SHAKESPEARE'S BRUTUS.

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AN aged man of letters somewhere said, that he had never found a solution of the contradiction in *Julius Caesar,* 3d scene of Act IV, where Brutus directly denies all tidings from his wife, having a moment before disclosed the news of her death to Cassius. What purpose or impulse governed him in that denial, was the question; not an important matter it might seem in itself, but it cannot be supposed an accident on the part of the author; and the investigation of it may bring us into contact with a good deal that is among the most interesting in all Shakespeare, very much as with the most trivial-seeming phenomena of Nature.

The explanation, we may naturally assume, is to be sought in the peculiar mental state of the hero at the time. The difficulty may have arisen from supposing this state, as conveyed in some expressions of indifference toward passing events, to have been one of imperturbable philosophical serenity. But it appears to have been rather, shall we say, one of a certain alienation, or incipient derangement. Now that we have pronounced the words, they seem too strong; or rather too coarse. To reckon Brutus among Shakespeare's lunatics would be obviously extravagant. It is rather a coloring than a substance, something to be taken in by impression more than by direct observation—a germ or rudiment, not a definite growth Just here we may find the chief interest and value of *Shakespeare's Delineations of Insanity.* An entertaining book with that title, by Dr. Kellogg of the Utica Asylum, glows throughout with a zeal of admiration, not only for the poet's "unrivalled psychological intuition," in this region especially, but for his views of treatment, so immeasurably in advance of his time, and just slowly and painfully reached by the van of medical science in this past century. Yet this fervent book seems to miss a little that main point of interest we

are noting. There insanity appears to be treated somewhat exclusively as a specific disease of the brain. Physical brain disease, or inherited tendency to it, is of course the cause of very much insanity; but it is not this kind that Shakespeare has occasion to delineate. His world is of the mind, and mental causes alone in his dramas bring about the result, whatever the prior tendencies may have been. He leaves to other workmen the display of knowledge and the stir of sensation in representations of bodily ills. From this it would be clear already, without the need of illustration, that insanity with Shakespeare will be a thing of absolute gradation. There can be no sanity and insanity as definite states, but elements of either will intermix and shade as they do in our human nature, possibly neither ever far from the other; not "thin partitions," but no partitions do their bounds divide, in life and in Shakespeare. Illustrations press upon us indeed from his writings. It would be most interesting to rank the cases from the various plays, especially from those deeper ones which are commonly thrown toward the end of the collection, through all degrees between the lightest traces of inharmony or unbalance, and raging madness. It would then be seen how perfect is the relation of the mental constitution in each case with the conditions that affect it. A satisfying solution of the Hamlet riddle, for example, might be reached. It might be seen that this character, with certain natural tendencies and under powerfully impelling circumstances, forced inexorably out of any position tolerable to himself, is led to assume one as of a disordered mind, till this assumption passes indeterminately into reality; as the fakir, after holding his arm distorted twenty years, has lost the free use of it; an unmeaning question it would be, whether that limb were crippled or not—"it practically is to some extent" would be the practical answer; so is Hamlet's mind.

Repelling all the throng of other instances, we turn to Brutus, and endeavor to grasp the conception of him; noting always that it is Shakespeare's Brutus we have to deal with, being very little concerned with the actual historical personage of that name. He is the genius or later incarnation of the old Roman Republicanism, calling and supposing itself Liberty—how far it deserves the claim is a question not pertaining here, but we are all familiar with the claim; that spirit which had held its course so steadily since the dawn of tradition, and extended from such frail beginnings to the domination of the earth. But now a new spirit is abroad, to be called forever after by the name of its amazing embodiment, just passed from among us, Cæsarism. The one

is Rome, the other is Rome; what is to become of them? There is not "Rome enough or room enough," for both. The new is moving to victory, and the old is beginning to feel that it is, but will the old be likely to yield the place? It is the trite dilemma of the irresistible force and the immovable body. All the historical framework we cannot present; suffice it, that the further this frame were examined, the fitter it would be found to hold the picture of a heroic subject brought to that tension which draws toward the viewless boundary of derangement.

Brutus had walked the course of prosperous greatness, and had borne himself in the simple magnanimity of the olden time. The foremost man of all the world had fallen before him; but instead of ending, the task had scarce begun, and there was greater than the greatest for him to overcome. The spirit laid has reappeared—as is to be seen more vividly a little further on; and dissolution is about his vitals. He and Cassius are the two very hands of the State—and they fly apart, and clash and tear each other. Still nearer is his lot invaded—Portia is dead, and of grief at his adversity. Yet he is not to sink under the trials sent. His powers draw together, and abide prepared to set the hostile universe at defiance. It is the thrilling moment when the hero is strengthened instead of weakened by disaster; it is that commencing alienation, of the powerful, not the paltry spirit, where for the time he seems the more self-contained and effective, not the less; all his fiber drawn so tense and hard that he rings when you strike him. This is one shining instant when his personal strength is at its highest; but he is rushing to inevitable ruin, because he is out of harmony with the movement of events. Insanity is of course a sort of inequality or unmatch with the environment; but at this dividing hour he seems superior rather than inferior to it, with such force are his faculties thrown back upon themselves; which is in itself a sign of the breach. Compare the portrayal of Wallenstein by Schiller, when he blazes into such spiritual glory over the brink of his fall. For a somewhat vigorous presentation of such a phase in recent fiction, we might refer to the closing scene in Black's *McLeod of Dare;* but there the scope is a mere personality, far from the world interest of these examples. Here the hero is fatally assured of his power and of the work to which he is called by the gods. It is well to compare this state with that of man in some of his other finest moments, borne upon his support, of various names, of fortitude, philosophy, religion. The normal hero, saint or sage, assured of his place, replies to hostile fact: "You shall not affect me, or you shall serve me," and he carries it

out, upheld by the strength beyond his own. The condition we have sought to sketch is similar, only instead of defying the power of the fact, defies its existence, from an intenser self-assurance, says, "I am so much more real than you, that you are nothing at all; you shall not be." He gloriously realises himself, but mis-measures obstacles, and plunges into the abyss.

Brutus had indeed been none too perfectly in tune with his environment before, as we learn from Portia's own comments, and the earlier ones of Cassius; he has been with himself at war, and he has lost a great deal of sleep. In such preparations especially, the management of Shakespeare is never at fault. The murder of Cæsar had probably been corroding his mind ever since, with suggestions of ghastly doubt, and much of his will-power must have gone to resistance of these suggestions. The image of the butchered leader, his own father-like benefactor, the only man who could ride the tempests of the Roman world, whose works upon that world had been so marvellous for its good, must have fixed itself on his inward sight. He had not broken with the actual heretofore. The last crisis, now, however, is drawing on. The storm with Cassius has sunk to its calm that is not peace; he has in outward tranquillity mentioned Portia's death. Titinius and Messala enter; great decisions are at hand. A query is raised by Messala about the wife of Brutus; it is not the business now; he repels it. "Nor nothing in your letters writ of her?" asks Messala. Brutus, now at war with fact, again denies. He could not admit the fact as his own, though he was stonily armed to hear it from another. Portia was "himself, his half," as she had claimed, and as he had allowed, "as dear to me as are the ruddy drops that visit my sad heart," an expression which may perhaps be as interesting in this regard as in that of proving Shakespeare was acquainted with the circulation of the blood in advance of Harvey, as so many wise men before Shakespeare were. It would be like shattering his own sharp-crystallized being to say in this public council, "I have lost her," as he had done in the deep unveiling of the hour before with Cassius, when he was already shaken by their conflict; but when Messala tells him so, it is but an external fact, which he can dismiss with a wave of the hand. Under this general or "formal cause" there may be a special or "efficient cause"; he would test the fact—as in all such cases we entertain a certain phantom of suspense or uncertainty, survival of our previous condition— and this he does by denying knowledge of it; but this would have hardly been the method of the straightforward Brutus, except for the inner state in question. He only pursued the subject at all

in response to an interrogative remark of the other. Watch him now in the consultation; blind to the advantages which the more experienced eye of Cassius sees, though appearing all sublimely considerate himself, he rushes toward the catastrophe. The council breaks and he retires. Not rest, however, but hallucination folds him round. There can be no silence, no repose, for that haunted soul. He must hear music, he must read. As under a fate, he grows automatic and mechanical; tongue and hand have lost their helm The book he searched for, he had already placed in his gown. And now the last seal is opened; Cæsar's ghost appears.

It may be scarcely necessary to remind any student of Shakespeare at much length, that no ghost ever exhibits gratis in his pages; none to the mere carnal eye. They are more a spiritual than an external phenomenon; it is always a state of mind that calls them up. If the comparatively indifferent guardsmen in the opening of Hamlet seem an exception, yet the trouble and transition of the time, their fresh bereavement of a glorious chief, affecting them in good part as it does the more important actors—"I am sick at heart," says one of them, with no other reason given—may relieve the exception, and make out a perfect proportion between the silent apparition to themselves (when deeper stirred they can hear its voice as from underground), the beginnings of response to Horatio, and the speaking shade to the filial prince. At any rate, the blindness of Hamlet's mother to the vision so deadly clear to himself, the like with the miscellaneous guests of Macbeth and the ghost of Banquo; King Richard hearing only the menaces, and Richmond only the encouragement of the spirits that speak at one time and place to both,—are matters quite essential to any proper theory of Shakespeare's ghosts. Very much in the line of probability then is the spectre of Cæsar. It is the new genius, whom these fanatic patriots thought they could smite to death in a single house of flesh; as if a new genius were likely to hold of such leases. Brutus is forced to see a little otherwise now. Its message is, that it shall meet him once again and for all, on the approaching battlefield. The old genius does not shrink; it can break, but never bend.

One point in the conclusion specially tallies with this view of the mental phase—the suicide of Brutus. Such is the close of Black's novel, cited above.

A single word, on the whole, may do our business best. With all his grandeur of spirit. Brutus is a fanatic; a man who follows his "principle" without intelligence to match. That will account for anything unworthy of human right or reason.