LECTURES

ON

SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON.

THE FIRST LECTURE.

I CANNOT avoid the acknowledgment of the difficulty of the task I have undertaken; yet I have undertaken it voluntarily, and I shall discharge it to the best of my abilities, requesting those who hear me to allow for deficiencies, and to bear in mind the wide extent of my subject. The field is almost boundless as the sea, yet full of beauty and variety as the land: I feel in some sort oppressed by abundance; *inopem me copia fecit.*

What I most rely upon is your sympathy; and, as I proceed, I trust that I shall interest you: sympathy and interest are to a lecturer like the sun and the showers to nature—absolutely necessary to the production of blossoms and fruit.

May I venture to observe that my own life has been employed more in reading and conversation—in collecting and reflecting, than in printing and publishing; for I never felt the desire, so often experienced by others, of becoming an author. It was accident made me an author in the first instance: I was called a poet almost before I knew I could write poetry. In what I have to offer I shall speak freely, whether of myself or of my contemporaries, when it is necessary: conscious superiority, if indeed it be superior, need not fear to have its self-love or its pride wounded; and contempt, the most absurd and debasing feeling that can actuate the human mind, must be far below the sphere in which lofty intellects live and move and have their being.

On the first examination of a work, especially a work of fiction and fancy, it is right to inquire to what feeling or passion it addresses itself—to the benevolent, or to the vindictive? whether it is calculated to excite emulation, or to produce envy, under the common mask of scorn? and, in the next place, whether the pleasure we receive from it has a tendency to keep us good, to make us better, or to reward us for being good.

It will be expected of me, as my prospectus indicates, that I should say something of the causes of false criticism, particularly as regards poetry, though I do not mean to confine myself to that only: in doing so, it will be necessary for me to point out some of the obstacles which impede, and possibly prevent, the formation of a correct judgment. These are either—

1. Accidental causes, arising out of the particular circumstances of the age in which we live; or—

2. Permanent causes, flowing out of the general principles of our nature.

Under the first head, accidental causes, may be classed —1. The events that have occurred in our own day, which, from their importance alone, have created a world of readers. 2. The practice of public speaking, which encourages a too great desire to be understood at once, and at the first blush. 3. The prevalence of reviews, magazines, newspapers, novels, &c.

Of the last, and of the perusal of them, I will run the risk of asserting, that where the reading of novels prevails as a habit, it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind: it is such an utter loss to the reader, that it is not so much to be called pass-time as kill-time. It conveys no trustworthy information as to facts; it produces no improvement of the intellect, but fills the mind with a mawkish and morbid sensibility, which is directly hostile to the cultivation, invigoration, and enlargement of the nobler faculties of the understanding.

Reviews are generally pernicious, because the writers determine without reference to fixed principles—because reviews are usually filled with personalities; and, above all, because they teach people rather to judge than to consider, to decide than to reflect: thus they encourage superficiality, and induce the thoughtless and the idle to adopt sentiments conveyed under the authoritative WE, and not, by the working and subsequent clearing of their own minds, to form just original opinions. In older times writers were looked up to almost as intermediate beings, between angels and men; afterwards they were regarded as venerable and, perhaps, inspired teachers; subsequently they descended to the level of learned and instructive friends; but in modern days they are deemed culprits

more than benefactors: as culprits they are brought to the bar of self-erected and self-satisfied tribunals. If a person be now seen reading a new book, the most usual question is—"What trash have you there?" I admit that there is some reason for this difference in the estimate; for in these times, if a man fail as a tailor, or a shoemaker, and can read and write correctly (for spelling is still of some consequence) he becomes an author.[1]

The crying sin of modern criticism is that it is overloaded with personality. If an author commit an error, there is no wish to set him right for the sake of truth, but for the sake of triumph—that the reviewer may show how much wiser, or how much abler he is than the writer. Reviewers are usually people who would have been poets, historians, biographers, &c., if they could: they have tried their talents at one or at the other, and have failed; therefore they turn critics, and, like the Roman emperor, a critic most hates those who excel in the particular department in which he, the critic, has notoriously been defeated. This is an age of personality and political gossip, when insects, as in ancient Egypt, are worshipped in proportion to the venom of their stings—when poems, and especially satires, are valued according to the number of living names they contain; and where the notes, however, have this comparative excellence, that they are generally more poetical and pointed than the text. This style of criticism is at the present moment one of the chief pillars of the Scotch professorial court; and, as to personality in poems, I remember to have once seen an epic advertised, and strongly recommended, because it contained more than a hundred names of living characters.

How derogatory, how degrading, this is to true poetry I need not say. A very wise writer has maintained that there is more difference between one man and another, than between man and a beast: I can conceive of no lower state of human existence than that of a being who, insensible to the beauties of poetry himself, endeavours to reduce others to his own level. What Hooker so eloquently claims for law I say of poetry—"Her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things

[1] Here my shorthand note informs me that Coleridge made a quotation from Jeremy Taylor, but from what work, or of what import, does not appear. He observed, that "although Jeremy Taylor wrote only in prose, according to some definitions of poetry he might be considered one of our noblest poets."—J. P. C.

in heaven and on earth do her homage." It is the language of heaven, and in the exquisite delight we derive from poetry we have, as it were, a type, a foretaste, and a prophecy of the joys of heaven.

Another cause of false criticism is the greater purity of morality in the present age, compared even with the last. Our notions upon this subject are sometimes carried to excess, particularly among those who in print affect to enforce the value of a high standard. Far be it from me to depreciate that value; but let me ask, who now will venture to read a number of the Spectator, or of the Tatler, to his wife and daughters, without first examining it to make sure that it contains no word which might, in our day, offend the delicacy of female ears, and shock feminine susceptibility? Even our theatres, the representations at which usually reflect the morals of the period, have taken a sort of domestic turn, and while the performances at them may be said, in some sense, to improve the heart, there is no doubt that they vitiate the taste. The effect is bad, however good the cause.

Attempts have been made to compose and adapt systems of education; but it appears to me something like putting Greek and Latin grammars into the hands of boys, before they understand a word of Greek or Latin. These grammars contain instructions on all the minutiæ and refinements of language, but of what use are they to persons who do not comprehend the first rudiments? Why are you to furnish the means of judging, before you give the capacity to judge? These seem to me to be among the principal accidental causes of false criticism.

Among the permanent causes, I may notice—

First, the great pleasure we feel in being told of the knowledge we possess, rather than of the ignorance we suffer. Let it be our first duty to teach thinking, and then what to think about. You cannot expect a person to be able to go through the arduous process of thinking, who has never exercised his faculties. In the Alps we see the chamois hunter ascend the most perilous precipices without danger, and leap from crag to crag over vast chasms without dread or difficulty, and who but a fool, if unpractised, would attempt to follow him? it is not intrepidity alone that is necessary, but he who would imitate the hunter must have gone through the same process for the acquisition of

strength, skill, and knowledge: he must exert, and be capable of exerting, the same muscular energies, and display the same perseverance and courage, or all his efforts will be worse than fruitless: they will lead not only to disappointment, but to destruction. Systems have been invented with the avowed object of teaching people how to think; but in my opinion the proper title for such a work ought to be "The Art of teaching how to think without thinking." Nobody endeavours to instruct a man how to leap, until he has first given him vigour and elasticity.

Nothing is more essential—nothing can be more important, than in every possible way to cultivate and improve the thinking powers: the mind as much requires exercise as the body, and no man can fully and adequately discharge the duties of whatever station he is placed in without the power of thought. I do not, of course, say that a man may not get through life without much thinking, or much power of thought; but if he be a carpenter, without thought a carpenter he must remain: if he be a weaver, without thought a weaver he must remain.—On man God has not only bestowed gifts, but the power of giving: he is not a creature born but to live and die: he has had faculties communicated to him, which, if he do his duty, he is bound to communicate and make beneficial to others. Man, in a secondary sense, may be looked upon in part as his own creator, for by the improvement of the faculties bestowed upon him by God, he not only enlarges them, but may be said to bring new ones into existence. The Almighty has thus condescended to communicate to man, in a high state of moral cultivation, a portion of his own great attributes.

A second permanent cause of false criticism is connected with the habit of not taking the trouble to think: it is the custom which some people have established of judging of books by books.—Hence to such the use and value of reviews. Why has nature given limbs, if they are not to be applied to motion and action; why abilities, if they are to lie asleep, while we avail ourselves of the eyes, ears, and understandings of others? As men often employ servants, to spare them the nuisance of rising from their seats and walking across a room, so men employ reviews in order to save themselves the trouble of exercising their own powers of judging: it is only mental slothfulness and sluggishness

that induce so many to adopt, and take for granted the opinions of others.

I may illustrate this moral imbecility by a case which came within my own knowledge. A friend of mine had seen it stated somewhere, or had heard it said, that Shakspeare had not made Constance, in "King John," speak the language of nature, when she exclaims on the loss of Arthur,

> "Grief fills the room up of my absent child;
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me;
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form:
> Then have I reason to be fond of grief."
>
> *King John*, Act III., Scene 4.

Within three months after he had repeated the opinion (not thinking for himself) that these lines were out of nature, my friend died. I called upon his mother, an affectionate, but ignorant woman, who had scarcely heard the name of Shakspeare, much less read any of his plays. Like Philip, I endeavoured to console her, and among other things I told her, in the anguish of her sorrow, that she seemed to be as fond of grief as she had been of her son. What was her reply? Almost a prose parody on the very language of Shakspeare—the same thoughts in nearly the same words, but with a different arrangement. An attestation like this is worth a thousand criticisms.

As a third permanent cause of false criticism we may notice the vague use of terms. And here I may take the liberty of impressing upon my hearers, the fitness, if not the necessity, of employing the most appropriate words and expressions, even in common conversation, and in the ordinary transactions of life. If you want a substantive do not take the first that comes into your head, but that which most distinctly and peculiarly conveys your meaning: if an adjective, remember the grammatical use of that part of speech, and be careful that it expresses some quality in the substantive that you wish to impress upon your hearer. Reflect for a moment on the vague and uncertain manner in which the word "taste" has been often employed; and how such epithets as "sublime," "majestic," "grand," "striking," "picturesque," &c.,

have been misapplied, and how they have been used on the most unworthy and inappropriate occasions.

I was one day admiring one of the falls of the Clyde; and ruminating upon what descriptive term could be most fitly applied to it, I came to the conclusion that the epithet "majestic" was the most appropriate. While I was still contemplating the scene a gentleman and a lady came up, neither of whose faces bore much of the stamp of superior intelligence, and the first words the gentleman uttered were "It is very majestic." I was pleased to find such a confirmation of my opinion, and I complimented the spectator upon the choice of his epithet, saying that he had used the best word that could have been selected from our language: "Yes, sir," replied the gentleman, "I say it is very majestic: it is sublime, it is beautiful, it is grand, it is picturesque."—"Ay" (added the lady), "it is the prettiest thing I ever saw." I own that I was not a little disconcerted.

You will see, by the terms of my prospectus, that I intend my lectures to be, not only "in illustration of the principles of poetry," but to include a statement of the application of those principles, "as grounds of criticism on the most popular works of later English poets, those of the living included." If I had thought this task presumptuous on my part, I should not have voluntarily undertaken it; and in examining the merits, whether positive or comparative, of my contemporaries, I shall dismiss all feelings and associations which might lead me from the formation of a right estimate. I shall give talent and genius its due praise, and only bestow censure where, as it seems to me, truth and justice demand it. I shall, of course, carefully avoid falling into that system of false criticism, which I condemn in others; and, above all, whether I speak of those whom I know, or of those whom I do not know, of friends or of enemies, of the dead or of the living, my great aim will be to be strictly impartial. No man can truly apply principles, who displays the slightest bias in the application of them; and I shall have much greater pleasure in pointing out the good, than in exposing the bad. I fear no accusation of arrogance from the amiable and the wise: I shall pity the weak, and despise the malevolent.

END OF THE FIRST LECTURE.

THE SECOND LECTURE.

READERS may be divided into four classes:

1. Sponges, who absorb all they réad, and return it nearly in the same state, only a little dirtied.

2. Sand-glasses, who retain nothing, and are content to get through a book for the sake of getting through the time.

3. Strain-bags, who retain merely the dregs of what they read.

4. Mogul diamonds, equally rare and valuable, who profit by what they read, and enable others to profit by it also.[1]

I adverted in my last lecture to the prevailing laxity in the use of terms: this is the principal complaint to which the moderns are exposed; but it is a grievous one, inasmuch as it inevitably tends to the misapplication of words, and to the corruption of language. I mentioned the word "taste," but the remark applies not merely to substantives and adjectives, to things and their epithets, but to verbs: thus, how frequently is the verb "indorsed" strained from its true signification, as given by Milton in the expression—"And elephants indorsed with towers." Again "virtue" has been equally perverted: originally it signified merely strength; it then became strength of mind and valour, and it has now been changed to the class term for moral excellence [2] in all its various species. I only introduce these as instances by the way, and nothing could be easier than to multiply them.

[1] In "Notes and Queries," July 22, 1854, I quoted this four-fold division of readers; and in a friendly letter to me, the Rev. S. R Maitland pointed out the following passage in the Mishna (*Cap. Patrum*, v. § 15), which Coleridge clearly had in his mind, but to which my shorthand note does not state that he referred. It is very possible that I did not catch the reference; but more probable that he omitted it, thinking it not necessary, in an extemporaneous lecture, to quote chapter and verse for whatever he delivered. Had Coleridge previously written, or subsequently printed, his Lectures, he would, most likely, not have omitted the information:—

"Quadruplices conditiones (inveniunt) in his qui sedent coram sapientibus (audiendi causâ) videlicet conditio spongiæ, clepsydræ, sacci fecinacei, et cribri. Spongia sugendo attrahit omnia. Clepsydra, quod ex una parte attrahit, ex altera rursum effundit. Saccus fecinaceus effundit vinum, et colligit feces. Cribrum emittit farinam, et colligit similam."—J. P. C.

[2] My shorthand note of this part of the sentence strongly illustrates the point adverted to in the Preface, viz., how easy it is for a person, somewhat mechanically taking down words uttered *vivâ voce*, to mishear what is said. I am confident that Coleridge's words were "moral excellence"—there cannot be a doubt about it—but in my note it stands "*modern* excellence." My ear deceived me, and I thought he said *modern*, when in fact he said "moral."—J. P. C.

At the same time, while I recommend precision both of thought and expression, I am far from advocating a pedantic niceness in the choice of language: such a course would only render conversation stiff and stilted. Dr. Johnson used to say that in the most unrestrained discourse he always sought for the properest word,—that which best and most exactly conveyed his meaning: to a certain point he was right, but because he carried it too far, he was often laborious where he ought to have been light, and formal where he ought to have been familiar. Men ought to endeavour to distinguish subtilely, that they may be able afterwards to assimilate truly.

I have often heard the question put whether Pope is a great poet, and it has been warmly debated on both sides, some positively maintaining the affirmative, and others dogmatically insisting upon the negative; but it never occurred to either party to make the necessary preliminary inquiry —What is meant by the words "poet" and "poetry?" Poetry is not merely invention: if it were, Gulliver's Travels would be poetry; and before you can arrive at a decision of the question, as to Pope's claim, it is absolutely necessary to ascertain what people intend by the words they use. Harmonious versification no more makes poetry than mere invention makes a poet; and to both these requisites there is much besides to be added. In morals, politics, and philosophy no useful discussion can be entered upon, unless we begin by explaining and understanding the terms we employ. It is therefore requisite that I should state to you what I mean by the word "poetry," before I commence any consideration of the comparative merits of those who are popularly called "poets."

Words are used in two ways:—

1. In a sense that comprises everything called by that name. For instance, the words "poetry" and "sense" are employed in this manner, when we say that such a line is bad poetry or bad sense, when in truth it is neither poetry nor sense. If it be bad poetry, it is not poetry; if it be bad sense, it is not sense. The same of "metre": bad metre is not metre.

2. In a philosophic sense, which must include a definition of what is essential to the thing. Nobody means mere metre by poetry; so, mere rhyme is not poetry.

Something more is required, and what is that something? It is not wit, because we may have wit where we never dream of poetry. Is it the just observation of human life? Is it a peculiar and a felicitous selection of words? This, indeed, would come nearer to the taste of the present age, when sound is preferred to sense; but I am happy to think that this taste is not likely to last long.

The Greeks and Romans, in the best period of their literature, knew nothing of any such taste! High-flown epithets and violent metaphors, conveyed in inflated language, is not poetry. Simplicity is indispensable, and in Catullus it is often impossible that more simple language could be used; there is scarcely a word or a line, which a lamenting mother in a cottage might not have employed.[1] That I may be clearly understood, I will venture to give the following definition of poetry.

It is an art (or whatever better term our language may afford) of representing, in words, external nature and human thoughts and affections, both relatively to human affections, by the production of as much immediate pleasure in parts, as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole.

Or, to vary the words, in order to make the abstract idea more intelligible:—

It is the art of communicating whatever we wish to communicate, so as both to express and produce excitement, but for the purpose of immediate pleasure; and each part is fitted to afford as much pleasure, as is compatible with the largest sum in the whole.

You will naturally ask my reasons for this definition of poetry, and they are these:—

"It is a representation of nature;" but that is not enough: the anatomist and the topographer give representations of nature; therefore I add:

"And of the human thoughts and affections" Here the metaphysician interferes: here our best novelists interfere likewise,—excepting that the latter describe with more minuteness, accuracy, and truth, than is consistent with poetry. Consequently I subjoin:

"It must be relative to the human affections." Here

[1] It appears by my shorthand note that Coleridge here named some particular poem by Catullus; but what it was is not stated, a blank having been left for the title. It would not be difficult to fill the chasm speculatively; but I prefer to give my memorandum as it stands.—J. P. C.

my chief point of difference is with the novel-writer, the historian, and all those who describe not only nature, and the human affections, but relatively to the human affections: therefore I must add:

"And it must be done for the purpose of immediate pleasure." In poetry the general good is to be accomplished through the pleasure, and if the poet do not do that, he ceases to be a poet to him to whom he gives it not. Still, it is not enough, because we may point out many prose writers to whom the whole of the definition hitherto furnished would apply. I add, therefore, that it is not only for the purpose of immediate pleasure, but—

"The work must be so constructed as to produce in each part that highest quantity of pleasure, or a high quantity of pleasure." There metre introduces its claim, where the feeling calls for it Our language gives to expression a certain measure, and will, in a strong state of passion, admit of scansion from the very mouth. The very assumption that we are reading the work of a poet supposes that he is in a continuous state of excitement; and thereby arises a language in prose unnatural, but in poetry natural.

There is one error which ought to be peculiarly guarded against, which young poets are apt to fall into, and which old poets commit, from being no poets, but desirous of the end which true poets seek to attain. No: I revoke the words; they are not desirous of that of which their little minds can have no just conception. They have no desire of fame—that glorious immortality of true greatness—

> "That lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
> And perfect witness of all judging Jove;"
>
> MILTON'S *Lycidas*.

but they struggle for reputation, that echo of an echo, in whose very etymon its signification is contained. Into this error the author of "The Botanic Garden" has fallen, through the whole of which work, I will venture to assert, there are not twenty images described as a man would describe them in a state of excitement. The poem is written with all the tawdry industry of a milliner anxious to dress up a doll in silks and satins. Dr. Darwin laboured to make his style fine and gaudy, by accumulating and applying all the sonorous and handsome-looking words

in our language. This is not poetry, and I subjoin to my definition—

That a true poem must give "as much pleasure in each part as is compatible with the greatest sum of pleasure in the whole." We must not look to parts merely, but to the whole, and to the effect of that whole. In reading Milton, for instance, scarcely a line can be pointed out which, critically examined, could be called in itself good: the poet would not have attempted to produce, merely what is in general understood by a good line; he sought to produce glorious paragraphs and systems of harmony, or, as he himself expresses it,

> "Many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out."
>
> *L'Allegro.*

Such, therefore, as I have now defined it, I shall consider the sense of the word "Poetry": pleasurable excitement is its origin and object; pleasure is the magic circle out of which the poet must not dare to tread. Part of my definition, you will be aware, would apply equally to the arts of painting and music, as to poetry; but to the last are added words and metre, so that my definition is strictly and logically applicable to poetry, and to poetry only, which produces delight, the parent of so many virtues. When I was in Italy, a friend of mine, who pursued painting almost with the enthusiasm of madness, believing it superior to every other art, heard the definition I have given, acknowledged its correctness, and admitted the pre-eminence of poetry.

I never shall forget, when in Rome, the acute sensation of pain I experienced on beholding the frescoes of Raphael and Michael Angelo, and on reflecting that they were indebted for their preservation solely to the durable material upon which they were painted. There they are, the permanent monuments (permanent as long as walls and plaster last) of genius and skill, while many others of their mighty works have become the spoils of insatiate avarice, or the victims of wanton barbarism. How grateful ought mankind to be, that so many of the great literary productions of antiquity have come down to us—that the works of Homer, Euclid, and Plato, have been preserved—while we possess those of Bacon, Newton, Milton, Shakspeare,

and of so many other living-dead men of our own island. These, fortunately, may be considered indestructible: they shall remain to us till the end of time itself—till time, in the words of a great poet of the age of Shakspeare, has thrown his last dart at death, and shall himself submit to the final and inevitable destruction of all created matter.[1]

A second irruption of the Goths and Vandals could not now endanger their existence, secured as they are by the wonders of modern invention, and by the affectionate admiration of myriads of human beings. It is as nearly two centuries as possible since Shakspeare ceased to write, but when shall he cease to be read? When shall he cease to give light and delight? Yet even at this moment he is only receiving the first-fruits of that glory, which must continue to augment as long as our language is spoken. English has given immortality to him, and he has given immortality to English. Shakspeare can never die, and the language in which he wrote must with him live for ever.

Yet, in spite of all this, some prejudices have attached themselves to the name of our illustrious countryman, which it will be necessary for me first to endeavour to overcome. On the continent, we may remark, the works of Shakspeare are honoured in a double way—by the admiration of the Germans, and by the contempt of the French.

Among other points of objection taken by the French, perhaps, the most noticeable is, that he has not observed the sacred unities, so hallowed by the practice of their own extolled tragedians. They hold, of course after Corneille and Racine, that Sophocles is the most perfect model for tragedy, and Aristotle its most infallible censor; and that as Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, and other dramas by Shakspeare are not framed upon that model, and consequently not subject to the same laws, they maintain (not having impartiality enough to question the model, or to deny the rules of the Stagirite) that Shakspeare was a sort of irregular genius—that he is now and then tasteful and touching, but generally incorrect; and, in short, that he

[1] Alluding, of course, to Ben Jonson's epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke:

"Underneath this sable herse
Lies the subject of all verse,
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother.
Death! ere thou hast slain another,
Learn'd, and fair, and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

Ben Jonson's Works; edit. Gifford, viii 337.—J. P. C.

was a mere child of nature, who did not know any better than to write as he has written.

It is an old, and I have hitherto esteemed it a just, Latin maxim, *Oportet discentem credere, edoctum judicare;* but modern practice has inverted it, and it ought now rather to stand, *Oportet discentem judicare, edoctum credere.* To remedy this mistake there is but one course, namely the acquirement of knowledge. I have often run the risk of applying to the ignorant, who assumed the post and province of judges, a ludicrous, but not inapt simile: they remind me of a congregation of frogs, involved in darkness in a ditch, who keep an eternal croaking, until a lantern is brought near the scene of their disputation, when they instantly cease their discordant harangues. They may be more politely resembled to night-flies, which flutter round the glimmering of a feeble taper, but are overpowered by the dazzling splendour of noon-day. Nor can it be otherwise, until the prevalent notion is exploded, that knowledge is easily taught, and until the conviction is general, that the hardest thing learned is that people are ignorant. All are apt enough to discover and expose the ignorance of their friends, but their blind faith in their own sufficiency is something more than marvellous.

Some persons have contended that mathematics ought to be taught by making the illustrations obvious to the senses. Nothing can be more absurd or injurious: it ought to be our never-ceasing effort to make people think, not feel; and it is very much owing to this mistake that, to those who do not think, and have not been made to think, Shakspeare has been found so difficult of comprehension. The condition of the stage, and the character of the times in which our great poet flourished, must first of all be taken into account, in considering the question as to his judgment. If it were possible to say which of his great powers and qualifications is more admirable than the rest, it unquestionably appears to me that his judgment is the most wonderful; and at this conviction I have arrived after a careful comparison of his productions with those of his best and greatest contemporaries.

If indeed "King Lear" were to be tried by the laws which Aristotle established, and Sophocles obeyed, it must be at once admitted to be outrageously irregular; and supposing the rules regarding the unities to be founded on

man and nature, Shakspeare must be condemned for arraying his works in charms with which they ought never to have been decorated. I have no doubt, however, that both were right in their divergent courses, and that they arrived at the same conclusion by a different process.

Without entering into matters which must be generally known to persons of education, respecting the origin of tragedy and comedy among the Greeks, it may be observed, that the unities grew mainly out of the size and construction of the ancient theatres: the plays represented were made to include within a short space of time events which it is impossible should have occurred in that short space. This fact alone establishes, that all dramatic performances were then looked upon merely as ideal. It is the same with us: nobody supposes that a tragedian suffers real pain when he is stabbed or tortured; or that a comedian is in fact transported with delight when successful in pretended love.

If we want to witness mere pain, we can visit the hospitals: if we seek the exhibition of mere pleasure, we can find it in ball-rooms. It is the representation of it, not the reality, that we require, the imitation, and not the thing itself; and we pronounce it good or bad in proportion as the representation is an incorrect, or a correct imitation. The true pleasure we derive from theatrical performances arises from the fact that they are unreal and fictitious. If dying agonies were unfeigned, who, in these days of civilisation, could derive gratification from beholding them?

Performances in a large theatre made it necessary that the human voice should be unnaturally and unmusically stretched; and hence the introduction of recitative, for the purpose of rendering pleasantly artificial the distortion of the face, and straining of the voice, occasioned by the magnitude of the building. The fact that the ancient choruses were always on the stage made it impossible that any change of place should be represented, or even supposed.

The origin of the English stage is less boastful than that of the Greek stage: like the constitution under which we live, though more barbarous in its derivation, it gives more genuine and more diffused liberty, than Athens in the zenith of her political glory ever possessed. Our earliest

dramatic performances were religious, founded chiefly upon Scripture history; and, although countenanced by the clergy, they were filled with blasphemies and ribaldry, such as the most hardened and desperate of the present day would not dare to utter. In these representations vice and the principle of evil were personified; and hence the introduction of fools and clowns in dramas of a more advanced period.

While Shakspeare accommodated himself to the taste and spirit of the times in which he lived, his genius and his judgment taught him to use these characters with terrible effect, in aggravating the misery and agony of some of his most distressing scenes. This result is especially obvious in "King Lear": the contrast of the Fool wonderfully heightens the colouring of some of the most painful situations, where the old monarch in the depth and fury of his despair, complains to the warring elements of the ingratitude of his daughters.

> "———————— Spit, fire! spout, rain!
> Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
> I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness,
> I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
> You owe me no subscription: then, let fall
> Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
> A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man."
>
> *King Lear*, Act III., Scene 2.

Just afterwards, the Fool interposes, to heighten and inflame the passion of the scene.

In other dramas, though perhaps in a less degree, our great poet has evinced the same skill and felicity of treatment; and in no instance can it be justly alleged of him, as it may be of some of the ablest of his contemporaries, that he introduced his fool, or his clown, merely for the sake of exciting the laughter of his audiences. Shakspeare had a loftier and a better purpose, and in this respect availed himself of resources, which, it would almost seem, he alone possessed.[1]

[1] I most deeply regret, that I have not recovered any of my notes of the third, fourth, and fifth Lectures.—J. P. C.

END OF THE SECOND LECTURE.

THE SIXTH LECTURE.

THE recollection of what has been said by some of his biographers, on the supposed fact that Milton received corporal punishment at college, induces me to express my entire dissent from the notion, that flogging or caning has a tendency to degrade and debase the minds of boys at school. In my opinion it is an entire mistake; since this species of castigation has not only been inflicted time out of mind, but those who are subjected to it are well aware that the very highest persons in the realm, and those to whom people are accustomed to look up with most respect and reverence, such as the judges of the land, have quietly submitted to it in their pupilage.

I well remember, about twenty years ago, an advertisement from a schoolmaster, in which he assured tender-hearted and foolish parents, that corporal punishment was never inflicted, excepting in cases of absolute necessity; and that even then the rod was composed of lilies and roses, the latter, I conclude, stripped of their thorns. What, let me ask, has been the consequence, in many cases, of the abolition of flogging in schools? Reluctance to remove a pimple has not unfrequently transferred the disease to the vitals: sparing the rod, for the correction of minor faults, has ended in the commission of the highest crimes. A man of great reputation (I should rather say of great notoriety) sometimes punished the pupils under his care by suspending them from the ceiling in baskets, exposed to the derision of their school-fellows; at other times he pinned upon the clothes of the offender a number of last dying speeches and confessions, and employed another boy to walk before the culprit, making the usual monotonous lamentation and outcry.

On one occasion this absurd, and really degrading punishment was inflicted because a boy read with a tone, although, I may observe in passing, that reading with intonation is strictly natural, and therefore truly proper, excepting in the excess.[1]

[1] This was the Lecturer's own mode of reading verse, and even in prose there was an approach to intonation. I have heard him read Spenser with such an excess (to use his own word) in this respect, that it almost amounted to a song. In blank verse it was less, but still apparent. Milton's "Liberty of unlicensed Printing" was a favourite piece of rhetorical writing, and portions of it I have heard Coleridge recite, never without a sort of habitual rise and fall of the voice.—J. P. C.

Then, as to the character and effect of the punishment just noticed, what must a parent of well regulated and instructed mind think of the exhibition of his son in the manner I have described? Here, indeed, was debasement of the worst and lowest kind; for the feelings of a child were outraged, and made to associate and connect themselves with the sentence on an abandoned and shameless criminal. Who would not prefer the momentary, but useful, impression of flogging to this gross attack upon the moral feelings and self-respect of a boy? Again, as to the proper mode of reading: why is a tone in reading to be visited as a criminal offence, especially when the estimate of that offence arises out of the ignorance and incompetence of the master? Every man who reads with true sensibility, especially poetry, must read with a tone, since it conveys, with additional effect, the harmony and rhythm of the verse, without in the slightest degree obscuring the meaning. That is the highest point of excellence in reading which gives to every thing, whether of thought or language, its most just expression. There may be a wrong tone, as a right, and a wrong tone is of course to be avoided; but a poet writes in measure, and measure is best made apparent by reading with a tone, which heightens the verse, and does not in any respect lower the sense. I defy any man, who has a true relish of the beauty of versification, to read a canto of "the Fairy Queen," or a book of "Paradise Lost," without some species of intonation.

In various instances we are hardly sensible of its existence, but it does exist, and persons have not scrupled to say, and I believe it, that the tone of a good reader may be set to musical notation. If in these, and in other remarks that fall from me, I appear dogmatical, or dictatorial, it is to be borne in mind, that every man who takes upon himself to lecture, requires that he should be considered by his hearers capable of teaching something that is valuable, or of saying something that is worth hearing. In a mixed audience not a few are desirous of instruction, and some require it; but placed in my present situation I consider myself, not as a man who carries moveables into an empty house, but as a man who entering a generally well furnished dwelling, exhibits a light which enables the owner to see what is still wanting. I endeavour to introduce the means of ascertaining what is, and is not, in a man's own mind.

Not long since, when I lectured at the Royal Institution, I had the honour of sitting at the desk so ably occupied by Sir Humphry Davy, who may be said to have elevated the art of chemistry to the dignity of a science; who has discovered that one common law is applicable to the mind and to the body, and who has enabled us to give a full and perfect Amen to the great axiom of Lord Bacon, that knowledge is power. In the delivery of that course I carefully prepared my first essay, and received for it a cold suffrage of approbation: from accidental causes I was unable to study the exact form and language of my second lecture, and when it was at an end, I obtained universal and heart-felt applause. What a lesson was this to me not to elaborate my materials, nor to consider too nicely the expressions I should employ, but to trust mainly to the extemporaneous ebullition of my thoughts. In this conviction I have ventured to come before you here; and may I add a hope, that what I offer will be received in a similar spirit? It is true that my matter may not be so accurately arranged: it may not dovetail and fit at all times as nicely as could be wished; but you shall have my thoughts warm from my heart, and fresh from my understanding: you shall have the whole skeleton, although the bones may not be put together with the utmost anatomical skill.

The immense advantage possessed by men of genius over men of talents can be illustrated in no stronger manner, than by a comparison of the benefits resulting to mankind from the works of Homer and of Thucydides. The merits and claims of Thucydides, as a historian, are at once admitted; but what care we for the incidents of the Peloponnesian War? An individual may be ignorant of them, as far as regards the particular narrative of Thucydides; but woe to that statesman, or, I may say, woe to that man, who has not availed himself of the wisdom contained in "the tale of Troy divine!"

Lord Bacon has beautifully expressed this idea, where he talks of the instability and destruction of the monuments of the greatest heroes, and compares them with the everlasting writings of Homer, one word of which has never been lost since the days of Pisistratus. Like a mighty ship, they have passed over the sea of time, not leaving a mere ideal track, which soon altogether disappears, but leaving a train of glory in its wake, present and enduring, daily acting

upon our minds, and ennobling us by grand thoughts and images: to this work, perhaps, the bravest of our soldiery may trace and attribute some of their heroic achievements. Just as the body is to the immortal mind, so are the actions of our bodily powers in proportion to those by which, independent of individual continuity,[1] we are governed for ever and ever; by which we call, not only the narrow circle of mankind (narrow comparatively) as they now exist, our brethren, but by which we carry our being into future ages, and call all who shall succeed us our brethren, until at length we arrive at that exalted state, when we shall welcome into Heaven thousands and thousands, who will exclaim—"To you I owe the first development of my imagination; to you I owe the withdrawing of my mind from the low brutal part of my nature, to the lofty, the pure, and the perpetual."

Adverting to the subject more immediately before us, I may observe that I have looked at the reign of Elizabeth, interesting on many accounts, with peculiar pleasure and satisfaction, because it furnished circumstances so favourable to the existence, and to the full development of the powers of Shakespeare. The Reformation, just completed, had occasioned unusual activity of mind, a passion, as it were, for thinking, and for the discovery and use of words capable of expressing the objects of thought and invention. It was, consequently, the age of many conceits, and an age when, for a time, the intellect stood superior to the moral sense.

The difference between the state of mind in the reign of Elizabeth, and in that of Charles I. is astonishing. In the former period there was an amazing development of power, but all connected with prudential purposes—an attempt to reconcile the moral feeling with the full exercise of the powers of the mind, and the accomplishment of certain practical ends. Then lived Bacon, Burghley, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, and a galaxy of great men, statesmen, lawyers, politicians, philosophers, and poets; and it is lamentable that they should have degraded

[1] I give this passage exactly as I find it in my notes; but it strikes me that something explanatory must have been accidentally omitted, and perhaps that the word I have written "continuity" ought to be *contiguity*. I might have left out the whole from "Just as the body" down to "the pure and the perpetual," but I preferred showing my own imperfectness to omitting what may be clear to others, though, at this distance of time, not so evident to me. The general point and bearing of what Coleridge said will be easily understood.—J. P. C.

their mighty powers to such base designs and purposes, dissolving the rich pearls of their great faculties in a worthless acid, to be drunken by a harlot. What was seeking the favour of the Queen, to a man like Bacon, but the mere courtship of harlotry ?

Compare this age with that of the republicans: that indeed was an awful age, as compared with our own. England may be said to have then overflowed from the fulness of grand principle—from the greatness which men felt in themselves, abstracted from the prudence with which they ought to have considered, whether their principles were, or were not, adapted to the condition of mankind at large. Compare the revolution then effected with that of a day not long past, when the bubbling-up and overflowing was occasioned by the elevation of the dregs—when there was a total absence of all principle, when the dregs had risen from the bottom to the top, and thus converted into scum, founded a monarchy to be the poisonous bane and misery of the rest of mankind.

It is absolutely necessary to recollect, that the age in which Shakspeare lived was one of great abilities applied to individual and prudential purposes, and not an age of high moral feeling and lofty principle, which gives a man of genius the power of thinking of all things in reference to all. If, then, we should find that Shakspeare took these materials as they were presented to him, and yet to all effectual purposes produced the same grand result as others attempted to produce in an age so much more favourable, shall we not feel and acknowledge the purity and holiness of genius—a light, which, however it might shine on a dunghill, was as pure as the divine effluence which created all the beauty of nature ?

One of the consequences of the idea prevalent at the period when Shakspeare flourished, viz., that persons must be men of talents in proportion as they were gentlemen, renders certain characters in his dramas natural with reference to the date when they were drawn: when we read them we are aware that they are not of our age, and in one sense they may be said to be of no age. A friend of mine well remarked of Spenser, that he is out of space: the reader never knows where he is, but still he knows, from the consciousness within him, that all is as natural and proper, as if the country where the action is laid were

distinctly pointed out, and marked down in a map. Shakspeare is as much out of time, as Spenser is out of space; yet we feel conscious, though we never knew that such characters existed, that they might exist, and are satisfied with the belief in their existence.

This circumstance enabled Shakspeare to paint truly, and according to the colouring of nature, a vast number of personages by the simple force of meditation: he had only to imitate certain parts of his own character, or to exaggerate such as existed in possibility, and they were at once true to nature, and fragments of the divine mind that drew them. Men who see the great luminary of our system through various optical instruments declare that it seems either square, triangular, or round, when in truth it is still the sun, unchanged in shape and proportion. So with the characters of our great poet: some may think them of one form, and some of another; but they are still nature, still Shakspeare, and the creatures of his meditation.

When I use the term meditation, I do not mean that our great dramatist was without observation of external circumstances: quite the reverse; but mere observation may be able to produce an accurate copy, and even to furnish to other men's minds more than the copyist professed; but what is produced can only consist of parts and fragments, according to the means and extent of observation. Meditation looks at every character with interest, only as it contains something generally true, and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem.

Shakspeare's characters may be reduced to a few--that is to say, to a few classes of characters. If you take his gentlemen, for instance, Biron is seen again in Mercutio, in Benedick, and in several others. They are men who combine the politeness of the courtier with the faculties of high intellect—those powers of combination and severance which only belong to an intellectual mind. The wonder is how Shakspeare can thus disguise himself, and possess such miraculous powers of conveying what he means without betraying the poet, and without even producing the consciousness of him.

In the address of Mercutio regarding Queen Mab, which is so well known that it is unnecessary to repeat it, is to be noted all the fancy of the poet; and the language in which it is conveyed possesses such facility and felicity, that one

would almost say that it was impossible for it to be thought, unless it were thought as naturally, and without effort, as Mercutio repeats it. This is the great art by which Shakspeare combines the poet and the gentleman throughout, borrowing from his most amiable nature that which alone could combine them, a perfect simplicity of mind, a delight in all that is excellent for its own sake, without reference to himself as causing it, and by that which distinguishes him from all other poets, alluded to by one of his admirers in a short poem, where he tells us that while Shakspeare possessed all the powers of a man, and more than a man, yet he had all the feelings, the sensibility, the purity, innocence, and delicacy of an affectionate girl of eighteen.

Before I enter upon the merits of the tragedy of "Romeo and Juliet," it will be necessary for me to say something of the language of our country. And here I beg leave to observe, that although I have announced these as lectures upon Milton and Shakspeare, they are in reality, as also stated in the prospectus, intended to illustrate the principles of poetry: therefore, all must not be regarded as mere digression which does not immediately and exclusively refer to those writers. I have chosen them, in order to bring under the notice of my hearers great general truths; in fact, whatever may aid myself, as well as others, in deciding upon the claims of all writers of all countries.

The language, that is to say the particular tongue, in which Shakspeare wrote, cannot be left out of consideration. It will not be disputed, that one language may possess advantages which another does not enjoy; and we may state with confidence, that English excels all other languages in the number of its practical words. The French may bear the palm in the names of trades, and in military and diplomatic terms. Of the German it may be said, that, exclusive of many mineralogical words, it is incomparable in its metaphysical and psychological force: in another respect it nearly rivals the Greek,

> "The learned Greek, rich in fit epithets,
> Blest in the lovely marriage of pure words;" [1]

I mean in its capability of composition—of forming com-

[1] From Act I., Scene 1, of "Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses." This drama is reprinted in Dodsley's Old Plays, vol. v. (last edition), and the lines may be found on p. 107 of that volume.

pound words. Italian is the sweetest and softest language; Spanish the most majestic. All these have their peculiar faults; but I never can agree that any language is unfit for poetry, although different languages, from the condition and circumstances of the people, may certainly be adapted to one species of poetry more than to another.

Take the French as an example. It is, perhaps, the most perspicuous and pointed language in the world, and therefore best fitted for conversation, for the expression of light and airy passion, attaining its object by peculiar and felicitous turns of phrase, which are evanescent, and, like the beautifully coloured dust on the wings of a butterfly, must not be judged by the test of touch. It appears as if it were all surface and had no substratum, and it constantly most dangerously tampers with morals, without positively offending decency. As the language for what is called modern genteel comedy all others must yield to French.

Italian can only be deemed second to Spanish, and Spanish to Greek, which contains all the excellences of all languages. Italian, though sweet and soft, is not deficient in force and dignity; and I may appeal to Ariosto, as a poet who displays to the utmost advantage the use of his native tongue for all purposes, whether of passion, sentiment, humour, or description.

But in English I find that which is possessed by no other modern language, and which, as it were, appropriates it to the drama. It is a language made out of many, and it has consequently many words, which originally had the same meaning; but in the progress of society those words have gradually assumed different shades of meaning. Take any homogeneous language, such as German, and try to translate into it the following lines:—

> "But not to one, in this benighted age,
> Is that diviner inspiration given,
> That burns in Shakspeare's or in Milton's page,
> The pomp and prodigality of heaven."
>
> GRAY'S *Stanzas to Bentley*.

In German it would be necessary to say "the pomp and *spendthriftness* of heaven," because the German has not, as we have, one word with two such distinct meanings, one expressing the nobler, the other the baser idea of the same action.

The monosyllabic character of English enables us,

besides, to express more meaning in a shorter compass than can be done in any other language. In truth, English may be called the harvest of the unconscious wisdom of various nations, and was not the formation of any particular time, or assemblage of individuals. Hence the number of its passionate phrases—its metaphorical terms, not borrowed from poets, but adopted by them. Our commonest people, when excited by passion, constantly employ them: if a mother lose her child she is full of the wildest fancies, and the words she uses assume a tone of dignity; for the constant hearing and reading of the Bible and Liturgy clothes her thoughts not only in the most natural, but in the most beautiful forms of language.

I have been induced to offer these remarks, in order to obviate an objection often made against Shakspeare on the ground of the multitude of his conceits. I do not pretend to justify every conceit, and a vast number have been most unfairly imputed to him; for I am satisfied that many portions of scenes attributed to Shakspeare were never written by him. I admit, however, that even in those which bear the strongest characteristics of his mind, there are some conceits not strictly to be vindicated. The notion against which I declare war is, that whenever a conceit is met with it is unnatural. People who entertain this opinion forget, that had they lived in the age of Shakspeare, they would have deemed them natural. Dryden in his translation of Juvenal has used the words "Look round the world," which are a literal version of the original; but Dr. Johnson has swelled and expanded this expression into the following couplet:—

> "Let observation, with extensive view,
> Survey mankind from China to Peru;"
> *Vanity of Human Wishes.*

mere bombast and tautology; as much as to say, "Let observation with extensive observation observe mankind extensively."

Had Dr. Johnson lived in the time of Shakspeare, or even of Dryden, he would never have been guilty of such an outrage upon common sense and common language; and if people would, in idea, throw themselves back a couple of centuries, they would find that conceits, and even puns, were very allowable, because very natural. Puns

often arise out of a mingled sense of injury, and contempt of the person inflicting it, and, as it seems to me, it is a natural way of expressing that mixed feeling. I could point out puns in Shakspeare, where they appear almost as if the first openings of the mouth of nature—where nothing else could so properly be said. This is not peculiar to puns, but is of much wider application: read any part of the works of our great dramatist, and the conviction comes upon you irresistibly, not only that what he puts into the mouths of his personages might have been said, but that it must have been said, because nothing so proper could have been said.

In a future lecture I will enter somewhat into the history of conceits, and shew the wise use that has heretofore been made of them. I will now (and I hope it will be received with favour) attempt a defence of conceits and puns, taking my examples mainly from the poet under consideration. I admit, of course, that they may be misapplied; but throughout life, I may say, I never have discovered the wrong use of a thing, without having previously discovered the right use of it. To the young I would remark, that it is always unwise to judge of anything by its defects: the first attempt ought to be to discover its excellences. If a man come into my company and abuse a book, his invectives coming down like water from a shower bath, I never feel obliged to him: he probably tells me no news, for all works, even the best have defects, and they are easily seen; but if a man show me beauties, I thank him for his information, because, in my time, I have unfortunately gone through so many volumes that have had little or nothing to recommend them. Always begin with the good—*à Jove principium*—and the bad will make itself evident enough, quite as soon as is desirable.

I will proceed to speak of Shakspeare's wit, in connexion with his much abused puns and conceits; because an excellent writer, who has done good service to the public taste by driving out the nonsense of the Italian school, has expressed his surprise, that all the other excellences of Shakspeare were, in a greater or less degree, possessed by his contemporaries: thus, Ben Jonson had one qualification, Massinger another, while he declares that Beaumont and Fletcher had equal knowledge of human nature, with more variety. The point in which none of them had

approached Shakspeare, according to this writer, was his wit. I own, I was somewhat shocked to see it gravely said in print, that the quality by which Shakspeare was to be individualised from all others was, what is ordinarily called, wit. I had read his plays over and over, and it did not strike me that wit was his great and characteristic superiority. In reading Voltaire, or (to take a standard and most witty comedy as an example) in reading "The School for Scandal," I never experienced the same sort of feeling as in reading Shakspeare.

That Shakspeare has wit is indisputable, but it is not the same kind of wit as in other writers: his wit is blended with the other qualities of his works, and is, by its nature, capable of being so blended. It appears in all parts of his productions, in his tragedies, comedies, and histories: it is not like the wit of Voltaire, and of many modern writers, to whom the epithet "witty" has been properly applied, whose wit consists in a mere combination of words; but in at least nine times out of ten in Shakspeare, the wit is produced not by a combination of words, but by a combination of images.

It is not always easy to distinguish between wit and fancy. When the whole pleasure received is derived from surprise at an unexpected turn of expression, then I call it wit; but when the pleasure is produced not only by surprise, but also by an image which remains with us and gratifies for its own sake, then I call it fancy. I know of no mode so satisfactory of distinguishing between wit and fancy. I appeal to the recollection of those who hear me, whether the greater part of what passes for wit in Shakspeare, is not most exquisite humour, heightened by a figure, and attributed to a particular character? Take the instance of the flea on Bardolph's nose, which Falstaff compares to a soul suffering in purgatory. The images themselves, in cases like this, afford a great part of the pleasure.

These remarks are not without importance in forming a judgment of poets and writers in general: there is a wide difference between the talent which gives a sort of electric surprise by a mere turn of phrase, and that higher ability which produces surprise by a permanent medium, and always leaves something behind it, which satisfies the mind as well as tickles the hearing. The first belongs to

men of cleverness, who, having been long in the world, have observed the turns of phrase which please in company, and which, passing away the moment, are passed in a moment, being no longer recollected than the time they take in utterance. We must all have seen and known such people; and I remember saying of one of them that he was like a man who squandered his estate in farthings: he gave away so many, that he must needs have been wealthy. This sort of talent by no means constitutes genius, although it has some affinity to it.

The wit of Shakspeare is, as it were, like the flourishing of a man's stick, when he is walking, in the full flow of animal spirits: it is a sort of exuberance of hilarity which disburdens, and it resembles a conductor, to distribute a portion of our gladness to the surrounding air. While, however, it disburdens, it leaves behind what is weightiest and most important, and what most contributes to some direct aim and purpose.

I will now touch upon a very serious charge against Shakspeare—that of indecency and immorality. Many have been those who have endeavoured to exculpate him by saying, that it was the vice of his age; but he was too great to require exculpation from the accidents of any age. These persons have appealed to Beaumont and Fletcher, to Massinger, and to other less eminent dramatists, to prove that what is complained of was common to them all. Oh! shame and sorrow, if it were so: there is nothing common to Shakspeare and to other writers of his day—not even the language they employed.

In order to form a proper judgment upon this point, it is necessary to make a distinction between manners and morals; and that distinction being once established, and clearly comprehended, Shakspeare will appear as pure a writer, in reference to all that we ought to be, and to all that we ought to feel, as he is wonderful in reference to his intellectual faculties.

By manners I mean what is dependent on the particular customs and fashions of the age. Even in a state of comparative barbarism as to manners, there may be, and there is, morality. But give me leave to say that we have seen much worse times than those—times when the mind was so enervated and degraded, that the most distant associations, that could possibly connect our ideas

with the basest feelings, immediately brought forward those base feelings, without reference to the nobler impulses; thus destroying the little remnant of humanity, excluding from the mind what is good, and introducing what is bad to keep the bestial nature company.

On looking through Shakspeare, offences against decency and manners may certainly be pointed out; but let us examine history minutely, and we shall find that this was the ordinary language of the time, and then let us ask, where is the offence? The offence, so to call it, was not committed wantonly, and for the sake of offending, but for the sake of merriment; for what is most observable in Shakspeare, in reference to this topic, is that what he says is always calculated to raise a gust of laughter, that would, as it were, blow away all impure ideas, if it did not excite abhorrence of them.

Above all, let us compare him with some modern writers, the servile imitators of the French, and we shall receive a most instructive lesson. I may take the liberty of reading the following note, written by me after witnessing the performance of a modern play at Malta, about nine years ago:—"I went to the theatre, and came away without waiting for the entertainment. The longer I live, the more I am impressed with the exceeding immorality of modern plays: I can scarcely refrain from anger and laughter at the shamelessness, and the absurdity of the presumption which presents itself, when I think of their pretences to superior morality, compared with the plays of Shakspeare."

Here let me pause for one moment; for while reading my note I call to mind a novel, on the sofa or toilet of nearly every woman of quality, in which the author gravely warns parents against the indiscreet communication to their children of the contents of some parts of the Bible, as calculated to injure their morals. Another modern author, who has done his utmost to undermine the innocence of the young of both sexes, has the effrontery to protest against the exhibition of the bare leg of a Corinthian female. My note thus pursues the subject:—

"In Shakspeare there are a few gross speeches, but it is doubtful to me if they would produce any ill effect on an unsullied mind; while in some modern plays, as well as in some modern novels, there is a systematic undermining

of all morality: they are written in the true cant of humanity, that has no object but to impose; where virtue is not placed in action, or in the habits that lead to action, but, like the title of a book I have heard of, they are 'a hot huddle of indefinite sensations.' In these the lowest incitements to piety are obtruded upon us; like an impudent rascal at a masquerade, who is well known in spite of his vizor, or known by it, and yet is allowed to be impudent in virtue of his disguise. In short, I appeal to the whole of Shakspeare's writings, whether his grossness is not the mere sport of fancy, dissipating low feelings by exciting the intellect, and only injuring while it offends? Modern dramas injure in consequence of not offending. Shakspeare's worst passages are grossnesses against the degradations of our nature: those of our modern plays are too often delicacies directly in favour of them."

Such was my note, made nine years ago, and I have since seen every reason to adhere firmly to the opinions it expresses.

In my next lecture I will proceed to an examination of "Romeo and Juliet;" and I take that tragedy, because in it are to be found all the crude materials of future excellence. The poet, the great dramatic poet, is throughout seen, but the various parts of the composition are not blended with such harmony as in some of his after writings. I am directed to it, more than all, for this reason,—because it affords me the best opportunity of introducing Shakspeare as a delineator of female character, and of love in all its forms, and with all the emotions which deserve that sweet and man-elevating name.

It has been remarked, I believe by Dryden, that Shakspeare wrote for men only, but Beaumont and Fletcher (or rather "the gentle Fletcher") for women. I wish to begin by shewing, not only that this is not true, but that, of all writers for the stage, he only has drawn the female character with that mixture of the real and of the ideal which belongs to it; and that there is no one female personage in the plays of all his contemporaries, of whom a man, seriously examining his heart and his good sense, can say "Let that woman be my companion through life: let her be the subject of my suit, and the reward of my success."

END OF THE SIXTH LECTURE.

THE SEVENTH LECTURE.

In a former lecture I endeavoured to point out the union of the Poet and the Philosopher, or rather the warm embrace between them, in the "Venus and Adonis" and "Lucrece" of Shakspeare. From thence I passed on to "Love's Labour's Lost," as the link between his character as a Poet, and his art as a Dramatist; and I shewed that, although in that work the former was still predominant, yet that the germs of his subsequent dramatic power were easily discernible.

I will now, as I promised in my last, proceed to "Romeo and Juliet," not because it is the earliest, or among the earliest of Shakspeare's works of that kind, but because in it are to be found specimens, in degree, of all the excellences which he afterwards displayed in his more perfect dramas, but differing from them in being less forcibly evidenced, and less happily combined: all the parts are more or less present, but they are not united with the same harmony.

There are, however, in "Romeo and Juliet" passages where the poet's whole excellence is evinced, so that nothing superior to them can be met with in the productions of his after years. The main distinction between this play and others is, as I said, that the parts are less happily combined, or to borrow a phrase from the painter, the whole work is less in keeping. Grand portions are produced: we have limbs of giant growth; but the production, as a whole, in which each part gives delight for itself, and the whole, consisting of these delightful parts, communicates the highest intellectual pleasure and satisfaction, is the result of the application of judgment and taste. These are not to be attained but by painful study, and to the sacrifice of the stronger pleasures derived from the dazzling light which a man of genius throws over every circumstance, and where we are chiefly struck by vivid and distinct images. Taste is an attainment after a poet has been disciplined by experience, and has added to genius that talent by which he knows what part of his genius he can make acceptable, and intelligible to the portion of mankind for which he writes.

In my mind it would be a hopeless symptom, as regards

genius, if I found a young man with anything like perfect taste. In the earlier works of Shakspeare we have a profusion of double epithets, and sometimes even the coarsest terms are employed, if they convey a more vivid image; but by degrees the associations are connected with the image they are designed to impress, and the poet descends from the ideal into the real world so far as to conjoin both—to give a sphere of active operations to the ideal, and to elevate and refine the real.

In "Romeo and Juliet" the principal characters may be divided into two classes: in one class passion—the passion of love—is drawn and drawn truly, as well as beautifully; but the persons are not individualised farther than as the actor appears on the stage. It is a very just description and development of love, without giving, if I may so express myself, the philosophical history of it—without shewing how the man became acted upon by that particular passion, but leading it through all the incidents of the drama, and rendering it predominant.

Tybalt is, in himself, a commonplace personage. And here allow me to remark upon a great distinction between Shakspeare, and all who have written in imitation of him. I know no character in his plays (unless indeed Pistol be an exception) which can be called the mere portrait of an individual: while the reader feels all the satisfaction arising from individuality, yet that very individual is a sort of class character, and this circumstance renders Shakspeare the poet of all ages.

Tybalt is a man abandoned to his passions—with all the pride of family, only because he thought it belonged to him as a member of that family, and valuing himself highly, simply because he does not care for death. This indifference to death is perhaps more common than any other feeling: men are apt to flatter themselves extravagantly, merely because they possess a quality which it is a disgrace not to have, but which a wise man never puts forward, but when it is necessary.

Jeremy Taylor in one part of his voluminous works, speaking of a great man, says that he was naturally a coward, as indeed most men are, knowing the value of life; but the power of his reason enabled him, when required, to conduct himself with uniform courage and hardihood. The good bishop, perhaps, had in his mind a story, told by

one of the ancients, of a Philosopher and a Coxcomb, on board the same ship during a storm: the Coxcomb reviled the Philosopher for betraying marks of fear: "Why are you so frightened? I am not afraid of being drowned: I do not care a farthing for my life."—"You are perfectly right," said the Philosopher, "for your life is not worth a farthing."

Shakspeare never takes pains to make his characters win your esteem, but leaves it to the general command of the passions, and to poetic justice. It is most beautiful to observe, in "Romeo and Juliet," that the characters principally engaged in the incidents are preserved innocent from all that could lower them in our opinion, while the rest of the personages, deserving little interest in themselves, derive it from being instrumental in those situations in which the more important personages develope their thoughts and passions.

Look at Capulet—a worthy, noble-minded old man of high rank, with all the impatience that is likely to accompany it. It is delightful to see all the sensibilities of our nature so exquisitely called forth; as if the poet had the hundred arms of the polypus, and had thrown them out in all directions to catch the predominant feeling. We may see in Capulet the manner in which anger seizes hold of everything that comes in its way, in order to express itself, as in the lines where he reproves Tybalt for his fierceness of behaviour, which led him to wish to insult a Montague, and disturb the merriment.—

> "Go to, go to;
> You are a saucy boy. Is't so, indeed?
> This trick may chance to scath you;—I know what.
> You must contrary me! marry, 'tis time.—
> Well said, my hearts!—You are a princox: go:
> Be quiet or—More light, more light!—For shame!
> I'll make you quiet.—What! cheerly, my hearts!"
>
> *Act I., Scene* 5.

The line

> "This trick may chance to scath you;—I know what,"

was an allusion to the legacy Tybalt might expect; and then, seeing the lights burn dimly, Capulet turns his anger against the servants. Thus we see that no one passion is so predominant, but that it includes all the parts of the character, and the reader never has a mere abstract of a

passion, as of wrath or ambition, but the whole man is presented to him—the one predominant passion acting, if I may so say, as the leader of the band to the rest.

It could not be expected that the poet should introduce such a character as Hamlet into every play; but even in those personages, which are subordinate to a hero so eminently philosophical, the passion is at least rendered instructive, and induces the reader to look with a keener eye, and a finer judgment into human nature.

Shakspeare has this advantage over all other dramatists —that he has availed himself of his psychological genius to develope all the minutiæ of the human heart: shewing us the thing that, to common observers, he seems solely intent upon, he makes visible what we should not otherwise have seen: just as, after looking at distant objects through a telescope, when we behold them subsequently with the naked eye, we see them with greater distinctness, and in more detail, than we should otherwise have done.

Mercutio is one of our poet's truly Shakspearean characters; for throughout his plays, but especially in those of the highest order, it is plain that the personages were drawn rather from meditation than from observation, or to speak correctly, more from observation, the child of meditation. It is comparatively easy for a man to go about the world, as if with a pocket-book in his hand, carefully noting down what he sees and hears: by practice he acquires considerable facility in representing what he has observed, himself frequently unconscious of its worth, or its bearings. This is entirely different from the observation of a mind, which, having formed a theory and a system upon its own nature, remarks all things that are examples of its truth, confirming it in that truth, and, above all, enabling it to convey the truths of philosophy, as mere effects derived from, what we may call, the outward watchings of life.

Hence it is that Shakspeare's favourite characters are full of such lively intellect. Mercutio is a man possessing all the elements of a poet: the whole world was, as it were, subject to his law of association. Whenever he wishes to impress anything, all things become his servants for the purpose: all things tell the same tale, and sound in unison. This faculty, moreover, is combined with the manners and feelings of a perfect gentleman, himself utterly un-

conscious of his powers. By his loss it was contrived that the whole catastrophe of the tragedy should be brought about: it endears him to Romeo, and gives to the death of Mercutio an importance which it could not otherwise have acquired.

I say this in answer to an observation, I think by Dryden (to which indeed Dr. Johnson has fully replied), that Shakspeare having carried the part of Mercutio as far as he could, till his genius was exhausted, had killed him in the third Act, to get him out of the way. What shallow nonsense! As I have remarked, upon the death of Mercutio the whole catastrophe depends; it is produced by it. The scene in which it occurs serves to show how indifference to any subject but one, and aversion to activity on the part of Romeo, may be overcome and roused to the most resolute and determined conduct. Had not Mercutio been rendered so amiable and so interesting, we could not have felt so strongly the necessity for Romeo's interference, connecting it immediately, and passionately, with the future fortunes of the lover and his mistress.

But what am I to say of the Nurse? We have been told that her character is the mere fruit of observation—that it is like Swift's "Polite Conversation," certainly the most stupendous work of human memory, and of unceasingly active attention to what passes around us, upon record. The Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet" has sometimes been compared to a portrait by Gerard Dow, in which every hair was so exquisitely painted, that it would bear the test of the microscope. Now, I appeal confidently to my hearers whether the closest observation of the manners of one or two old nurses would have enabled Shakspeare to draw this character of admirable generalisation? Surely not. Let any man conjure up in his mind all the qualities and peculiarities that can possibly belong to a nurse, and he will find them in Shakspeare's picture of the old woman: nothing is omitted. This effect is not produced by mere observation. The great prerogative of genius (and Shakspeare felt and availed himself of it) is now to swell itself to the dignity of a god, and now to subdue and keep dormant some part of that lofty nature, and to descend even to the lowest character—to become everything, in fact, but the vicious.

Thus, in the Nurse you have all the garrulity of old-

age, and all its fondness; for the affection of old-age is one of the greatest consolations of humanity. I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be without children, and what an inhuman world without the aged.

You have also in the Nurse the arrogance of ignorance, with the pride of meanness at being connected with a great family. You have the grossness, too, which that situation never removes, though it sometimes suspends it; and, arising from that grossness, the little low vices attendant upon it, which, indeed, in such minds are scarcely vices.—Romeo at one time was the most delightful and excellent young man, and the Nurse all willingness to assist him; but her disposition soon turns in favour of Paris, for whom she professes precisely the same admiration. How wonderfully are these low peculiarities contrasted with a young and pure mind, educated under different circumstances!

Another point ought to be mentioned as characteristic of the ignorance of the Nurse:—it is, that in all her recollections, she assists herself by the remembrance of visual circumstances. The great difference, in this respect, between the cultivated and the uncultivated mind is this—that the cultivated mind will be found to recal the past by certain regular trains of cause and effect; whereas, with the uncultivated mind, the past is recalled wholly by coincident images, or facts which happened at the same time. This position is fully exemplified in the following passages put into the mouth of the Nurse:—

> "Even or odd, of all days in the year,
> Come Lammas eve at night shall she be fourteen.
> Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls!—
> Were of an age.—Well, Susan is with God;
> She was too good for me. But, as I said,
> On Lammas eve at night shall she be fourteen;
> That shall she, marry: I remember it well.
> 'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;
> And she was wean'd,—I never shall forget it,—
> Of all the days of the year, upon that day,
> For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
> Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall:
> My lord and you were then at Mantua.—
> Nay, I do bear a brain:—but, as I said,
> When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
> Of my dug, and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
> To see it tetchy, and fall out with the dug!
> Shake, quoth the dove-house: 'twas no need, I trow,

To bid me trudge.
And since that time it is eleven years;
For then she could stand alone."

Act I., Scene 3.

She afterwards goes on with similar visual impressions, so true to the character.—More is here brought into one portrait than could have been ascertained by one man's mere observation, and without the introduction of a single incongruous point.

I honour, I love, the works of Fielding as much, or perhaps more, than those of any other writer of fiction of that kind: take Fielding in his characters of postillions, landlords, and landladies, waiters, or indeed, of anybody who had come before his eye, and nothing can be more true, more happy, or more humorous; but in all his chief personages, Tom Jones for instance, where Fielding was not directed by observation, where he could not assist himself by the close copying of what he saw, where it is necessary that something should take place, some words be spoken, or some object described, which he could not have witnessed (his soliloquies for example, or the interview between the hero and Sophia Western before the reconciliation) and I will venture to say, loving and honouring the man and his productions as I do, that nothing can be more forced and unnatural: the language is without vivacity or spirit, the whole matter is incongruous, and totally destitute of psychological truth.

On the other hand, look at Shakspeare: where can any character be produced that does not speak the language of nature? where does he not put into the mouths of his *dramatis personæ*, be they high or low, Kings or Constables, precisely what they must have said? Where, from observation, could he learn the language proper to Sovereigns, Queens, Noblemen or Generals? yet he invariably uses it.—Where, from observation, could he have learned such lines as these, which are put into the mouth of Othello, when he is talking to Iago of Brabantio?

"Let him do his spite:
My services, which I have done the signiory,
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
I shall promulgate, I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak, unbonneted, to as proud a fortune

> As this that I have reach'd: for know, Iago,
> But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
> I would not my unhoused free condition
> Put into circumscription and confine
> For the sea's worth."
>
> *Act I., Scene 2.*

I ask where was Shakspeare to observe such language as this? If he did observe it, it was with the inward eye of meditation upon his own nature: for the time, he became Othello, and spoke as Othello, in such circumstances, must have spoken.

Another remark I may make upon "Romeo and Juliet" is, that in this tragedy the poet is not, as I have hinted, entirely blended with the dramatist,—at least, not in the degree to be afterwards noticed in "Lear," "Hamlet," "Othello," or "Macbeth." Capulet and Montague not unfrequently talk a language only belonging to the poet, and not so characteristic of, and peculiar to, the passions of persons in the situations in which they are placed—a mistake, or rather an indistinctness, which many of our later dramatists have carried through the whole of their productions.

When I read the song of Deborah, I never think that she is a poet, although I think the song itself a sublime poem: it is as simple a dithyrambic production as exists in any language; but it is the proper and characteristic effusion of a woman highly elevated by triumph, by the natural hatred of oppressors, and resulting from a bitter sense of wrong: it is a song of exultation on deliverance from these evils, a deliverance accomplished by herself. When she exclaims, "The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I, Deborah, arose, that I arose a mother in Israel," it is poetry in the highest sense: we have no reason, however, to suppose that if she had not been agitated by passion, and animated by victory, she would have been able so to express herself; or that if she had been placed in different circumstances, she would have used such language of truth and passion. We are to remember that Shakspeare, not placed under circumstances of excitement, and only wrought upon by his own vivid and vigorous imagination, writes a language that invariably, and intuitively becomes the condition and position of each character.

On the other hand, there is a language not descriptive

of passion, nor uttered under the influence of it, which is at the same time poetic, and shows a high and active fancy, as when Capulet says to Paris,—

> " Such comfort as do lusty young men feel,
> When well-apparell'd April on the heel
> Of limping winter treads, even such delight
> Among fresh female buds, shall you this night
> Inherit at my house."
>
> *Act I., Scene 2.*

Here the poet may be said to speak, rather than the dramatist; and it would be easy to adduce other passages from this play, where Shakspeare, for a moment forgetting the character, utters his own words in his own person.

In my mind, what have often been censured as Shakspeare's conceits are completely justifiable, as belonging to the state, age, or feeling of the individual. Sometimes, when they cannot be vindicated on these grounds, they may well be excused by the taste of his own and of the preceding age; as for instance, in Romeo's speech,

> " Here's much to do with hate, but more with love :—
> Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
> O anything, of nothing first created!
> O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
> Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
> Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is! "
>
> *Act I., Scene 1.*

I dare not pronounce such passages as these to be absolutely unnatural, not merely because I consider the author a much better judge than I can be, but because I can understand and allow for an effort of the mind, when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and qualify contradictions, leaving a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images. As soon as it is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination. Such is the fine description of Death in Milton :—

> " The other shape,
> If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
> Or substance might be call'd, that shadow seem'd,

> For each seem'd either: black it stood as night;
> Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
> And shook a dreadful dart: what seem'd his head
> The likeness of a kingly crown had on."
>
> *Paradise Lost*, Book II.

The grandest efforts of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image. I have sometimes thought that the passage just read might be quoted as exhibiting the narrow limit of painting, as compared with the boundless power of poetry: painting cannot go beyond a certain point; poetry rejects all control, all confinement. Yet we know that sundry painters have attempted pictures of the meeting between Satan and Death at the gates of Hell; and how was Death represented? Not as Milton has described him, but by the most defined thing that can be imagined—a skeleton, the dryest and hardest image that it is possible to discover; which, instead of keeping the mind in a state of activity, reduces it to the merest passivity,—an image, compared with which a square, a triangle, or any other mathematical figure, is a luxuriant fancy.

It is a general but mistaken notion that, because some forms of writing, and some combinations of thought, are not usual, they are not natural; but we are to recollect that the dramatist represents his characters in every situation of life and in every state of mind, and there is no form of language that may not be introduced with effect by a great and judicious poet, and yet be most strictly according to nature. Take punning, for instance, which may be the lowest, but at all events is the most harmless, kind of wit, because it never excites envy. A pun may be a necessary consequence of association: one man, attempting to prove something that was resisted by another, might, when agitated by strong feeling, employ a term used by his adversary with a directly contrary meaning to that for which that adversary had resorted to it: it might come into his mind as one way, and sometimes the best, of replying to that adversary. This form of speech is generally produced by a mixture of anger and contempt, and punning is a natural mode of expressing them.

It is my intention to pass over none of the important so-called conceits of Shakspeare, not a few of which are introduced into his later productions with great propriety and effect. We are not to forget, that at the time he lived there was an attempt at, and an affectation of, quaintness and adornment, which emanated from the Court, and against which satire was directed by Shakspeare in the character of Osrick in Hamlet. Among the schoolmen of that age, and earlier, nothing was more common than the use of conceits: it began with the revival of letters, and the bias thus given was very generally felt and acknowledged.

I have in my possession a dictionary of phrases, in which the epithets applied to love, hate, jealousy, and such abstract terms, are arranged; and they consist almost entirely of words taken from Seneca and his imitators, or from the schoolmen, showing perpetual antithesis, and describing the passions by the conjunction and combination of things absolutely irreconcileable. In treating the matter thus, I am aware that I am only palliating the practice in Shakspeare: he ought to have had nothing to do with merely temporary peculiarities: he wrote not for his own only, but for all ages, and so far I admit the use of some of his conceits to be a defect. They detract sometimes from his universality as to time, person, and situation.

If we were able to discover, and to point out the peculiar faults, as well as the peculiar beauties of Shakspeare, it would materially assist us in deciding what authority ought to be attached to certain portions of what are generally called his works. If we met with a play, or certain scenes of a play, in which we could trace neither his defects nor his excellences, we should have the strongest reason for believing that he had had no hand in it. In the case of scenes so circumstanced we might come to the conclusion that they were taken from the older plays, which, in some instances, he reformed or altered, or that they were inserted afterwards by some under-hand, in order to please the mob. If a drama by Shakspeare turned out to be too heavy for popular audiences, the clown might be called in to lighten the representation; and if it appeared that what was added was not in Shakspeare's manner, the conclusion would be inevitable, that it was not from Shakspeare's pen.

It remains for me to speak of the hero and heroine, of Romeo and Juliet themselves; and I shall do so with unaffected diffidence, not merely on account of the delicacy, but of the great importance of the subject. I feel that it is impossible to defend Shakspeare from the most cruel of all charges,—that he is an immoral writer—without entering fully into his mode of pourtraying female characters, and of displaying the passion of love. It seems to me, that he has done both with greater perfection than any other writer of the known world, perhaps with the single exception of Milton in his delineation of Eve.

When I have heard it said, or seen it stated, that Shakspeare wrote for man, but the gentle Fletcher for woman, it has always given me something like acute pain, because to me it seems to do the greatest injustice to Shakspeare: when, too, I remember how much character is formed by what we read, I cannot look upon it as a light question, to be passed over as a mere amusement, like a game of cards or chess. I never have been able to tame down my mind to think poetry a sport, or an occupation for idle hours.

Perhaps there is no more sure criterion of refinement in moral character, of the purity of intellectual intention, and of the deep conviction and perfect sense of what our own nature really is in all its combinations, than the different definitions different men would give of love. I I will not detain you by stating the various known definitions, some of which it may be better not to repeat: I will rather give you one of my own, which, I apprehend, is equally free from the extravagance of pretended Platonism (which, like other things which super-moralise, is sure to demoralise) and from its grosser opposite.

Considering myself and my fellow-men as a sort of link between heaven and earth, being composed of body and soul, with power to reason and to will, and with that perpetual aspiration which tells us that this is ours for a while, but it is not ourselves; considering man, I say, in this two-fold character, yet united in one person, I conceive that there can be no correct definition of love which does not correspond with our being, and with that subordination of one part to another which constitutes our perfection. I would say therefore that—

"Love is a desire of the whole being to be united to some thing, or some being, felt necessary to its complete-

ness, by the most perfect means that nature permits, and reason dictates."

It is inevitable to every noble mind, whether man or woman, to feel itself, of itself, imperfect and insufficient, not as an animal only, but as a moral being. How wonderfully, then, has Providence contrived for us, by making that which is necessary to us a step in our exaltation to a higher and nobler state! The Creator has ordained that one should possess qualities which the other has not, and the union of both is the most complete ideal of human character. In everything the blending of the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight. Who shall dare to stand alone, and vaunt himself, in himself, sufficient? In poetry it is the blending of passion with order that constitutes perfection: this is still more the case in morals, and more than all in the exclusive attachment of the sexes.

True it is, that the world and its business may be carried on without marriage; but it is so evident that Providence intended man (the only animal of all climates, and whose reason is pre-eminent over instinct) to be the master of the world, that marriage, or the knitting together of society by the tenderest, yet firmest ties, seems ordained to render him capable of maintaining his superiority over the brute creation. Man alone has been privileged to clothe himself, and to do all things so as to make him, as it were, a secondary creator of himself, and of his own happiness or misery: in this, as in all, the image of the Deity is impressed upon him.

Providence, then, has not left us to prudence only; for the power of calculation, which prudence implies, cannot have existed, but in a state which pre-supposes marriage. If God has done this, shall we suppose that he has given us no moral sense, no yearning, which is something more than animal, to secure that, without which man might form a herd, but could not be a society? The very idea seems to breathe absurdity.

From this union arise the paternal, filial, brotherly and sisterly relations of life; and every state is but a family magnified. All the operations of mind, in short, all that distinguishes us from brutes, originate in the more perfect state of domestic life.—One infallible criterion in forming an opinion of a man is the reverence in which he holds

women. Plato has said, that in this way we rise from sensuality to affection, from affection to love, and from love to the pure intellectual delight by which we become worthy to conceive that infinite in ourselves, without which it is impossible for man to believe in a God. In a word, the grandest and most delightful of all promises has been expressed to us by this practical state—our marriage with the Redeemer of mankind.

I might safely appeal to every man who hears me, who in youth has been accustomed to abandon himself to his animal passions, whether when he first really fell in love, the earliest symptom was not a complete change in his manners, a contempt and a hatred of himself for having excused his conduct by asserting, that he acted according to the dictates of nature, that his vices were the inevitable consequences of youth, and that his passions at that period of life could not be conquered? The surest friend of chastity is love: it leads us, not to sink the mind in the body, but to draw up the body to the mind—the immortal part of our nature. See how contrasted in this respect are some portions of the works of writers, whom I need not name, with other portions of the same works: the ebullitions of comic humour have at times, by a lamentable confusion, been made the means of debasing our nature, while at other times, even in the same volume, we are happy to notice the utmost purity, such as the purity of love, which above all other qualities renders us most pure and lovely.

Love is not, like hunger, a mere selfish appetite: it is an associative quality. The hungry savage is nothing but an animal, thinking only of the satisfaction of his stomach: what is the first effect of love, but to associate the feeling with every object in nature? the trees whisper, the roses exhale their perfumes, the nightingales sing, nay the very skies smile in unison with the feeling of true and pure love. It gives to every object in nature a power of the heart, without which it would indeed be spiritless.

Shakspeare has described this passion in various states and stages, beginning, as was most natural, with love in the young. Does he open his play by making Romeo and Juliet in love at first sight—at the first glimpse, as any ordinary thinker would do? Certainly not: he knew what he was about, and how he was to accomplish what

he was about: he was to develope the whole passion, and he commences with the first elements—that sense of imperfection, that yearning to combine itself with something lovely. Romeo became enamoured of the idea he had formed in his own mind, and then, as it were, christened the first real being of the contrary sex as endowed with the perfections he desired. He appears to be in love with Rosaline; but, in truth, he is in love only with his own idea. He felt that necessity of being beloved which no noble mind can be without. Then our poet, our poet who so well knew human nature, introduces Romeo to Juliet, and makes it not only a violent, but a permanent love—a point for which Shakspeare has been ridiculed by the ignorant and unthinking. Romeo is first represented in a state most susceptible of love, and then, seeing Juliet, he took and retained the infection.

This brings me to observe upon a characteristic of Shakspeare, which belongs to a man of profound thought and high genius. It has been too much the custom, when anything that happened in his dramas could not easily be explained by the few words the poet has employed, to pass it idly over, and to say that it is beyond our reach, and beyond the power of philosophy—a sort of terra incognita for discoverers—a great ocean to be hereafter explored. Others have treated such passages as hints and glimpses of something now non-existent, as the sacred fragments of an ancient and ruined temple, all the portions of which are beautiful, although their particular relation to each other is unknown. Shakspeare knew the human mind, and its most minute and intimate workings, and he never introduces a word, or a thought, in vain or out of place: if we do not understand him, it is our own fault or the fault of copyists and typographers; but study, and the possession of some small stock of the knowledge by which he worked, will enable us often to detect and explain his meaning. He never wrote at random, or hit upon points of character and conduct by chance; and the smallest fragment of his mind not unfrequently gives a clue to a most perfect, regular, and consistent whole.

As I may not have another opportunity, the introduction of Friar Laurence into this tragedy enables me to remark upon the different manner in which Shakspeare

has treated the priestly character, as compared with other writers. In Beaumont and Fletcher priests are represented as a vulgar mockery; and, as in others of their dramatic personages, the errors of a few are mistaken for the demeanour of the many: but in Shakspeare they always carry with them our love and respect. He made no injurious abstracts: he took no copies from the worst parts of our nature; and, like the rest, his characters of priests are truly drawn from the general body.

It may strike some as singular, that throughout all his productions he has never introduced the passion of avarice. The truth is, that it belongs only to particular parts of our nature, and is prevalent only in particular states of society; hence it could not, and cannot, be permanent. The Miser of Moliere and Plautus is now looked upon as a species of madman, and avarice as a species of madness. Elwes, of whom everybody has heard, was an individual influenced by an insane condition of mind; but, as a passion, avarice has disappeared. How admirably, then, did Shakspeare foresee, that if he drew such a character it could not be permanent! he drew characters which would always be natural, and therefore permanent, inasmuch as they were not dependent upon accidental circumstances.

There is not one of the plays of Shakspeare that is built upon anything but the best and surest foundation; the characters must be permanent—permanent while men continue men,—because they stand upon what is absolutely necessary to our existence. This cannot be said even of some of the most famous authors of antiquity. Take the capital tragedies of Orestes, or of the husband of Jocasta: great as was the genius of the writers, these dramas have an obvious fault, and the fault lies at the very root of the action. In Œdipus a man is represented oppressed by fate for a crime of which he was not morally guilty; and while we read we are obliged to say to ourselves, that in those days they considered actions without reference to the real guilt of the persons.

There is no character in Shakspeare in which envy is pourtrayed, with one solitary exception—Cassius, in "Julius Cæsar"; yet even there the vice is not hateful, inasmuch as it is counterbalanced by a number of excellent qualities and virtues. The poet leads the reader to suppose that it is rather something constitutional, something

derived from his parents, something that he cannot avoid, and not something that he has himself acquired; thus throwing the blame from the will of man to some inevitable circumstance, and leading us to suppose that it is hardly to be looked upon as one of those passions that actually debase the mind.

Whenever love is described as of a serious nature, and much more when it is to lead to a tragical result, it depends upon a law of the mind, which, I believe, I shall hereafter be able to make intelligible, and which would not only justify Shakspeare, but show an analogy to all his other characters.

END OF THE SEVENTH LECTURE.

THE EIGHTH LECTURE.

It is impossible to pay a higher compliment to poetry, than to consider the effects it produces in common with religion, yet distinct (as far as distinction can be, where there is no division) in those qualities which religion exercises and diffuses over all mankind, as far as they are subject to its influence.

I have often thought that religion (speaking of it only as it accords with poetry, without reference to its more serious impressions) is the poetry of mankind, both having for their objects:—

1. To generalise our notions; to prevent men from confining their attention solely, or chiefly, to their own narrow sphere of action, and to their own individual circumstances. By placing them in certain awful relations it merges the individual man in the whole species, and makes it impossible for any one man to think of his future lot, or indeed of his present condition, without at the same time comprising in his view his fellow-creatures.

2. That both poetry and religion throw the object of deepest interest to a distance from us, and thereby not only aid our imagination, but in a most important manner subserve the interest of our virtues; for that man is indeed a slave, who is a slave to his own senses, and whose mind and imagination cannot carry him beyond the distance which his hand can touch, or even his eye can reach.

3. The grandest point of resemblance between them is, that both have for their object (I hardly know whether the English language supplies an appropriate word) the perfecting, and the pointing out to us the indefinite improvement of our nature, and fixing our attention upon that. They bid us, while we are sitting in the dark at our little fire, look at the mountain-tops, struggling with darkness, and announcing that light which shall be common to all, in which individual interests shall resolve into one common good, and every man shall find in his fellow man more than a brother.

Such being the case, we need not wonder that it has pleased Providence, that the divine truths of religion should have been revealed to us in the form of poetry; and that at all times poets, not the slaves of any particular sectarian opinions, should have joined to support all those delicate sentiments of the heart (often when they were most opposed to the reigning philosophy of the day) which may be called the feeding streams of religion.

I have heard it said that an undevout astronomer is mad. In the strict sense of the word, every being capable of understanding must be mad, who remains, as it were, fixed in the ground on which he treads—who, gifted with the divine faculties of indefinite hope and fear, born with them, yet settles his faith upon that, in which neither hope nor fear has any proper field for display. Much more truly, however, might it be said that, an undevout poet is mad: in the strict sense of the word, an undevout poet is an impossibility. I have heard of verse-makers (poets they are not, and never can be) who introduced into their works such questions as these:—Whether the world was made of atoms?—Whether there is a universe?—Whether there is a governing mind that supports it? As I have said, verse-makers are not poets: the poet is one who carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood; who, with a soul unsubdued by habit, unshackled by custom, contemplates all things with the freshness and the wonder of a child; and, connecting with it the inquisitive powers of riper years, adds, as far as he can find knowledge, admiration; and, where knowledge no longer permits admiration, gladly sinks back again into the childlike feeling of devout wonder.

The poet is not only the man made to solve the riddle