinguished for intellect of the highest order, who was not also remarkable for this trusting spirit, this hopefulness and cheerfulness of temper, which is compatible with the most serious habits of thought, and the most profound sensibility. Lady Wortley Montagu was one instance; and Madame de Staël furnishes another much more memorable. In her Corinne, whom she drew from herself, this natural brightness of temper is a prominent part of the character. A disposition to doubt, to suspect, and to despond, in the young, argues, in general, some inherent weakness, moral or physical, or some miserable and radical error of education; in the old, it is one of the first symptoms of age; it speaks of the influence of sorrow and experience, and foreshows the decay of the stronger and more generous powers of the soul. Portia's strength of intellect takes a natural tinge from the flush and bloom of her young and prosperous existence, and from her fervent imagination. In the casket scene, she fears indeed the issue of the trial,

on which more than her life is hazarded; but while she trembles, her hope is stronger than her fear. While Bassanio is contemplating the caskets, she suffers herself to dwell for one moment on the possibility of disappointment and misery.

> Let music sound while he doth make his choice;
> Then if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,
> Fading in music: that the comparison
> May stand more proper, my eye shall be the stream
> And watery death-bed for him.

Then immediately follows that revulsion of feeling, so beautifully characteristic of the hopeful, trusting, mounting spirit of this noble creature.

> But he may win!
> And what is music then?—then music is
> Even as the flourish, when true subjects bow
> To a new-crowned monarch: such it is
> As are those dulcet sounds at break of day,
> That creep into the dreaming bridegroom's ear,
> And summon him to marriage. Now he goes
> With no less presence, but with much more love
> Than young Alcides, when he did redeem
> The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
> To the sea monster. I stand here for sacrifice.

Here, not only the feeling itself, born of the elastic and sanguine spirit which had never been touched by grief, but the images in which it comes arrayed to her fancy,—the bridegroom waked by music on his wedding morn,—the new crowned monarch,—the comparison of Bassanio to the young Alcides, and of herself to the daughter of Laomedon,—are all precisely what would have suggested themselves to the fine poetical imagination of Portia in such a moment.

Her passionate exclamations of delight, when Bassanio has fixed on the right casket, are as strong as though she had despaired before. Fear and doubt she could repel; the native elasticity of her mind bore up against them; yet she makes us feel that, as the sudden joy overpowers her almost to fainting, the disappointment would as certainly have killed her.

> How all the other passions fleet to air,
> As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embraced despair,
> And shudd'ring fear, and green-eyed jealousy?
> O love! be moderate, allay thy ecstacy;

In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess;
I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
For fear I surfeit!

Her subsequent surrender of herself in heart and soul, of her maiden freedom, and her vast possessions, can never be read without deep emotions; for not only all the tenderness and delicacy of a devoted woman, are here blended with all the dignity which becomes the princely heiress of Belmont, but the serious, measured self-possession of her address to her lover, when all suspense is over, and all concealment superfluous, is most beautifully consistent with the character. It is, in truth, an awful moment, that in which a gifted woman first discovers, that besides talents and powers, she has also passions and affections; when she first begins to suspect their vast importance in the sum of her existence; when she first confesses that her happiness is no longer in her own keeping, but is surrendered for ever and for ever into the dominion of another! The possession of uncommon powers of mind are so far from affording

relief or resource in the first intoxicating surprise—I had almost said terror—of such a revolution, that they render it more intense. The sources of thought multiply beyond calculation the sources of feeling; and mingled, they rush together, a torrent deep as strong. Because Portia is endued with that enlarged comprehension which looks before and after, she does not feel the less, but the more: because from the height of her commanding intellect she can contemplate the force, the tendency, the consequences of her own sentiments—because she is fully sensible of her own situation, and the value of all she concedes—the concession is not made with less entireness and devotion of heart, less confidence in the truth and worth of her lover, than when Juliet, in a similar moment, but without any such intrusive reflections—any check but the instinctive delicacy of her sex, flings herself and her fortunes at the feet of her lover:

> And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
> And follow thee, my lord, through all the world.[1]

[1] Romeo and Juliet, Act ii, Scene 2.

In Portia's confession, which is not breathed from a moon-lit balcony, but spoken openly in the presence of her attendants and vassals, there is nothing of the passionate self-abandonment of Juliet, nor of the artless simplicity of Miranda, but a consciousness and a tender seriousness, approaching to solemnity, which are not less touching.

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am: though for myself alone,
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better; yet, for you,
I would be trebled twenty times myself;
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
More rich; that only to stand high in your account,
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account; but the full sum of me
Is sum of something; which to term is gross,
Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd,
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn, and happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king.
Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord

> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
> This house, these servants, and this same myself,
> Are yours, my lord.

We must also remark that the sweetness, the solicitude, the subdued fondness which she afterwards displays, relative to the letter, are as true to the softness of her sex, as the generous self-denial with which she urges the departure of Bassanio (having first given him a husband's right over herself and all her countless wealth), is consistent with a reflecting mind, and a spirit at once tender, reasonable, and magnanimous.

It is not only in the trial scene, that Portia's acuteness, eloquence, and lively intelligence are revealed to us; they are displayed in the first instance, and kept up consistently to the end. Her reflections, arising from the most usual aspects of nature, and from the commonest incidents of life, are in such a poetical spirit, and are at the same time so pointed, so profound, that they have passed into familiar and daily application, with all the force of proverbs.

If to do, were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages prince's palaces.

I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.

> The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark,
> When neither is attended; and I think
> The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
> When every goose is cackling, would be thought
> No better a musician than the wren.
> How many things by season, seasoned are
> To their right praise and true perfection!
>
> How far that little candle throws his beams!
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world.
> A substitute shines as brightly as a king,
> Until a king be by; and then his state
> Empties itself, as doth an inland brook,
> Into the main of waters.

Her reflections on the friendship between her husband and Antonio are as full of deep meaning as of tenderness; and her portrait of a young coxcomb, in the same scene, is touched with a truth and spirit which show with what a keen observing eye she has looked upon men and things.

—— I'll hold thee any wager,
When we are both accoutred like young men,
I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
And wear my dagger with a braver grace;
And speak between the change of man and boy
With a reed voice; and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride; and speak of frays
Like a fine bragging youth; and tell quaint lies—
How honourable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died;
I could not do with all: then I'll repent,
And wish, for all that, that I had not killed them:
And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell,
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth!

And in the description of her various suitors, in the first scene with Nerissa, what infinite power, wit, and vivacity! She half checks herself as she is about to give the reins to her sportive humour: "In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker."—But if it carries her away, it is so perfectly good-natured, so temperately bright, so lady-like, it is ever without offence; and so far, most unlike the satirical, poignant, unsparing wit of Beatrice, "misprising what she looks on."

In fact, I can scarce conceive a greater contrast than between the vivacity of Portia and the vivacity of Beatrice. Portia, with all her airy brilliance, is supremely soft and dignified; every thing she says or does, displays her capability for profound thought and feeling, as well as her lively and romantic disposition; and as I have seen in an Italian garden a fountain flinging round its wreaths of showery light, while the many-coloured Iris hung brooding above it, in its calm and soul-felt glory; so in Portia the wit is ever kept subordinate to the poetry, and we still feel the tender, the intellectual, and the imaginative part of the character, as superior to, and presiding over, its spirit and vivacity.

In the last act, Shylock and his machinations being dismissed from our thoughts, and the rest of the *dramatis personæ* assembled together at Belmont, all our interest and all our attention are rivetted on Portia, and the conclusion leaves the most delightful impression on the fancy. The playful equivoque of the rings, the sportive trick

she puts on her husband, and her thorough enjoyment of the jest, which she checks just as it is proceeding beyond the bounds of propriety, show how little she was displeased by the sacrifice of her gift, and are all consistent with her bright and buoyant spirit. In conclusion, when Portia invites her company to enter her palace to refresh themselves after their travels, and talk over "these events at full," the imagination, unwilling to lose sight of the brilliant group, follows them in gay procession from the lovely moonlight garden to marble halls and princely revels, to splendour and festive mirth, to love and happiness.

Many women have possessed many of those qualities which render Portia so delightful. She is in herself a piece of reality, in whose possible existence we have no doubt: and yet a human being, in whom the moral, intellectual, and sentient faculties should be so exquisitely blended and proportioned to each other; and these again, in harmony with all outward aspects and influences, probably never existed—certainly could not now exist. A woman constituted like Portia, and placed in this age, and in the actual state of society, would find society arm'd against her; and instead of being like Portia, a gracious, happy, beloved, and loving creature, would be a victim, immolated in fire to that multitudinous Moloch termed Opinion. With her the world without would be at war with the world within; in the perpetual strife, either her nature would "be subdued to the element it worked in," and bending to a necessity it could neither escape nor approve, lose at last something of its original brightness; or otherwise—a perpetual spirit of resistance, cherished as

a safeguard, might perhaps in the end destroy the equipoise; firmness would become pride and self-assurance; and the soft, sweet, feminine texture of the mind, settle into rigidity. Is there then no sanctuary for such a mind?—Where shall it find a refuge from the world?—Where seek for strength against itself? Where, but in heaven?

Camiola, in Massinger's Maid of Honour, is said to emulate Portia; and the real story of Camiola (for she is an historical personage) is very beautiful. She was a lady of Messina, who lived in the beginning of the fourteenth century; and was the cotemporary of Queen Joanna, of Petrarch and Boccaccio. It fell out in those days, that Prince Orlando of Arragon, the younger brother of the King of Sicily, having taken the command of a naval armament against the Neapolitans, was defeated, wounded, taken prisoner, and confined by Robert of Naples (the father of Queen Joanna) in one of his strongest castles. As the prince had distinguished himself by his enmity to the Neapolitans, and by many exploits

against them, his ransom was fixed at an exorbitant sum, and his captivity was unusually severe; while the King of Sicily, who had some cause of displeasure against his brother, and imputed to him the defeat of his armament, refused either to negociate for his release, or to pay the ransom demanded.

Orlando, who was celebrated for his fine person and reckless valour, was apparently doomed to languish away the rest of his life in a dungeon, when Camiola Turinga, a rich Sicilian heiress, devoted the half of her fortune to release him. But as such an action might expose her to evil comments, she made it a condition, that Orlando should marry her. The prince gladly accepted the terms, and sent her the contract of marriage, signed by his hand; but no sooner was he at liberty, than he refused to fulfil it, and even denied all knowledge of his benefactress.

Camiola appealed to the tribunal of state, produced the written contract, and described the obligations she had heaped on this ungrateful and ungenerous man; sentence was

given against him, and he was adjudged to Camiola, not only as her rightful husband, but as a property which, according to the laws of war in that age, she had purchased with her gold. The day of marriage was fixed; Orlando presented himself with a splendid retinue; Camiola also appeared, decorated as for her bridal; but instead of bestowing her hand on the recreant, she reproached him in the presence of all with his breach of faith, declared her utter contempt for his baseness; and then freely bestowing on him the sum paid for his ransom, as a gift worthy of his mean soul, she turned away, and dedicated herself and her heart to heaven. In this resolution she remained inflexible, though the king and all the court united in entreaties to soften her. She took the veil; and Orlando, henceforth regarded as one who had stained his knighthood, and violated his faith, passed the rest of his life as a dishonoured man, and died in obscurity.

Camiola, in "The Maid of Honour," is, like Portia, a wealthy heiress, surrounded by suitors, and "queen o'er herself:" the cha-

racter is constructed upon the same principles, as great intellectual power, magnanimity of temper, and feminine tenderness; but not only do pain and disquiet, and the change induced by unkind and inauspicious influences, enter into this sweet picture to mar and cloud its happy beauty,—but the portrait itself may be pronounced out of drawing;—for Massinger apparently had not sufficient delicacy of sentiment to work out his own conception of the character with perfect consistency. In his adaptation of the story, he represents the mutual love of Orlando and Camiola as existing previous to the captivity of the former, and on his part declared with many vows of eternal faith, yet she requires a written contract of marriage before she liberates him. It will perhaps be said that she has penetrated his weakness, and anticipates his falsehood: miserable excuse!—how could a magnanimous woman love a man, whose falsehood she believes but *possible?*—or loving him, how could she deign to secure herself by such means against the conse-

quences? Shakspeare and Nature never committed such a solecism. Camiola doubts before she has been wronged; the firmness and assurance in herself border on harshness. What in Portia is the gentle wisdom of a noble nature appears, in Camiola, too much a spirit of calculation: it savours a little of the counting-house. As Portia is the heiress of Belmont, and Camiola a merchant's daughter, the distinction may be proper and characteristic, but it is not in favour of Camiola. The contrast may be thus illustrated:

CAMIOLA.

You have heard of Bertoldo's captivity, and the king's neglect, the greatness of his ransom; *fifty thousand crowns*, Adorni! *Two parts of my estate!* Yet I so love the gentleman, for to you I will confess my weakness, that I purpose now, when he is forsaken by the king and his own hopes, to ransom him.

Maid of Honour, act iii.

PORTIA.

What sum owes he the Jew?

BASSANIO.

For me—three thousand ducats.

PORTIA.

What! *no more!*
Pay him six thousand and deface the bond,
Double six thousand, and then treble that,
Before a friend of this description
Shall lose a hair through my Bassanio's fault.
—— You shall have gold
To pay the *petty debt* twenty times o'er.
Merchant of Venice.

Camiola, who is a Sicilian, might as well have been born at Amsterdam: Portia could have only existed in Italy. Portia is profound as she is brilliant; Camiola is sensible and sententious: she asserts her dignity very successfully; but we cannot for a moment imagine Portia as reduced to the necessity of *asserting* her's. The idiot Sylli, in "The Maid of Honour," who follows Camiola like one of the deformed dwarfs of old time, is an intolerable violation of taste and propriety, and it sensibly lowers our impression of the principal character. Shakspeare would never have placed Sir Andrew Aguecheek in constant and immediate approximation with such a woman as Portia.

Lastly, the charm of the poetical colour-

ing is wholly wanting in Camiola, so that when she is placed in contrast with the glowing eloquence, the luxuriant grace, the buoyant spirit of Portia, the effect is somewhat that of coldness and formality. Notwithstanding the dignity and the beauty of Massinger's delineation, and the noble self-devotion of Camiola, which I acknowledge and admire, the two characters will admit of no comparison as sources of contemplation and pleasure.

* * * *

It is observable that something of the intellectual brilliance of Portia is reflected on the other female characters of "The Merchant of Venice," so as to preserve in the midst of contrast a certain harmony and keeping. Thus Jessica, though properly kept subordinate, is certainly

> A most beautiful Pagan—a most sweet Jew.

She cannot be called a sketch—or if a sketch, she is like one of those dashed off in glowing colours from the rainbow pallette of a Rubens; she has a rich tinge of orientalism

shed over her, worthy of her eastern origin. In any other play, and in any other companionship than that of the matchless Portia, Jessica would make a very beautiful heroine of herself. Nothing can be more poetically, more classically fanciful and elegant, than the scenes between her and Lorenzo; — the celebrated moonlight dialogue, for instance, which we all have by heart. Every sentiment she utters interests us for her:—more particularly her bashful self-reproach, when flying in the disguise of a page;

> I am glad 'tis night, you do not look upon me,
> For I am much asham'd of my exchange;
> But love is blind, and lovers cannot see
> The pretty follies that themselves commit;
> For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
> To see me thus transformed to a boy.

And the enthusiastic and generous testimony to the superior graces and accomplishments of Portia comes with a peculiar grace from her lips.

> Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match,
> And on the wager lay two earthly women,

> And Portia one, there must be something else
> Pawned with the other; for the poor rude world
> Hath not her fellow.

We should not, however, easily pardon her for cheating her father with so much indifference, but for the perception that Shylock values his daughter far beneath his wealth.

> I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!—would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!

Nerissa is a good specimen of a common genus of characters; she is a clever confidential waiting-woman, who has caught a little of her lady's elegance and romance; she affects to be lively and sententious, falls in love, and makes her favour conditional on the fortune of the caskets, and in short mimics her mistress with good emphasis and discretion. Nerissa and the gay talkative Gratiano are as well matched as the incomparable Portia and her magnificent and captivating lover.

ISABELLA.

THE character of Isabella, considered as a poetical delineation, is less mixed than that of Portia; and the dissimilarity between the two appears, at first view, so complete, that we can scarce believe that the same elements enter into the composition of each.

Yet so it is; they are portrayed as equally wise, gracious, virtuous, fair, and young; we perceive in both the same exalted principle and firmness of character; the same depth of reflection and persuasive eloquence; the same self-denying generosity and capability of strong affections; and we must wonder at that marvellous power by which qualities and endowments, essentially and closely allied, are so combined and modified as to produce a result altogether different. "O Nature! O Shakspeare! which of ye drew from the other?"

Isabella is distinguished from Portia, and strongly individualized by a certain moral grandeur, a saintly grace, something of vestal dignity and purity, which render her less attractive and more imposing; she is "severe in youthful beauty," and inspires a reverence which would have placed her beyond the daring of one unholy wish or thought, except in such a man as Angelo—

> O cunning enemy! that to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook.

This impression of her character is con-

veyed from the very first, when Lucio, the libertine jester, whose coarse audacious wit checks at every feather, thus expresses his respect for her,—

> I would not, though 'tis my familiar sin
> With maids to seem the lapwing, and to jest,
> Tongue far from heart—play with all virgins so.
> I hold you as a thing enskyed and sainted;
> By your renouncement an immortal spirit,
> And to be talked with in sincerity,
> As with a saint.

A strong distinction between Isabella and Portia is produced by the circumstances in which they are respectively placed. Portia is a high-born heiress, "Lord of a fair mansion, master of her servants, queen o'er herself;" easy and decided, as one born to command, and used to it. Isabella has also the innate dignity which renders her "queen o'er herself," but she has lived far from the world and its pomps and pleasures; she is one of a consecrated sisterhood—a novice of St. Clare; the power to command obedience and to confer happiness are to her unknown. Portia is a splendid creature,

radiant with confidence, hope, and joy. She is like the orange-tree, hung at once with golden fruit and luxuriant flowers, which has expanded into bloom and fragrance beneath favouring skies, and has been nursed into beauty by the sunshine and the dews of heaven. Isabella is like a stately and graceful cedar, towering on some alpine cliff, unbowed and unscathed amid the storm. She gives us the impression of one who has passed under the ennobling discipline of suffering and self-denial: a melancholy charm tempers the natural vigour of her mind: her spirit seems to stand upon an eminence, and look down upon the world as if already enskyed and sainted; and yet when brought in contact with that world which she inwardly despises, she shrinks back with all the timidity natural to her cloistral education.

This union of natural grace and grandeur with the habits and sentiments of a recluse, — of austerity of life with gentleness of manner,—of inflexible moral principle with humility and even bashfulness of deport-

ment, is delineated with the most beautiful and wonderful consistency. Thus, when her brother sends to her, to entreat her mediation, her first feeling is fear, and a distrust in her own powers:

> Alas! what poor ability's in me
> To do him good?
>
> LUCIO.
>
> Essay the power you have.
>
> ISABELLA.
>
> My power, alas! I doubt.

In the first scene with Angelo she seems divided between her love for her brother and her sense of his fault; between her self-respect and her maidenly bashfulness. She begins with a kind of hesitation, "at war 'twixt will and will not:" and when Angelo quotes the law, and insists on the justice of his sentence, and the responsibility of his station, her native sense of moral rectitude and severe principles takes the lead, and she shrinks back:

> O just, but severe law!
> I *had* a brother then—Heaven keep your honour!
> (*Retiring.*)

Excited and encouraged by Lucio, and supported by her own natural spirit, she returns to the charge,—she gains energy and self-possession as she proceeds, grows more earnest and passionate from the difficulty she encounters, and displays that eloquence and power of reasoning for which we had been already prepared by Claudio's first allusion to her:

> In her youth
> There is a prone and speechless dialect,
> Such as moves men; besides, she hath prosperous art,
> When she will play with reason and discourse,
> And well she can persuade.

It is a curious coincidence, that Isabella, exhorting Angelo to mercy, avails herself of precisely the same arguments, and insists on the self-same topics which Portia addresses to Shylock in her celebrated speech; but how beautifully and how truly is the distinction marked! how like, and yet how unlike! Portia's eulogy on mercy is a piece of heavenly rhetoric; it falls on the ear with a solemn measured harmony; it is

the voice of a descended angel addressing an inferior nature: if not premeditated, it is at least part of a preconcerted scheme; while Isabella's pleadings are poured from the abundance of her heart in broken sentences, and with the artless vehemence of one who feels that life and death hang upon her appeal. This will be best understood by placing the corresponding passages in immediate comparison with each other.

PORTIA.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
But mercy is above this sceptred sway—
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings.

ISABELLA.

Well, believe this,
No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,

Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does.

PORTIA.

Consider this—
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

ISABELLA.

Alas! alas!
Why all the souls that are, were forfeit once;
And He, that might the 'vantage best have took,
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips
Like man new made!

The beautiful things which Isabella is made to utter, have, like the sayings of Portia, become proverbial: but in spirit and character they are as distinct as are the two women. In all that Portia says, we confess the power of a rich poetical imagination, blended with a quick practical spirit of observation, familiar with the surfaces of things; while there is a profound yet simple morality, a depth of

religious feeling, a touch of melancholy, in Isabella's sentiments, and something earnest and authoritative in the manner and expression, as though they had grown up in her mind from long and deep meditation in the silence and solitude of her convent cell:

O it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.

Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet:
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder.
Merciful Heaven!
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle. O but man, proud man!
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven,
As make the angels weep.

Great men may jest with saints, 'tis wit in them;
But in the less, foul profanation.
That in the captain's but a choleric word,
Which in the soldier is flat blasphemy.

Authority, although it err like others,
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself
That skins the vice o' the top. Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as his is,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life.

Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good,
But graciously to know I am no better.

The sense of death is most in apprehension;
And the poor beetle that we tread upon,
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies!

'Tis not impossible
But one, the wicked'st caitiff on the ground
May seem as shy, as grave, as just, as absolute
As Angelo; even so may Angelo,
In all his dressings, characts, titles, forms,
Be an arch villain.

Her fine powers of reasoning, and that natural uprightness and purity, which no sophistry can warp, and no allurement betray, are farther displayed in the second scene with Angelo.

ANGELO.

What would you do?

ISABELLA.

As much for my poor brother as myself;
That is, were I under the terms of death,
The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That, longing, I have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.

ANGELO.

Then must your brother die.

ISABELLA.

And 'twere the cheaper way:
Better it were a brother died at once,
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.

ANGELO.

Were not you then as cruel as the sentence,
That you have slander'd so!

ISABELLA.

Ignominy in ransom, and free pardon,
Are of two houses: lawful mercy is
Nothing akin to foul redemption.

ANGELO.

You seem'd of late to make the law a tyrant;
And rather proved the sliding of your brother
A merriment than a vice.

ISABELLA.

O pardon me, my lord; it oft falls out,
To have what we'd have, we speak not what we mean:
I something do excuse the thing I hate,
For his advantage that I dearly love.

Towards the conclusion of the play we have another instance of that rigid sense of justice, which is a prominent part of Isabella's character, and almost silences her earnest intercession for her brother, when his fault is placed between her plea and her conscience. The Duke condemns the villain Angelo to death, and his wife Mariana entreats Isabella to plead for him.

Sweet Isabel, take my part,
Lend me your knees, and all my life to come
I'll lend you all my life to do you service.

Isabella remains silent, and Mariana reiterates her prayer.

MARIANA.

Sweet Isabel, do yet but kneel by me,
Hold up your hands, say nothing, I'll speak all!
O Isabel! will you not lend a knee?

Isabella, thus urged, breaks silence and

appeals to the Duke, not with supplication, or persuasion, but with grave argument, and a kind of dignified humility and conscious power, which are finely characteristic of the individual woman.

> Most bounteous Sir,
> Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
> As if my brother liv'd; I partly think
> A due sincerity governed his deeds
> Till he did look on me; since it is so
> Let him not die. My brother had but justice,
> In that he did the thing for which he died.
> For Angelo,
> His art did not o'ertake his bad intent,
> That perish'd by the way: thoughts are no subjects,
> Intents, but merely thoughts.

In this instance, as in the one before mentioned, Isabella's conscientiousness is overcome by the only sentiment which ought to temper justice into mercy, the power of affection and sympathy.

Isabella's confession of the general frailty of her sex, has a peculiar softness, beauty, and propriety. She admits the imputation with all the sympathy of woman for woman;

yet with all the dignity of one who felt her own superiority to the weakness she acknowledges.

ANGELO.

Nay, women are frail too.

ISABELLA.

Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves;
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women! help heaven! men their creation mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;
For we are soft as our complexions are,
And credulous to false prints.

Nor should we fail to remark the deeper interest which is thrown round Isabella, by one part of her character, which is betrayed rather than exhibited in the progress of the action; and for which we are not at first prepared, though it is so perfectly natural. It is the strong under-current of passion and enthusiasm flowing beneath this calm and saintly self-possession; it is the capacity for high feeling and generous and strong indignation, veiled beneath the sweet austere composure of the religious recluse, which, by the very force of contrast, powerfully

impress the imagination. As we see in real life that where, from some external or habitual cause, a strong control is exercised over naturally quick feelings and an impetuous temper, they display themselves with a proportionate vehemence when that restraint is removed; so the very violence with which her passion burst forth, when opposed or under the influence of strong excitement, is admirably characteristic.

Thus in her exclamation, when she first allows herself to perceive Angelo's vile design—

ISABELLA.

Ha! little honour to be much believed,
And most pernicious purpose!—seeming!—seeming!
I will proclaim thee, Angelo: look for it!
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
Or with an outstretched throat I'll tell the world
Aloud, what man thou art!

And again, where she finds that the "outward sainted deputy" has deceived her—

O I will to him, and pluck out his eyes!
Unhappy Claudio! wretched Isabel!
Injurious world! most damned Angelo!

She places at first a strong and high-souled confidence in her brother's fortitude and magnanimity, judging him by her own lofty spirit:

> I'll to my brother;
> Though he hath fallen by prompture of the blood,
> Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour,
> That had he twenty heads to tender down,
> On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up
> Before his sister should her body stoop
> To such abhorr'd pollution.

But when her trust in his honour is deceived by his momentary weakness, her scorn has a bitterness, and her indignation a force of expression almost fearful; and both are carried to an extreme, which is perfectly in character:

> O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
> Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
> Is 't not a kind of incest to take life
> From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
> Heaven shield, my mother play'd my father fair!
> For such a warped slip of wilderness
> Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance:
> Die! perish! might but my bending down,
> Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.

I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.

The whole of this scene with Claudio is inexpressibly grand in the poetry and the sentiment; and the entire play abounds in those passages and phrases which must have become trite from familiar and constant use and abuse, if their wisdom and unequalled beauty did not invest them with an immortal freshness and vigour, and a perpetual charm.

The story of Measure for Measure is a tradition of great antiquity, of which there are several versions, narrative and dramatic. A contemptible tragedy, the *Promos and Cassandra* of George Whetstone, is supposed, from various coincidences, to have furnished Shakspeare with the groundwork of the play; but the character of Isabella is in conception and execution, all his own. The commentators have collected with infinite industry all the sources of the plot; but to the grand creation of Isabella, they award either silence or worse than silence. Johnson and the rest of the black-letter

crew, pass her over without a word. One critic, a lady-critic too, whose name I will be so merciful as to suppress, treats Isabella as a coarse vixen. Hazlitt, with that strange perversion of sentiment and want of taste which sometimes mingle with his piercing and powerful intellect, dismisses Isabella with a slight remark, that "we are not greatly enamoured of her rigid chastity, nor can feel much confidence in the virtue that is sublimely good at another's expense." What shall we answer to such criticism? Upon what ground can we read the play from beginning to end, and doubt the angel-purity of Isabella, or contemplate her possible lapse from virtue? Such gratuitous mistrust is here a sin against the light of heaven.

> Having waste ground enough,
> Shall we desire to raise the sanctuary,
> And pitch our evils there?

Professor Richardson is more just, and truly sums up her character as "amiable, pious, sensible, resolute, determined, and

eloquent:" but his remarks are rather superficial.

Schlegel's observations are also brief and general, and in no way distinguish Isabella from many other characters; neither did his plan allow him to be more minute. Of the play altogether, he observes very beautifully "that the title Measure for Measure is in reality a misnomer, the sense of the whole being properly the triumph of mercy over strict justice:" but it is also true that there is "an original sin in the nature of the subject, which prevents us from taking a cordial interest in it."[1] Of all the characters, Isabella alone has our sympathy. But though she triumphs in the conclusion, her triumph is not produced in a pleasing manner. There are too many disguises and tricks, too many "bye-paths and indirect crooked ways," to conduct us to the natural and foreseen catastrophe, which the Duke's presence throughout renders inevitable. This Duke seems to have

[1] Characters of Shakspeare's Plays.

a predilection for bringing about justice by a most unjustifiable succession of falsehoods and counterplots. He really deserves Lucio's satirical designation, who somewhere styles him "The Fantastical Duke of Dark Corners." But Isabella is ever consistent in her pure and upright simplicity, and in the midst of this simulation, expresses a characteristic disapprobation of the part she is made to play,

> To speak so indirectly I am loth:
> I would say the truth.[1]

She yields to the supposed Friar with a kind of forced docility, because her situation as a religious novice, and his station, habit, and authority, as her spiritual director, demand this sacrifice. In the end we are made to feel that her transition from the convent to the throne has but placed this noble creature in her natural sphere: for though Isabella, as Duchess of Vienna, could not more command our highest reve-

[1] Act iv., scene 5.

rence, than Isabel the novice of Saint Clare, yet a wider range of usefulness and benevolence, of trial and action, was better suited to the large capacity, the ardent affections, the energetic intellect, and firm principle of such a woman as Isabella, than the walls of a cloister. The philosophical Duke observes in the very first scene—

> Spirits are not finely touched,
> But to fine issues: nor nature never lends
> The smallest scruple of her excellence,
> But like a thrifty goddess she determines,
> Herself the glory of a creditor,
> Both thanks and use.[1]

This profound and beautiful sentiment is illustrated in the character and destiny of Isabella. She says, of herself, that "she has spirit to act whatever her heart approves;" and what her heart approves we know.

In the convent (which may stand here poetically for any narrow and obscure situation in which such a woman might be

[1] *Use*, i. e., usury, interest.

placed), Isabella would not have been unhappy, but happiness would have been the result of an effort, or of the concentration of her great mental powers to some particular purpose; as St. Theresa's intellect, enthusiasm, tenderness, restless activity, and burning eloquence, governed by one overpowering sentiment of devotion, rendered her the most extraordinary of saints. Isabella, like St. Theresa, complains that the rules of her order are not sufficiently severe, and from the same cause,—that from the consciousness of strong intellectual and imaginative power, and of overflowing sensibility, she desires a more "strict restraint," or, from the continual, involuntary struggle against the trammels imposed, feels its necessity.

ISABELLA.

And have you nuns no further privileges?

FRANCISCA.

Are not these large enough?

ISABELLA.

Yes truly; I speak, not as desiring more,
But rather wishing a more strict restraint
Upon the sisterhood.

Such women as Desdemona and Ophelia would have passed their lives in the seclusion of a nunnery, without wishing, like Isabella, for stricter bonds, or planning, like St. Theresa, the reformation of their order, simply, because any restraint would have been efficient, as far as *they* were concerned. Isabella, "dedicate to nothing temporal," might have found resignation through self-government, or have become a religious enthusiast: while "place and greatness" would have appeared to her strong and upright mind, only a more extended field of action, a trust and a trial. The mere trappings of power and state, the gemmed coronal, the ermined robe, she would have regarded as the outward emblems of her earthly profession; and would have worn them with as much simplicity as her novice's hood and scapular; still, under whatever guise she might tread this thorny world—the same "angel of light."

BEATRICE.

SHAKSPEARE has exhibited in Beatrice a spirited and faithful portrait of the fine lady of his own time. The deportment, language, manners, and allusions, are those of a particular class in a particular age; but the individual and dramatic character which forms the groundwork, is strongly discriminated; and being taken from general nature, belongs to every age. In Beatrice, high intellect and high animal spirits meet, and excite each other like fire and air. In her wit (which is brilliant without being imaginative), there is a touch of insolence, not unfrequent in women when the wit predominates over reflection and imagination. In her temper, too, there is a slight infusion of the termagant; and her satirical humour plays with such an unrespective

levity over all subjects alike, that it required a profound knowledge of women to bring such a character within the pale of our sympathy. But Beatrice, though wilful, is not wayward; she is volatile, not unfeeling. She has not only an exuberance of wit and gaiety, but of heart, and soul, and energy of spirit; and is no more like the fine ladies of modern comedy,—whose wit consists in a temporary allusion, or a play upon words, and whose petulance is displayed in a toss of the head, a flirt of the fan, or a flourish of the pocket handkerchief, —than one of our modern dandies is like Sir Philip Sydney.

In Beatrice, Shakspeare has contrived that the poetry of the character shall not only soften, but heighten its comic effect. We are not only inclined to forgive Beatrice all her scornful airs, all her biting jests, all her assumption of superiority; but they amuse and delight us the more, when we find her, with all the headlong simplicity of a child, falling at once into the snare laid for her affections; when we see *her*, who thought a man

of God's making not good enough for her, who disdained to be o'ermastered by "a piece of valiant dust," stooping like the rest of her sex, vailing her proud spirit, and taming her wild heart to the loving hand of him whom she had scorned, flouted, and misused, "past the endurance of a block." And we are yet more completely won by her generous enthusiastic attachment to her cousin. When the father of Hero believes the tale of her guilt; when Claudio, her lover, without remorse or a lingering doubt, consigns her to shame; when the Friar remains silent, and the generous Benedick himself knows not what to say, Beatrice, confident in her affections, and guided only by the impulses of her own feminine heart, sees through the inconsistency, the impossibility of the charge, and exclaims, without a moment's hesitation,

O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!

Schlegel, in his remarks on the play of "Much Ado about nothing," has given us an amusing instance of that sense of reality

with which we are impressed by Shakspeare's characters. He says of Benedick and Beatrice, as if he had known them personally, that the exclusive direction of their pointed raillery against each other "is a proof of a growing inclination." This is not unlikely; and the same inference would lead us to suppose that this mutual inclination had commenced before the opening of the play. The very first words uttered by Beatrice are an inquiry after Benedick, though expressed with her usual arch impertinence:—

> I pray you, is Signior Montanto returned from the wars, or no?
>
> I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed? for indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

And in the unprovoked hostility with which she falls upon him in his absence, in the pertinacity and bitterness of her satire, there is certainly great argument that he occupies much more of her thoughts than she would have been willing to confess,

even to herself. In the same manner, Benedick betrays a lurking partiality for his fascinating enemy; he shows that he has looked upon her with no careless eye, when he says,

> There's her cousin (meaning Beatrice), an she were not possessed with a fury, excels her as much in beauty as the first of May does the last of December.

Infinite skill, as well as humour, is shown in making this pair of airy beings the exact counterpart of each other; but of the two portraits, that of Benedick is by far the most pleasing, because the independence and gay indifference of temper, the laughing defiance of love and marriage, the satirical freedom of expression, common to both, are more becoming to the masculine than to the feminine character. Any woman might love such a cavalier as Benedick, and be proud of his affection; his valour, his wit, and his gaiety sit so gracefully upon him! and his light scoffs against the power of love are but just sufficient to render more piquant the conquest of this

"heretic in despite of beauty." But a man might well be pardoned who should shrink from encountering such a spirit as that of Beatrice, unless, indeed, he had "served an apprenticeship to the taming school." The wit of Beatrice is less good-humoured than that of Benedick; or, from the difference of sex, appears so. It is observable, that the power is throughout on her side, and the sympathy and interest on his: which, by reversing the usual order of things, seems to excite us *against the grain*, if I may use such an expression. In all their encounters she constantly gets the better of him, and the gentleman's wits go off halting, if he is not himself fairly *hors de combat*. Beatrice, woman like, generally has the first word, and will have the last. Thus, when they first meet, she begins by provoking the merry warfare:

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick; nobody marks you.

BENEDICK.

What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

BEATRICE.

Is it possible Disdain should die, while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

It is clear that she cannot for a moment endure his neglect, and he can as little tolerate her scorn. Nothing that Benedick addresses to Beatrice personally can equal the malicious force of some of her attacks upon him: he is either restrained by a feeling of natural gallantry, little as she deserves the consideration due to her sex (for a female satirist ever places herself beyond the pale of such forbearance), or he is subdued by her superior volubility. He revenges himself, however, in her absence: he abuses her with such a variety of comic invective, and pours forth his pent-up wrath with such a ludicrous extravagance and exaggeration, that he betrays at once how deep is his mortification, and how unreal his enmity.

In the midst of all this tilting and sparring of their nimble and fiery wits, we find them infinitely anxious for the good opinion

of each other, and secretly impatient of each other's scorn: but Beatrice is the most truly indifferent of the two; the most assured of herself. The comic effect produced by their mutual attachment, which, however natural and expected, comes upon us with all the force of a surprise, cannot be surpassed: and how exquisitely characteristic the mutual avowal!

BENEDICK.

By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

BEATRICE.

Do not swear by it, and eat it.

BENEDICK.

I will swear by it, that you love me; and I will make him eat it, that says, I love not you.

BEATRICE.

Will you not eat your word?

BENEDICK.

With no sauce that can be devised to it: I protest, I love thee.

BEATRICE.

Why, then, God forgive me!

BENEDICK.

What offence, sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE.

You stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to protest, I loved you.

BENEDICK.

And do it with all thy heart.

BEATRICE.

I love you with so much of my heart, that there is none left to protest.

But here again the dominion rests with Beatrice, and she appears in a less amiable light than her lover. Benedick surrenders his whole heart to her and to his new passion. The revulsion of feeling even causes it to overflow in an excess of fondness; but with Beatrice temper has still the mastery. The affection of Benedick induces him to challenge his intimate friend for her sake, but the affection of Beatrice does not prevent her from risking the life of her lover.

The character of Hero is well contrasted with that of Beatrice, and their mutual attachment is very beautiful and natural. When they are both on the scene together, Hero has but little to say for herself:

Beatrice asserts the rule of a master spirit, eclipses her by her mental superiority, abashes her by her raillery, dictates to her, answers for her, and would fain inspire her gentle-hearted cousin with some of her own assurance.

> Yes, faith; it is my cousin's duty to make a curtsey, and say "Father, as it please you;" but yet, for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsey, and, "Father, as it please me."

But Shakspeare knew well how to make one character subordinate to another, without sacrificing the slightest portion of its effect; and Hero, added to her grace and softness, and all the interest which attaches to her as the sentimental heroine of the play, possesses an intellectual beauty of her own. When she has Beatrice at an advantage, she repays her with interest, in the severe, but most animated and elegant picture she draws of her cousin's imperious character and unbridled levity of tongue. The portrait is a little overcharged, because administered as a corrective, and intended to be overheard.

But nature never fram'd a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice:
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak; she cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endeared.

URSULA.

Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

HERO.

No: not to be so odd, and from all fashions,
As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable:
But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
She'd mock me into air: O she would laugh me
Out of myself, press me to death with wit.
Therefore let Benedick, like cover'd fire,
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly:
It were a better death than die with mocks,
Which is as bad as die with tickling.

Beatrice never appears to greater advantage than in her soliloquy after leaving her concealment "in the pleached bower where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun, forbid the sun to enter;" she exclaims, after listening to this tirade against herself,

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?

The sense of wounded vanity is lost in bitter feelings, and she is infinitely more struck by what is said in praise of Benedick, and the history of his supposed love for her, than by the dispraise of herself. The immediate success of the trick is a most natural consequence of the self-assurance and magnanimity of her character; she is so accustomed to assert dominion over the spirits of others, that she cannot suspect the possibility of a plot laid against herself.

A haughty, excitable, and violent temper is another of the characteristics of Beatrice; but there is more of impulse than of passion in her vehemence. In the marriage scene where she has beheld her gentle spirited cousin,—whom she loves the more for those very qualities which are most unlike her own,—slandered, deserted, and devoted to public shame, her indignation, and the eagerness with which she hungers and thirsts after revenge, are, like the rest of her character, open, ardent, impetuous, but not deep or implacable. When she bursts into that outrageous speech—

Is he not approved in the height a villain that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What! bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place!

And when she commends her lover, as the first proof of his affection, "to kill Claudio," the very consciousness of the exaggeration—of the contrast between the real good-nature of Beatrice and the fierce tenor of her language, keeps alive the comic effect, mingling the ludicrous with the serious. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding the point and vivacity of the dialogue, few of the speeches of Beatrice are capable of a general application, or engrave themselves distinctly on the memory; they contain more mirth than matter; and though wit be the predominant feature in the dramatic portrait, Beatrice more charms and dazzles us by what she is, than by what she *says*. It is not merely her sparkling repartees and saucy jests, it is the soul of wit, and the spirit of gaiety in forming the whole character,—looking out from her brilliant eyes,

and laughing on her full lips that pout with scorn,—which we have before us, moving and full of life. On the whole, we dismiss Benedick and Beatrice to their matrimonial bonds, rather with a sense of amusement, than a feeling of congratulation or sympathy; rather with an acknowledgment that they are well-matched, and worthy of each other, than with any well-founded expectation of their domestic tranquillity. If, as Benedick asserts, they are both "too wise, to woo peaceably," it may be added, that both are too wise, too witty, and too wilful, to live peaceably together. We have some misgivings about Beatrice — some apprehensions, that poor Benedick will not escape the "predestinated scratched face," which he had foretold to him who should win and wear this quick-witted and pleasant-spirited lady; yet when we recollect that to the wit and imperious temper of Beatrice is united a magnanimity of spirit which would naturally place her far above all selfishness, and all paltry struggles for power—when we perceive, in the midst of her sarcastic levity and volubility of

tongue, so much of generous affection, and such a high sense of female virtue and honour, we are inclined to hope the best. We think it possible that though the gentleman may now and then swear, and the lady scold, the native good-humour of the one, the really fine understanding of the other, and the value they so evidently attach to each other's esteem, will ensure them a tolerable portion of domestic felicity, and in this hope we leave them.

ROSALIND.

I COME now to Rosalind, whom I should have ranked before Beatrice, inasmuch as the greater degree of her sex's softness and sensibility, united with equal wit and intellect, give her the superiority as a woman; but that, as a dramatic character, she is inferior in force. The portrait is one of infinitely more delicacy and variety, but of less strength and depth. It is easy to seize

on the prominent features in the mind of Beatrice, but extremely difficult to catch and fix the more fanciful graces of Rosalind. She is like a compound of essences, so volatile in their nature, and so exquisitely blended, that on any attempt to analyze them, they seem to escape us. To what else shall we compare her, all-enchanting as she is?—to the silvery summer clouds, which even while we gaze on them, shift their hues and forms, dissolving into air, and light, and rainbow showers?—to the May-morning, flush with opening blossoms and roseate dews, and "charm of earliest birds?" — to some wild and beautiful melody, such as some shepherd boy might "pipe to Amarillis in the shade?"—to a mountain streamlet, now smooth as a mirror in which the skies may glass themselves, and anon leaping and sparkling in the sunshine—or rather to the very sunshine itself? for so her genial spirit touches into life and beauty whatever it shines on!

But this impression, though produced by the complete development of the character,

and in the end possessing the whole fancy, is not immediate. The first introduction of Rosalind is less striking than interesting; we see her a dependant, almost a captive, in the house of her usurping uncle; her genial spirits are subdued by her situation, and the remembrance of her banished father: her playfulness is under a temporary eclipse.

I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry!

is an adjuration which Rosalind needed not when once at liberty, and sporting "under the greenwood tree." The sensibility and even pensiveness of her demeanour in the first instance, render her archness and gaiety afterwards, more graceful, and more fascinating.

Though Rosalind is a princess, she is a princess of Arcady; and notwithstanding the charming effect produced by her first scenes, we scarcely ever think of her with a reference to them, or associate her with a court, and the artificial appendages of her rank. She was not made to "lord it o'er a

fair mansion," and take state upon her like the all-accomplished Portia; but to breathe the free air of heaven, and frolic among green leaves. She was not made to stand the siege of daring profligacy, and oppose high action and high passion to the assaults of adverse fortune, like Isabel; but to "fleet the time carelessly as they did i' the golden age." She was not made to bandy wit with lords, and tread courtly measures with plumed and warlike cavaliers, like Beatrice; but to dance on the green sward, and "murmur among living brooks a music sweeter than their own."

Though sprightliness is the distinguishing characteristic of Rosalind, as of Beatrice, yet we find her much more nearly allied to Portia in temper and intellect. The tone of her mind is, like Portia's, genial and buoyant: she has something too of her softness and sentiment; there is the same confiding abandonment of self in her affections; but the characters are otherwise as distinct as the situations are dissimilar. The age, the manners, the circumstance in

which Shakspeare has placed his Portia, are not beyond the bounds of probability; nay, have a certain reality and locality. We fancy her a contemporary of the Raffaelles and the Ariostos; the sea-wedded Venice, its merchants and Magnificos,—the Rialto, and the long canals,—rise up before us when we think of her. But Rosalind is surrounded with the purely ideal and imaginative; the reality is in the characters and in the sentiments, not in the circumstances or situation. Portia is dignified, splendid and romantic; Rosalind is playful, pastoral and picturesque: both are in the highest degree poetical, but the one is epic and the other lyric.

Every thing about Rosalind breathes of "youth and youth's sweet prime." She is fresh as the morning, sweet as the dew-awakened blossoms, and light as the breeze that plays among them. She is as witty, as voluble, as sprightly as Beatrice; but in a style altogether distinct. In both, the wit is equally unconscious; but in Beatrice it plays about us like the lightning, dazzling

but also alarming; while the wit of Rosalind bubbles up and sparkles like the living fountain, refreshing all around. Her volubility is like the bird's song; it is the outpouring of a heart filled to overflowing with life, love, and joy, and all sweet and affectionate impulses. She has as much tenderness as mirth, and in her most petulant raillery there is a touch of softness —"By this hand it will not hurt a fly!" As her vivacity never lessens our impression of her sensibility, so she wears her masculine attire without the slightest impugnment of her delicacy. Shakspeare did not make the modesty of his women depend on their dress, as we shall see further when we come to Viola and Imogen. Rosalind has in truth "no doublet and hose in her disposition." How her heart seems to throb and flutter under her page's vest! What depth of love in her passion for Orlando! whether disguised beneath a saucy playfulness, or breaking forth with a fond impatience, or half betrayed in that beautiful scene where she faints at the

sight of his 'kerchief stained with his blood! Here her recovery of her self-possession—her fears lest she should have revealed her sex—her presence of mind, and quick-witted excuse—

I pray you, tell your brother how well I counterfeited—

and the characteristic playfulness which seems to return so naturally with her recovered senses,—are all as amusing as consistent. Then how beautifully is the dialogue managed between herself and Orlando! how well she assumes the airs of a saucy page, without throwing off her feminine sweetness! How her wit flutters free as air over every subject! With what a careless grace, yet with what exquisite propriety!

For innocence hath a privilege in her
To dignify arch jests and laughing eyes.

And if the freedom of some of the expressions used by Rosalind or Beatrice be objected to, let it be remembered that this was not the fault of Shakspeare or the

women, but generally of the age. Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, and the rest, lived in times when more importance was attached to things than to words; now we think more of words than of things: and happy are we in these later days of super-refinement, if we are to be saved by our verbal morality. But this is meddling with the province of the melancholy Jaques, and our argument is Rosalind.

The impression left upon our hearts and minds by the character of Rosalind—by the mixture of playfulness, sensibility, and what the French (and we for lack of a better expression) call *naïveté*—is like a delicious strain of music. There is a depth of delight, and a subtlety of words to express that delight, which is enchanting. Yet when we call to mind particular speeches and passages, we find that they have a relative beauty and propriety, which renders it difficult to separate them from the context without injuring their effect. She says some of the most charming things in the world, and some of the most

humourous: but we apply them as phrases rather than as maxims, and remember them rather for their pointed felicity of expression and fanciful application, than for their general truth and depth of meaning. I will give a few instances:—

I was never so berhymed since Pythagoras' time—that I was an Irish rat—which I can hardly remember.[1]

Good, my complexion! Dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, that I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?

We dwell here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat.

Love is merely a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.

A traveller! By my faith you have great reason to be sad. I fear you have sold your own lands to see other

[1] In Shakspeare's time, there were people in Ireland (there may be so still, for aught I know), who undertook to charm rats to death, by chanting certain verses which acted as a spell. "Rhyme them to death, as they do rats in Ireland," is a line in one of Ben Jonson's comedies; this will explain Rosalind's humorous allusion.

men's; then to have seen much and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

Farewell, Monsieur Traveller. Look you lisp, and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of your own country; be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are; or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.

Break an hour's promise in love! He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapp'd him o' the shoulder, but I warrant him heart-whole.

Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them—but not for love.

I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel, and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat.

Rosalind has not the impressive eloquence of Portia, nor the sweet wisdom of Isabella. Her longest speeches are not her best: nor is her taunting address to Phebe, beautiful and celebrated as it is, equal to Phebe's own description of her. The latter, indeed, is more in earnest.[1]

[1] Rousseau could describe such a character as Rosalind,

Celia is more quiet and retired: but she rather yields to Rosalind, than is eclipsed by her. She is as full of sweetness, kindness and intelligence, quite as susceptible, and almost as witty, though she makes less display of wit. She is described as less fair and less gifted; yet the attempt to excite in her mind a jealousy of her lovelier friend, by placing them in comparison—

Thou art a fool; she robs thee of thy name;
And thou wilt show more bright, and seem more virtuous,
When she is gone—

fails to awaken in the generous heart of Celia any other feeling than an increased tenderness and sympathy for her cousin. To Celia, Shakspeare has given some of the most striking and animated parts of the dialogue; and in particular, that exquisite

but failed to represent it consistently. "N'est-ce pas de ton cœur que viennent les graces de ton enjouement? Tes railleries sont des signes d'intérêt plus touchants que les compliments d'un autre. Tu caresses quand tu folâtres. Tu ris, mais ton rire pénètre l'âme; tu ris, mais tu fais pleurer de tendresse, et je te vois presque toujours sérieuse avec les indifférents."—*Héloïse.*

description of the friendship between her and Rosalind—

> If she be a traitor,
> Why, so am I; we have still slept together,
> Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together,
> And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
> Still we were coupled and inseparable.

The feeling of interest and admiration thus excited for Celia at the first, follows her through the whole play. We listen to her as to one who has made herself worthy of our love; and her silence expresses more than eloquence.

Phebe is quite an Arcadian coquette; she is a piece of pastoral poetry. Audrey is only rustic. A very amusing effect is produced by the contrast between the frank and free bearing of the two princesses in disguise, and the scornful airs of the real shepherdess. In the speeches of Phebe, and in the dialogue between her and Sylvius, Shakspeare has anticipated all the beauties of the Italian pastoral, and surpassed Tasso and Guarini. We find two among the most poetical passages of the

play, appropriated to Phebe; the taunting speech to Sylvius, and the description of Rosalind in her page's costume;—which last is finer than the portrait of Bathyllus in Anacreon.

Characters of Passion and Imagination.

JULIET.

O Love! thou teacher—O Grief! thou tamer—and Time, thou healer of human hearts!—bring hither all your deep and serious revelations!—And ye too, rich

fancies of unbruised, unbowed youth—ye visions of long perished hopes—shadows of unborn joys—gay colourings of the dawn of existence! whatever memory hath treasured up of bright and beautiful in nature or in art; all soft and delicate images —all lovely forms—divinest voices and entrancing melodies—gleams of sunnier skies and fairer climes—Italian moonlights and airs that "breathe of the sweet south" —now, if it be possible, revive to my imagination—live once more to my heart! Come, thronging around me, all inspirations that wait on passion, on power, on beauty; give me to tread, not bold, and yet unblamed, within the inmost sanctuary of Shakspeare's genius, in Juliet's moonlight bower, and Miranda's enchanted isle!

* * * *

It is not without emotion, that I attempt to touch on the character of Juliet. Such beautiful things have already been said of her—only to be exceeded in beauty by the subject that inspired them!—it is impossible to say anything better; but it is possible to

say something more. Such, in fact, is the simplicity, the truth, and the loveliness of Juliet's character, that we are not at first aware of its complexity, its depth and its variety. There is in it an intensity of passion, a singleness of purpose, an entireness, a completeness of effect, which we feel as a whole; and to attempt to analyse the impression thus conveyed at once to soul and sense, is as if while hanging over a half-blown rose, and revelling in its intoxicating perfume, we should pull it asunder, leaflet by leaflet, the better to display its bloom and fragrance. Yet how otherwise should we disclose the wonders of its formation, or do justice to the skill of the divine hand that hath thus fashioned it in its beauty?

Love, as a passion, forms the groundwork of the drama. Now, admitting the axiom of Rochefoucauld, that there is but one love, though a thousand different copies, yet the true sentiment itself has as many different aspects as the human soul of which it forms a part. It is not only

modified by the individual character and temperament, but it is under the influence of climate and circumstance. The love that is calm in one moment, shall show itself vehement and tumultuous at another. The love that is wild and passionate in the south, is deep and contemplative in the north; as the Spanish or Roman girl perhaps poisons a rival, or stabs herself for the sake of a living lover, and the German or Russian girl pines into the grave for love of the false, the absent, or the dead. Love is ardent or deep, bold or timid, jealous or confiding, impatient or humble, hopeful or desponding—and yet there are not many loves, but one love.

All Shakspeare's women, being essentially women, either love or have loved, or are capable of loving; but Juliet is love itself. The passion is her state of being, and out of it she has no existence. It is the soul within her soul; the pulse within her heart; the life-blood along her veins, "blending with every atom of her frame." The love that is so chaste and dignified in

Portia—so airy-delicate and fearless in Miranda—so sweetly confiding in Perdita—so playfully fond in Rosalind—so constant in Imogen—so devoted in Desdemona—so fervent in Helen—so tender in Viola—is each and all of these in Juliet. All these remind us of her; but she reminds us of nothing but her own sweet self; or if she does, it is of the Gismunda, or the Lisetta, or the Fiametta of Boccaccio, to whom she is allied, not in the character or circumstances, but in the truly Italian spirit, the glowing, national complexion of the portrait.[1]

There was an Italian painter who said

[1] Lord Byron remarked of the Italian women (and he could speak *avec connaissance de fait*), that they are the only women in the world capable of impressions, at once very sudden and very durable; which, he adds, is to be found in no other nation. Mr. Moore observes afterwards, how completely an Italian woman, either from nature or her social position, is led to invert the usual course of frailty among ourselves, and, weak in resisting the first impulses of passion, to reserve the whole strength of her character for a display of constancy and devotedness afterwards.—Both these traits of national character are exemplified in Juliet.—*Moore's Life of Byron*, vol. ii., pp. 303, 338, 4to edit.

that the secret of all effect in colour consisted in white upon black, and black upon white. How perfectly did Shakspeare understand this secret of effect! and how beautifully has he exemplified it in Juliet!

> So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
> As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

Thus she and her lover are in contrast with all around them. They are all love, surrounded with all hate; all harmony, surrounded with all discord: all pure nature, in the midst of polished and artificial life. Juliet, like Portia, is the foster child of opulence and splendour; she dwells in a fair city—she has been nurtured in a palace—she clasps her robe with jewels—she braids her hair with rainbow-tinted pearls; but in herself she has no more connexion with the trappings around her, than the lovely exotic transplanted from some Eden-like climate has with the carved and gilded conservatory which has reared and sheltered its luxuriant beauty.

But in this vivid impression of contrast,

there is nothing abrupt or harsh. A tissue of beautiful poetry weaves together the principal figures, and the subordinate personages. The consistent truth of the costume, and the exquisite gradations of relief with which the most opposite hues are approximated, blend all into harmony. Romeo and Juliet are not poetical beings placed on a prosaic back-ground; nor are they, like Thekla and Max in the Wallenstein, two angels of light amid the darkest and harshest, the most debased and revolting aspects of humanity; but every circumstance, and every personage, and every shade of character in each, tends to the development of the sentiment which is the subject of the drama. The poetry, too, the richest that can possibly be conceived, is interfused through all the characters; the splendid imagery lavished upon all with the careless prodigality of genius, and the whole is lighted up into such a sunny brilliance of effect, as though Shakspeare had really transported himself into Italy, and had drunk to intoxication of her genial

atmosphere. How truly it has been said, that "although Romeo and Juliet are in love, they are not love-sick!" What a false idea would any thing of the mere whining amoroso, give us of Romeo, such as he really is in Shakspeare—the noble, gallant, ardent, brave, and witty! And Juliet—with even less truth could the phrase or idea apply to her! The picture in "Twelfth Night" of the wan girl dying of love, "who pined in thought, and with a green and yellow melancholy," would never surely occur to us, when thinking on the enamoured and impassioned Juliet, in whose bosom love keeps a fiery vigil, kindling tenderness into enthusiasm, enthusiasm into passion, passion into heroism! No, the whole sentiment of the play is of a far different cast. It is flushed with the genial spirit of the south: it tastes of youth, and of the essence of youth; of life, and of the very sap of life.[1] We have indeed the struggle of love against evil destinies, and

[1] *La sève de la vie*, is an expression used somewhere by Madame de Staël.

a thorny world; the pain, the grief, the anguish, the terror, the despair; the aching adieu; the pang unutterable of parted affection; and rapture, truth, and tenderness trampled into an early grave: but still an Elysian grace lingers round the whole, and the blue sky of Italy bends over all!

In the delineation of that sentiment which forms the groundwork of the drama, nothing in fact can equal the power of the picture, but its inexpressible sweetness and its perfect grace: the passion which has taken possession of Juliet's whole soul, has the force, the rapidity, the resistless violence of the torrent: but she is herself as "moving delicate," as fair, as soft, as flexible as the willow that bends over it, whose light leaves tremble even with the motion of the current which hurries beneath them. But at the same time that the pervading sentiment is never lost sight of, and is one and the same throughout, the individual part of the character in all its variety is developed, and marked with the nicest discrimination. For instance,—the simplicity of Juliet is very

different from the simplicity of Miranda: her innocence is not the innocence of a desert island. The energy she displays does not once remind us of the moral grandeur of Isabel, or the intellectual power of Portia;—it is founded in the strength of passion, not in the strength of character:—it is accidental rather than inherent, rising with the tide of feeling or temper, and with it subsiding. Her romance is not the pastoral romance of Perdita, nor the fanciful romance of Viola; it is the romance of a tender heart and a poetical imagination. Her inexperience is not ignorance; she has heard that there is such a thing as falsehood, though she can scarcely conceive it. Her mother and her nurse have perhaps warned her against flattering vows and man's inconstancy; or she has even

> —— Turned the tale by Ariosto told,
> Of fair Olympia, loved and left, of old!

Hence that bashful doubt, dispelled almost as soon as felt—

Ah, gentle Romeo!
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.

That conscious shrinking from her own confession—

Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
What I have spoke!

The ingenuous simplicity of her avowal—

Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo—but else, not for the world!
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou may'st think my 'haviour light,
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those who have more cunning to be strange.

And the proud yet timid delicacy, with which she throws herself for forbearance and pardon, upon the tenderness of him she loves, even for the love she bears him—

Therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered,

In the alternative, which she afterwards places before her lover with such a charm-

ing mixture of conscious delicacy and girlish simplicity, there is that jealousy of female honour which precept and education have infused into her mind, without one real doubt of his truth, or the slightest hesitation in her self-abandonment: for she does not even wait to hear his asseverations;

> But if thou mean'st not well, I do beseech thee
> To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief.
>
> ROMEO.
>
> So thrive my soul ——
>
> JULIET.
>
> A thousand times, good night!

But all these flutterings between native impulses and maiden fears become gradually absorbed, swept away, lost, and swallowed up in the depth and enthusiasm of confiding love.

> My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep; the more I give to you
> The more I have—for both are *infinite!*

What a picture of the young heart, that sees no bound to its hopes, no end to its

affections! For "what was to hinder the thrilling tide of pleasure which had just gushed from her heart, from flowing on without stint or measure, but experience, which she was yet without? What was to abate the transport of the first sweet sense of pleasure which her heart had just tasted, but indifference, to which she was yet a stranger? What was there to check the ardour of hope, of faith, of constancy, just rising in her breast, but disappointment, which she had never yet felt?"[1]

Lord Byron's Haidée is a copy of Juliet in the Oriental costume, but the development is epic, not dramatic.[2]

[1] Characters of Shakspeare's Plays.

[2] I must allude, but with reluctance, to another character, which I have heard likened to Juliet, and often quoted as the heroine *par excellence* of amatory fiction—I mean the Julie of Rosseau's Nouvelle Héloïse; I protest against her altogether. As a creation of fancy the portrait is a compound of the most gross and glaring inconsistencies; as false and impossible to the reflecting and philosophical mind, as the fabled Syrens, Hamadryads and Centaurs to the eye of the anatomist. As a woman, Julie belongs neither to nature, nor to artificial society; and if the pages of melting and dazzling eloquence in which Rousseau has garnished out his idol did not blind and intoxicate us, as

I remember no dramatic character, conveying the same impression of singleness of purpose, and devotion of heart and soul, except the Thekla of Schiller's Wallenstein; she is the German Juliet; far unequal, indeed, but conceived, nevertheless, in a kindred spirit. I know not if critics have ever compared them, or whether Schiller is supposed to have had the English, or rather the Italian, Juliet in his fancy when he portrayed Thekla; but there are some striking points of coincidence, while the

the incense and the garlands did the votaries of Isis, we should be disgusted. Rousseau, having composed his Julie of the commonest clay of the earth, does not animate her with fire from heaven, but breathes his own spirit into her, and then calls the "impetticoated" paradox a *woman*. He makes her a peg on which to hang his own visions and sentiments—and what sentiments! but that I fear to soil my pages, I would pick out a few of them, and show the difference between this strange combination of youth and innocence, philosophy and pedantry, sophistical prudery, and detestable *grossièreté*, and our own Juliet. No! if we seek a French Juliet, we must go far—far back to the real Héloïse, to her eloquence, her sensibility, her fervour of passion, her devotedness of truth. She, at least, married the man she loved, and loved the man she married, and more than died for him; but enough of both.

national distinction in the character of the passion leaves to Thekla a strong cast of originality.[1] The *Princess* Thekla is, like Juliet, the heiress of rank and opulence; her first introduction to us, in her full dress and diamonds, does not impair the impression of her softness and simplicity. We do not think of them, nor do we sympathise with the complaint of her lover,

> The dazzle of the jewels which played round you
> Hid the beloved from me.

We almost feel the reply of Thekla before she utters it,

> Then you saw me
> Not with your heart, but with your eyes!

The timidity of Thekla in her first scene, her trembling silence in the commence-

[1] B. Constant describes her beautifully—"Sa voix si douce au travers le bruit des armes, sa forme délicate au milieu de ces hommes tous couverts de fer, la pureté de son âme opposée à leurs calculs avides, son calme céleste qui contraste avec leurs agitations, remplissent le spectateur d'une émotion constante et mélancolique, telle que ne la fait ressentir nulle tragédie ordinaire."

ment, and the few words she addresses to her mother, remind us of the unobtrusive simplicity of Juliet's first appearance; but the impression is different; the one is the shrinking violet, the other the unexpanded rose-bud. Thekla and Max Piccolomini are, like Romeo and Juliet, divided by the hatred of their fathers. The death of Max, and the resolute despair of Thekla, are also points of resemblance; and Thekla's complete devotion, her frank yet dignified abandonment of all disguise, and her apology for her own unreserve, are quite in Juliet's style,

> I ought to be less open, ought to hide
> My heart more from thee—so decorum dictates:
> But where in this place wouldst thou seek for truth,
> If in my mouth thou didst not find it?

The same confidence, innocence, and fervour of affection, distinguish both heroines; but the love of Juliet is more vehement, the love of Thekla is more calm, and reposes more on itself; the love of Juliet gives us the idea of infinitude, and

that of Thekla of eternity: the love of Juliet flows on with an increasing tide, like the river pouring to the ocean; and the love of Thekla stands unalterable, and enduring as the rock. In the heart of Thekla love shelters as in a home; but in the heart of Juliet he reigns a crowned king,—" he rides on its pants triumphant!" As women, they would divide the loves and suffrages of mankind, but not as dramatic characters: the moment we come to look nearer, we acknowledge that it is indeed "rashness and ignorance to compare Schiller with Shakspeare."[1] Thekla is a fine conception in the German spirit, but Juliet is a lovely and palpable creation. The colouring in which Schiller has arrayed his Thekla is pale, sombre, vague, compared with the strong individual marking, the rich glow of life and reality, which distinguish Juliet. One contrast in particular has always struck me; the two beautiful speeches in the first interview between Max

[1] Coleridge—preface to Wallenstein.

and Thekla, that in which she describes her father's astrological chamber, and that in which he replies with reflections on the influence of the stars, are said to "form in themselves a fine poem." They do so; but never would Shakspeare have placed such extraneous description and reflection in the mouths of *his* lovers. Romeo and Juliet speak of themselves only; they see only themselves in the universe, all things else are as an idle matter. Not a word they utter, though every word is poetry—not a sentiment or description, though dressed in the most luxuriant imagery, but has a direct relation to themselves, or to the situation in which they are placed, and the feelings that engross them: and besides, it may be remarked of Thekla, and generally of all tragedy heroines in love, that, however beautifully and distinctly characterised, we see the passion only under one or two aspects at most, or in conflict with some one circumstance or contending duty or feeling. In Juliet alone we find it exhibited under every variety of aspect, and every

gradation of feeling it could possibly assume in a delicate female heart: as we see the rose, when passed through the colours of the prism, catch and reflect every tint of the divided ray, and still it is the same sweet rose.

I have already remarked the quiet manner in which Juliet steals upon us in her first scene, as the serene, graceful girl, her feelings as yet unawakened, and her energies all unknown to herself, and unsuspected by others. Her silence and her filial deference are charming.

> I'll look to like, if looking liking move;
> But no more deep will I endart mine eye,
> Than your consent shall give it strength to fly.

Much in the same unconscious way we are impressed with an idea of her excelling loveliness:

> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!

and which could make the dark vault of death "a feasting presence full of light." Without any elaborate description, we be-

hold Juliet, as she is reflected in the heart of her lover, like a single bright star mirrored in the bosom of a deep, transparent well. The rapture with which he dwells on the "white wonder of her hand;" on her lips,

> That even in pure and vestal modesty
> Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin.

And then her eyes, "two of the fairest stars in all the heavens!" In his exclamation in the sepulchre,

> Ah, dear Juliet, why art thou yet so fair!

there is life and death, beauty and horror, rapture and anguish combined. The Friar's description of her approach,

> O, so light a step
> Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint!

and then her father's similitude,

> Death lies on her, like an untimely frost
> Upon the sweetest flower of all the field;—

all these mingle into a beautiful picture of

youthful, airy, delicate grace, feminine sweetness and patrician elegance.

And our impression of Juliet's loveliness and sensibility is enhanced, when we find it overcoming in the bosom of Romeo a previous love for another. His visionary passion for the cold, inaccessible Rosaline forms but the prologue, the threshold, to the true—the real sentiment which succeeds to it. This incident, which is found in the original story, has been retained by Shakspeare with equal feeling and judgment; and far from being a fault in taste and sentiment, far from prejudicing us against Romeo, by casting on him, at the outset of the piece, the stigma of inconstancy, it becomes, if properly considered, a beauty in the drama, and adds a fresh stroke of truth to the portrait of the lover. Why, after all, should we be offended at what does not offend Juliet herself? for in the original story we find that her attention is first attracted towards Romeo, by seeing him "fancy sick and pale of cheer," for love of a cold beauty. We must remember that in those times every young cavalier of any

distinction devoted himself, at his first entrance into the world, to the service of some fair lady, who was selected to be his fancy's queen; and the more rigorous the beauty, and the more hopeless the love, the more honourable the slavery. To go about "metamorphosed by a mistress," as Speed humourously expresses it,[1]—to maintain her supremacy in charms at the sword's point; to sigh; to walk with folded arms; to be negligent and melancholy, and to show a careless desolation, was the fashion of the day. The Surreys, the Sydneys, the Bayards, the Herberts of the time—all those who were the mirrors "in which the noble youth did dress themselves," were of this fantastic school of gallantry—the last remains of the age of chivalry; and it was especially prevalent in Italy. Shakspeare has ridiculed it in many places with exquisite humour; but he wished to show us that it has its serious as well as its comic aspect. Romeo, then, is introduced to us with perfect truth of costume, as the thrall of a dreaming, fanciful

[1] In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

passion for the scornful Rosaline, who had forsworn to love; and on her charms and coldness, and on the power of love generally, he descants to his companions in pretty phrases, quite in the style and taste of the day.[1]

Why, then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O any thing, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!

Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;
Being purg'd, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
Being vexed, a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears.

[1] There is an allusion to this court language of love in "All's Well that Ends Well," where Helena says,

There shall your master have a thousand loves—
A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign;
A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear,
His humble ambition, proud humility,
His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,
His faith, his sweet disaster, with a world
Of pretty fond adoptious Christendoms
That blinking Cupid gossips.—ACT I. SCENE 1.

The courtly poets of Elizabeth's time, who copied the Italian sonnetteers of the sixteenth century, are full of these quaint conceits.

But when once he has beheld Juliet, and quaffed intoxicating draughts of hope and love from her soft glance, how all these airy fancies fade before the soul-absorbing reality! The lambent fire that played round his heart, burns to that heart's very core. We no longer find him adorning his lamentations in picked phrases, or making a confidant of his gay companions: he is no longer "for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in;" but all is concentrated, earnest, rapturous, in the feeling and the expression. Compare, for instance, the sparkling antithetical passages just quoted, with one or two of his passionate speeches to or of Juliet:

> Heaven is here,
> Where Juliet lives! &c.

> Ah Juliet! if the measure of thy joy
> Be heap'd like mine, and that thy skill be more
> To blazon it, then sweeten with thy breath
> This neighbour air, and let rich music's tongue
> Unfold the imagin'd happiness, that both
> Receive in either by this dear encounter.

Come what sorrow may,
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
That one short minute gives me in her sight.

How different! and how finely the distinction is drawn! His first passion is indulged as a waking dream, a reverie of the fancy; it is depressing, indolent, fantastic; his second elevates him to the third heaven, or hurries him to despair. It rushes to its object through all impediments, defies all dangers, and seeks at last a triumphant grave, in the arms of her he so loved. Thus Romeo's previous attachment to Rosaline is so contrived as to exhibit to us another variety in that passion which is the subject of the poem, by showing us the distinction between the fancied and the real sentiment. It adds a deeper effect to the beauty of Juliet; it interests us in the commencement for the tender and romantic Romeo; and gives an individual reality to his character, by stamping him like an historical, as well as a dramatic portrait, with the very spirit of the age in which he lived.[1]

[1] Since this was written, I have met with some remarks of a similar tendency in that most interesting book, "The Life of Lord E. Fitzgerald."

It may be remarked of Juliet as of Portia, that we not only trace the component qualities in each as they expand before us in the course of the action, but we seem to have known them previously, and mingle a consciousness of their past, with the interest of their present and their future. Thus, in the dialogue between Juliet and her parents, and in the scenes with the Nurse, we seem to have before us the whole of her previous education and habits: we see her on the one hand kept in severe subjection by her austere parents; and on the other, fondled and spoiled by a foolish old nurse—a situation perfectly accordant with the manners of the time. Then Lady Capulet comes sweeping by with her train of velvet, her black hood, her fan, and her rosary—the very *beau-idéal* of a proud Italian matron of the fifteenth century, whose offer to poison Romeo in revenge for the death of Tybalt, stamps her with one very characteristic trait of the age and country. Yet she loves her daughter; and there is a touch of remorseful tenderness in her lamentation over her, which adds to our

impression of the timid softness of Juliet, and the harsh subjection in which she has been kept:—

> But one, poor one!—one poor and loving child,
> But one thing to rejoice and solace in,
> And cruel death hath catched it from my sight!

Capulet, as the jovial, testy old man, the self-willed, violent, tyrannical father, — to whom his daughter is but a property, the appanage of his house, and the object of his pride,—is equal as a portrait: but both must yield to the Nurse, who is drawn with the most wonderful power and discrimination. In the prosaic homeliness of the outline, and the magical illusion of the colouring, she reminds us of some of the marvellous Dutch paintings, from which, with all their coarseness, we start back as from a reality. Her low humour, her shallow garrulity, mixed with the dotage and petulance of age—her subserviency, her secrecy, and her total want of elevated principle, or even common honesty,—are brought before us like a living and palpable truth.

Among these harsh and inferior spirits is Juliet placed; her haughty parents, and her plebeian nurse, not only throw into beautiful relief her own native softness and elegance, but are at once the cause and the excuse of her subsequent conduct. She trembles before her stern mother and her violent father; but, like a petted child, alternately cajoles and commands her nurse. It is her old foster-mother who is the confidante of her love. It is the woman who cherished her infancy, who aids and abets her in her clandestine marriage. Do we not perceive how immediately our impression of Juliet's character would have been lowered, if Shakspeare had placed her in connexion with any commonplace dramatic waiting-woman?—even with Portia's adroit Nerissa, or Desdemona's Emilia? By giving her the Nurse for her confidante, the sweetness and dignity of Juliet's character are preserved inviolate to the fancy, even in the midst of all the romance and wilfulness of passion.

The natural result of these extremes of subjection and independence, is exhibited in

the character of Juliet, as it gradually opens upon us. We behold it in the mixture of self-will and timidity, of strength and weakness, of confidence and reserve, which are developed as the action of the play proceeds. We see it in the fond eagerness of the indulged girl, for whose impatience the "nimblest of the lightning-winged loves" had been too slow a messenger; in her petulance with her nurse; in those bursts of vehement feeling, which prepare us for the climax of passion at the catastrophe; in her invectives against Romeo, when she hears of the death of Tybalt; in her indignation when the Nurse echoes those reproaches, and the rising of her temper against unwonted contradiction:

NURSE.

Shame come to Romeo!

JULIET.

Blister'd be thy tongue,
For such a wish! he was not born to shame.

Then comes that revulsion of strong feeling, that burst of magnificent exultation in the virtue and honour of her lover:

Upon *his* brow Shame is asham'd to sit,
For 'tis a throne where Honour may be crown'd
Sole monarch of the universal earth!

And this, by one of those quick transitions of feeling which belong to the character, is immediately succeeded by a gush of tenderness and self-reproach—

Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
When I, thy three hours' wife, have mangled it?

With the same admirable truth of nature, Juliet is represented as at first bewildered by the fearful destiny that closes round her; reverse is new and terrible to one nursed in the lap of luxury, and whose energies are yet untried.

Alack, alack, that heaven should practise stratagems
Upon so soft a subject as myself!

While a stay remains to her amid the evils that encompass her, she clings to it. She appeals to her father—to her mother—

Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak one word!

* * * * * *

> Ah, sweet my mother, cast me not away!
> Delay this marriage for a month,—a week!

And, rejected by both, she throws herself upon her nurse in all the helplessness of anguish, of confiding affection, of habitual dependence—

> O God! O nurse! how shall this be prevented?
> Some comfort, nurse!

The old woman, true to her vocation, and fearful lest her share in these events should be discovered, counsels her to forget Romeo and marry Paris; and the moment which unveils to Juliet the weakness and the baseness of her confidante, is the moment which reveals her to herself. She does not break into upbraidings; it is no moment for anger; it is incredulous amazement, succeeded by the extremity of scorn and abhorrence, which take possession of her mind. She assumes at once and asserts all her own superiority, and rises to majesty in the strength of her despair.

JULIET.

Speakest thou from thy heart?

NURSE.

Aye, and from my soul too;—or else
Beshrew them both!

JULIET.

AMEN!

This final severing of all the old familiar ties of her childhood—

Go, counsellor!
Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain!

and the calm, concentrated force of her resolve,

If all else fail,—myself have power to die;

have a sublime pathos. It appears to me also an admirable touch of nature, considering the master passion which, at this moment, rules in Juliet's soul, that she is as much shocked by the Nurse's dispraise of her lover, as by her wicked, time-serving advice.

This scene is the crisis in the character;

and henceforth we see Juliet assume a new aspect. The fond, impatient, timid girl, puts on the wife and the woman: she has learned heroism from suffering, and subtlety from oppression. It is idle to criticise her dissembling submission to her father and mother; a higher duty has taken place of that which she owed to them; a more sacred tie has severed all others. Her parents are pictured as they are, that no feeling for them may interfere in the slightest degree with our sympathy for the lovers. In the mind of Juliet there is no struggle between her filial and her conjugal duties, and there ought to be none. The Friar, her spiritual director, dismisses her with these instructions:—

> Go home,—be merry,—give consent
> To marry Paris;

and she obeys him. Death and suffering in every horrid form she is ready to brave, without fear or doubt, "to live an unstained wife:" and the artifice to which she has recourse, which she is even instructed to

use, in no respect impairs the beauty of the character; we regard it with pain and pity, but excuse it, as the natural and inevitable consequence of the situation in which she is placed. Nor should we forget, that the dissimulation, as well as the courage of Juliet, though they spring from passion, are justified by principle:—

> My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven:
> How shall my faith return again to earth,
> Unless that husband send it me from heaven?

In her successive appeals to her father, her mother, her nurse, and the Friar, she seeks those remedies which would first suggest themselves to a gentle and virtuous nature, and grasps her dagger only as the last resource against dishonour and violated faith;

> God join'd my heart with Romeo's—thou our hands.
> And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal'd,
> Shall be the label to another deed,
> Or my true heart, with treacherous revolt
> Turn to another,—*this* shall slay them both!

Thus, in the very tempest and whirlwind

of passion and terror, preserving, to a certain degree, that moral and feminine dignity which harmonizes with our best feelings, and commands our unreproved sympathy.

I reserve my remarks on the catastrophe, which demands separate consideration; and return to trace from the opening, another and distinguishing trait in Juliet's character.

In the extreme vivacity of her imagination, and its influence upon the action, the language, the sentiments of the drama, Juliet resembles Portia; but with this striking difference. In Portia, the imaginative power, though developed in a high degree, is so equally blended with the other intellectual and moral faculties, that it does not give us the idea of excess. It is subject to her nobler reason; it adorns and heightens all her feelings; it does not overwhelm or mislead them. In Juliet, it is rather a part of her southern temperament, controlling and modifying the rest of her character; springing from her sensibility, hurried along by her passions, animating her joys, darkening her sorrows, exaggerating her terrors, and,

in the end, overpowering her reason. With Juliet, imagination is, in the first instance, if not the source, the medium of passion; and passion again kindles her imagination. It is through the power of imagination that the eloquence of Juliet is so vividly poetical: that every feeling, every sentiment comes to her, clothed in the richest imagery, and is thus reflected from her mind to ours. The poetry is not here the mere adornment, the outward garnishing of the character; but its result, or rather blended with its essence. It is indivisible from it, and interfused through it like moonlight through the summer air. To particularize is almost impossible, since the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Juliet is one rich stream of imagery; she speaks in pictures; and sometimes they are crowded one upon another;—thus in the balcony scene—

> I have no joy of this contráct to-night:
> It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
> Too like the lightning which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say it lightens.

This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.

Again,

O for a falconer's voice
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetition of my Romeo's name.

Here there are three images in the course of six lines. In the same scene, the speech of twenty-two lines, beginning,

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,

contains but one figurative expression, *the mask of night;* and every one reading this speech with the context, must have felt the peculiar propriety of its simplicity, though perhaps without examining the cause of an omission which certainly is not fortuitous. The reason lies in the situation and in the feeling of the moment; where confusion, and anxiety, and earnest self-defence predominate, the excitability and

play of the imagination would be checked and subdued for the time.

In the soliloquy of the second act, where she is chiding at the nurse's delay:—

> O she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts,
> That ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,
> Driving back shadows over low'ring hills:
> Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw Love,
> And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings!

How beautiful! how the lines mount and float responsive to the sense! She goes on—

> Had she affections, and warm youthful blood,
> She'd be as swift in motion as a ball;
> My words should bandy her to my sweet love,
> And his to me!

The famous soliloquy, "Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds," teems with luxuriant imagery. The fond adjuration, "Come night! come Romeo! *come thou day in night!*" expresses that fulness of enthusiastic admiration for her lover, which possesses her whole soul; but expresses it as only Juliet could or would have expressed it,—in a

bold and beautiful metaphor. Let it be remembered, that, in this speech, Juliet is not supposed to be addressing an audience, nor even a confidante; and I confess I have been shocked at the utter want of taste and refinement in those who, with coarse derision, or in a spirit of prudery, yet more gross and perverse, have dared to comment on this beautiful "Hymn to the Night," breathed out by Juliet in the silence and solitude of her chamber. She is thinking aloud; it is the young heart "triumphing to itself in words." In the midst of all the vehemence with which she calls upon the night to bring Romeo to her arms, there is something so almost infantine in her perfect simplicity, so playful and fantastic in the imagery and language, that the charm of sentiment and innocence is thrown over the whole; and her impatience, to use her own expression, is truly that of "a child before a festival, that hath new robes and may not wear them." It is at the very moment too that her whole heart and fancy are abandoned to blissful anticipation, that the nurse enters

with the news of Romeo's banishment; and the immediate transition from rapture to despair has a most powerful effect.

It is the same shaping spirit of imagination which, in the scene with the Friar, heaps together all images of horror that ever hung upon a troubled dream.

> O bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,
> From off the battlements of yonder tower,
> Or walk in thievish ways; or bid me lurk
> Where serpents are—chain me with roaring bears,
> Or shut me nightly in a charnel-house
> O'ercover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones:
> Or bid me go into a new-made grave;
> Or hide me with a dead man in his shroud;—
> Things that to hear them told have made me tremble!

But she immediately adds,

> And I will do it without fear or doubt,
> To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love!

In the scene where she drinks the sleeping potion, although her spirit does not quail, nor her determination falter for an instant, her vivid fancy conjures up one terrible apprehension after another, till gradually,

and most naturally, in such a mind once thrown off its poise, the horror rises to frenzy—her imagination realizes its own hideous creations, and she sees her cousin Tybalt's ghost.[1]

In particular passages this luxuriance of fancy may seem to wander into excess. For instance,

> O serpent heart, hid with a flowery face!
> Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
> Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
> Dove-feather'd raven! wolfish ravening lamb, &c.

Yet this highly figurative and antithetical exuberance of language is defended by Schlegel on strong and just grounds; and to me also it appears natural, however critics may argue against its taste or propriety.[2]

[1] Juliet, courageously drinking off the potion, after she has placed before herself in the most fearful colours all its possible consequences, is compared by Schlegel to the famous story of Alexander and his physician.

[2] Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
Thoughts so all unlike each other;
To mutter and mock a broken charm,
To dally with wrong that does no harm!

The warmth and vivacity of Juliet's fancy, which plays like a light over every part of her character—which animates every line she utters—which kindles every thought into a picture, and clothes her emotions in visible images, would naturally, under strong and unusual excitement, and in the conflict of opposing sentiments, run into some extravagance of diction.[1]

> Perhaps 'tis tender, too, and pretty,
> At each wild word to feel within
> A sweet recoil of love and pity.
> And what if in a world of sin
> (O sorrow and shame should this be true!)
> Such giddiness of heart and brain
> Comes seldom save from rage and pain,
> So talks as it's most used to do? COLERIDGE.

These lines seem to me to form the truest comment on Juliet's wild exclamations against Romeo.

[1] "The censure," observes Schlegel, "originates in a fanciless way of thinking, to which every thing appears unnatural that does not suit its tame insipidity. Hence an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery, and nowise elevated above every-day life; but energetic passions electrify the whole mental powers, and will, consequently, in highly-favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner."

With regard to the termination of the play, which has been a subject of much critical argument, it is well known that Shakspeare, following the old English versions, has departed from the original story of Da Porta;[1] and I am inclined to believe that

[1] The "Giulietta" of Luigi da Porta was written about 1520. In a popular little book published in 1565, thirty years before Shakspeare wrote his tragedy, the name of Juliet occurs as an example of faithful love, and is thus explained by a note in the margin. "Juliet, a noble maiden of the citie of Verona, which loved Romeo, eldest son of the Lord Monteschi; and being privily married together, he at last poisoned himself for love of her: she, for sorrow of his death, slew herself with his dagger." This note, which furnishes, in brief, the whole argument of Shakspeare's play, might possibly have made the first impression on his fancy. In the novel of Da Porta the catastrophe is altogether different. After the death of Romeo, the Friar Lorenzo endeavours to persuade Juliet to leave the fatal monument. She refuses; and throwing herself back on the dead body of her husband, she resolutely holds her breath and dies.—"E voltatasi al giacente corpo di Romeo, il cui capo sopra un origliere, che con lei nell' arca era stato lasciato, posto aveva; gli occhi meglio rinchiusi avendogli, e di lagrime il freddo volto bagnandogli, disse;" Che debbo senza di te in vita più fare, signor mio? e che altro mi resta verso te se non colla mia morte seguirti? "E detto questo, la sua gran sciagura nell' animo recatasi, e la perdita del caro amante ricordandosi, deliberando di più non vivere, raccolto

Da Porta, in making Juliet waken from her trance while Romeo yet lives, and in his terrible final scene between the lovers, has himself departed from the old tradition, and, as a romance, has certainly improved it; but that which is effective in a narrative, is not always calculated for the drama; and I cannot but agree with Schlegel, that Shakspeare has done well and wisely in adhering

a se il fiato, e per buono spazio tenutolo, e poscia con un gran grido fuori mandandolo, sopra il morto corpo, morta ricadde."

There is nothing so improbable in the story of Romeo and Juliet as to make us doubt the tradition that it is a real fact. "The Veronese," says Lord Byron, in one of his letters from Verona, "are tenacious to a degree of the truth of Juliet's story,oinsisting on the fact, giving the date 1303, and showing a tomb. It is a plain, open, and partly decayed sarcophagus, with withered leaves in it, in a wild and desolate conventual garden—once a cemetery, now ruined, to the very graves! The situation struck me as very appropriate to the legend, being blighted as their love." He might have added, that when Verona itself with its amphitheatre and ita Palladian structures, lies level with the earth, the very spot on which it stood will still be consecrated by the memory of Juliet.

When in Italy, I met a gentleman, who being then "*dans le genre romantique*," wore a fragment of Juliet's tomb set in a ring.

to the old story. Can we doubt for a moment that he who has given us the catastrophe of Othello, and the tempest scene in Lear, might also have adopted these additional circumstances of horror in the fate of the lovers, and have so treated them as to harrow up our very soul—had it been his object to do so ? But apparently it was *not*. The tale is one,

> Such as, once heard, in gentle heart destroys
> All pain but pity.

It is in truth a tale of love and sorrow, not of anguish and terror. We behold the catastrophe afar off with scarcely a wish to avert it. Romeo and Juliet *must* die: their destiny is fulfilled: they have quaffed off the cup of life, with all its infinite of joys and agonies, in one intoxicating draught. What have they to do more upon this earth ? Young, innocent, loving and beloved, they descend together into the tomb: but Shakspeare has made that tomb a shrine of martyred and sainted affection consecrated for the worship of all hearts,—not a dark char-

nel vault, haunted by spectres of pain, rage, and desperation. Romeo and Juliet are pictured lovely in death as in life; the sympathy they inspire does not oppress us with that suffocating sense of horror which in the altered tragedy makes the fall of the curtain a relief; but all pain is lost in the tenderness and poetic beauty of the picture. Romeo's last speech over his bride is not like the raving of a disappointed boy: in its deep pathos, its rapturous despair, its glowing imagery, there is the very luxury of life and love. Juliet, who had drunk off the sleeping potion in a fit of frenzy, wakes calm and collected—

> I do remember well where I should be,
> And there I am—Where is my Romeo?

The profound slumber in which her senses have been steeped for so many hours has tranquillized her nerves, and stilled the fever in her blood; she wakes "like a sweet child who has been dreaming of something promised to it by its mother," and opens her eyes to ask for it—

. . . . Where is my Romeo?

she is answered at once,

Thy husband in thy bosom here lies dead.

This is enough: she sees at once the whole horror of her situation—she sees it with a quiet and resolved despair—she utters no reproach against the Friar—makes no inquiries, no complaints, except that affecting remonstrance—

O churl—drink all, and leave no friendly drop
To help me after!

All that is left her is to die, and she dies. The poem, which opened with the enmity of the two families, closes with their reconciliation over the breathless remains of their children; and no violent, frightful, or discordant feeling is suffered to mingle with that soft impression of melancholy left within the heart, and which Schlegel compares to one long, endless sigh.

"A youthful passion," says Goëthe (alluding to one of his own early attachments), "which is conceived and cherished without

any certain object, may be compared to a shell thrown from a mortar by night: it rises calmly in a brilliant track, and seems to mix and even to dwell for a moment, with the stars of heaven; but at length it falls—it bursts, consuming and destroying all around, even as itself expires."

* * * * *

To conclude : love, considered under its poetical aspect, is the union of passion and imagination; and accordingly, to one of these, or to both all the qualities of Juliet's mind and heart (unfolding and varying as the action of the drama proceeds), may be finally traced; the former concentrating all those natural impulses, fervent affections and high energies, which lend the character its internal charm, its moral power and individual interest; the latter diverging from all those splendid and luxuriant accompaniments which invest it with its external glow, its beauty, its vigour, its freshness, and its truth.

With all this immense capacity of affection and imagination, there is a deficiency

of reflection and of moral energy arising from previous habit and education; and the action of the drama, while it serves to develope the character, appears but its natural and necessary result. "Le mystère de l'existence," said Madame de Staël to her daughter, "c'est le rapport de nos erreurs avec nos peines."

HELENA.

In the character of Juliet we have seen the passionate and the imaginative blended in an equal degree, and in the highest conceivable degree as combined with delicate female nature. In Helena we have a modification of character altogether distinct; allied, indeed, to Juliet as a picture of fervent, enthusiastic, self-forgetting love, but differing wholly from her in other respects; for Helen is the union of strength of passion with strength of character.

"To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immoveable heart amidst even the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it is the utmost and rarest endowment of humanity.[1] Such a character, al-

[1] Foster's Essays.

most as difficult to delineate in fiction as to find in real life, has Shakspeare given us in Helena; touched with the most soul-subduing pathos, and developed with the most consummate skill.

Helena, as a woman, is more passionate than imaginative; and, as a character, she bears the same relation to Juliet that Isabel bears to Portia. There is equal unity of purpose and effect, with much less of the glow of imagery and the external colouring of poetry in the sentiments, language and details. It is passion developed under its most profound and serious aspect; as in Isabella, we have the serious and the thoughtful, not the brilliant side of intellect. Both Helena and Isabel are distinguished by high mental powers, tinged with a melancholy sweetness; but in Isabella the serious and energetic part of the character is founded in religious principle; in Helena it is founded in deep passion.

There never was, perhaps, a more beautiful picture of a woman's love, cherished in secret, not self-consuming in silent languish-

ment—not pining in thought—not passive and "desponding over its idol"—but patient and hopeful, strong in its own intensity, and sustained by its own fond faith. The passion here reposes upon itself for all its interest; it derives nothing from art or ornament or circumstance; it has nothing of the picturesque charm or glowing romance of Juliet; nothing of the poetical splendour of Portia, or the vestal grandeur of Isabel. The situation of Helena is the most painful and degrading in which a woman can be placed. She is poor and lowly: she loves a man who is far her superior in rank, who repays her love with indifference, and rejects her hand with scorn. She marries him against his will; he leaves her with contumely on the day of their marriage, and makes his return to her arms depend on conditions apparently impossible.[1] All the circumstances and details with which Helena is surrounded, are

[1] I have read somewhere that the play of which Helena is the heroine (All's Well that Ends Well), was at first entitled by Shakspeare "Love's Labour Won." Why the title was altered, or by whom, I cannot discover.

shocking to our feelings and wounding to our delicacy; and yet the beauty of the character is made to triumph over all; and Shakspeare, resting for all his effect on its internal resources and its genuine truth and sweetness, has not even availed himself of some extraneous advantages with which Helen is represented in the original story. She is the Giletta di Narbonna of Boccaccio. In the Italian tale, Giletta is the daughter of a celebrated physician attached to the court of Roussillon; she is represented as a rich heiress, who rejects many suitors of worth and rank, in consequence of her secret attachment to the young Bertram de Roussillon. She cures the King of France of a grievous distemper, by one of her father's prescriptions; and she asks and receives as her reward the young Count of Roussillon as her wedded husband. He forsakes her on their wedding day, and she retires, by his order, to his territory of Roussillon. There she is received with honour, takes state upon her in her husband's absence as the "lady of the land," administers justice, and rules

her lord's dominions so wisely and so well, that she is universally loved and reverenced by his subjects. In the meantime, the Count, instead of rejoining her, flies to Tuscany, and the rest of the story is closely followed in the drama. The beauty, wisdom, and royal demeanour of Giletta are charmingly described, as well as her fervent love for Bertram. But Helena, in the play, derives no dignity or interest from place or circumstance, and rests for all our sympathy and respect solely upon the truth and intensity of her affections.

She is indeed represented to us as one

> Whose beauty did astonish the survey
> Of richest eyes: whose words all ears took captive;
> Whose dear perfection, hearts that scorn'd to serve,
> Humbly called mistress.

As her dignity is derived from mental power, without any alloy of pride, so her humility has a peculiar grace. If she feels and repines over her lowly birth, it is merely as an obstacle which separates her from the man she loves. She is more sensible to his

greatness than her own littleness: she is continually looking from herself up to him, not from him down to herself. She has been bred up under the same roof with him; she has adored him from infancy. Her love is not " th' infection taken in at the eyes," nor kindled by youthful romance: it appears to have taken root in her being; to have grown with her years; and to have gradually absorbed all her thoughts and faculties, until her fancy " carries no favour in it but Bertram's," and " there is no living, none, if Bertram be away."

It may be said that Bertram, arrogant, wayward, and heartless, does not justify this ardent and deep devotion. But Helena does not behold him with our eyes; but as he is " sanctified in her idolatrous fancy." Dr. Johnson says he cannot reconcile himself to a man who marries Helena like a coward, and leaves her like a profligate. This is much too severe; in the first place there is no necessity that we *should* reconcile ourselves to him. In this consists a part of the wonderful beauty of the character of He-

lena—a part of its womanly truth, which Johnson, who accuses Bertram, and those who so plausibly defend him, did not understand. If it never happened in real life, that a woman, richly endued with heaven's best gifts, loved with all her heart, and soul, and strength, a man unequal to or unworthy of her, and to whose faults herself alone was blind—I would give up the point: but if it be in nature, why should it not be in Shakspeare? We are not to look into Bertram's character for the spring and source of Helena's love for him, but into her own. She loves Bertram,—because she loves him!—a woman's reason,—but here, and sometimes elsewhere, all-sufficient.

And although Helena tells herself that she loves in vain, a conviction stronger than reason tells her that she does not: her love is like a religion, pure, holy and deep: the blessedness to which she has lifted her thoughts is for ever before her; to despair would be a crime,—it would be to cast herself away and die. The faith of her affection, combining with the natural energy of her

character, believing all things possible makes them so. It could say to the mountain of pride which stands between her and her hopes, "Be thou removed!" and it is removed. This is the solution of her behaviour in the marriage scene, where Bertram, with obvious reluctance and disdain, accepts her hand, which the King, his feudal lord and guardian, forces on him. Her maidenly feeling is at first shocked, and she shrinks back—

> That you are well restor'd, my lord, I am glad:
> Let the rest go.

But shall she weakly relinquish the golden opportunity, and dash the cup from her lips at the moment it is presented? Shall she cast away the treasure for which she has ventured both life and honour, when it is just within her grasp? Shall she, after compromising her feminine delicacy by the public disclosure of her preference, be thrust back into shame, "to blush out the remainder of her life," and die a poor, lost, scorned thing? This would be very pretty and

interesting and characteristic in Viola or Ophelia, but not at all consistent with that high, determined spirit, that moral energy, with which Helena is portrayed. Pride is the only obstacle opposed to her. She is not despised and rejected as a woman, but as a poor physician's daughter; and this, to an understanding so clear, so strong, so just as Helena's, is not felt as an unpardonable insult. The mere pride of rank and birth is a prejudice of which she cannot comprehend the force, because her mind towers so immeasurably above it; and, compared to the infinite love which swells within her own bosom, it sinks into nothing. She cannot conceive that he to whom she has devoted her heart and truth, her soul, her life, her service, must not one day love her in return; and once her own beyond the reach of fate, that her cares, her caresses, her unwearied patient tenderness, will not at last "win her lord to look upon her"—

> . . . For time will bring on summer,
> When briers shall have leaves as well as thorns,
> And be as sweet as sharp!

It is this fond faith which, hoping all things, enables her to endure all things; which hallows and dignifies the surrender of her woman's pride, making it a sacrifice on which virtue and love throw a mingled incense.

The scene in which the Countess extorts from Helen the confession of her love, must, as an illustration, be given here. It is, perhaps, the finest in the whole play, and brings out all the striking points of Helen's character, to which I have already alluded. We must not fail to remark, that though the acknowledgment is wrung from her with an agony which seems to convulse her whole being, yet when once she has given it solemn utterance, she recovers her presence of mind, and asserts her native dignity. In her justification of her feelings and her conduct, there is neither sophistry, nor self-deception, nor presumption, but a noble simplicity, combined with the most impassioned earnestness; while the language naturally rises in its eloquent beauty, as the tide of feeling, now first let loose from the bursting

heart, comes pouring forth in words. The whole scene is wonderfully beautiful.

HELENA.

What is your pleasure, madam?

COUNTESS.

You know, Helen, I am a mother to you.

HELENA.

Mine honourable mistress.

COUNTESS.

Nay, a mother;
Why not a mother? When I said a mother,
Methought you saw a serpent: what's in mother,
That you start at it? I say, I am your mother;
And put you in the catalogue of those
That were enwombed mine: 'tis often seen,
Adoption strives with nature; and choice breeds
A native slip to us from foreign seeds.
You ne'er oppress'd me with a mother's groan,
Yet I express to you a mother's care;
God's mercy, maiden! does it curd thy blood
To say I am thy mother? What's the matter,
That this distempered messenger of wet,
The many-colour'd Iris, rounds thine eye?
Why?—that you are my daughter?

HELENA.

That I am not.

COUNTESS.

I say, I am your mother.

HELENA.

Pardon, madam:
The Count Roussillon cannot be my brother,
I am from humble, he from honour'd name;
No note upon my parents, his all noble:
My master, my dear lord he is: and I
His servant live, and will his vassal die:
He must not be my brother.

COUNTESS.

Nor I your mother?

HELENA.

You are my mother, madam; would you were
(So that my lord, your son, were not my brother)
Indeed my mother, or, were you both our mothers,
I care no more for, than I do for Heaven,[1]
So I were not his sister; can't no other,
But I, your daughter, he must be my brother?

COUNTESS.

Yes, Helen, you might be my daughter-in-law;
God shield, you mean it not! daughter and mother
So strive upon your pulse: what, pale again?
My fear hath catch'd your fondness: now I see
The mystery of your loneliness, and find

[1] i. e., I care as much for as I do for heaven.

Your salt tears' head. Now to all sense 'tis gross
You love my son; invention is asham'd,
Against the proclamation of thy passion,
To say, thou dost not: therefore tell me true;
But tell me, then, 'tis so :—for, look, thy cheeks
Confess it, one to the other.
Speak, is't so?
If it be so, you have wound a goodly clue!
If it be not, forswear 't; howe'er, I charge thee,
As heaven shall work in me for thy avail,
To tell me truly.

HELENA.

Good madam, pardon me!

COUNTESS.

Do you love my son?

HELENA.

Your pardon, noble mistress!

COUNTESS.

Love you my son?

HELENA.

Do not you love him, madam?

COUNTESS.

Go not about; my love hath in 't a bond,
Whereof the world takes note: come, come, disclose
The state of your affection; for your passions
Have to the full appeach'd.

HELENA.

Then I confess
Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son:—
My friends were poor, but honest; so 's my love.
Be not offended; for it hurts not him,
That he is loved of me; I follow him not
By any token of presumptuous suit;
Nor would I have him till I do deserve him:
Yet never know how that desert should be.
I know I love in vain; strive against hope;
Yet, in this captious and intenible sieve,
I still pour in the waters of my love,
And lack not to love still: thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun that looks upon his worshipper,
But knows of him no more. My dearest madam,
Let not your hate encounter with my love,
For loving where you do: but, if yourself,
Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,
Did ever in so true a flame of liking,
Wish chastely, and love dearly, that your Dian
Was both herself and love; O then give pity
To her, whose state is such, that cannot choose
But lend and give, where she is sure to lose;
That seeks not to find that her search implies,
But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies.

This old Countess of Roussillon is a charming sketch. She is like one of Titian's old women, who still, amid their wrinkles, remind us of that soul of beauty and sensibility, which must have animated them when young. She is a fine contrast to Lady Capulet—benign, cheerful, and affectionate; she has a benevolent enthusiasm, which neither age, nor sorrow, nor pride can wear away. Thus, when she is brought to believe that Helen nourishes a secret attachment for her son, she observes—

> Even so it was with me when I was young!
> This thorn
> Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong,
> It is the show and seal of nature's truth,
> When love's strong passion is impress'd in youth.

Her fond, maternal love for Helena, whom she has brought up; her pride in her good qualities overpowering all her own prejudices of rank and birth, are most natural in such a mind; and her indignation against her son, however strongly expressed, never forgets the mother.

> What angel shall
> Bless this unworthy husband? he cannot thrive
> Unless *her* prayers, whom heaven delights to hear
> And loves to grant, reprieve him from the wrath
> Of greatest justice.
> Which of them both
> Is dearest to me—I have no skill in sense
> To make distinction.

This is very skilfully, as well as delicately conceived. In rejecting those poetical and accidental advantages which Giletta possesses in the original story, Shakspeare has substituted the beautiful character of the Countess; and he has contrived, that, as the character of Helena should rest for its *internal* charm on the depth of her own affections, so it should depend for its *external* interest on the affection she inspires. The enthusiastic tenderness of the Countess, the admiration and respect of the King, Lafeu, and all who are brought in connexion with her, make amends for the humiliating neglect of Bertram; and cast round Helen that collateral light, which Giletta in the story owes to other circumstances, striking indeed, and well imagined,

but not (I think) so finely harmonising with the character.

It is also very natural that Helen, with the intuitive discernment of a pure and upright mind, and the penetration of a quick-witted woman, should be the first to detect the falsehood and cowardice of the boaster Parolles, who imposes on every one else.

It has been remarked that there is less of poetical imagery in this play than in many of the others. A certain solidity in Helen's character takes place of the ideal power; and with consistent truth of keeping, the same predominance of feeling over fancy, of the reflective over the imaginative faculty, is maintained through the whole dialogue. Yet the finest passages in the serious scenes are those appropriated to her; they are familiar and celebrated as quotations; but fully to understand their beauty and truth, they should be considered relatively to her character and situation: thus, when in speaking of Bertram, she says, "that he is one to whom she wishes well," the consciousness of the disproportion between her words and

her feelings draws from her this beautiful and affecting observation, so just in itself, and so true to her situation, and to the sentiment which fills her whole heart;

> 'Tis pity
> That wishing well had not a body in 't
> Which might be felt: that we, the poorer born,
> Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,
> Might with effects of them follow our friends,
> And act what we must only think, which never
> Returns us thanks.

Some of her general reflections have a sententious depth and a contemplative melancholy, which remind us of Isabella:

> Our remedies oft in themselves do lie
> Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky
> Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
> Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
>
> Impossible be strange events to those
> That weigh their pains in sense; and do suppose
> What hath been, cannot be.
>
> He that of greatest works is finisher,
> Oft does them by the weakest minister;
> So holy writ in babes hath judgment shown,
> When judges have been babes.

Oft expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises; and oft it hits,
Where hope is coldest, and despair most sits.

Her sentiments in the same manner are remarkable for the union of profound sense with the most passionate feeling; and when her language is figurative, which is seldom, the picture presented to us is invariably touched either with a serious, a lofty, or a melancholy beauty. For instance—

It were all one
That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it—he's so far above me.

And when she is brought to choose a husband from among the young lords at the court, her heart having already made its election, the strangeness of that very privilege for which she had ventured all, nearly overpowers her, and she says beautifully—

The blushes on my cheeks thus whisper me,
"We blush that thou shouldst choose;—but be refused,
Let the white death sit on that cheek for ever,
We'll ne'er come there again!"

In her soliloquy after she has been forsaken by Bertram, the beauty lies in the intense feeling, the force and simplicity of the expressions. There is little imagery, and wherever it occurs, it is as bold as it is beautiful, and springs out of the energy of the sentiment, and the pathos of the situation. She has been reading his cruel letter.

Till I have no wife I have nothing in France.
'Tis bitter!
Nothing in France, until he has no wife!
Thou shalt have none, Roussillon, none in France,
Then hast thou all again. Poor lord! is 't I
That chase thee from thy country, and expose
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
Of the none-sparing war? And is it I
That drive thee from the sportive court, where thou
Wast shot at with fair eyes, to be the mark
Of smoky muskets? O you leaden messengers,
That ride upon the violent speed of fire,
Fly with false aim! move the still-piercing air,
That sings with piercing, do not touch my lord!
Whoever shoots at him, I set him there;
Whoever charges on his forward breast,
I am the caitiff that do hold him to it;
And though I kill him not, I am the cause
His death was so effected; better 'twere

I met the ravin lion when he roared
With sharp constraint of hunger; better 'twere
That all the miseries which nature owes,
Were mine at once.
No, no, although
The air of paradise did fan the house,
And angels officed all; I will be gone.

Though I cannot go the length of those who have defended Bertram on almost every point, still I think the censure which Johnson has passed on the character is much too severe. Bertram is certainly not a pattern hero of romance, but full of faults such as we meet with every day in men of his age and class. He is a bold, ardent, self-willed youth, just dismissed into the world from domestic indulgence, with an excess of aristocratic and military pride, but not without some sense of true honour and generosity. I have lately read a defence of Bertram's character, written with much elegance and plausibility. "The young Count," says this critic, "comes before us possessed of a good heart, and of no mean capacity, but with a haughtiness

which threatens to dull the kinder passions, and to cloud the intellect. This is the inevitable consequence of an illustrious education. The glare of his birthright has dazzled his young faculties. Perhaps the first words he could distinguish were from the important nurse, giving elaborate directions about his lordship's pap. As soon as he could walk, a crowd of submissive vassals doffed their caps, and hailed his first appearance on his legs. His spelling-book had the arms of the family emblazoned on the cover. He had been accustomed to hear himself called the great, the mighty son of Roussillon, ever since he was a helpless child. A succession of complacent tutors would by no means destroy the illusion; and it is from their hands that Shakspeare receives him, while yet in his minority. An overweening pride of birth is Bertram's great foible. To cure him of this, Shakspeare sends him to the wars, that he may win fame for himself, and thus exchange a shadow for a reality. There the great dignity that his valour acquired

for him places him on an equality with any one of his ancestors, and he is no longer beholden to them alone for the world's observance. Thus in his own person he discovers there is something better than mere hereditary honours; and his heart is prepared to acknowledge that the entire devotion of a Helen's love is of more worth than the court-bred smiles of a princess."[1]

It is not extraordinary that, in the first instance, his spirit should revolt at the idea of marrying his mother's "waiting gentlewoman," or that he should refuse her; yet when the king, his feudal lord, whose despotic authority was in this case legal and indisputable, threatens him with the extremity of his wrath and vengeance, that he should submit himself to a hard necessity, was too consistent with the manners of the time to be called *cowardice*. Such forced marriages were not uncommon even in our own country, when the right of wardship, now vested in the Lord Chan-

[1] New Monthly Magazine, vol. iv.

cellor, was exercised with uncontrolled and often cruel despotism by the sovereign.

There is an old ballad, in which the king bestows a maid of low degree on a noble of his court, and the undisguised scorn and reluctance of the knight, and the pertinacity of the lady, are in point.

He brought her down full forty pound
  Tyed up within a glove,
"Fair maid, I'll give the same to thee,
  Go seek another love."

"O I'll have none of your gold," she said,
  "Nor I'll have none of your fee;
But your fair bodye I must have,
  The king hath granted me."

Sir William ran and fetched her then,
  Five hundred pounds in gold,
Saying, "Fair maid, take this to thee,
  My fault will ne'er be told."

"'Tis not the gold that shall me tempt,"
  These words then answered she;
"But your own bodye I must have,
  The king hath granted me."

"Would I had drank the water clear,
When I did drink the wine,
Rather than any shepherd's brat
Should be a ladye of mine!"[1]

Bertram's disgust at the tyranny which has made his freedom the payment of another's debt, which has united him to a woman whose merits are not towards him —whose secret love, and long-enduring faith, are yet unknown and untried—might well make his bride distasteful to him. He flies her on the very day of their marriage, most like a wilful, haughty, angry boy, but not like a profligate. On other points he is not so easily defended; and Shakspeare, we see, has not defended, but corrected him. The latter part of the play is more perplexing than pleasing. We do not, indeed, repine with Dr. Johnson, that Bertram, after all his misdemeanours, is "dismissed to happiness;" but, notwithstanding the clever defence that has been made for him, he has our pardon rather than our sympathy; and for mine own part, I could

[1] Percy's Reliques.

find it easier to love Bertram as Helena does, than to excuse him; her love for him is his best excuse.

PERDITA.

In Viola and Perdita the distinguishing traits are the same—sentiment and elegance; thus we associate them together,

though nothing can be more distinct to the fancy than the Doric grace of Perdita, compared to the romantic sweetness of Viola. They are created out of the same materials, and are equal to each other in the tenderness, delicacy, and poetical beauty of the conception. They are both more imaginative and passionate; but Perdita is the more imaginative of the two. She is the union of the pastoral and romantic with the classical and poetical, as if a dryad of the woods had turned shepherdess. The perfections with which the poet has so lavishly endowed her, sit upon her with a certain careless and picturesque grace, "as though they had fallen upon her unawares." Thus, Belphœbe, in the Fairy Queen, issues from the flowering forest with hair and garments all besprinkled with the leaves and blossoms they had entangled in her flight; and so arrayed by chance and "heedless hap," takes all hearts with "stately presence and with princely port,"—most like to Perdita!

The story of Florizel and Perdita is but an episode in the "Winter's Tale;" and

the character of Perdita is properly kept subordinate to that of her mother, Hermione: yet the picture is perfectly finished in every part;—Juliet herself is not more firmly and distinctly drawn. But the colouring in Perdita is more silvery light and delicate; the pervading sentiment more touched with the ideal; compared with Juliet, she is like a Guido hung beside a Georgione, or one of Paesiello's airs heard after one of Mozart's.

The qualities which impart to Perdita her distinct individuality, are the beautiful combination of the pastoral with the elegant—of simplicity with elevation—of spirit with sweetness. The exquisite delicacy of the picture is apparent. To understand and appreciate its effective truth and nature, we should place Perdita beside some of the nymphs of Arcadia, or the Cloris' and Sylvias of the Italian pastorals, who, however graceful in themselves, when opposed to Perdita, seem to melt away into mere poetical abstractions:—as, in Spenser, the fair but fictitious Florimel, which the subtle enchantress had moulded out of snow, "ver-

meil tinctured," and informed with an airy spirit, that knew "all wiles of woman's wits," fades and dissolves away, when placed next to the real Florimel, in her warm, breathing, human loveliness.

Perdita does not appear till the fourth act, and the whole of the character is developed in the course of a single scene (the third), with a completeness of effect which leaves nothing to be required—nothing to be supplied. She is first introduced in the dialogue between herself and Florizel, where she compares her own lowly state to his princely rank, and expresses her fears of the issue of their unequal attachment. With all her timidity and her sense of the distance which separates her from her lover, she breathes not a single word which could lead us to impugn either her delicacy or her dignity.

FLORIZEL.

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Do give a life—no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April's front; this your sheep-shearing
Is as the meeting of the petty gods,
And you the queen on 't.

PERDITA.

Sir, my gracious lord,
To chide at your extremes it not becomes me;
O pardon that I name them: your high self,
The gracious mark o' the land, you have obscur'd
With a swain's bearing; and me, poor lowly maid,
Most goddess-like prank'd up:—but that our feasts
In every mess have folly, and the feeders
Digest it with a custom, I should blush
To see you so attired; sworn, I think,
To show myself a glass.

The impression of her perfect beauty and airy elegance of demeanour is conveyed in two exquisite passages:

What you do
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever. When you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so; so give alms,
Pray so, and for the ordering your affairs
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own
No other function.

I take thy hand; this hand
A soft as dove's down, and as white as it;
Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow,
That's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er.

The artless manner in which her innate nobility of soul shines forth through her pastoral disguise, is thus brought before us at once:

> This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
> Ran on the green sward; nothing she does or seems,
> But smacks of something greater than herself;
> Too noble for this place.

Her natural loftiness of spirit breaks out where she is menaced and reviled by the King, as one whom his son has degraded himself by merely looking on; she bears the royal frown without quailing; but the moment he is gone, the immediate recollection of herself, and of her humble state, of her hapless love, is full of beauty, tenderness, and nature:

> Even here undone!
> I was not much afeard: for once or twice,
> I was about to speak; and tell him plainly
> The self-same sun, that shines upon his court
> Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
> Looks on alike.
>
> Will 't please you, Sir, be gone?
> I told you what would come of this. Beseech you,

Of your own state take care; this dream of mine—
Being now awake—I'll queen it no inch further,
But milk my ewes, and weep.

How often have I told you 't would be thus!
How often said, my dignity would last
But till 't were known!

FLORIZEL.

It cannot fail, but by
The violation of my faith; and then
Let nature crush the sides o' the earth together
And mar the seeds within! Lift up thy looks.

* * * * * *

Not for Bohemia, nor the pomp that may
Be thereat glean'd! for all the sun sees, or
The close earth wombs, or the profound seas hide
In unknown fathoms, will I break my oath
To thee, my fair beloved!

Perdita has another characteristic, which lends to the poetical delicacy of the delineation a certain strength and moral elevation which is peculiarly striking. In that sense of truth and rectitude, that upright simplicity of mind which disdains all crooked and indirect means, which would not stoop for an instant to dissemblance, and is mingled with a noble confidence in her love and in

her lover. In this spirit is her answer to Camillo, who says, courtier-like,

> Besides, you know
> Prosperity's the very bond of love;
> Whose fresh complexion, and whose heart together,
> Affliction alters.

To which she replies,

> One of these is true;
> I think, affliction may subdue the cheek,
> But not take in the mind.

In that elegant scene where she receives the guests at the sheep-shearing, and distributes the flowers, there is in the full flow of the poetry, a most beautiful and striking touch of individual character: but here it is impossible to mutilate the dialogue.

> Reverend sirs,
> For you there's rosemary and rue; these keep
> Seeming and savour all the winter long;
> Grace and remembrance be to you both,
> And welcome to our shearing!
>
> POLIXENES.
>
> Shepherdess
> (A fair one you are), well you fit our ages
> With flowers of winter.

PERDITA.

Sir, the year growing ancient,
Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations, and streaked gilliflowers,
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.

POLIXENES.

Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?

PERDITA.

For I have heard it said,
There is an art, which in their piedness, shares
With great creating nature.

POLIXENES.

Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean; so o'er that art
Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentle scion to the wildest stock;
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather; but
The art itself is nature.

PERDITA.

So it is.

POLIXENES.

Then make your garden rich in gilliflowers,
And do not call them bastards.

PERDITA.

I 'll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them ;
No more than were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say 't were well.

It has been well remarked of this passage, that Perdita does not attempt to answer the reasoning of Polixenes: she gives up the argument, but, woman-like, retains her own opinion, or rather, her sense of right, unshaken by his sophistry. She goes on in a strain of poetry, which comes over the soul like music and fragrance mingled: we seem to inhale the blended odours of a thousand flowers, till the sense faints with their sweetness; and she concludes with a touch of passionate sentiment, which melts into the very heart:

O Proserpina!
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one! O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of; and my sweet friend
To strew him o'er and o'er.

FLORIZEL.

What! like a corse?

PERDITA.

No, like a bank, for Love to lie and play on;
Not like a corse: or if,—not to be buried,
But quick, and in mine arms!

This love of truth, this *conscientiousness*, which forms so distinct a feature in the character of Perdita, and mingles with its picturesque delicacy a certain firmness and dignity, is maintained consistently to the last. When the two lovers fly together from Bohemia, and take refuge in the court of Leontes, the real father of Perdita, Florizel presents himself before the King with

a feigned tale, in which he has been artfully instructed by the old counsellor Camillo. During this scene, Perdita does not utter a word. In the strait in which they are placed, she cannot deny the story which Florizel relates—she will not confirm it. Her silence, in spite of all the compliments and greetings of Leontes, has a peculiar and characteristic grace; and, at the conclusion of the scene, when they are betrayed, the truth bursts from her as if instinctively, and she exclaims, with emotion,

> The heavens set spies upon us—will not have
> Our contract celebrated.

After this scene, Perdita says very little. The description of her grief, while listening to the relation of her mother's death,

> " One of the prettiest touches of all, was, when at the relation of the queen's death, with the manner how she came by it, how attentiveness wounded her daughter: till, from one sign of dolour to another, she did, with an *alas !* I would fain say, bleed tears: "—

her deportment too as she stands gazing on the statue of Hermione, fixed in wonder, ad-

miration, and sorrow, as if she too were marble —

> O royal piece!
> There's magic in thy majesty, which has
> From thy admiring daughter ta'en the spirits,
> Standing like stone beside thee!

are touches of character conveyed indirectly, and which serve to give a more finished effect to this beautiful picture.

As the innate dignity of Perdita pierces through her rustic disguise, so the exquisite refinement of Viola triumphs over her masculine attire. Viola is, perhaps, in a degree less elevated and ideal than Perdita, but with a touch of sentiment more profound and heart-stirring; she is "deep-learned in the lore of love,"—at least, theoretically,—and speaks as masterly on the subject as Perdita does of flowers.

> DUKE.
>
> How dost thou like this tune?
>
> VIOLA.
>
> It gives a very echo to the seat
> Where love is thron'd.

And again,

If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suffering, such a deadly life—
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it.

OLIVIA.

Why, what would you do?

VIOLA.

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons[1] of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night.
Holla your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out, Olivia! O you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me.

OLIVIA.

You might do much.

The situation and the character of Viola have been censured for their want of consistency and probability; it is therefore worth while to examine how far this criticism is true. As for her situation in the

[1] i. e., *canzons*, songs.

drama (of which she is properly the heroine), it is shortly this. She is shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria; she is alone and without protection in a strange country. She wishes to enter into the service of the Countess Olivia; but she is assured that this is impossible; "for the lady having recently lost an only and beloved brother, has abjured the sight of men, has shut herself up in her palace, and will admit no kind of suit." In this perplexity, Viola remembers to have heard her father speak with praise and admiration of Orsini, the Duke of the country; and having ascertained that he is not married, and that therefore his court is not a proper asylum for her in her feminine character, she attires herself in the disguise of a page, as the best protection against uncivil comments, till she can gain some tidings of her brother.

If we carry our thoughts back to a romantic and chivalrous age, there is surely sufficient probability here for all the purposes of poetry. To pursue the thread of

Viola's destiny;—she is engaged in the service of the Duke, whom she finds "fancy-sick" for the love of Olivia. We are left to infer (for so it is hinted in the first scene), that this Duke,—who with his accomplishments, and his personal attractions, his taste for music, his chivalrous tenderness, and his unrequited love, is really a very fascinating and poetical personage, though a little passionate and fan-

tastic—had already made some impression on Viola's imagination; and when she comes to play the confidante, and to be loaded with favours and kindness in her assumed character, that she should be touched by a passion made up of pity, admiration, gratitude, and tenderness, does not, I think, in any way detract from the genuine sweetness and delicacy of her character, for "*she never told her love.*"

Now all this, as the critic wisely observes, may not present a very just picture of life; and it may also fail to impart any moral lesson for the especial profit of well-bred young ladies; but is it not in truth and in nature? Did it ever fail to charm or to interest, to seize on the coldest fancy, to touch the most insensible heart?

Viola then is the chosen favourite of the enamoured Duke, and becomes his messenger to Olivia, and the interpreter of his sufferings to that inaccessible beauty. In her character of a youthful page, she attracts the favour of Olivia, and excites the jealousy of her lord. The situation is

critical and delicate; but how exquisitely is the character of Viola fitted to her part, carrying her through the ordeal with all the inward and spiritual grace of modesty! What beautiful propriety in the distinction drawn between Rosalind and Viola! The wild sweetness, the frolic humour which sports free and unblamed amid the shades of Ardennes, would ill become Viola, whose playfulness is assumed as part of her disguise as a court-page, and is guarded by the strictest delicacy. She has not, like Rosalind, a saucy enjoyment in her own incognito; her disguise does not sit so easily upon her; her heart does not beat freely under it. As in the old ballad, where "Sweet William" is detected weeping in secret over her "man's array,"[1] so in Viola, a sweet consciousness of her feminine nature is for ever breaking through her masquerade:

> And on her cheek is ready with a blush,
> Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
> The youthful Phœbus.

[1] Percy's Reliques, vol. iii.—see the ballad of the "Lady turning Serving Man."

She plays her part well, but never forgets, nor allows us to forget, that she is playing a part.

OLIVIA.

Are you a comedian?

VIOLA.

No, my profound heart! and yet by the very fangs of malice I swear, I am not that I play!

And thus she comments on it:

Disguise, I see thou art wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much;
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas! our frailty is the cause, not we.

The feminine cowardice of Viola, which will not allow her even to affect a courage becoming her attire,—her horror at the idea of drawing a sword, is very natural and characteristic; and produces a most humorous effect, even at the very moment it charms and interests us.

Contrasted with the deep, silent, patient love of Viola for the Duke, we have the lady-like wilfulness of Olivia; and her sudden passion, or rather fancy, for the

disguised page, takes so beautiful a colouring of poetry and sentiment, that we do not think her forward. Olivia is like a princess of romance, and has all the privileges of one; she is, like Portia, high born and high bred, mistress over her servants—but not like Portia, "queen o'er herself." She has never in her life been opposed; the first contradiction, therefore, rouses all the woman in her, and turns a caprice into a headlong passion; yet she apologizes for herself.

> I have said too much unto a heart of stone,
> And laid mine honour too unchary out;
> There's something in me that reproves my fault;
> But such a headstrong potent fault it is,
> That it but mocks reproof!

And in the midst of her self-abandonment, never allows us to contemn, even while we pity her:

> What shall you ask of me that I'll deny.
> That honour, saved, may upon asking give?

The distance of rank which separates the Countess from the youthful page—the real

sex of Viola—the dignified elegance of Olivia's deportment, except where passion gets the better of her pride—her consistent coldness towards the Duke—the description of that "smooth, discreet, and stable bearing" with which she rules her household—her generous care for her steward Malvolio, in the midst of her own distress,—all these circumstances raise Olivia in our fancy, and render her caprice for the page a source of amusement and interest, not a subject of reproach. *Twelfth Night* is a genuine comedy;—a perpetual spring of the gayest and the sweetest fancies. In artificial society men and women are divided into castes and classes, and it is rarely that extremes in character or manners can approximate. To blend into one harmonious picture the utmost grace and refinement of sentiment, and the broadest effects of humour; the most poignant wit, and the most indulgent benignity;—in short, to bring before us in the same scene, Viola and Olivia, with Malvolio and Sir Toby, belonged only to Nature and to Shakspeare.

A woman's affections, however strong, are sentiments, when they run smooth; and become passions only when opposed.

In Juliet and Helena, love is depicted as a passion, properly so called; that is, a natural impulse throbbing in the heart's blood, and mingling with the very sources of life; a sentiment more or less modified by the imagination; a strong abiding principle and motive, excited by resistance, acting upon the will, animating all the other faculties, and again influenced by them. This is the most complex aspect of

love, and in these two characters, it is depicted in colours at once the most various, the most intense, and the most brilliant.

In Viola and Perdita, love, being less complex, appears more refined; more a sentiment than a passion—a compound of impulse and fancy, while the reflective powers and moral energies are more faintly developed. The same remark applies also to Julia and Silvia, in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, and, in a greater degree, to Hermia and Helena in the Midsummer Night's Dream. In the two latter, though perfectly discriminated, love takes the visionary fanciful cast, which belongs to the whole piece; it is scarcely a passion or a sentiment, but a dreamy enchantment, a reverie, which a fairy spell dissolves or fixes at pleasure.

But there was yet another possible modification of the sentiment, as combined with female nature; and this Shakspeare has shown to us. He has portrayed two beings, in whom all intellectual and moral energy is in a manner latent, if existing; in whom love

is an unconscious impulse, and imagination lends the external charm and hue, not the internal power; in whom the feminine character appears resolved into its very elementary principles—as modesty, grace,[1] tenderness. *Without* these a woman is no woman, but a thing which, luckily, wants a name yet; *with* these, though every other faculty were passive or deficient, she might still be herself. These are the inherent qualities with which God sent us into the world: they may be perverted by a bad education—they may be obscured by harsh and evil destinies—they may be overpowered by the development of some particular mental power, the predominance of some passion;—but they are never wholly crushed out of the woman's soul, while it retains those faculties which render it responsible to its Creator. Shak-

[1] By this word, as used here, I would be understood to mean that inexpressible something within the soul, which tends to the good, the beautiful, the true, and is the antipodes to the vulgar, the violent, and the false;—that which we see diffused externally over the form and movements, where there is perfect innocence and unconsciousness, as in children.

speare then has shown us that these elemental feminine qualities, modesty, grace, tenderness, when expanded under genial influences, suffice to constitute a perfect and happy human creature; such is Miranda. When thrown alone amid harsh and adverse destinies, and amid the trammels and corruptions of society, without energy to resist, or will to act, or strength to endure, the end must needs be desolation.

Ophelia—poor Ophelia! O far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briers of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What shall be said of her? for eloquence is mute before her! Like a strain of sad sweet music, which comes floating by us on the wings of night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear—like the exhalation of the violet dying even upon the sense it charms—like the snow-flake dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth—like the light surf severed from the billow, which a breath disperses—such is the character of Ophelia; so exquisitely delicate, it seems as

if a touch would profane it; so sanctified in our thoughts by the last and worst of human woes, that we scarcely dare to consider it too deeply. The love of Ophelia, which she never once confesses, is like a secret which we have stolen from her, and which ought to die upon our hearts as upon her own. Her sorrow asks not words but tears; and her madness has precisely the same effect that would be produced by the spectacle of real insanity, if brought before us: we feel inclined to turn away, and veil our eyes in reverential pity, and too painful sympathy.

Beyond every character that Shakspeare has drawn (Hamlet alone excepted), that of Ophelia makes us forget the poet in his own creation. Whenever we bring her to mind, it is with the same exclusive sense of her real existence, without reference to the wondrous power which called her into life. The effect (and what an effect!) is produced by means so simple, by strokes so few, and so unobtrusive, that we take no thought of them. It is so purely natural and unsophisticated, yet so profound in its pathos, that,

as Hazlitt observes, it takes us back to the old ballads; we forget that, in its perfect artlessness, it is the supreme and consummate triumph of art.

The situation of Ophelia in the story,[1] is that of a young girl who, at an early age, is brought from a life of privacy into the circle of a court—a court such as we read of in those early times, at once rude, magnificent, and corrupted. She is placed immediately about the person of the queen, and is apparently her favourite attendant. The affection of the wicked queen for this gentle and innocent creature, is one of those beautiful and redeeming touches, one of those penetrating glances into the secret springs of natural and feminine feeling, which we find only in Shakspeare. Gertrude, who is not so wholly abandoned but that there remains within her heart some sense of the

[1] *i. e.*, In the story of the drama: for in the original "History of Amleth the Dane," from which Shakspeare drew his materials, there is a woman introduced who is employed as an instrument to seduce Amleth, but not even the germ of the character of Ophelia.

virtue she has forfeited, seems to look with a kind yet melancholy complacency on the lovely being she has destined for the bride of her son; and the scene in which she is introduced as scattering flowers on the grave of Ophelia, is one of those effects of contrast in poetry, in character and in feeling, at once natural and unexpected; which fill the eye, and make the heart swell and tremble within itself—like the nightingales singing in the grove of the Furies in Sophocles.[1]

Again, in the father of Ophelia, the Lord Chamberlain Polonius—the shrewd, wary, subtle, pompous, garrulous old courtier—have we not the very man who would send his son into the world to see all, learn all it could teach of good and evil, but keep his only daughter as far as possible from every taint of that world he knew so well? So that when she is brought to the court, she seems, in her loveliness and perfect purity, like a seraph that had wandered out of bounds, and yet breathed on earth the air of paradise. When her father and her brother

[1] In the Œdipus Coloneus.

find it necessary to warn her simplicity, give her lessons of worldly wisdom, and instruct her "to be scanter of her maiden presence," for that Hamlet's vows of love "but breathe like sanctified and pious bonds, the better to beguile," we feel at once that it comes too late; for from the moment she appears on the scene, amid the dark conflict of crime and vengeance, and supernatural terrors, we know what must be her destiny. Once, at Murano, I saw a dove caught in a tempest; perhaps it was young, and either lacked strength of wing to reach its home, or the instinct which teaches to shun the brooding storm, but so it was—and I watched it, pitying, as it flitted, poor bird! hither and thither, with its silver pinions shining against the black thunder-cloud, till, after a few giddy whirls, it fell blinded, affrighted, and bewildered, into the turbid wave beneath, and was swallowed up for ever. It reminded me then of the fate of Ophelia; and now when I think of her, I see again before me that poor dove, beating with weary wing, bewildered amid the storm. It is the help-

lessness of Ophelia, arising merely from her innocence, and pictured without any indication of weakness, which melts us with such profound pity. She is so young, that neither her mind nor her person have attained maturity: she is not aware of the nature of her own feelings; they are prematurely developed in their full force before she has strength to bear them; and love and grief together rend and shatter the frail texture of her existence, like the burning fluid poured into a crystal vase. She says very little, and what she does say seems rather intended to hide than to reveal the emotions of her heart; yet in those few words we are made as perfectly acquainted with her character, and with what is passing in her mind, as if she had thrown forth her soul with all the glowing eloquence of Juliet. Passion with Juliet seems innate, a part of her being, "as dwells the gathered lightning in the cloud;" and we never fancy her but with the dark splendid eyes and Titian-like complexion of the south. While in Ophelia we recognise as distinctly the pensive, fair-

haired, blue-eyed daughter of the north, whose heart seems to vibrate to the passion she has inspired, more conscious of being loved than of loving; and yet, alas ! loving in the silent depths of her young heart far more than she is loved.

When her brother warns her against Hamlet's importunities—

> For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
> Hold it a fashion, and a toy of blood,
> A violet in the youth of primy nature,
> Forward not permanent, sweet not lasting,
> The perfume and the suppliance of a minute—
> No more!

she replies with a kind of half consciousness,

> No more but so?
>
> LAERTES.
>
> Think it no more.

He concludes his admonition with that most beautiful passage, in which the soundest sense, the most excellent advice, is conveyed in a strain of the most exquisite poetry.

> The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
> If she unmask her beauty to the moon:

Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclos'd:
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
Contagious blastments are most imminent.

She answers with the same modesty, yet with a kind of involuntary avowal, that his fears are not altogether without cause:

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whilst, like the puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own read.[1]

When her father, immediately afterwards, catechises her on the same subject, he extorts from her, in short sentences, uttered with bashful reluctance, the confession of Hamlet's love for her, but not a word of her love for him. The whole scene is managed with inexpressible delicacy: it is one of those instances, common in Shakspeare, in which

[1] "And recks not his own read," *i. e.*, heeds not his own lesson.

we are allowed to perceive what is passing in the mind of a person, without any consciousness on their part. Only Ophelia herself is unaware that while she is admitting the extent of Hamlet's courtship, she is also betraying how deep is the impression it has made, how entire the love with which it is returned.

POLONIUS.

What is between you? give me up the truth!

OPHELIA.

He hath, my lord, of late, made many tenders
Of his affection to me.

POLONIUS.

Affection! poh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstances.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

OPHELIA.

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS.

Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;
That you have taken these tenders for true pay
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;
Or (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Wronging it thus) you'll tender me a fool.

OPHELIA.

My lord, he hath importun'd me with love
In honourable fashion.

POLONIUS.

Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

OPHELIA.

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

POLONIUS.

Ay, springes to catch woodcocks.
——— This is for all:
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth
Have you so slander any moment's leisure
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet,
Look to 't, I charge you: come your ways.

OPHELIA.

I shall obey, my lord.

Besides its intrinsic loveliness, the character of Ophelia has a relative beauty and delicacy when considered in relation to that of Hamlet, which is the delineation of a man of genius in contest with the powers of this world. The weakness of volition, the instability of purpose, the contemplative sensibi-

lity, the subtlety of thought, always shrinking from action, and always occupied in "thinking too precisely on the event," united to immense intellectual power, render him unspeakably interesting: and yet I doubt whether any woman, who would have been capable of understanding and appreciating such a man, would have passionately loved him. Let us for a moment imagine any one of Shakspeare's most beautiful and striking female characters in immediate connexion with Hamlet. The gentle Desdemona would never have despatched her household cares in haste, to listen to his philosophical speculations, his dark conflicts with his own spirit. Such a woman as Portia would have studied him; Juliet would have pitied him; Rosalind would have turned him over with a smile to the melancholy Jacques; Beatrice would have laughed at him outright; Isabel would have reasoned with him; Miranda could but have wondered at him: but Ophelia loves him. Ophelia, the young, fair, inexperienced girl, facile to every impression, fond in her simplicity, and

credulous in her innocence, loves Hamlet; not from what he is in himself, but for that which appears to her—the gentle, accomplished prince, upon whom she has been accustomed to see all eyes fixed in hope and admiration, "the expectancy and rose of the fair state," the star of the court in which she moves, the first who has ever whispered soft vows in her ear: and what can be more natural?

But is it not singular, that while no one entertains a doubt of Ophelia's love for Hamlet—though never once expressed by herself, or asserted by others, in the whole course of the drama—yet it is a subject of dispute whether Hamlet loves Ophelia, though she herself allows that he had importuned her with love, and "had given countenance to his suit with almost all the holy vows of heaven;" although in the letter which Polonius intercepted, Hamlet declares that he loves her "best, O most best!"—though he asserts himself, with the wildest vehemence,

I lov'd Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum :

—still I have heard the question canvassed; I have even heard it denied that Hamlet did love Ophelia. The author of the finest remarks I have yet seen on the play and character of Hamlet, leans to this opinion. As the observations I allude to are contained in a periodical publication, and may not be at hand for immediate reference, I shall indulge myself (and the reader no less) by quoting the opening paragraphs of this noble piece of criticism, upon the principle, and for the reason I have already stated in the introduction.

"We take up a play, and ideas come rolling in upon us, like waves impelled by a strong wind. There is in the ebb and flow of Shakspeare's soul all the grandeur of a mighty operation of nature; and when we think or speak of him, it should be with humility where we do not understand, and a conviction that it is rather to the narrowness of our own mind than to any failing in

the art of the great magician, that we ought to attribute any sense of weakness which may assail us during the contemplation of his created worlds.

" Shakspeare himself, had he even been as great a critic as a poet, could not have written a regular dissertation upon Hamlet. So ideal, and yet so real an existence, could have been shadowed out only in the colours of poetry. When a character deals solely or chiefly with this world and its events, when it acts and is acted upon by objects that have a palpable existence, we see it distinctly, as if it were cast in a material mould, as if it partook of the fixed and settled lineaments of the things on which it lavishes its sensibilities and its passions. We see in such cases the vision of an individual soul, as we see the vision of an individual countenance. We can describe both, and can let a stranger into our knowledge. But how tell in words, so pure, so fine, so ideal an abstraction as Hamlet? We can, indeed, figure to ourselves generally, his princely form, that outshone all others in manly

beauty, and adorn it with the consummation of all liberal accomplishment. We can behold in every look, every gesture, every motion, the future king,

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
> Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state;
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> Th' observ'd of all observers.

"But when we would penetrate into his spirit, meditate on those things on which he meditates, accompany him even unto the brink of eternity, fluctuate with him on the ghastly sea of despair, soar with him into the purest and serenest regions of human thought, feel with him the curse of beholding iniquity, and the troubled delight of thinking on innocence, and gentleness, and beauty; come with him from all the glorious dreams cherished by a noble spirit in the halls of wisdom and philosophy, of a sudden into the gloomy courts of sin, and incest, and murder; shudder with him over the broken and shattered fragments of all the fairest creations of his fancy,—be borne with

him at once, from calm, and lofty, and delighted speculations, into the very heart of fear, and horror, and tribulations,—have the agonies and the guilt of our mortal world brought into immediate contact with the world beyond the grave, and the influence of an awful shadow hanging for ever on our thoughts—be present at a fearful combat between all the stirred-up passions of humanity in the soul of man, a combat in which one and all of these passions are alternately victorious and overcome; I say, that when we are thus placed and acted upon, how is it possible to draw a character of this sublime drama, or of the mysterious being who is its moving spirit? In him, his character and situation, there is a concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity. There is scarcely a trait of frailty or of grandeur which may have endeared to us our most beloved friends in real life, that is not to be found in Hamlet. Undoubtedly Shakspeare loved him beyond all his other creations. Soon as he appears on the stage we are satisfied: when absent we long for his return.

This is the only play which exists almost altogether in the character of one single person. Who ever knew a Hamlet in real life? yet who, ideal as the character is, feels not its reality? This is the wonder. We love him not, we think of him, not because he is witty, because he was melancholy, because he was filial; but we love him because he existed, and was himself. This is the sum total of the impression. I believe that, of every other character, either in tragic or epic poetry, the story makes part of the conception; but of Hamlet, the deep and permanent interest is the conception of himself. This seems to belong, not to the character being more perfectly drawn, but to there being a more intense conception of individual human life than perhaps any other human composition. Here is a being with springs of thought and feeling, and action, deeper than we can search. These springs rise from an unknown depth, and in that depth there seems to be a oneness of being which we cannot distinctly behold, but which we believe to be there; and thus irreconcile-

able circumstances, floating on the surface of his actions, have not the effect of making us doubt the truth of the general picture." [1]

This is all most admirable, most eloquent, most true! but the critic subsequently declares, that "there is nothing in Ophelia which could make her the object of an engrossing passion to so majestic a spirit as Hamlet."

Now, though it be with reluctance, and even considerable mistrust of myself, that I differ from a critic who can thus feel and write, I do not think so:—I do think, with submission, that the love of Hamlet for Ophelia is deep, is real, and is precisely the kind of love which such a man as Hamlet would feel for such a woman as Ophelia.

When the heathens would represent their Jove as clothed in all his Olympian terrors, they mounted him on the back of an eagle, and armed him with the lightnings; but when in Holy Writ the Supreme Being is described as coming in His glory, He is upborne on the wings of cherubim, and His

emblem is the dove. Even so our blessed religion, which has revealed deeper mysteries in the human soul than ever were dreamt of by philosophy, till she went hand-in-hand with faith, has taught us to pay that worship to the symbols of purity and innocence, which in darker times was paid to the manifestations of power: and therefore do I think that the mighty intellect, the capacious, soaring, penetrating genius of Hamlet may be represented, without detracting from its grandeur, as reposing upon the tender virgin innocence of Ophelia, with all that deep delight with which a superior nature contemplates the goodness which is at once perfect in itself, and of itself unconscious. That Hamlet regards Ophelia with this kind of tenderness,—that he loves her with a love as intense as can belong to a nature in which there is (I think) much more of contemplation and sensibility than action or passion—is the feeling and conviction with which I have always read the play of Hamlet.

As to whether the mind of Hamlet be, or

be not, touched with madness—this is another point at issue among critics, philosophers, ay, and physicians. To me it seems that he is not so far disordered as to cease to be a responsible human being—that were too pitiable: but rathar that his mind is shaken from its equilibrium, and bewildered by the horrors of his situation—horrors which his fine and subtle intellect, his strong imagination, and his tendency to melancholy, at once exaggerate, and take from him the power either to endure, or "by opposing, end them." We do not see him as a lover, nor as Ophelia first beheld him; for the days when he importuned her with love were before the opening of the drama—before his father's spirit revisited the earth; but we behold him at once in a sea of troubles, of perplexities, of agonies, of terrors. Without remorse he endures all its horrors; without guilt he endures all its shame. A loathing of the crime he is called on to revenge, which revenge is again abhorrent to his nature, has set him at strife with himself; the supernatural visitation has per-

turbed his soul to its inmost depths; all things else, all interests, all hopes, all affections, appear as futile, when the majestic shadow comes lamenting from its place of torment "to shake him with thoughts beyond the reaches of his soul!" His love for Ophelia is then ranked by himself among those trivial, fond records which he has deeply sworn to erase from his heart and brain. He has no thought to link his terrible destiny with hers: he cannot marry her: he cannot reveal to her, young, gentle, innocent as she is, the terrific influences which have changed the whole current of his life and purposes. In his distraction he overacts the painful part to which he had tasked himself; he is like that judge of the Areopagus, who being occupied with graver matters, flung from him the little bird which had sought refuge in his bosom, and with such angry violence, that unwittingly he killed it.

In the scene with Hamlet,[1] in which he madly outrages her and upbraids himself, Ophelia says very little: there are two short

[1] Act iii., scene 1.

sentences in which she replies to his wild, abrupt discourse—

HAMLET.

I did love you once.

OPHELIA.

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET.

You should not have believed me: for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock, but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA.

I was the more deceived.

Those who ever heard Mrs. Siddons read the play of Hamlet, cannot forget the world of meaning, of love, of sorrow, of despair, conveyed in these two simple phrases. Here, and in the soliloquy afterwards, where she says,

And I of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,

are the only allusions to herself and her own feelings in the course of the play; and these, uttered almost without consciousness on her own part, contain the revelation of a life of love, and disclose the secret burthen of a heart bursting with its own unuttered grief.

She believes Hamlet crazed; she is repulsed, she is forsaken, she is outraged, where she had bestowed her young heart, with all its hopes and wishes; her father is slain by the hand of her lover, as it is supposed, in a paroxysm of insanity: she is entangled inextricably in a web of horrors which she cannot even comprehend, and the result seems inevitable.

Of her subsequent madness, what can be said? What an affecting—what an astonishing picture of a mind utterly, hopelessly wrecked!—past hope—past cure! There is the frenzy of excited passion—there is the madness caused by intense and continued thought—there is the delirium of fevered nerves; but Ophelia's madness is distinct from these: it is not the suspension, but the utter destruction of the reasoning powers; it is the total imbecility which, as medical people well know, frequently follows some terrible shock to the spirits. Constance is frantic; Lear is mad; Ophelia is *insane.* Her sweet mind lies in fragments before us —a pitiful spectacle! Her wild, rambling fancies; her aimless, broken speeches; her

quick transitions from gaiety to sadness—each equally purposeless and causeless: her snatches of old ballads, such as perhaps her nurse sung her to sleep with in her infancy—are all so true to the life, that we forget to wonder, and can only weep. It belonged to Shakspeare alone so to temper such a picture that we can endure to dwell upon it—

> Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
> She turns to favour and to prettiness.

That in her madness she should exchange her bashful silence for empty babbling, her sweet maidenly demeanour for the impatient restlessness that spurns at straws, and say and sing precisely what she never would or could have uttered had she been in possession of her reason, is so far from being an impropriety, that it is an additional stroke of nature. It is one of the symptoms of this species of insanity, as we are assured by physicians. I have myself known one instance in the case of a young Quaker girl, whose character resembled that of Ophelia, and whose malady arose from a similar cause.

The whole action of this play sweeps past

us like a torrent which hurries along in its dark and resistless course all the personages of the drama towards a catastrophe that is not brought about by human will, but seems like an abyss ready dug to receive them, where the good and the wicked are whelmed together.[1] As the character of Hamlet has been compared, or rather contrasted, with the Greek Orestes, being, like him, called on to avenge a crime by a crime, tormented by remorseful doubts, and pursued by distraction, so, to me, the character of Ophelia bears a certain relation to that of the Greek Iphigenia,[2] with the same strong distinction between the classical and the romantic conception of the portrait. Iphigenia led forth to sacrifice, with her unresisting tenderness, her mournful sweetness, her virgin innocence, is doomed to perish by that relentless power, which has linked her destiny with crimes and contests, in which she has no part but as a sufferer; and even so, poor Ophelia, " divided from herself and her fair

[1] Goëthe. See the analysis of Hamlet in Wilhelm Meister.

[2] The Iphigenia in Aulis of Euripides.

judgment," appears here like a spotless victim offered up to the mysterious and inexorable fates.

"For it is the property of crime to extend its mischiefs over innocence, as it is of virtue to extend its blessings over many that deserve them not, while frequently the author of one or the other is not, as far as we can see, either punished or rewarded." [1]
But there's a heaven above us!

[1] Goëthe.

MIRANDA.

We might have deemed it impossible to go beyond Viola, Perdita, and Ophelia, as pictures of feminine beauty; to exceed the one in tender delicacy, the other in ideal grace, and the last in simplicity,—if Shakspeare had not done this; and he alone could have done it. Had he never created a Miranda, we should never have been made to feel how completely the purely natural and the purely ideal can blend into each other.

The character of Miranda resolves itself into the very elements of womanhood. She is beautiful, modest, and tender, and she is these only; they comprise her whole being, external and internal. She is so perfectly unsophisticated, so delicately refined, that she is all but ethereal. Let us imagine any

other woman placed beside Miranda—even one of Shakspeare's own loveliest and sweetest creations—there is not one of them that could sustain the comparison for a moment; not one that would not appear somewhat coarse or artificial when brought into immediate contact with this pure child of nature, this "Eve of an enchanted Paradise."

What, then, has Shakspeare done?—"O wondrous skill and sweet wit of the man!"—he has removed Miranda far from all comparison with her own sex; he has placed her between the demi-demon of earth and the delicate spirit of air. The next step is into the ideal and supernatural; and the only being who approaches Miranda, with whom she can be contrasted, is Ariel. Beside the subtle essence of this ethereal sprite, this creature of elemental light and air, that "ran upon the winds, rode the curl'd clouds, and in the colours of the rainbow lived," Miranda herself appears a palpable reality, a woman, "breathing thoughtful breath," a woman, walking the earth in her

mortal loveliness, with a heart as frail-strung, as passion-touched, as ever fluttered in a female bosom.

I have said that Miranda possesses merely the elementary attributes of womanhood, but each of these stand in her with a distinct and peculiar grace. She resembles nothing upon earth; but do we therefore compare her, in our own minds, with any of those fabled beings with which the fancy of ancient poets peopled the forest depths, the fountain or the ocean?—oread or dryad fleet, sea-maid, or naiad of the stream? We cannot think of them together. Miranda is a consistent, natural, human being. Our impression of her nymph-like beauty, her peerless grace, and purity of soul, has a distinct and individual character. Not only is she exquisitely lovely, being what she is, but we are made to feel that she *could* not possibly be otherwise than as she is portrayed. She has never beheld one of her own sex; she has never caught from society one imitated or artificial grace. The impulses which have come to her, in her en-

chanted solitude, are of heaven and nature, not of the world and its vanities. She has sprung up into beauty beneath the eye of her father, the princely magician; her companions have been the rocks and woods, the many-shaped, many-tinted clouds, and the silent stars; her playmates the ocean billows, that stooped their foamy crests, and ran rippling to kiss her feet. Ariel and his attendant sprites hovered over her head, ministered duteous to her every wish, and presented before her pageants of beauty and grandeur. The very air, made vocal by her father's art, floated in music around her. If we can pre-suppose such a situation with all its circumstances, do we not behold in the character of Miranda not only the credible, but the natural, the necessary results of such a situation? She retains her woman's heart, for that is unalterable and inalienable, as a part of her being; but her deportment, her looks, her language, her thoughts—all these, from the supernatural and poetical circumstances around her, assume a cast of the pure ideal; and to us,

who are in the secret of her human and pitying nature, nothing can be more charming and consistent than the effect which she produces upon others, who never having beheld any thing resembling her, approach her as "a wonder," as something celestial:

> Be sure! the goddess on whom these airs attend!

And again—

> What is this maid?
> Is she the goddess who hath severed us,
> And brought us thus together?

And Ferdinand exclaims, while gazing on her,

> My spirits as in a dream are all bound up!
> My father's loss, the weakness that I feel,
> The wreck of all my friends, or this man's threats,
> To whom I am subdued, are but light to me
> Might I but through my prison once a day
> Behold this maid: all corners else o' the earth
> Let liberty make use of, space enough
> Have I in such a prison.

Contrasted with the impression of her refined and dignified beauty, and its effect on all beholders, is Miranda's own soft sim-

plicity, her virgin innocence, her total ignorance of the conventional forms and language of society. It is most natural that in a being thus constituted, the first tears should spring from compassion, "suffering with those that she saw suffer;"

> O the cry did knock
> Against my very heart. Poor souls! they perished.
> Had I been any god of power, I would
> Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
> It should the good ship so have swallowed,
> And the freighting souls within her;

and that her first sigh should be offered to a love at once fearless and submissive, delicate and fond. She has no taught scruples of honour like Juliet; no coy concealments like Viola; no assumed dignity standing in its own defence. Her bashfulness is less a quality than an instinct; it is like the self-folding of a flower, spontaneous and unconscious. I suppose there is nothing of the kind in poetry equal to the scene between Ferdinand and Miranda. In Ferdinand, who is a noble creature, we have all the chivalrous magnanimity with which man, in

a high state of civilisation, disguises his real superiority, and does humble homage to the being of whose destiny he disposes; while Miranda, the mere child of nature, is struck with wonder at her own new emotions. Only conscious of her own weakness as a woman, and ignorant of those usages of society which teach us to dissemble the real passion, and assume (and sometimes abuse) an unreal and transient power, she is equally ready to place her life, her love, her service beneath his feet.

MIRANDA.

Alas, now! pray you,
Work not so hard: I would the lightning had
Burnt up those logs, that you are enjoined to pile!
Pray set it down and rest you: when this burns,
'Twill weep for having weary'd you. My father
Is hard at study; pray now, rest yourself:
He's safe for these three hours.

FERDINAND.

O most dear mistress,
The sun will set before I shall discharge
What I must strive to do.

MIRANDA.

If you'll sit down,

I'll bear your logs the while. Pray give me that,
I'll carry it to the pile.

FERDINAND.

No, precious creature;
I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,
Than you should such dishonour undergo,
While I sit lazy by.

MIRANDA.

It would become me
As well as it does you; and I should do it
With much more ease; for my good will is to it,
And yours against.

MIRANDA.

You look wearily.

FERDINAND.

No, noble mistress; 'tis fresh morning with me
When you are by at night. I do beseech you
(Chiefly that I might set it in my prayers),
What is your name?

MIRANDA.

Miranda. O, my father,
I have broke your hest to say so!

FERDINAND.

Admir'd Miranda!
Indeed the top of admiration: worth

What's dearest in the world! Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard: and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear: for several virtues
Have I liked several women; never any
With so full soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best!

MIRANDA.

I do not know
One of my sex: no woman's face remember,
Save, from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen
More that I may call man, than you, good friend,
And my dear father. How features are abroad
I am skill-less of; but, by my modesty
(The jewel is my dower), I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you;
Nor can imagination form a shape,
Besides yourself, to like of. But I prattle
Something too wildly, and my father's precepts
Therein forget.

FERDINAND.

I am, in my condition,
A prince, Miranda—I do think a king—
I would not so! and would no more endure
This wooden slavery, than I would suffer

The flesh-fly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service, there resides
To make me slave to it; and, for your sake,
Am I this patient log-man.

MIRANDA.

Do you love me?

FERDINAND.

O heavens! O earth! bear witness to this sound,
And crown what I profess with kind event,
If I speak true: if hollowly, invert
What best is boded me to mischief! I,
Beyond all limit of what else in the world,
Do love, prize, honour you.

MIRANDA.

I am a fool,
To weep at what I am glad of.

FERDINAND.

Wherefore weep you?

MIRANDA.

At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
What I desire to give; and much less take,
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling:
And all the more it seeks to hide itself,
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning;
And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!

I am your wife, if you will marry me;
If not I'll die your maid: to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant
Whether you will or no!

FERDINAND.

My mistress, dearest!
And I thus humble ever.

MIRANDA.

My husband, then?

FERDINAND.

Ay, with a heart as willing,
As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.

MIRANDA.

And mine with my heart in it. And now farewell
Till half an hour hence.

As Miranda, being what she is, could only have had a Ferdinand for her lover, and an Ariel for an attendant, so she could have had with propriety no other father than the majestic and gifted being, who fondly claims her as "a thread of his own life—nay, that for which he lives." Prospero, with his magical powers, his super-

human wisdom, his moral worth and grandeur, and his kingly dignity, is one of the most sublime visions that ever swept with ample robes, pale brow, and sceptred hand, before the eye of fancy. He controls the invisible world, and works through the agency of spirits; not by any evil and forbidden compact, but solely by superior might of intellect—by potent spells gathered from the lore of ages, and abjured when he mingles again as a man with his fellow men. He is as distinct a being from the necromancers and astrologers celebrated in Shakspeare's age, as can well be imagined:[1] and all the wizards of poetry and fiction, even Faust and St. Leon, sink into commonplaces before the princely, the philosophic, the benevolent Prospero.

The Bermuda Isles, in which Shakspeare has placed the scene of the Tempest, were discovered in his time: Sir George Somers and his companions having been wrecked

[1] Such as Cornelius Agrippa, Michael Scott, Dr. Dee. The last was the contemporary of Shakspeare.

there in a terrible storm,[1] brought back a most fearful account of those unknown islands, which they described as "a land of devils—a most prodigious and enchanted place, subject to continual tempests and supernatural visitings." Such was the idea entertained of the "still-vext Bermoothes" in Shakspeare's age; but later travellers describe them as perfect regions of enchantment in a far different sense; as so many fairy Edens, clustered like a knot of gems upon the bosom of the Atlantic, decked out in all the lavish luxuriance of nature, with shades of myrtle and cedar, fringed round with groves of coral; in short, each island a tiny paradise, rich with perpetual blossoms, in which Ariel might have slumbered, and ever-verdant bowers, in which Ferdinand and Miranda might have strayed: so that Shakspeare, in blending the wild relations of the shipwrecked mariners with his own inspired fancies, has produced nothing,

[1] In 1609, about three years before Shakspeare produced the Tempest, which, though placed first in all the editions of his works, was one of the last of his dramas.

however lovely in nature and sublime in magical power, which does not harmonise with the beautiful and wondrous reality.

There is another circumstance connected with the Tempest, which is rather interesting. It was produced and acted for the first time upon the occasion of the nuptials of the Princess Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of James I. with Frederic, the elector palatine. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of the fate of this amiable but most unhappy woman, whose life, almost from the period of her marriage, was one long tempestuous scene of trouble and adversity.

* * * *

The characters which I have here classed together, as principally distinguished by the predominance of passion and fancy, appear to me to rise, in the scale of ideality and simplicity, from Juliet to Miranda; the last being in comparison so refined, so elevated above all stain of earth, that we can only acknowledge her in connexion with it

through the emotions of sympathy she feels and inspires.

I remember, when I was in Italy, standing "at evening on the top of Fesole," and at my feet I beheld the city of Florence and the Val d'Arno, with its villas, its luxuriant gardens, groves, and olive grounds, all bathed in crimson light. A transparent vapour or exhalation, which in its tint was almost as rich as the pomegranate flower, moving with soft undulation, rolled through the valley, and the very earth seemed to pant with warm life beneath its rosy veil. A dark purple shade, the forerunner of night, was already stealing over the east; in the western sky still lingered the blaze of the sunset, while the faint perfume of trees, and flowers, and now and then a strain of music wafted upwards, completed the intoxication of the senses. But I looked from the earth to the sky, and immediately above this scene hung the soft crescent moon—alone, with all the bright heaven to herself: and as that sweet moon to the

glowing landscape beneath it, such is the character of Miranda compared to that of Juliet.

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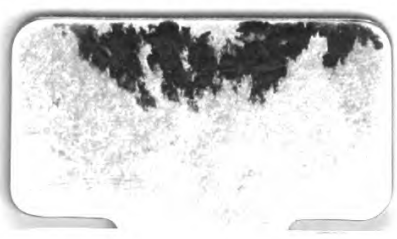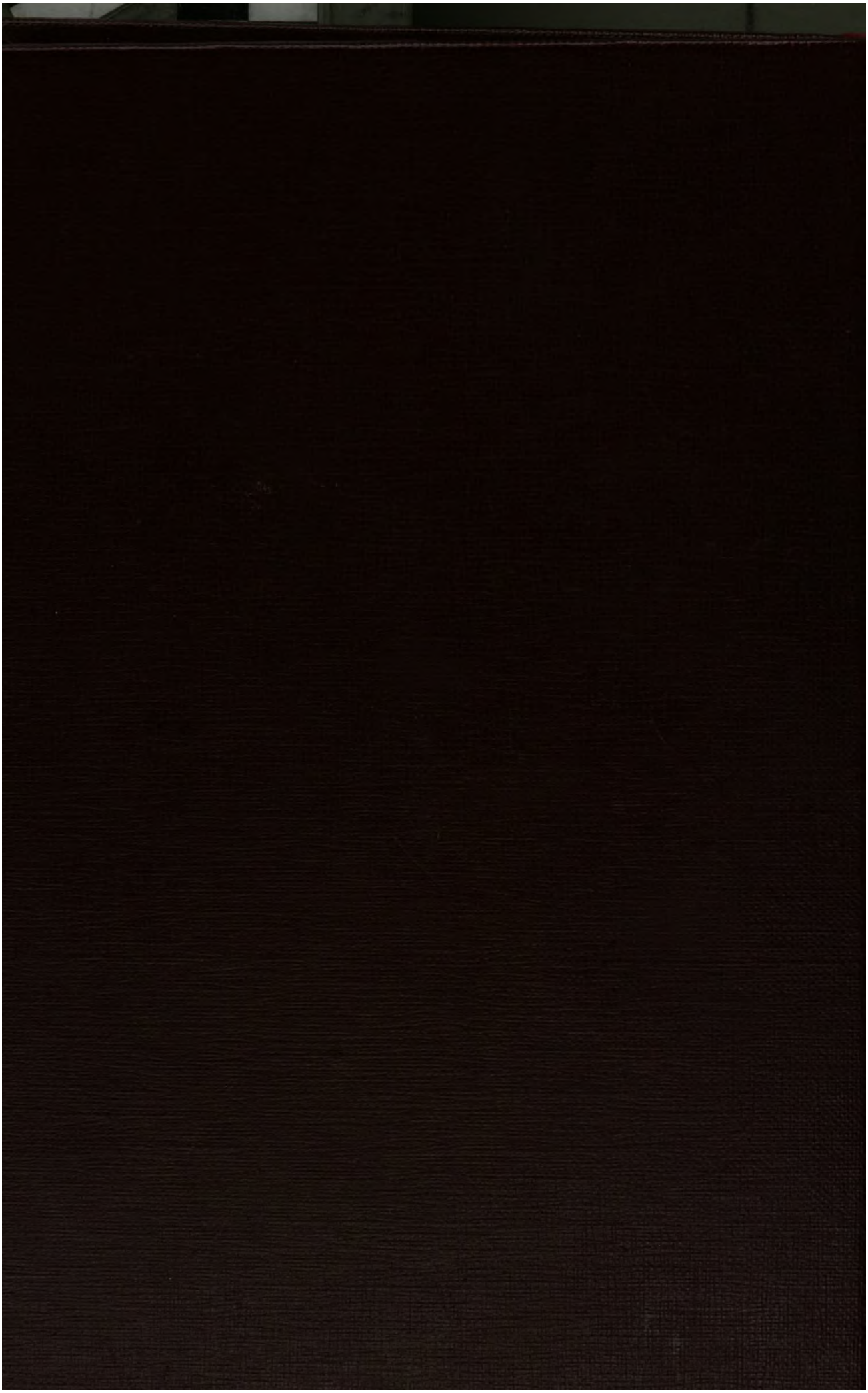
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