THE ASYLUM JOURNAL

OF

MENTAL SCIENCE.

VOL. IV. JULY, 1858. No. 26.

## *Macbeth: A Psychological Study.*

Macbeth, the most awful creation of the poetic mind, is a study every way worthy of those to whom the storms of passion present the frequent cause of mental disease. The historian studies the temper of the mind in its most ardent heats, that he may gain a clue to the causation of human events; the statesman, that he may obtain foreknowledge of tendencies to human action; and the psychologist, for the more beneficent purpose of acquiring that knowledge as the means of alleviating the most terrible of calamities, and of doing that which the terrified physician in this tragedy dared not attempt, of "ministering to the mind diseased." The philosopher studies the laws of storms, that he may teach the mariner to avoid the destructive circle of their influence; and the physician, whose noble object of study is the human mind, seizes every opportunity of making himself acquainted with the direction and events of its hurricane movements, that he may perchance lead some into a port of safety, or at least that he may assist in the restoration of the torn and shattered bark. But to stand on one side and calmly contemplate the phenomena of human passion, like the chorus in the old Greek drama, is the lot of few. When the elements of human passion are in fierce strife, there is no near standing-place for the foot of science, like the deck of the great steamer which allowed Scoresby to measure the force and speed of the wild Atlantic wave. The vortex of



https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

passion tends to draw in all who float near; and tranquil observation of its turmoil can only be made from a standing point more or less remote. On all actual occasions, indeed, it behoves the man whose object of study and of care is the human mind, to observe accurately its phenomena, and to test its springs and sources of action; but it behoves him to accept the testimony of those who have weathered the storm, and also gratefully to appreciate any assistance he may obtain from others who contemplate the same phenomena from different points of view to his own: and there is no one from whom he will derive help of such inestimable value, as from him whose high faculties enables him to contemplate human nature, as it were, from within. The Poet or maker, the same intrinsically with the Seer or gifted observer, is the best guide and helpmate with whom the psychologist can ally himself. He is like the native of a country to whom mountain and stream and every living thing are known, acting as instructor and guide to the naturalist, whose systems and classifications he may hold in slight esteem, but with whom he has a common love and a more personal knowledge for all their objects. Compared with the assistance which the psychologist derives from the true poet, that which he obtains from the metaphysician is as sketchy and indistinct as the theoretical description of a new country might be, given by one who had never been therein, as the description of Australia might be, drawn from the parallel of its climate and latitude with South America or China.

Above all seers with whom a beneficent Providence has blessed mankind, to delight and instruct them with that knowledge which is so wondrous that it is falsely called intuitive, is that heaven-born genius, who is the pride and glory of this country, the greatest poet of all ages, and pre-eminently the most truthful analyst of human action. Shakespeare not only possesses more psychological insight than all other poets, but than all other writers, the sacred writings alone excepted. He has been aptly called, "a nature humanized." He has above all men the faculty of unravelling the motives of human action. Compared with his profound knowledge of the surface and depths of the human soul, the information of other great minds, even of such wondrously vigorous intelligences as those of Plato and Bacon, were obscure and fragmentary. Had he not been a poet, what might he not have been as a philosopher? What essays might he not have written? What Socratic

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dialogues, sparkling with wit, seething with humour, saturated with truth, might he not have written upon politics and philosophy? Some American writer has lately started the idea that Shakespeare's plays were written by Bacon! Verily, were it not for the want of power of imagination and verbal euphony which is displayed in Bacon's Essays, one might rather think that they were some of Shakespeare's own rough memoranda on men and motives, which had strayed from his desk.

Although Macbeth is less pervaded with the idea of mental disease than its great rival tragedies of Hamlet and Lear, and contains but one short scene in which a phase of insanity is actually represented, it is not only replete with passages of deep psychological interest, but in the mental development of the bloody-handed hero and of his terrible mate, it affords a study scarcely less instructive than the wild and passionate madness of Lear, or the metaphysical motive-weighing melancholy of the Prince of Denmark.

It is not within the scope of our intention to comment upon the artistic perfection of this work. This has already been done, and done well, by professed writers of dramatic criticism—by Schlegel especially, and by Hazlitt. The wonderful rapidity of action which obtains in this tragedy, the exquisite adaptation of all its parts to form a perfect and consistent whole, and the inimitable use of violent contrasts which it presents, have been dilated upon by the German with a ripe and critical intelligence—by our countryman with the eloquence of vehement admiration. Coleridge also has a long essay upon this drama, to which the authority of his name has attached importance. Some of his criticisms, however, appear more subtle than sensible. He discovers that Lady Macbeth's "is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition. She shames her husband by a superhuman audacity of fancy which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony." He discovers that the scene opens "with superstition;" as if Macbeth had dreamt he had seen the Witches. Surely there is a difference between the supernatural and the superstitious! The difference between mere apprehension and reality, between imagination and existence. The truth of supernatural events may be doubted or denied, but if admitted, to see it as it is, is not superstition. Degrading Lady Macbeth into a fanciful would-be heroine, Coleridge makes her lord a pre-determined scoundrel, "rendered temptable (by the Witches,) by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts." "His



https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

soliloquy shewed the early birth-date of his guilt." According to this view, the temptation of the weird Sisters, and the "concatinating tendency of the imagination," was quite needless. A villain *ab initio*, "who, wishing a temporal end for itself, does in truth will the means," can find no palliation in the direct tempting of supernatural beings, or in being subject to the masterdom of another human will. Then Macbeth makes the most grievous metaphysical mistakes. Before the deed, "the inward pangs and warnings of conscience are interpreted into prudential reasonings;" and afterwards, he is "ever and ever mistaking the anguish of conscience for fears of selfishness." The idea conveyed is, that conscience is independent of reason; that the inward monitor intuitively decides upon the right and wrong without the aid of the judgment; that the still small voice is an uninstructed sentiment.

We cannot give our adhesion to the theory that Macbeth was originally a treacherous and bad man, prone to deeds of midnight murder. His bold and fierce wife is likely to have known him far better than his metaphysical critic; and she reading his letter, which describes the prophecies of the weird Sisters, says:

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised:—Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way; Thou would'st be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st surely win."

Macbeth is introduced as a right brave man. "Valour's minion," he is called by the bleeding captain, and "Bellona's bridegroom" by Rosse. "Oh, valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!" exclaims the King, on hearing the relation of his first victory. Twice in one day he is represented to have saved the kingdom, and the gracious Duncan regrets his inadequate power of reward:

"More is thy due than more than all can pay."

He is "full of the milk of human kindness," but withal so personally brave that his deeds against the Irish gallowglasses and the Norwegians are the theme of general enthusiasm, and win for him "golden opinions from all sorts of people." Evidently he is a man of sanguine nervous temperament, of large capacity and ready susceptibility. The high energy and courage which guides his sword in the battles of his

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

country are qualities of nerve force which future circumstances will direct to good or evil purposes. Circumstances arise soliciting to evil; "supernatural soliciting," the force of which, in these anti-spiritualist days, it requires an almost unattainable flight of imagination to get a glimpse of. It must be remembered that the drama brings Macbeth face to face with the supernatural, with that devil's brood the weird Sisters, so unlike the inhabitants of earth, who, after a prophecy immediately fulfilled, "made themselves air into which they vanished." What would be the effect upon a man of nervous sensibility, of such appearances? Surely most profound. Well may Hazlitt say, that "he can conceive no common actor to look like a man who had encountered the weird Sisters." When they had "melted as breath into the wind," even the firm tempered and judicious Banquo exclaims:

> "Were such things here as we do speak about?
> Or have we eaten of the insane root
> That takes the reason prisoner?"

We may disbelieve in any manifestations of the supernatural; but we cannot but believe that were their occurrence possible, it would profoundly affect the mind. Humboldt says, that the effect of the first earthquake shock is most bewildering, unsettling one of the strongest articles of material faith, namely, the fixedness of the earth. Any supernatural appearance must have this effect of shaking the foundations of the mind in an infinitely greater degree. Indeed, we so fully feel that any glimpse into the spirit-world would effect in ourselves a profound mental revulsion, that we intuitively extend to Macbeth a more indulgent opinion of his great crimes, than we should have been able to do had he been led on to their commission by the temptations of earthly incident alone.

Macbeth is no villain in-grain, like Richard the Third or Iago, revelling in the devil's work because he likes it; but a once noble human nature, struggling but yielding in a net of temptation, whose meshes are wound around him by the visible hand of the Spirit of Evil. Slave as he is to that soldier's passion, the love of fame and power, he is not without amiable qualities. He was once loved even by his arch-enemy Macduff, to whom Malcolm says:

> "This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues,
> Was once thought honest; you have lov'd him well."

And we may even accept the testimony of the Queen of Hell, "the close contriver of all harms," in his favour. She up-

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

braids her foul menials, the Sisters, that they had been serving one who had no pleasure in evil for its own sake, but who had spitefully and wrathfully accepted it only as the means to an end:

> "And, which is worse, all you have done
> Hath been but for a wayward son,
> Spiteful and wrathful; who, as others do,
> Loves for his own ends, not for you."

Let it not be thought that we attempt to palliate the guilt of Macbeth. In a moral point of view this is impossible. If his solicitings to crime are supernatural, combined with fate and metaphysic aid, he is not blinded by them. With conscience fully awake, with eyes open to the foul nature of his double treachery, although resisting, he yields to temptation. He even feels that he is not called upon to act to fulfil the decrees of destiny.

> "If Chance will have me king, why Chance may crown me
> Without my stir."

Had he with more determination resisted the temptations of the woman, he might have falsified the prophecies of the fiend, and put aside from his lips the poisoned chalice of remorse, maintained from rancours the vessel of his peace, and above all have rescued the eternal jewel of his soul.

Though here and elsewhere Shakespeare has admitted the doctrine of destiny, no one more pitilessly tore aside this veil from the features for wickedness. Edgar in Lear, says: "This is the excellent foppery of the world! That when we are sick in fortune [often the surfeit of our own behaviour] we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by a forced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion———"

To the Christian moralist, Macbeth's guilt is so dark that its degree cannot be estimated, as there are no shades in black. But to the mental physiologist, to whom nerve rather than conscience is an object of study, the functions of the brain rather than the powers of the will, it is impossible to omit from calculation the influences of the supernatural event, which is not only the starting point of the action, but the remote cause of the mental phenomena.

The professed moralist is slow to accept the teaching of the drama; but where shall we find a more impressive lesson of the manner in which the infraction of the moral law works

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

out its own punishment, than in the delineation of the agonizing soul torture of Macbeth? In this, as in all other instances, the true psychological is not opposed to the true moral doctrine of human life. In the attempt to trace conduct to its earliest source or motive, and to deduce the laws of emotional progression, the psychological, or to use the stricter and better term, the physiological moralist teaches the importance of establishing an early habit of emotional action, which may tend to virtuous conduct, and form a prepared defence against temptation; by shewing how invariably in the moral world evil leads on to evil, he teaches in the best manner the wisdom of opposing the beginnings of evil, and he developes the ethical principle laid down by our Great Teacher, that an evil emotion is in the heart the representation of the bad action.

The great interest of this drama is most skilfully made to depend upon the conflicting emotions of sympathy with a man struggling under fearful temptation; horror excited by treachery and foul murder; awful amazement at the visible grasp of the Spirit of Evil upon the human soul; and of satisfied justice at the hell of remorse into which he is plunged. In this respect there is an obvious parallelism between Macbeth and Faust; since in both the hero-criminal of the piece is not responsible as a free agent, so far as he is but the mortal instrument of the fiend in deeds of evil. The conduct of Faust, indeed, is not comparable to the fierce and bloody deeds of the Scotch tyrant, and he is saved from our utter disgust and hatred by the more immediate intervention of the fiend in the execution of the murders, both of Margaret's mother and her brother. Had the action not been thus arranged, had Faust himself poisoned the mother and slain the brother, all sympathy with him as a human soul in the hands of fate would have been destroyed in the irrepressible feelings which attach to a base and dastardly criminal.

In Macbeth the fiercer temptation, fanned not only by the evil solicitings of the devil, but by the agency of his dark and terrible human tempter and colleague, renders it possible to commit the perpetration of crimes to his own hand, without destroying those traces of sympathy, without which any deep interest in his fate would have been impossible.

The temptation of the weird Sisters has an immediate effect on Macbeth. In the presence of others, he soliloquises, and calls upon himself the remark:

"Look how our partner's wrapt."

The immediate fulfilment of two parts of the prophecy come

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as "happy prologues to the swelling act," and murder is thought of as an "horrible imagining," and an indication that the supernatural soliciting was evil in its nature.

> "This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good:—If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smother'd in surmise; and nothing is,
> But what is not."

Let not this early and important testimony be overlooked, which Macbeth gives to the extreme excitability of his imagination. The supernatural soliciting of the weird Sisters suggests to him an *image*, not a thought merely, but an image so horrible that its contemplation

> "does unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature."

This passage was scarcely intended to describe an actual hallucination, but rather that excessive predominance of the imaginative faculty which enables some men to call at will before the mind's eye the very appearance of the object of thought; that faculty which enabled a great painter to place at will in the empty chair of his studio the mental delineation of any person who had given him one sitting. It is a faculty bordering on a morbid state, and apt to pass the limit, when judgment swallowed in surmise yields her function, and the imaginary becomes to the mind as real as the true, "and nothing is, but what is not." This early indication of Macbeth's tendency to hallucination is most important in the psychological development of his character.

We cannot believe that Macbeth had entertained any idea of his great crime, before the suggestion of it arising from the devil's interview on Fores heath. That he yields to it is only too evident from the passage beginning "Stars hide your fires." That his wife should form the same guilty purpose, upon the mere recital in his letter of the supernatural information he had obtained of that which was in the "coming on of time," proves not that he had suggested it to her, but

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that she is prone to entertain it on slighter grounds, and that there is between them that unity of thought and desire which is common between man and wife who are much wrapt up in each other.

The struggle with which Macbeth yields to the suggestion is so fierce that horror and pain are forthwith stamped upon his features. His wife exclaims, when he meets her:

> "Your face, my thane, is like a book, where men
> May read strange matters."

For herself, she hath no faltering; she hath no need of supernatural appearances to "prick the sides of her intent." Ambition and the desire "of sovereign sway and masterdom," are to her undaunted metal the all-sufficient motives of the terrible deed which she plotted and instigated, and would have perpetrated, had not a touch of filial piety withheld her hand. Strange inconsistency of humanity which leaves not the darkest moments of the lost soul without stray gleams of light.

> "Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't."

It was one of the "compunctious visitings of nature," against which she invokes the murdering ministers whose sightless substances wait on nature's mischief, in that expression of sublimated wickedness in which she welcomes the fatal entrance of Duncan under her battlements.

The wavering of Macbeth, expressed in his first soliloquy, appears to us very different from the "prudential reasonings" which, according to Coleridge, he mistakes for conscience. Surely it indicates a sensitive appreciation of right motive, and the fear of punishment in the life to come; the acknowledgment also that crime, even in this world, receives its proper reward from the operation of even-handed justice; the acknowledgment of the foul nature of treachery to a kinsman and disloyalty to a king. Moreover, that expression of sincere pity for the gracious Duncan, whose meek and holy character is depicted in so fine a contrast to his own fierce and wayward passions, is a sentiment far removed from "prudential reasonings." Thus he convinces himself against the deed, and concludes:

> "I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'er-leaps its'sell,
> And falls on the other."

When Lady Macbeth joins him, he expresses his virtuous resolve, and for the first time adds "prudential reasonings:"

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon."

Then mark the temptation to which the terrible woman subjects him; the taunts of cowardice and weakness; taunts to which a soldier gifted with sensitive and not obtuse bravery would be keenly alive, especially coming from the lips of a beautiful woman whom he loved;

"Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire?"

She further urges the temptation by comparing his vacillating desire with her own fell purpose, in that terrible passage:

"I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd the nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash't the brains out, had I but so sworn
As you have done to this."

Fearing that his better nature would relent, she had sworn him to the treacherous and bloody deed. She concludes by shewing clearly the opportunity. She will ply the two chamberlains with wine and wassel, until

"Memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only: When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death ——"

Well may Macbeth exclaim in astonishment:

"Bring forth men-children only!
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males."

He reels under the fierce battery of temptation and when she has thus poured her spirits into his ear, and chastised his compunctions with the valour of her tongue, he falls; without time for further thought, rushing into the commission of his first great crime.

"I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As in earliest time, the temptation was urged by the woman, who, infinitely the most virtuous, distances her partner when she has once entered the career of crime.

"Denn, geht es zu des Bösen Haus,
Das Weib hat tausend Shritt voraus."

The dagger scene is an illustration of Shakespeare's finest psychological insight. An hallucination of sight resulting from the high-wrought nervous tension of the regicide, and "the present horror of the time," and typifying in form, the dread purpose of his mind; impressed upon his senses, but rejected by his judgment; recognised as a morbid product of mental excitement, and finally its existence altogether repudiated, and the bloody business of the mind made answerable for the foolery of the senses.

"Is this a dagger, which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:——
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind; a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest: I see thee still;
And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There 's no such thing.
It is the bloody business, which informs
Thus to mine eyes."

The deed is done! and the terrible punishment of guilt commences from the very moment. Remorse dogs the murderer's heels even from the chamber of death.

"*Macb.* One cried *God bless us!* and, *Amen*, the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say, amen,
When they did say, God bless us.
*Lady M.* Consider it not so deeply.
*Macb.* But wherefore could not I pronounce, amen?
I had most need of blessing, and amen
Stuck in my throat.
*Lady M.* These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, *it will make us mad.*"

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Guilt hath instantly changed the brave man into a coward.

"I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again, I dare not."
"How is't with me, when every noise appals me?"

The sting of remorse extorts from him the direct expression of regret:

"To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself."
"Wake Duncan with thy knocking: *I would thou could'st!*"

Compare this with the woman's firmer nerve, rebuking him:

"You do unbend your noble strenth, to think
*So brainsickly of things.*"
"Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: The sleeping, and the dead,
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil."

She enters the murder chamber, to do that which her mate dare not do; and shewing her hands, gilded like the faces of the grooms with Duncan's blood, says:

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

And this is the lady whom Mr. Coleridge describes as courageous in fancy only!

The passage, "Methought I heard a voice," &c., is scarcely to be accepted as another instance of hallucination; an hallucination of hearing parallel to that of sight in the appearance of the dagger. It is rather an instance of merely excited imagination without sensual representation, like the "suggestion whose horrid image" is spoken of on Fores heath. The word "*methought*" is sufficient to distinguish this voice of the fancy from an hallucination of sense. The lengthened reasoning of the fancied speech is also unlike an hallucination of hearing; real hallucinations of hearing being almost always restricted to two or three words, or at furthest, to brief sentences. How exquisite is this description of sleep! How correct, psychologically, is the threat that remorse will murder sleep! How true the prediction to the course of the drama, in which we find that hereafter the murderer did "lack the season of all natures, sleep!"

"*Macb.* Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more!*
*Macbeth doth murder sleep; the innocent sleep;*
*Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,*
*The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,*
*Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,*
*Chief nourisher in life's feast.*

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

*Lady M.* What do you mean?

*Macb.* Still it cried, *Sleep no more!* to all the house:
*Glamis hath murder'd sleep; and therefore Cawdor*
*Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!*"

When the first agony of remorseful excitement has passed, its more settled phase is expressed in the life-weary, Hamlet-like melancholy of the passage:

"Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys; renown, and grace, is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of."

The description of the night of murder is conceived to add to the supernatural. By lamentings in the air, earthquake, eclipse, prodigies in animal life, things "unnatural, even like the deed that's done," the mental effect of awe is skilfully produced, and the feeling of Macbeth's balance between fate and free-will is maintained just at that point which enables us both to sympathize and condemn.

Macbeth at last hath obtained the "All hail hereafter;" but the furies of conscience rack his soul with cowardly and anxious thoughts. He is cowed by the presence of a brave and honest man, his old friend and colleague, whose royalty of nature, dauntless temper, and the prudence with which he acts, make him an object of fear, and his presence a rebuke. Jealousy, moreover, of the greatness which the weird Sisters had promised to the issue of Banquo, rankles in his mind, now debased by guilt and the fertile seed ground of all evil passion.

"For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come, *Fate*, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance!"

Strange inconsistency! He yields to Fate when its decrees jump with his own desires; but when the tide turns he resolves to breast its irresistible wave. One is inclined, however, to the belief, that the first reason assigned for Banquo's death was the most potent, that "there is none but he whose being I do fear." Macbeth had no children, and the descent of the crown could not touch his feelings or interests. When he

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

learns that Fleance had escaped, he feels "bound in to saucy doubts and fears;" but, on the whole, he treats the escape as a light matter, and as the cause of future danger to himself, rather than of anxiety respecting the succession.

How awful is the retribution which the Nemesis of conscience works upon the guilty pair, and that before they have cause to dread any earthly retribution. Duncan's sons are fugitives in foreign lands. The peers gather freely round the court of the new king. Suspicions have indeed arisen in the mind of Banquo, but he breathes them only to himself, and commends his indissoluble duties to the king. All without seems fair; but within? Listen to the deep sound of melancholy surging from the heart of the lady:

"Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

From these sad lonely thoughts she rouses herself to chide her lord for permitting similar thoughts to be expressed legibly on his more sensitive organization.

"*Lady M.* How now, my lord? why do you keep alone?
Of sorriest fancies your companions making?
Using those thoughts, which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without remedy
Should be without regard: what's done, is done.
*Macb.* We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it;
She'll close, and be herself; whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly: Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstacy."

Well might she feel it needful to urge upon him the policy of sleeking o'er his rugged looks, and of being bright and jovial among his guests; but how deep the agony of the reply:

"O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!"

The banquet scene following the murder of Banquo is unrivalled in dramatic force and psychological truth. The kingly host hath put on a forced cheerfulness. He will play the humble host, and sit in the midst. He commands his guests to be large in mirth. He has something like a grim jest for the murderer who appears at the side door, to whom he

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

makes the only play on words in the tragedy, the porter's ribaldry excepted.

"*Macb.* There's blood upon thy face.
*Mur.* 'Tis Banquo's, then.
*Macb.* 'Tis better thee *without*, than him *within*."
"Thou art the best o' the cut throats; yet he's good
That did the like for Fleance; if thou didst it,
Thou art the *nonpareil*."

The short-lived effort to be gay subsides into the usual abstracted mood, and Lady Macbeth needs to chide him: "You do not give the cheer," &c. He makes an effort, gives that fine physiological grace before meat:

"Now good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both!"

playfully challenges the absence of Banquo as an act of unkindness, thus by a voluntary mental act calling before his mind's eye the image of the murdered man. When invited to sit, "The table's full."—"Here's a place reserv'd, sir."—"Where? which of you have done this?" None see the shadowy form except Macbeth himself, and his first impression is that it is a sorry jest; but how quickly does he believe in the supernatural nature of his visitor? "Thou canst not say, I did it; never shake thy gory locks at me." He looks "on that which might appal the devil," but which no eyes but his own can see. Although "quite unmann'd in folly," fear turns to daring, and he threatens the ghost:

"Pr'ythee, see there! behold! look! lo! how say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.—
If charnel houses, and our graves, must send
Those that we bury, back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites."

The hallucination fades, and his natural high courage allows him on the moment to philosophize upon the appearance:

"Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,
Ere human statute purg'd the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd,
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end: but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: This is more strange
Than such a murder is."

Again roused from reverie by his wife, he excuses his behaviour by the same reference to a customary infirmity, which is twice alluded to for the same purpose by his wife:

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"I do forget:—
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends;
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those who know me."

He proposes a bumper health to the general joy of the whole table, and that in particular of "our dear friend Banquo," this second reference shewing how his mind is fascinated with the idea of the dead man; and having the immediate effect of re-establishing the hallucination. Then comes that burst of despairing defiance, when the extremity of fear changes to audacity:

"Avaunt! and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold:
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with."
"What man dare, I dare:
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger,
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble: Or, be alive again,
And dare me to the desert with thy sword;
If trembling I exhibit then, protest me
The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow!
Unreal mockery, hence!—Why so;—being gone,
I am a man again.—Pray you, sit still."

He is astonished that the others present are not moved by the object of his dread. Unlike the air-drawn dagger, which he recognized as an hallucination, he believes this appearance to have been most real. He does this notwithstanding his wife's assurance that—

"This is the very painting of your fear;
This is the air-drawn dagger, which, you said,
Led you to Duncan."

She gives no credence to matters which

"Would well become
A woman's story, told by a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam."

She taunts him, and assures him:

"Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool."

It is markworthy that the ghost of Banquo is seen to no one but Macbeth, differing in this respect from that of Hamlet's Father. Moreover, Banquo's ghost is silent: Hamlet's ghost is a conversational being, subject to disappearance at cock-crow, and other ghost laws; points

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

indicating the poet's idea of the ghost of Banquo as an hallucination, not as an apparition; a creation of the heat-oppressed brain, not a shadowy messenger from spirit-land. It is the pathological Nemesis of guilt, not a phantom returned to the confines of the day actively to assist in the discovery of guilt. The progress of the morbid action is depicted with exquisite skill. First, there is the horrible picture of the imagination not transferred to the sense, then there is the sensual hallucination whose reality is questioned and rejected, and now there is the sensual hallucination whose reality is fully accepted.

Are we to accept the repeated assurance, both from Macbeth and from his lady, that he is subject to sudden fits of some kind? or was it a ready lie, coined on the spur of the moment, as an excuse for his strange behaviour?

> "Sit, worthy friends, my lord is often thus,
> And hath been from his youth: 'pray you, keep seat,
> The fit is momentary; upon a thought
> He will again be well; if much you note him,
> You shall offend him, and extend his passion."

And again:

> "Think of this, good peers,
> But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other,
> Only it spoils the pleasure of the time."

Doubtless it was a ready lie; otherwise the lady would have used the argument to her husband, instead of scoffing at his credulity. Macbeth, however, is at this juncture in a state of mind closely bordering upon disease, if he have not actually passed the limit. He is hallucinated, and, in respect to the appearance of Banquo, he believes in the hallucination, and refers it to the supernatural agencies which discover the "secret'st man of blood." The reality of the air-drawn dagger he did not believe in, but referred its phenomena to their proper source, with as much truth, though not with as much phlegm, as Nicolai or any other sane subject of hallucination could have done. Unlike the hallucinations of Nicolai and Ben Johnson, it caused terror although its unreality was fully recognised, because it suited with "the horror of the time" of which it was a reflex. But between this time and the appearance of Banquo, the stability of Macbeth's reason had undergone a fearful ordeal. He lacked "the season of all natures—sleep;" or, when he did sleep, it was

> "In the affliction of those terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly."

Waking, he made his companions of the "sorriest fancies;"



https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and, "on the torture of the mind," he lay "in restless ecstacy." Truly, the caution given by his wife was likely to become a prophecy:

> "These deeds must not be thought on
> After these ways; so, it will make us mad."

In the point of view of psychological criticism, this fact appears on the eve of being fulfilled by the man, when to sleepless nights and days of brooding melancholy are added that undeniable indication of insanity, a credited hallucination. The fear was in reality fulfilled in the instance of the woman, although, at the point we have reached, when she with clear intellect and well-balanced powers is supporting her horror-struck and hallucinated husband, she offers a character little likely, on her next appearance, to be the subject of profound and fatal insanity. The man, on the other hand, appears to be almost within the limits of mental disease. Macbeth, however, saved himself from actual insanity by rushing from the maddening horrors of meditation into a course of decisive resolute action. From henceforth he gave himself no time to think; he made the firstlings of his heart the firstlings of his hand; he became a fearful tyrant to his country; but he escaped madness. This change in him, however, effected a change in his relation to his wife, which in her had the opposite result. Up to this time, her action had been that of sustaining him; but when he waded forward in the sea of blood, without desire of the tedious return, when his thoughts were acted ere they were scanned, then his queen found her occupation gone. Her attention, heretofore directed to her husband and to outward occurrences, was forced inwards upon that wreck of all-content which her meditation supplied. The sanitary mental influence of action is thus impressively shewn. Even the stings of conscience, if not blunted, can for a time be averted, by that busy march of affairs, which attracts all the attention outwardly, and throws the faculty of reflection into disuse.

The rapid deterioration of Macbeth's moral nature deserves notice. The murder of the king, to which he had the greatest temptation, was effected in the midst of a storm of conscientious rebuke. The murder of Banquo was attended with no expression of remorse, although it highly stimulated the imagination; for this also, he had temptation. But shortly afterwards we find him committing a wholesale and motiveless deed of blood, in the assassination of the kindred of Macduff—far more atrocious and horrible, if there can be degrees in the guilt of such deeds, than all he has done before.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

At first we find him "infirm of purpose" in guilt. Referring either to his want of sleep or to his hallucination, he says:

"My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use:—
We are yet but young in deeds."

Afterwards he becomes indeed "bloody, bold, and resolute;" and he orders the massacre of Macduff's kindred without hesitation or compunction.

"From this moment,
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:
The castle of Macduff I will surprise;
Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace his line. No boasting like a fool:
This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool."

Subsequently to this foul deed, the tyrant supported his power with many acts of sudden and bloody violence: for, notwithstanding the great rapidity of action in the drama, an interval in reality of some years must be supposed between the first and last acts, during which time,

"Each new morn,
New widows howl; new orphans cry; new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face."

See also the fine description of the country under the tyrant's sway given by Rosse:

"The dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd, for who; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying, or ere they sicken."

The change in Macbeth's nervous system, from its early sensibility, when he was young in deeds of guilt, to the obtuseness brought on by hard use, is later in the piece described by himself:

"*Sey.* It is the cry of women, my good lord.
*Macb.* I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been, my senses would have quail'd
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaught'rous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.—Wherefore was that cry?
*Sey.* The queen, my lord, is dead."

To the last the shadow of madness is most skilfully indicated



https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as hovering around Macbeth, without the reality actually falling upon him. When at last brought to bay in his stronghold, the opinion of his madness is positively expressed:

"Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies:
Some say, he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,
Do call it valiant fury: but, for certain,
He cannot buckle his distemper'd course
Within the belt of rule."

The cause of his reputed madness is conscience.

"Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil, and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself for being there?"

The defiant fierceness of his resistance is not within the belt of rule. He'll fight till from his bones the flesh is hacked; put on his armour before 'tis needed;

"Send out more horses, skir the country round;
Hang those that talk of fear."

But with all this valiant fury, he is sick at heart, oppressed with profound weariness of life: "I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun." What exquisite pathos in the melancholy passages:

"My May of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, but dare not."

And in this, so Hamlet like:

"She should have died hereafter,
There would have been a time for such a word.—
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

When all hope has fled, his superabundant activity rejects the very idea of self-destruction. He will not play the Roman fool, and die on his own sword. Gashes look best on others. In the last scene, in which the lying juggle of the fiend is

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

unmasked, and he falls by the sword of Macduff, some remaining touches of conscience and of nature are shewn. At first he refuses to fight:

"My soul is too much charg'd
With blood of thine already."

When even fate deserts him, and his better part of man is cowed, he fights bravely to the last, and falls in a manner which the poet takes care to mark, in the scene which immediately follows, as the honourable end of a soldier's life. He descends from the light a fearful example of a noble mind, depraved by yielding to the tempter; a terrible evidence of the fires of hell lighted in the breast of a living man by his own act.

The character of Lady Macbeth is less interesting to the psychological student than that of her husband. It is far less complex; drawn with a classic simplicity of outline, it presents us with none of those balancing and contending emotions which make the character of Macbeth so wide and and varied a field of study. It does not come within the scope of this criticism to enquire at length into the relative degree of wickedness and depravity exhibited by the two great criminals. Much ingenious speculation has been expended on this subject, one upon which writers are never likely entirely to agree so long as different people have antipathies and preferences for different forms of character. The first idea of the crime undoubtedly comes into the mind of Macbeth before he sees his wife; the suggestion of it fills his mind immediately after his interview with the weird Sisters, and he indicates the strong hold which the horrible imagination takes on him.

"Stars hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see."

But in Macbeth's letter to his wife there is not a word by which the enterprise can be said to be broken to her, and she expresses her own fell purpose before their meeting. At the first moment of their meeting, she replies to his assertion, that Duncan goes hence to-morrow:

"O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!"

The idea of the crime arises in the minds of both man and wife, without suggestion from either to the other; though in Macbeth the idea is a "horrible imagining," while in Lady Macbeth it is a "fell purpose."

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lady Macbeth's subsequent taunt,—

"What boast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?"
"Nor time nor place did then cohere,
And yet you would make both,"—

appears to us, though we dare hardly say it, a flaw in the plot. It is certainly inconsistent with Lady Macbeth's language at her first meeting with her lord. The truthfulness of these expressions can only be saved by supposing them to have referred to confidences between husband and wife on Duncan's murder, before Macbeth went to the wars; a supposition inconsistent with the development of the wicked thought as it is pourtrayed after the meeting with the weird Sisters.

The terrible remorseless impersonation of passionate ambition delineated in the character of Lady Macbeth, is not gradually developed, but is placed at once in all its fierce power before us in that awful invocation to the spirits of evil.

"Come, come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect, and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell!
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;
Nor heaven peep through the blankness of the dark,
To cry, *Hold, Hold!*'

With what vehemence and unchanging resolution does she carry out this fell purpose; how she dominates the spirit of her vacillating husband; with what inflexible and pitiless determination she pursues that one great crime which gives her sovereign sway and masterdom! It is, however, to be remarked, that she is not exhibited as participating in her husband's crimes after the murder of Duncan. Having seized upon "the golden round," her high moral courage and self-contained nature, save her from those eternal suspicions and that restlessness of imagination which lead her husband onward from crime to crime. Her want of imagination, her very want of sympathy, would save her from that perver-

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sion of sympathy, which, in her husband, resulted in useless deeds of blood. There are some characters capable of committing one great crime, and of resting upon it; there are others in whom the first crime is certainly and necessarily followed by a series of crimes. A bad, cold, selfish, and unfeeling heart may preserve a person from that fever of wickedness which a more sympathizing nature is prone to run into when the sympathies are perverted, and the mobile organization lends itself to effect their destructive suggestions. We have above indicated the turning point of Lady Macbeth's madness to have been the state of inactivity into which she fell when her husband broke away from her support into that bloody, bold, and resolute career which followed the murder of Banquo. We can only speculate upon her course of conduct from this time. She probably in some manner gave her countenance to her husband's career, or she would scarcely have been called his "fiend-like queen;" for it must be remembered, that, although the reader is well aware of her guilt, no suspicion of her participation in Duncan's murder has been excited in the other personages of the drama. We may suppose, then, that without active participation in that career of tyranny which desolated Scotland, she looked on with frigid and cruel indifference, while, her imagination having no power to throw itself outwardly, it became the prey of one engrossing emotion—that of remorse. Giving no outward expression of it in word or deed, she verified the saying of Malcolm:

> "The grief that does not speak,
> Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."

Cold, stedfast, and self-contained, she could no more escape from the gnawing tooth of remorse, than Prometheus, chained upon his rock, could escape from the vulture-talons for ever tearing his vitals. In Macbeth's more demonstrative and flexible nature, passion was explosive; in her's it was consuming. In him the inward fires found a volcanic vent; in her their pent-up force shook in earthquake the deep foundations of the soul.

Lady Macbeth's end is psychologically even more instructive than that of her husband. The manner in which even-handed justice deals with her, "his fiend-like wife," is an exquisite masterpiece of dramatic skill. The undaunted metal which would have compelled her to resist to the last, if brought face to face with any resistible adversaries, gradually gives way to the feeling of remorse and deep melancholy, when left to feed upon itself. The moral object of the drama required that the fierce gnawing of remorse at the heart of the lady should be

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

made manifest; and, as her firm self-contained nature imposes upon her a reticence in her waking moments in strong contrast to the soliloquising loquacity of her demonstrative husband, the great dramatist has skilfully availed himself of the sleep-talking state in which she uncovers the corroding ulcers of her conscience. Whether the deep melancholy of remorse tends to exhibit itself in somnambulism, is a fact which may on scientific grounds be doubted. Shakespeare makes the Doctor himself express the doubt: "This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds." The phenomena of sleep-walking are painted with great truthfulness. In this slumbrous agitation, "the benefit of sleep" cannot be received, as the Doctor thinks. It neither exerts its soothing effects on the mind, nor is it "chief nourisher in life's feast" to the body.—Light is left by her continually. Was this to avert the presence of those "sightless substances" once so impiously invoked?—She "seems washing her hands," and "continues in this a quarter of an hour." What a comment on her former boast, "A little water clears us of this deed."—The panorama of her crime passes before her, searing the eye-balls of the fancy; a fancy usually so cold and impassive, but now in agonising erethism. A wise and virtuous man can "thank God for his happy dreams," in which "the slumber of the body seems to be but the waking of the soul;" dreams of which he says "it is the ligation of sense, but the liberty of reason, and our waking conceptions do not match the fancies of our sleep." "There is surely a nearer apprehension of anything that delights us in our dreams than in our waked senses." "Were my memory as faithful as my reason is then fruitful, I would never study but in my dreams; and this time also would I chuse for my devotions." *(Religio Medici.)* But the converse? Who can tell the torture of bad dreams! Surely, 'tis better in the mind to lie in restless ecstacy, than thus to have the naked fancy stretched upon the rack; all its defences gone, all power of voluntary attention and abstraction, all guidance of the thoughts, all judgment abrogated. What more lurid picture of hell can be formed than that it is one long bad dream!

"*Gent.* Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from the bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon it, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

*Doct.* A great perturbation in nature! to receive at once

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching. In this slumbry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performance, what, at any time, have you heard her say?"

* * * *

"*Gent.* ——— Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her: stand close.

*Doct.* How came she by that light?

*Gent.* Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

*Doct.* You see, her eyes are open.

*Gent.* Ay, but their sense is shut.

*Doct.* What is it she does now? Look how she rubs her hands.

*Gent.* It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

*Lady M.* Yet here's a spot.

*Doct.* Hark, she speaks; I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

*Lady M.* Out, damned spot! out, I say!—One; Two: Why, then 'tis time to do't;——Hell is murky!—Fye, my lordy, fye! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power into account?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

*Doct.* Do you mark that?

*Lady M.* The thane of Fife had a wife: Where is she now?——What, will these hands ne'er be clean?—No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.

*Doct.* Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

*Gent.* She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: Heaven knows what she has known.

*Lady M.* Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!

*Doct.* What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

*Gent.* I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body."

The diagnosis arrived at by the judicious and politic Doctor appears to have been, that she was scarcely insane, but so sorely troubled in conscience as to be prone to quit the anguish of this life by means of suicide.

"Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.—
God, God, forgive us all! Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her."

A passage at the very end of the drama indicates, though it does not assert that the fear of the Doctor was realized—

"his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life."

This diagnosis of the Doctor, that actual disease was not present, is again expressed in his interview with Macbeth:

"*Macb.* How does your patient, doctor?
*Doct.* Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.
*Macb.* Cure her of that:
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous grief,
Which weighs upon the heart?
*Doct.* Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.
*Macb.* Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it."

This contempt of physic was not ill-founded upon the want of reliance which the Doctor expressed on the resources of his art. In those early times, the leech and the mediciner had not learnt to combine the moral influences which are the true means of ministering to a mind diseased after the manner of Lady Macbeth's, with those sleep-producing oblivious antidotes which at present form the remedies of melancholia. Such a patient would not now be given over, either to the divine, or to the unresisted ravages of conscience. What indeed could the divine effect without the aid of the physician? or, rather, until the physician had done his work? In such a state of nervous system as that of this wretched lady, no judicious divine would attempt to excite religious emotion; indeed, all thoughts of the world to come would act as fuel to the fire of a conscience so remorseful. The treatment of such a case as that of Lady Macbeth, would be, to remove her from all scenes suggesting unhappy thoughts, by constant endeavours to fix her attention upon new objects of interest, and to find, if possible, some stimulus to healthy emotion. If she had been thrown

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from her high estate, and compelled to labour for her daily bread, the tangible evils of such a condition, would have been most likely to have rooted out those of the imagination and of memory. The judicious physician, moreover, would not in such a case have neglected the medicinal remedies at his command, especially those which Macbeth himself seems to indicate, under the title of some sweet oblivious antidote. He would have given the juice of poppy, or some "drowsy syrup," to prevent thick-coming fancies depriving her of rest. He would thus have replaced the unrefreshing, nay, exhausting sleep of somnambulism, for that condition so beautifully described earlier in the play as that which

> "knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast."

When these remedies had produced their effect, and the patient's remorse was no longer of that "brainsickly" kind accompanying disorders of the organization, then, and only then, might the divine step in with those consolations of religious faith which assure us, that "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

What was Lady Macbeth's form and temperament? In Maclise's great painting of the banquet scene, she is represented as a woman of large and coarse development; a Scandinavian amazon, the muscles of whose brawny arms could only have been developed to their great size by hard and frequent use; a woman of whose fists her husband might well be afraid; but scarcely one who would present that Satanic spiritualization of character which we find in this awful impersonation of dauntless and ruthless ambition; an instrument, in fact, to do coarse things coarsely; a butcher's cleaver perhaps, but by no means the keen scimitar whose rapid blow destroys ere it is seen. We do not so figure Lady Macbeth to the mind's eye—no, not even as the large and majestic figure of Siddons, whose impersonation of the character so moved our fathers. Shakespeare was not in the habit of painting big and brawny women. There is a certain femininity in all his female characters, which is distinguishable even in those whom he has filled with the coarser passions. But that Lady Macbeth, whose soul is absorbed, and whose devilish deeds are instigated by ambition, the highest of all earthly passions, "the last infirmity of noble minds," which, like Aaron's rod, consumes and destroys the meaner desires,—that this woman

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

should have had the physical conformation of a cook, is a monstrous libel upon the sex. Regan and Goneril, whom we not only hate, but who excite disgust in our minds, might have been such women, coarse and low natures as they were; and indeed they are represented as using their fists with a freedom proving the reliance they placed in the efficiency of that safety-valve to passion; and Lear threatens the wolfish visage of one with the nails of the other. But was Lady Macbeth such a being? Did the fierce fire of her soul animate the epicene bulk of a virago? Never! Lady Macbeth was a lady beautiful and delicate, whose one vivid passion proves that her organization was instinct with nerve-force, unoppressed by weight of flesh. Probably she was small; for it is the smaller sort of women whose emotional fire is the most fierce, and she herself bears unconscious testimony to the fact that her hand was little. The drama contains many indications that, to outward appearance, she was gentle and feminine. Duncan greets her by the name of "most kind hostess;" and, after the murder, Macduff says:

> "*Gentle* lady,
> 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak;
> The repetition in a woman's ear
> Would murder as it fell."

Although she manifests no feeling towards Macbeth, beyond the regard which ambition makes her yield, it is clear that he entertains for her the personal love which a beautiful woman would excite. Returning from the wars, he greets her with "Dearest love!" "Dearest partner of my greatness!" Afterwards he lavishes upon her the terms of endearment, "Love!" "Dear wife!" "Dearest chuck!" "Sweet remembrancer!" Above all, she makes use of his love to taunt him with his change of purpose, when it looked green and pale at the contemplated murder of Duncan. "From this time," she says, "such I account thy love." She relies upon this threat of disbelief in his love as a goad to urge him to his first great crime; and she applies this motive with the confident assurance that the love was there to give it force. Moreover, the effect of remorse upon her own health proves the preponderance of nerve in her organization. Could the Lady Macbeth of Mr. Maclise, and of others who have painted this lady, have shewn the fire and metal of her fierce character in the commission of her crimes, the remembrance of them would scarcely have disturbed the quiet of her after years. We figure Lady Macbeth to have been a blonde Rachel, with more beauty, with grey and cruel eyes, but with the same slight dry

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

configuration and constitution, instinct with determined nerve-power.*

The scene with the doctor at the English court has several points of interest, besides that of antiquarian medicine. It fixes the date of Macbeth's history as that of Edward the Confessor's time. It was doubtless introduced as a compliment to James the First, who assumed the power of curing scrofula, the king's evil, by means of the king's touch. Another passage indicates that it was written in this reign, and thus that it was one of the later productions of the poet. James was descended from Banquo, and in the last witch scene Macbeth thus refers to the lineage of his rival:

"And some I see
"That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry."

The cure of the king's evil is thus described:

"*Doct.* There are a crew of wretched souls,
That stay his cure: their malady convinces
The great assay of art; but, at his touch,
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
They presently amend.
*Macd.* What's the disease he means?
*Mal.* 'Tis call'd the evil:
A most miraculous work in this good king:
Which often, since my here remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven
Himself best knows: but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures;
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction."

Old Fuller, in the plenitude of faith, gives a curious disquisition of this same medical hocus pocus of royalty, the best part of which we subjoin:

"And now the full time was come, wherein good King Edward exchanged this life for a better one. Who, as he was famous for many personal miracles, so he is reported to have entailed (by Heaven's consort,) an hereditary virture in his successors, the kings of England, (only with this condition, that they continue constant in Christianity,) to cure the

* Since the above was written, we have been informed that Mrs. Siddons herself entertained an opinion of Lady Macbeth's physique similar to our own; and that in Mrs. Jamieson's critique on this character, which we have not had the opportunity of consulting, the same opinion is expressed.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

*King's Evil.* This disease, known to the Greeks by the name of Χοιράδες, termed by the Latines *Struma*, and scrophulæ, hath its cause from phlegm, its chief and common outward residence in or near the neck or throat; where it expresseth itself in knobs or kernells, pregnant oftentimes with corrupted bloud and other putrified matter, which, on the breaking forth of those bunches, floweth forth, equally offensive to sight, smell, and toutch. And yet this noisome disease is happily healed by the hands of the kings of England, stroaking the soar: and if any doubt of the truth thereof, they may be remitted to their own eyes for confirmation. But there is a sort of men who, to avoid the censure of over-easy credulity, and purchase the repute of prudent austerity, justly incurre the censure of affected frowardnesse. It being neither manners nor discretion in them, in matters notoriously known, to give daily exprience the lye, by the backwardnesse of their belief.

"But whence this cure proceeds is much controverted by the learned. Some recount it in the number of those ἀναπόδεικτα whose reason cannot be demonstrated. For as in vicious commonwealths bastards are frequent, who, being reputed *Filii populi*, have no particular father; so man's ignorance increaseth the number of occult qualities, (which I might call chances in nature,) where the effect is beheld, but cannot immediately be referred to any immediate and proper cause thereof. Others impute it the power of fancie, and an exalted imagination. For when the poor patient (who perchance seldom heard of, and never saw a king before,) shall behold his royall hand dabling in a puddle of putrefaction, and with a charitable confidence rubbing, smoothing, chafing those loathsome kernels, (which I may call clouds of corruption, dissolved oft-times into a feculent shower): I say, when the sick man shall see a hand so humble of one borne so high, such condescension in a king to stroak that soar, at which meaner persons would stop their nostrills, shut their eyes, or turn their faces; this raiseth, erecteth, enthroneth, the patient's fancie, summoning his spirits to assist nature with their utmost might to encounter the disease with greater advantage. And who will look into the legend of the miracles of the imagination, shall find many strange and almost incredible things thereby really effected. Other learned men, and particularly Gaspar Peucerus, though acquitting this cure from diabolical conjuration, yet tax it as guilty of superstition. With him all such do side as quarrell at the ceremonies and circumstances used at the healing of this maladie. Either displeased at the Collect read, (consisting of the first nine

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press

verses of the Gospel of St. John,) as wholly improper, and nothing relating to the question; or unresolved of the efficacy of the gold pendent about the patient's neck, (whether partly compleating or a bare complement of the cure); or secretly unsatisfied, what manner or measure or belief is required, (according to the modell whereof health is observed to come sooner or later); or openly offended with the *Sign of the Crosse* which was used to be made on the place affected. All which exceptions fall to the ground, when it shall be avowed, that notwithstanding the omission of such ceremonies, (as requisite rather to the solemnity than substance of the cure,) the hands of our kings (without the gloves, as I may term it, of the aforesaid circumstances,) have effected the healing of this disease.

"Hereupon some make it a clear miracle, and immediately own God's finger in the king's hand."

Fuller proceeds to describe how a "stiffe Roman Catholic," having the king's evil in a high degree, and having been cured by Queen Elizabeth, did perceive that the excommunication which Pope Pius had "let fly at her Majestie" was "in very deed of no effect, seeing God hath blessed her with so great and miraculous a vertue." He proceeds:

"This mention of Queen Elizabeth (there is a magnetic vertue in stories for one to attract another,) minds me of a passage in the beginning of her reign. Making her progresse into Gloucestershire, people affected with this disease did in such uncivil crowds press in upon her; insomuch that her Majestie, between anger, grief, and compassion, did let fall words to this effect: *Alasse, poor people, I cannot—I cannot cure you; it is God alone that can doe it.* Which some people interpreted (contrary to her intent and practice, continuing such cures to the day of her death,) an utter renouncing and disclaiming of any instrumentall efficacy in herself. Whereas she only removed her subjects eyes from gazing on her to look up to Heaven. For men's minds naturally are so dull and heavy, that instead of traveling with their thanks to God, the cause of all cures, they lazily take up their lodging more than half-way this side, mistaking the dealer for the Giver of their recovery." An explanation more ingenious than ingenuous; for Fuller must have noticed that the Queen disclaimed even the power of dealing the cure.

J. C. B.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.4.26.477 Published online by Cambridge University Press