

I cannot introduce the first better than by quoting a sentence from Swinburne, who speaks of "the indomitable and ineradicable fallacy of criticism, which would find the keynote of Hamlet's character in the quality of irresolution," and then tells us how certain incidents are introduced on purpose to show "the instant and almost unscrupulous resolution of Hamlet's character in time of practical need." The reviewer following in the wake of Swinburne says that Hamlet's mind is evidently preoccupied with some dominant event, and that this *pre-occupation*, rather than irresolution, is the key to his behaviour. In the mental history of any mind some sudden, unexpected event may so take possession of the chambers of the brain as to dwarf all other events in comparison and to check all activities which do not have immediate reference thereto. For instance, let a brave commander on the eve of a battle receive news that his wife or child is at the point of death, and who will wonder if his orders be not always correct? If an eloquent politician be told as he enters the legislative chamber on some great night that his home has been invaded by treachery and he will, as we say, have no heart for the details of an argument. Neither in the one case nor the other would we say that the soldier was less brave in spirit, or that the tongue of the orator had permanently lost its power to charm. Othello when poisoned by jealousy did what Othello in his own nature would never have done. Similarly it would seem as if something had pre-possessed Hamlet's mind, which by its constant presence on his thoughts incapacitated him for carrying out the purpose assigned him. If a man were oppressed with having a great deed to do which he was unable to accomplish he could not accuse himself of perpetually forgetting it, as Hamlet does, with evident truth. Instead of being always thinking of it we find musings and broodings over the possibilities of escape from so vile a world, alternating with cool and keen analysis, polished criticism and petulant wit; and when his mind does revert to this "great action," this "dread command," which is supposed to haunt it and to keep it in a whirl of doubt and irresolution, it is because it is forcibly recalled to it, because some incident startles him to recollection,

proves to him that he has forgotten it, and he turns upon himself with surprise and indignation. Why is it this thing remains to do? Am I a coward; Do I lack gall? Is it "bestial oblivion?" or is it

Some craven scruple

Of thinking to precisely on the event?

There is in this drama a double tragedy as it were, the one outward in the events which pass before us, the other inward in the soul of Hamlet. Each has its initial movements, each has its crisis, and each has its independent development. The two are concurrent, but not coincident; they are intimately related, and are yet distinct. In the outward drama the great event, the turning point, is to be found in the command given by the ghost to kill the king. In the inward drama we must seek for some other motive, for Hamlet with his "bestial oblivion" is evidently not dominated by this command. That other event took place before the opening of this ghostly commission, and it seems to me nothing more or less than the marriage of his mother on the death of the late king. This event had annoyed him, had disgusted him, had shaken his faith in everything, but especially in feminine worth. His father had been a man of such noble character, and his mother, previously to this "o'er hasty marriage," had seemed to him the very type of wifehood and womanhood, that to find her seduced by that man whom he describes to his mother as

A murderer and a villain,

A slave that is not the twentieth part the type
Of your precedent lord,

had so unhinged him and disturbed his moral nature that all thought and action are tainted with the memory of the foul deed. Says the reviewer—"Start from this as a fixed point and a dramatic situation is gained in which every stroke of satire, every curiosity of logic, every strain of melancholy is appropriate and per-

continent to the action." The crisis of the tragedy of Hamlet the man is antecedent to the crisis of the tragedy of Hamlet the prince. This seems to be hinted at in the very first muttered words that Hamlet speaks in the play before he has seen the ghost.

King—But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son.

H. (aside)—A little more than kin and less than kind.

King—How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

H—Not so my lord, I am too much i the sun.

It is still more manifest in his soliloquy, also uttered before he has received the supernatural command, beginning—"O that this too too solid flesh would melt," when Hamlet and his friends are talking about the ghost, whose appearance at that time was very problematical, and Hamlet asks Horatio what brought him from Wittenburg. Horatio answers—"My lord I came to see your father's funeral." Hamlet replies—"I pray thee do not mock me, fellow-student, I think it was to see my mother's wedding."

Horatio—Indeed my lord it followed hard upon.

Hamlet—Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!

When Hamlet is introduced to us he is not a mere scholarly knightly prince, but one whose philosophy has been rudely shaken by an event which has annoyed him, whose confidence in the order of the world has been disturbed, and whose chivalrous devotion to ideal womanhood has received a terrible shock. He has been deceived by his own mother. That mother, being the queen, had drawn all the world in her train—Nobles and people, councillors and courtiers, the honored statesmen, the artless maiden of his affections, had all joined, had connived at her deed, were, in a sense, her accomplices. Everything seems wrong in consequence. How weary, stale, flat, unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on't! Oh, fie, tis an unweeded garden.

Some three months after this disastrous subjective crisis in the mind of the hero occurred the objective crisis of the drama. A ghost appears as a visitant from the unseen realms of purgatorial fires, and tells Hamlet that the present king murdered in profound secrecy the former king, and that it is his duty to avenge that murder. Now, what was Hamlet to do, we ask; what was he likely to do? or we may put the question thus—what course was alone open to him unless he were in very deed a mad fool? We hear a great deal from the critics of irresolution. Suppose he had been, as the critics seem to have wanted him to be, "grandly resolute," and rushed at the king with his rapier the next time they met and pierced him to the heart—what then? Hamlet would have appeared a convicted regicide and nothing more; a disappointed prince who had murdered his king, his uncle, and his stepfather, because he had been cheated out of the throne. The late king had died as all thought a sudden but a natural death. Hamlet would have to say he was murdered, but Hamlet's only witness was a ghost, and who would believe him? Others might support him in his testimony as to the actual fact [of this visitant having appeared on the ramparts, but none of these witnesses heard anything that the ghost said except that dubious and sepulchral monition to "swear." Had Hamlet swept to his revenge he would have himself paid the penalty by loss of honor, of liberty, and of life, unless as is most unlikely the "great love the general gender bore him" would have enabled him to tide over the bad odor of this ghost inspired murder. The death of the late king was a horrible murder, but there are only two persons who have any knowledge of it, or indeed any suspicion of it; those are Hamlet and the king himself who did the deed. It must be Hamlet's first endeavor to get fresh proof of the deed—proof that will satisfy himself, which is easy, and proof that will satisfy the world, which is more difficult. There was no blood shed, nor any of the features of ordinary horror—in fact, nothing unnatural or suspicious about the deed. The old man apparently dies quietly in his afternoon nap in his garden. The guilt of the deed was completely entombed, and could only be brought to light by making the king in some way or other confess