

dinary accuracy of Shakespeare's delineations of mental diseases; the nicety with which he traces their various steps in one individual, the accuracy with which he distinguishes these morbid affections in different persons. He seems unable to account for the exact minuteness in any other way than by external observation.

He acknowledges that "indefinable possession of genius, call it spiritual tact or insight, or whatever term may suggest itself, by which the great lords of mind estimate all phases of mind with little aid from reflected light," as the mental instrument through which Shakespeare looked upon others at a distance, or within reach of minute observation.

Still he seems to think that Shakespeare must have had many opportunities of observing mental phenomena. I own I am more inclined to think that the process by which the genius of Shakespeare reached this painful yet strange accuracy, was rather that of introversion than of external observation. At any rate, it is most interesting to see eminent physicians maintaining, by some means or other, that Shakespeare arrived by some sort of intuition at the possession of a psychological or even medical knowledge, fully verified and proved to be exact by the researches, two centuries later, of distinguished men in a science only recently developed. Mrs. Jameson* has well distinguished the different forms of aberration in Shakespeare's characters, when she says that "Constance is frantic, Lear is mad, Ophelia is insane."—*William Shakespeare. By His Eminence Cardinal Wiseman.* London, 1865.

The Westminster Review on Hamlet.

ONE lesson which Shakespeare implicitly teaches, is a lesson of infinite tolerance as the result of deep insight and a comprehensive view. Heartily do we sympathise with Hamlet in his great sorrow and sore trial; we esteem the faithful friendship and admire the cool judgment of Horatio; the treachery of Laertes, so greatly provoked as he was by events, does not excite unmitigated horror and render him inexcusably hateful—his repentance we accept with sincere satisfaction; and even the wicked king inspires sorrow rather than anger, though we abhor his deeds, and as he kneels to pray we would certainly forgive his crime if the decision lay with us: believing that God will be kind to the wicked, as he has been kind to the good in making them good, we cannot give up the comforting hope that, after the day of retribution, the fratricidal king may find rest. No poet, save Goethe, thus approaches Shakespeare in the tolerant and emancipated point of view from which he contemplates humanity. On account of this surpassing excellence, some, fired by

* 'Characteristics of Women,' New York, 1833, p. 142.

the restless presumption of their own infirmities, have dared to find fault with Shakespeare; they have blamed him because he has exhibited moral ugliness unveiled, because he was not sufficiently patriotic, and because he seemed more sceptical than was fitting. Imperturbable assurance! As if Shakespeare's far-seeing vision and penetrating insight could anywhere detect inexcusable vice; as if his mighty mind could be fettered by the littleness of scepticism, or could condescend to the selfishness of patriotism! Is it really a matter for regret to any mortal that Shakespeare has not given us the demented twaddle of the *Civis Romanus*?

From the evidence of his sonnets and of different plays—indeed, from the character of Hamlet himself—there can be no doubt that Shakespeare was at one time much tried, disheartened, and oppressed by the harsh experiences of life; he began, doubtless, as many others have done, by thinking life “a Paradise,” and found it, as others have done, “only a Vauxhall.” But as Goethe advanced from the storminess of Werter to the calmness of Faust, so did Shakespeare rise in a glorious development from the subjective character of Timon to that lofty and pure region of clear vision from which he contemplated the actions of men with infinite calmness. His practical life was correspondent; by bending his actions to the yoke of his intellectual life—by living, in fact, his philosophy—he was able to work steadily in the painful sphere of his vocation to the end which he had proposed to himself. If Hamlet is a reflex of Shakespeare's character, it reflects a period ere it had attained to its full development—a stage in which the struggle between the feeling of the painful experiences of life and the intellectual appreciation of them as events was actively going on—in which his nature was not yet in harmony with itself; but the crowning development of his philosophy seems to have been to look on all events with a serene and passionless gaze as inevitable effects of antecedent causes—to be nowise moved by the vices of men, and to see in their virtues the evolution of their nature. It is a probable conjecture which has been made, therefore, that Hamlet was sketched out at an earlier period of his life than that at which it was published, and that it was kept by him for some time and much modified, the soliloquies and large generalisations being some of them perhaps thus introduced, and the action of the play thereby delayed. The Hamlet of his youth may thus have been alloyed with a more advanced philosophy, and a character progressively elaborated which seems almost over-weighted with intellectual preponderance. If this be so, it may account for the strange circumstance, that at the beginning of the play Hamlet is represented as wishing to go back to school at Wittenberg, when, as the graveyard scene proves, he must have been about thirty years of age.

The metaphysician who would gain a just conception of what human freedom is, could scarce do better than study the relations of the human will in the events of life as these are exhibited in the play of "Hamlet." It represents the abstract and brief chronicle of human life, and, faithfully holding the mirror up to nature, it teaches—better than all philosophical disquisition and minute introspective analysis can—how is evolved the drama in which human will contests with necessity. Struggle as earnestly and as constantly as he may, the reflecting mortal must feel at the end of all that he is inevitably what he is; that his follies and his virtues are alike his fate; that there is "a divinity which shapes his ends, rough-hew them as he may." Hamlet, the man of thought, may brood over possibilities, speculate on events, analyse motives, and purposely delay action; but in the end he is, equally with Macbeth, the man of energetic action, whom the darkest hints of the witches arouse to desperate deeds, drawn on to the unavoidable issue. Mighty, it must be allowed, is the power of human will; that which, to him whose will is not developed, is *fate*, is, to him who has a well-fashioned will, *power*—so much has been conquered from necessity, so much has been taken from the devil's territory. The savage prostrates himself, powerless, prayerful, and pitiable, before the flashing lightning; but the developed mortal lays hold of the lightning and makes of it a very useful servant; to the former, lightning is a fate against which will is helpless; to the latter, will is a fate against which lightning is helpless. What limit, then, to the power of will, when so much of fate is ignorance? The limit which there necessarily is to the contents of the continent, to the comprehended of that which comprehends it. The unrelenting circle of necessity encompasses all: one may go his destined course with tranquil resignation, and another may fume and fret and struggle; but, willing or unwilling, both must go. As the play of "Hamlet" so instructively teaches, notwithstanding all the ingenious refinements of a powerful meditation, the human will is included within the larger sphere of necessity or natural law. The cage may be a larger or a smaller one, but its bars are always there. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the band of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Then Job answered and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." Well, then, is it for him who learns his limitation, to whom the dark horizon of necessity becomes the sunlit circle of duty.—*The Westminster Review*, January, 1865.