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ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

OF THE

CHRISTIAN MIDDLE AGES

IN

SHAKESPEARE

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

OF THE

CHRISTIAN MIDDLE AGES

IN

SHAKESPEARE

by

Joseph Leo O'Donnell

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts in the  
Department of Philosophy of the University of Western Ontario  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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PART ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE AND METHOD PURSUED

Professor Dowden objects to the study of internal evidence as a means to the discovery of the particulars of the life of Shakespeare, and concludes by saying that "inquiry of this kind can lead to no certain results".<sup>1</sup> The objection is well taken, it seems to me. The very multiplicity of 'proven theories' is their own refutation, for Greene's 'Johannes Factotum' could never have been all the things he has been proven. The very fact that Shakespeare accomplished so much in his chosen field in so short a time and in so short a life precludes the possibility that he served, even as apprentice, in so many occupations, and visited so many lands as have been 'proven' to his credit. No one can deny the breadth of his knowledge of foreign places and human occupations; but that seems best explained by a trait which is everywhere manifest in his work: that he was a very observant man. England, in his day, was a land swarming with travellers from foreign parts and men of many occupations. Now, little escaped the notice of

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare - His Mind and Art, Harper Brothers (New York: 1898), p.38.

Shakespeare wherever he went, and his mind went everywhere, into the haunts of sailors and landlubbers, observing kings and nobles and commoners, watching life in all its forms, and understanding it as few men have ever understood it.

It is because he understood life so well, and portrayed it so well, that the failure of others to prove that he must have been a lawyer, a merchant, a sailor, a traveller in foreign lands, does not deter me from seeking to fathom his mind, to discover in his works something of the philosophy of life which governed his outlook and the presentation of what he saw there. There is something of truth in the Idealist Philosophy that would give to men's minds the power to determine the real world. I am Realist enough to recognize that the proper condition of man's mind is humility before the object that determines it; but I am Idealist enough to recognize also that the minds of most men are not humble, that they are prone to impose the thought of their minds upon the impressions of life that come to them from the world around them. If a man could be delivered from the prejudices that error begets, he would see life as it is; but, if the mind is corroded with error, error weaves itself into the fabric of his thoughts, and distorts the impressions which the world of reality imposes upon them. Was it not the turmoil of his atheism that robbed Marlowe's plays of the ethical unity

everywhere manifest in the writings of his great disciple? It is to discover the principles which underlie that unity that I shall direct my efforts in the writing of this thesis.

Those who dislike propoganda in drama may revolt against me from the beginning on the grounds that there is nothing didactic in Shakespeare's dramas. If I point out that Hamlet's description of the purpose of playing includes the didactic, they will reply that the description is Hamlet's, not Shakespeare's. To this I can only assert that whether or not Shakespeare believed that

"the purpose of playing.... both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."<sup>1</sup>

the fact is, that is what he really did. Whether or not he was bent on teaching a lesson, is beside the point. One cannot read his plays or see them acted without learning a lesson in life. He does not scream his lesson at us after the manner of Bernard Shaw. He gives us credit for a little intelligence, and allows us to draw our own conclusions. But he does present the picture of life honestly, sometimes when it would perhaps be better for the box-office to veer away from the truth. With a depth of vision that is the chief

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, Sc.2.

virtue of his genius, he plunges to the heart of life's mystery, understands it, and presents it with a clarity that tells us, as nothing else could, that his grasp on the principles on which life is founded is sure and firm. When he shows 'virtue her own feature' he does not point it out to her, much less analyze it for her. He credits her with being able to understand it for herself. When he reveals the image of vice, he leaves it for virtue to discover it, and does not bother to instruct vice that may be too blind to see, because he knows that instruction would be wasted. Both virtue and vice (I use these terms in their broadest sense as covering the whole range of human acts) he paints with a sureness of touch and a stark honesty that bespeak his amazing knowledge and appreciation of what they are, the grandeur and the nastiness filling the mind with admiration for the one and disgust for the other. Shakespeare may not have followed the didactic urge of his time, but he does instruct men down to our own day by presenting to them true pictures of life, with its dark shadows of error and vice and its bright rays of truth and virtue. Lines and plays we may find among his works that are sordid, but they are only foils to the general purity of his thought and the almost universal soundness of his ethical outlook.

Some phases of that outlook will be our concern in the pages that are to follow. To draw from his plays a complete synthesis of his philosophy is not my intention. If it could be done, it would involve a depth of study to which I can lay no claim, and would demand a volume much larger than a thesis of this kind has any right to be. Besides, I am convinced that such a work is impossible for the simple reason that Shakespeare was an artist, not a philosopher. While he had, I am sure, a grasp on many principles of philosophic thought, to claim for him that universal knowledge which a synthesis demands, can only be absurd. Few men in the history of the world have been able to formulate a synthesis covering the whole range of truth that is within the reach of the human mind, and these men have given their whole lives to an orderly pursuit of it. To consider that Shakespeare was capable of doing such a thing, even if he had never given the best years of his life to the writing of plays, is to go to an extreme of admiration which only mad admirers of the Bard may hope to achieve.

Be that as it may, there are certain phases of life into which Shakespeare penetrated with a sureness of step that could come only from a clear grasp of the principles that govern them. He knew what constitutes a good man and the

forces that are active in producing him. He knew what a good prince must be over and above being a good man, and why some good men may fail in being good princes. He understood the principles upon which society are founded, the rights and duties of princes and their subjects. He knew that there are times when subjects may and should revolt against tyrannical kings, and times when tyranny should be endured rather than bring upon the state the disorder that the overthrow of a tyrant entails. He realized that evil in an individual member of society may affect the whole family of the nation, and that evil, in a person of high station, increases in danger to the society in which he lives in proportion to his greatness, and he reveals, beyond any shadow of doubt, that corruption thus begotten and spread, brings dreadful calamities upon the state as a whole. In general, these are the chief points of interest in Shakespeare's philosophy, and they shall be the points on which I shall dwell in studying it.

His deep knowledge of human character is something that is self-evident in his plays. It shall be my interest to examine the forces that he sees at work in the formulation of human character, and to show that, for him, character is nothing more than the accumulation of virtues and vices,

habits good and bad, that arise out of human acts. In other words, I shall strive to show that character for Shakespeare is not merely psychological but moral in its foundations, that the weaknesses and strengths of his characters come, not so much from heredity and environment, as the modern empiricist maintains, but from the failure on the part of the higher faculties to govern this little kingdom, man. In short, I shall attempt to show that Shakespeare was a medievalist in his beliefs concerning the good and bad life.

From there I shall pass on to consider his treatment of man in his social aspects. Shakespeare generally fixes his attention on the leaders of society and their influence over the lives of other men around them. The rugged individualist's conception of man's life in this vale of tears is certainly not his. He sees him as a social being whose life is bound up inextricably with the lives of his fellows in the society in which he lives. The governing class is his chief concern, mainly because their actions are more far-reaching than the actions of ordinary men. But he does not forget the little man and shows him as definitely affected by the actions of his rulers. Shakespeare's tragic hero never falls without that fall reverberating to the ends of the territory over which he has cast his shadow, and his kings never fall into crime without the whole nation suffering.

For all these reasons, revolution is often his theme, revolution justified and revolution unjustified. He sees through each and lays the causes and effects, good and bad, clearly before us. It is to this aspect of the social problem, and this alone, that I shall devote my efforts. There are others, as for instance, the relation of man's attitude to divine law and its results in their attitude towards the laws that govern society. I had hoped to be able to devote a chapter to this relationship as it is unfolded in *Lear*, but it would extend this dissertation beyond all reasonable limits. I shall, however, attempt to show that Shakespeare's medieval conception of the sinfulness of moral disorder is everywhere a potent force directing him in the writing of his plays, that it is his sense of sin that directs his thoughts and the portrayal of them in his dramas.

In his Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, H.J.C. Grierson says:

"Neither the structure of the play nor any authoritative utterance, like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, nor any summing-up such as I have cited from other dramatists, reveals anything of Shakespeare's own thought about the transcendental background of life. He seems not to be concerned about evil as sin, as the transgression of divine law, an offence against God. The word sin occurs comparatively seldom in the tragedies. He sees it on the human side, as the wrongs and cruelties that men inflict on one another, "man's inhumanity to man". Indeed

there are plays in which one feels acutely the absence of any reference to religious inhibitions or sanctions."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Grierson's work seems to me to bear witness to painstaking and objective study of English literature, and for that reason his statement, and still more the chapter from which it is taken, have given me pause. Does he not undermine my whole position? Does he not deny and disprove what seems obvious to me, that the sense of sin is largely responsible for the unity and universality which make Shakespeare's tragedies and histories timeless with the timelessness of truth? At first glance it would seem so, for he seems to prove that Shakespeare had no sense of sin, or having it, ignored it in writing his plays.

But, if we study Grierson's work closely, we shall find that his idea of sin and the sense of sin is not mine, and, I am convinced, not Shakespeare's. One cannot read Cross Currents in English Literature without realizing that, though out of sympathy with Puritan fanaticism, the author's conception of the moral life and the religious life is fundamentally the same as that of Prynne and Baxter. He tells us that "Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher and their school

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<sup>1</sup> Chatto and Windus (London: 1929), p.106.

avoided the raising of moral and religious issues in any definite or dogmatic fashion".<sup>1</sup> His whole outlook seems to circumscribe the moral life with dogmatic pronouncements, to make it co-extensive with codes, biblical, ecclesiastical, or at least conventional; and it is apparent that without the discussion and application of "religious inhibitions and sanctions", for him there can be no moralizing. Unless it can be shown that punishments that follow upon the evils man inflicts on man come as a result of direct intervention on the part of an avenging God, he will admit of no moral lesson. He is aware of no contradiction in his statement that Shakespeare lets morality take care of itself and sets only life before us.<sup>2</sup> He fails completely to realize that it is impossible to set "life" before us without setting morality as well. In a word, he divorces nature and the law. Like Prynne, he looks upon human nature as corrupt, and morality as related only to special decrees of God. For him, God's law is the positive law, and the positive law has no relation to the natural law.

Now as Grierson himself maintains, "Shakespeare thought as the average man of the Middle Ages".<sup>3</sup> But for

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., p.82.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., p.125.

the average man of the Middle Ages - I might add, for the average theologian of the Middle Ages - there was no such separation between nature and God's law. For the men of the Middle Ages, murder was evil, not because God forbade it, but God forbade it because it is evil - because it is contrary to man's nature. For them, the ten commandments, the laws of the Church, and the laws of the land - the positive law in other words, interpret the law of man's nature for the convenience of men too dull of mind, or too much occupied with other things, to arrive, by the light of reason, at the principles which govern the life of man in himself and in society, and direct him towards the end for which he was created.

The average man of the Middle Ages and the Church did not regard nature as something evil. Grierson accepts<sup>1</sup> the opinion he quotes from Ernest Froeltsch:<sup>2</sup>

"The Catholic Church always regarded the sphere of the natural as a relatively independent sub-structure of the Kingdom of Grace; and conditionally upon its readiness to submit, had allowed to the natural life a rich freedom of movement. It could, through the institution of confession and penance, be directed; and its excesses through the same agency, could always be atoned for."

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Renaissance and Reformation, Gesammelta Werke, IV, 19.

This is hardly a correct statement of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards "the sphere of the natural", and, in man, its relation to the "Kingdom of Grace". It is tinged with the Lutheran conception of corrupt nature, and fumbles with the doctrine of Grace.

The Catholic Church, neither in the Middle Ages nor now, regards human nature as corrupt. She has given nature "a rich freedom" because she has always regarded it as essentially good. She teaches that the natural man can never hope to see God face to face without becoming the supernatural man; but she does not believe that without grace he is condemned by natural corruption inevitably to hell. The evil effects of Original Sin - darkness of intellect, weakness of will, and a strong inclination to evil - do make it difficult for him to practise the natural virtues that will bring him to natural joy in an immortal life; but it is not impossible. In him, as in all things, the law of God is operative, and natural man can follow it freely in the practice of natural virtues, which in no sense are to be considered vices.

Then too, it might be said that in a sense man's very nature was created for heaven; for it is obediential to Grace. By the Incarnation of the Son of God, it was

united with Divine Nature in the Person of Christ, the Son of God, Who merited by His death a redemption that makes it possible for human nature to be supernaturalized without ceasing to be natural. In Baptism the soul, the natural soul, is clothed with the vesture of sanctifying grace; the body becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost; and man, sanctified natural man, is made a son of God and heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. And man will come to this inheritance only by obeying still the law of his nature in the practice of natural virtue supernaturalized by Grace.

Man is free to obey the law, and will enjoy the fullness of his freedom only in obedience to it with joy of heart in a clear conscience, that lets him laugh uproariously if he choose, while he partakes of the good things of life that God has given him. But his freedom gives him the power to disobey if he should so choose, giving way to the inclinations to evil which are within him. In that case, the law has its own sanction quite apart from any special retribution which Providence may hurl down upon him for his correction and punishment.

The average man of the Middle Ages may not have been sufficiently studied in the science of ethics to associate nature's sanctions with his own violence to her law.

But the average theologian and philosopher were so studied, and, it seems to me, so was Shakespeare. They knew, and so did he, that violence done to the principles of the natural law bring chaos to the individual and society as inevitably as violence done to the eternal law, by some wayward star free for the nonce of eternal necessity, would bring chaos to the heavens and to the earth. It is Shakespeare's knowledge of those principles of the natural law and the sanctions which are visited upon offenders that gives unity and coherence to his presentations of life.

Here lay Shakespeare's chief concern. I accept without question Grierson's conclusion that Shakespeare never sought to be a moral theologian, certainly not after the manner of Prynne. He lacked some of Prynne's conceit and all his fanaticism, and was willing to leave theology, moral and dogmatic, to theologians deeply enough studied in that most difficult of sciences, to speak. I can well imagine the annoyance he must have felt with the shallow artifice of some of his fellow dramatists and the stupid fanaticism of men like Prynne.

But I find it difficult to believe that he escaped entirely the spirit of his age. Are we to believe that when his friend Ben Jonson was indulging in allegory to moral purpose, Shakespeare felt no didactic urge? Are we to believe

that when moralizing, petty and shallow or otherwise, was the vogue of the theatre, Will could escape to some Olympian retreat, there to play with eternal verities beyond the ken of a Prynne or a Baxter; and, that toying with these eternal truths, he used them blindly, without intelligent effort on his part, in the writing of masterpieces of unity and coherence only to amuse his audiences for box-office returns? Shakespeare may have been the unconscious philosopher, but not so unconscious as that. Grierson claims that "neither Hamlet nor Shakespeare quite understand what has gone wrong".<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that if the Professor would broaden his conception of morality, he might find a simple explanation of some of the perplexing problems in the life of Hamlet which befuddle the minds of those afflicted with Prynne's narrow views.

Shakespeare was not, I am sure, a moralist of the Puritan school, but of the medieval school; nor did he treat morality as a theologian of any kind, but as a sociologist, or better still, as a dramatist with sociological interests and penetration. I think that Grierson is quite correct in maintaining that Shakespeare was interested in evil chiefly from the human viewpoint,<sup>2</sup> as man's inhumanities to man

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.115.

<sup>2</sup>Op.cit., p.106.

rather than as man's infidelities to God. But it seems to me that the Professor in his eagerness to prove his point has overlooked what seems equally true, that Shakespeare understood and portrayed man's inhumanities to man so well only because he never overlooked the fact that they are also man's infidelities to God. Though the word "sin" does occur quite seldom in the tragedies, it does occur - as it seldom occurs in modern dramas. Claudius' offences "smell to heaven".<sup>1</sup> Hamlet knows that the "Everlasting" decrees "against self-slaughter";<sup>2</sup> the ghost has been "sent to his account with all his imperfections on his head".<sup>3</sup> Macbeth may "jump the life to come",<sup>4</sup> but conscience upbraids him, and he is aware that he has "'filed his mind" and "given his eternal jewel to the common enemy of man".<sup>5</sup> And whatever interpretation Grierson may impose upon the text, the fact remains that the dramatic impression conveyed to any audience is one of sin committed and a conscience guilty, and a soul in despair before the thought of Judgment and God's Justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, Act. III, Sc.3.

<sup>2</sup> Act I, Sc.2.

<sup>3</sup> Act I, Sc.5.

<sup>4</sup> Act I, Sc.7.

<sup>5</sup> Act III, Sc.1.

Claudius is conscious of sin, and so is Macbeth, and though neither thinks or speaks of the danger of the heavens opening to pour down upon him God's vengeance in this life, though the catastrophe that comes upon them is a natural one, we are conscious of the fact that it has come as a result of sin. For Shakespeare was neither a Stoic nor a Puritan. He treats of man's inhumanities to man. He does not lay stress upon the "sinfulness" of acts contrary to the natural law, but he never forgets that they are sins. And though he does not concern himself with special decrees of divine retribution, he does associate natural retribution with sin, because sin is a natural deformity which brings disorder to the individual and to the society in which it is committed.

This dissertation will be devoted, then, to a study of these forces as they are portrayed by Shakespeare especially in his English Histories and in Hamlet. It is in these plays that I find my theme of revolution most clearly developed, and I shall largely confine my efforts to them lest, by spreading out over too wide a field, I should lose myself in the variety of exceptions and new phases of the same problem that are bound to arise amid the infinite variety of Shakespeare's works.

It remains for me only to explain the method of my attack upon the problem. One is prone to look for Shakespeare's thoughts on the lips of the characters he creates. Such a method is obviously unsound. Certainly, for example, one can hardly subscribe to the belief that Edmund speaks Shakespeare's thoughts when he delivers himself of his defence of the illegitimate. Such a contention could hardly stand when we consider the villainies that Shakespeare bestows upon his galaxy of bastards. Again, to say that Hamlet is Shakespeare's mouthpiece when he declares that "nothing is but thinking makes it so", is entirely to be rejected when we consider the stark realism that is the warp and woof of Shakespeare's plays. Even to maintain that Hamlet's description of the purpose of playing is Shakespeare's, simply because we find Hamlet saying it with such conviction, is not to be accepted. It is only because we find that purpose everywhere at work in Shakespeare's dramas that we can say that Hamlet is speaking his master's thoughts.

The advice which Stephen Hale brings from wiser critics will be my guide:<sup>1</sup>

"Wiser critics..... advise us to study the plays synthetically, to view them as fields belonging to one estate, or as we look upon a landscape as a natural

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare's Religion, Shakespeare Press (Stratford-on-Avon: 1916), p.11.

unity: to trace throughout, the self-same spirit, brooding over all, selecting, inspiring, and marshalling creatures of its genius, each in conformity with some harmonizing principle in the mind of their creator."

The method seems to have the approval of A.C. Bradley, for he asks:<sup>1</sup>

"Is it really conceivable that a man can write some five and thirty dramas, and portray in them an enormous amount and variety of human nature, without betraying anything of his own disposition and prejudices? I do not believe that he could do this."

It will be mine. I shall strive to see the play only as a whole, looking for the general theme that constitutes its unifying principle and tracing the development of that theme in the unfolding of the drama in all its parts.

As I have gone further and further into the volume of material that has been written on this field, I have become more and more convinced of the necessity of finding the general theme of each play if we are to understand the parts that go to make it up. One can hardly read the works of our great scholars without a feeling of bewilderment that comes, I think, from their concentration upon parts of the theme or individual problems within it, rather than on the problem as a whole. I am convinced that writers like A.C. Bradley in

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<sup>1</sup>Oxford Lectures, Macmillan & Co. (London: 1926), p.314.

one school and E.E. Stoll in another have imposed upon Shakespeare's plays a complexity that would leave their author in a state of wonder and admiration. It has ever been the practice of critics to analyze the work of great literary artists to the point of robbing it of the simplicity which is its very soul. Lacking entirely the breadth and profundity of these great minds, I hope to avoid this folly without falling into a greater.

## CHAPTER I I

### SHAKESPEARE THE MAN

The problem of Shakespeare's religious affiliations is one of those which we may never hope to settle beyond controversy. He lived at a time when the loyalties of Englishmen with regard to religious matters were submerged in the needs of the nation as a whole in the face of foreign foes. It was a time, too, when the ordinary Catholic layman was apt to be silent about his religious loyalties. The Protestant Reformation in England was but beginning, and ordinary men were not likely to grasp the line of division between the old faith and the new, so closely did the Anglican heresy cling to the old beliefs. Intelligent Catholics very likely did realize that what appeared on the surface as a political division with Rome was decidedly dangerous to the religious well-being of the nation; but they would be prone to maintain silence with regard to their thoughts on the matter. Priests of the old faith went secretly about their labours attending to the needs of the faithful; and, at all times, were in danger of

being apprehended and put to death. The layman, too, who was loyal to the old faith, was likely to be secret about his convictions and practices, rather than run the risk of having his faith put to the test by being obliged to attend the state church or pay a fine as a recusant. To be as wise as a serpent and as simple as a dove was the part of true wisdom, the better part of valour, and the part played by the best of Catholics in the religious theme of the day. If Shakespeare was a Catholic, as I believe he was, we can hope to find little evidence that is not purely circumstantial to prove it.

It comes about, therefore, that conservative scholars who desire at all times definite evidence before they advance even opinions, are apt to be silent on the subject, leaving the field to fanatics whose prejudices fill up gaps with abandon, and so befuddle the minds of their readers that the whole matter is thrown into a confusion wherein even the known facts are distorted and twisted beyond recognition and Shakespeare is "proven" everything from an atheist to a martyr for the old faith. Staid scholarship washes its hands of all part in the controversy, and makes matters worse by taking the attitude that it really matters little what his religious affiliations were, or what his religious convictions,

and shows annoyance<sup>1</sup> when romantic scholars like Madame du Chambrun claim to have made discoveries that clear up long-standing doubts. Be that as it may, the problem is an important one; for, whatever we may think on the subject, a man's religious convictions do affect his work, whether it be in the field of lyric poetry or what we like to consider purely impersonal drama. No man can be so impersonal as to write of man and the deeds of men without colouring them with his own thoughts. To achieve such objectivity demands a realism in man that must ever remain impossible so long as men's minds remain subject to the effects of Original Sin. To neglect the problem of Shakespeare's religious affiliations as one that is unimportant is an evasion which true scholarship cannot tolerate.

Now, it is not my purpose to prove Shakespeare's active membership in the Catholic Church. To do that would require much more definite evidence than has as yet been unearthed. But there are certain facts known about him and his background which have led Stephen Hales<sup>2</sup> "after most careful

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Rollins, a thorough-going scholar of Harvard University, in his review of Madame du Chambrun's Shakespeare Rediscovered, has given the book decidedly harsh treatment, attacking her for her style, and dismissing her arguments with the suggestion that she leave the field to scholars and betake herself to fiction (Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, July, 1938).

<sup>2</sup>Shakespeare's Religion, (Stratford-on-Avon: 1916), p. 28.

and impartial study", to the conclusion, "in clear and decided agreement with that of Mr. G.K. Chesterton, that Shakespeare was spiritually a Catholic." It is these facts and the conclusion drawn from them by both Hales and Chesterton that will occupy my interest, for that conclusion is of vital interest to the further conclusions which I shall attempt to prove about Shakespeare's ethical outlook. To find that he was 'spiritually a Catholic' is really of more interest to us here than to find that he was an active and devout member of the Catholic fold. We can leave the latter between himself and God until true scholarship finds, if it ever can, documentary evidence to prove or disprove the fact.

Unfortunately, Shakespeare did not have his Boswell, probably because his age was one in which people were more interested in the work than in the man who produced it. That was a characteristic of the Middle Ages which still cast their light (or their darkness, if you will) upon the English mind when Shakespeare was at work. The difficulty, therefore, of proving even the little which I wish to prove, is great. However, there are certain facts at my disposal, and these we shall consider.

What are these facts? That Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, his wife, no one of

importance seems to doubt. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon during the first half century after the revolt of Luther from the Church of his fathers, and at a time when England, largely for political reasons,<sup>1</sup> was also revolting from Rome. Of the religion of Shakespeare's parents, we can only say that all the evidence at our disposal points to the belief that they were followers of the old faith. Professor Boas tells us<sup>2</sup> that the Arden family gave martyrs to it, and Madame Clara L. du Chambrun<sup>3</sup> supports his remark with the story of the execution of John Somervyle, Edward Arden, Mary Arden, and John Hall, the first three of whom were relatives of Shakespeare. Whatever Professor Rollins may think of her work as a whole, this part of it Madame du Chambrun supports with photostat copies from the Domestic Papers of Elizabeth 164, 177. Moreover, her handling of the question of John Shakespeare's will,<sup>4</sup> which reveals beyond doubt that he died a fervent Catholic, is without question an excellent piece of scholarly research. We

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Legouis writes: "As pope she (Elizabeth) was political, not devout, well fitted to govern men who desired independence of Rome, but were in no wise inclined to profound conviction or to proselytism." A History of English Literature, Dent (London: 1933), p.252.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare and His Predecessors, Scribner (New York: 1904), p.98.

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare Rediscovered, Scribner (New York: 1938), p.47.

<sup>4</sup> Op.cit., Chapter 4.

know, too, that he was fined as a recusant,<sup>1</sup> and it is not impossible that the fines imposed played a large part in the impoverishment that was responsible for cutting short young Will's schooling.

With these facts in mind, is it being unscholarly to maintain Shakespeare was reared in a thoroughly Catholic home, a home that could be loyal to the British throne in secular matters even while refusing to submit in matters into which it had no right to intrude? It was a time when the followers of the new churches were insisting upon the right of a man to follow his conscience in matters of faith and morals. Are we to believe that the followers of the old were less insistent upon their rights in such matters? Indeed, the very fact that their faith was being attacked on every side would lead men and women like John Shakespeare and Mary Arden to see to it that their children were well instructed in their religion.

Certainly the complaints of Stockwood<sup>2</sup> about the care that Papists took to see to it that their children were given such instruction, bears out the thought. He tells us that they "full well understood" that children should be

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison, Description of Britaine and England, ed. by F.J. Furnivall, Chatto & Windus (London), Vol.2, p.332.

taught young, and that some of them even went so far as

"to have their picked schoolmasters privately to nousel up their children in their houses, in the pope's religion, that they may tast and smel thereof when theyr parents be dead and rotten... By theys meanes are many towarde gentlemen otherwise utterly marred and spoiled..... Howe (I pray you) falleth it out at theys days in this lande, many young gentlemen not above 24 yeres old at the most, are more obstinate and stubborne Papistes than theyr fathers? They wyll come at no church, at no sermons, whenas theyr parents will do both."

What might we not conclude with regard to Shakespeare whose parents would do neither?

It is interesting to note these facts in connection with the strange attempts of Rev. Mr. T. Carter to prove that Shakespeare was a Puritan. I can think of no better example of the absurdities into which the study of internal evidence can carry us, nor a clearer warning against the dangers of prejudice, than the contents of Shakespeare, Puritan and Recusant. Mr. Carter found in the writings of Will, a thorough-going knowledge of the Bible; and, because he was convinced<sup>1</sup> that "the Bible typified to the Papist the Puritan religion, just as images and crosses typified Roman Catholicism to the Puritan", he concluded that Shakespeare must have been a Puritan, and that John Shakespeare the recusant must have been a Puritan recusant. He tells us:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier (Edinburgh and London: 1897), p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.38.

"There is only one time in life when this power (of attaining perfect ease of quotation from the Bible) may be won. And the best place to learn it is at that point and focus of all scriptural attainments, the mother's knee, and in the home circle when, as a child, the words of the Bible are dropped into the heart and memory."

The thought is one with which few will argue; but, unless the findings of careful scholarship are in error, the knee at which Shakespeare studied and learned eternal verities was that of Catholic Mary Arden. Perhaps she learned them from "the priestly instruction, missals, and books of devotion" of which he speaks but which he has apparently not bothered to examine for Scriptural reference.

It is well nigh impossible to over-estimate the influence of that Catholic home upon the mind of young Will. But there were others, not the least of which was that of the school, and the schoolmaster who directed its destiny in the days when Shakespeare was acquiring the little education it was ever his privilege to enjoy. There is no doubt today among scholars that it was Simon Hunt who was that schoolmaster. Both Edgar Fripp<sup>1</sup> and Madame du Chambrun<sup>2</sup> quote from Bishop Bullingham's register concerning him, that he was nominated by the Earl of Warwick:

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, Man and Artist, Oxford U.P. (London), Vol.1, p.89.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., p.22.

"docendi litteras et instruendi pueros in Schola grammaticali in Villa Stratford super avonam",

on the 29th of October, 1571, and that he taught there until 1575. He was an Oxford Bachelor of Art (1569), and, if we may judge from the career he followed after leaving Stratford, he was one in whom the Catholic traditions of Oxford bore fruit. Edgar Fripp, convinced of Shakespeare's Protestant upbringing, seems to be under the impression that Simon was not a Catholic when he came to Stratford, and tells us that<sup>1</sup>

"both the Earl and Bishop must have been satisfied of his (Simon's) Protestant principles, and that the bailiff and his deputy, who were Adrian Quayney and John Shakespeare, would want a guarantee on this point. Suspicion and hatred of Catholics deepened after the Rebellion of 1569, and still more after the Bartholomew Massacre in 1572."

However, Fripp either believes that the authorities were extremely careless about their examination of prospective teachers, or he does not expect us to take his supposition too seriously; for he does an about face that belies the possibility of Simon's being anything but a Catholic. He tells us<sup>2</sup> that Simon's sympathies were with the persecuted Catholics, that the expression of these sympathies brought upon him the

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., Vol.I, p.89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.91 ff.

ire of some hotheads in the neighbourhood who expressed their disapproval by breaking the windows of the school, that he continued to serve as schoolmaster until 1575 and then departed for Douai to matriculate at Cardinal Allen's school, that Thomas Jenkins, a Puritan and friend of the Powers, who succeeded him, was not popular, that Simon became a Jesuit in Rome on April 20th, 1578, and that he succeeded Father Parsons as English Penitentiarius in Rome, 1580. Apparently, too, Fripp considers that Simon was influential with his boys; for he remarks that Robert Debdale, one of these boys, went with him to Douai and later died for the faith as a seminarist priest, and he ends by telling us that Simon

"died in Rome 11 June, 1585. The greatest of his pupils was William Shakespeare, at the all important age from his eighth to his twelfth years."

The remark can be considered either as pointless or as expressing Fripp's belief that Simon Hunt played an important part in the formation of the mind and thought of young Will. We need only recall the influence that some of our own teachers have exercised over our own lives to realize that such a supposition is a reasonable one, especially when we remember that Simon was Shakespeare's teacher through most of his schooling. Add to this the fact that schoolmasters

were even more closely associated with their charges in those days than they are today, and we can only agree that Simon Hunt must be considered as one of the most important influences in the life of Shakespeare.

Obviously a Catholic, with the Catholic traditions of Oxford behind him, he had enough zeal for the old faith to lead him to dedicate his life to it after leaving Stratford. Is it reasonable to believe that this zeal never asserted itself while he was engaged in the formation of the minds of the young men of Stratford? Certainly the story of the window-breaking would indicate that it did - to the annoyance of the followers of the new order of things. Boys have been known, indeed, to register their disapproval of the pedagogical methods of their teachers by acts of similar violence; but if Fripp's supposition is correct, it was not a dislike for his methods of teaching Latin syntax that led to the episode. Furthermore, the fact that Simon was allowed to go on teaching for two years after that episode would seem to indicate that he was regarded as a good teacher.

If we may judge from the office he came to hold in Rome, it is safe to conclude that Simon was an intelligent young man, living in a revolutionary age in which the old order was dying and the new was being violently born. It

would have been strange if this young graduate of the University of Lost Causes never found cause to speak to his charges about the burning questions of the day, and it would be stranger still if young Shakespeare, probably the most intelligent boy in the school, did not listen, comprehending at least enough to serve as a guide to him in his later years when he would devote his energies to the understanding of life. If there is one thing that stands out in Shakespeare's plays and marks them as superior to those of Marlowe, even more than the superiority of his handling of blank verse, it is the ethical unity that is found everywhere in them. Now, that ethical unity comes from his thorough knowledge of ethical principles. He could never have acquired that knowledge by intuition. Someone must have given him at least guidance in the pursuit of it, planting the seeds early in life; for, from the very beginning of his work, and growing stronger as the years go by, Shakespeare's grasp of those principles impresses itself on his plays.

Who it was that was responsible for the beginnings of that knowledge, we cannot say for certain; but Simon Hunt has a claim prior to all others upon our suspicions in the matter. He came to Stratford from a University wherein discussion of the principles underlying the social and religious

changes of the day must have raged among both students and professors, and we know that its sympathies were with the past. To think that he came to Stratford, where, as everywhere else in the country, the suggestion and the fear of Catholic revolt against the Queen were rife, and settled down to teach nothing but grammar school subjects, calls for an unconcern that is entirely out of keeping with all that we know of the man. That he was interested in the teachings of the Schoolmen with regard to social ethics may well be taken for granted, if for no other reasons than that Philosophy occupied an important place in every centre of learning in those days, and that with times such as they were, the social problems of Philosophy would be occupying men's minds much as they occupy them today when social revolution is in the air.

Now, all this may seem to my reader like pure conjecture; but the fact remains that Shakespeare certainly knew and understood the principles upon which the Schoolmen believed society to be founded. The knowledge and formulation of those principles required searching discussion on the part of the best minds of Europe over the centuries before they were given the perfection of presentation they received at the hands of St. Thomas. To assume that a man, occupied

chiefly in the writing of dramas such as have never been surpassed, could acquire the grasp on those principles which Shakespeare certainly had, by haphazard methods and without guidance, demands in him an intelligence which no one in his right sense will attribute even to Shakespeare. He must have had instructors in the pursuit of that knowledge, and Simon Hunt may well have been the first of many.

So far, then, everything seems to point to the conclusion that Shakespeare's youth was spent in a decidedly Catholic environment. Now, what of his years in London? We know that his patron was the Lord Southampton who was, at that time, one of the leaders<sup>1</sup> of the Catholics suffering under Cecil. Furthermore, we know that Shakespeare's friend Ben Jonson was a Catholic until late in life when recusant fines led him to waver.<sup>2</sup> We know, too, that the theatres were the objects of Topcliff's suspicions and were searched as hideouts for priests more than once.<sup>3</sup> We know that the Burbage company was considered as allied to the Essex party; and, though their presentation of Richard II was done for pay, it is difficult to believe that it would have been done at

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<sup>1</sup> C.L. du Chambrun, op.cit., p.114.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hollis, The Monstrous Regiment (London: 1929), p.215.

<sup>3</sup> C.L. du Chambrun, op.cit., pp.211 ff.

all if the playwright and his company had not been in sympathy with the rebels. Along with many Catholics, Shakespeare looked forward<sup>1</sup> to the reign of Catholic Mary Stuart's son, and, when finally Elizabeth had passed from the scene and was being sung by all the poets, little and great, including even Ben Jonson, Shakespeare drew upon himself a rebuke<sup>2</sup> from Chettle by refraining from writing a single line to her memory. Whatever conclusion may be drawn from these facts, it must at least be conceded that if Shakespeare was not an ardent Catholic, he at least numbered many Catholics among his friends and associates; and it is very probable that he found his sympathies in accord with theirs.

To me it seems reasonable to suppose that as a very active man of the world, a man busily engaged in writing plays for a public largely indifferent to religion, Shakespeare's interest in religion was at least not so pronounced as to cause either comment or difficulty. We have every reason to believe that there were in his day many good Catholics who were quite unaware of the seriousness of the danger to the faith in England, just as today there are many good Catholics who are unaware of the threat to the faith in

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<sup>1</sup> J.Q. Adams, A Life of William Shakespeare (New York: 1923), p.355.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.358.

the growth of national socialism at home and abroad. There can be little doubt that in Germany today there are many Catholics who, although they are conscious of the persecution of the Church at the hands of the Nazis, are not so conscious of it as to lead them to make themselves conspicuously Catholic by resisting the authorities at the expense of their business or art. Still, they continue to think as their Catholic forefathers thought and to see the world about them as Catholics see it. They render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and sometimes, through worldliness or lethargy, are scarcely aware of the fact that they are rendering to him some of the things that belong to God. So, I think, it may have been with Shakespeare.

But, even if the difficulties which Catholics must have found in the practice of their religion in London allowed him to become indifferent to the lessons of childhood, or, again, if worldly ambition for success carried him to the point of accepting the state religion, if, in a word, Shakespeare had become an apostate to the faith of his father and mother (an extreme supposition in the light of all the evidence to the contrary), this would hardly have made him a Protestant in thought. Even the apostate continues to see things much as a Catholic does, unless he becomes a fanatic

in heresy, and Shakespeare certainly shows no signs of that. No sane man who is at all familiar with Shakespeare's plays will ever accuse Shakespeare of being any kind of fanatic, let alone a fanatic in matters of religion. The very worst that can be said of him from the Catholic viewpoint, and the very best that can be suggested of him from the Protestant one, is that he was indifferent to religion with the indifference that was characteristic of the London of his day, an indifference that was scarcely aware of or interested in the religious changes that were taking place in the land. State decrees cannot change overnight the thoughts of a nation, and we may rest assured that the vast majority of Englishmen went on thinking as medievalists and Catholics long after Elizabeth and Cecil and Topcliff were laid to rest. Only Puritan fanatics like Prynne looked out on the world through the eyes of the new order of things, and they received scant respect from Shakespeare, if we may judge by the digs that he takes at the Puritans and the Anglican clergy. Whatever the fervour of his devotion to the old faith, Shakespeare continued to think as a Catholic with a sanity that none but the blind can fail to find in his plays.

The studied opinion of a multitude of authors seems to me to make it unnecessary to labour the point of England's

continued Catholicity of thought after the break with Rome. Appleton Morgan, after describing an England in which all was peace and rest after the butcheries of Mary's reign, an England wherein the people saw no difference between Catholic England and Anglican England, tells us:<sup>1</sup>

"Under such conditions was Shakespeare born and reared. The change was only dawning when he died, and came too late to impress itself upon him."

In more recent times, Christopher Hollis has shown clearly in his The Monstrous Regiment, that to think of England during the time of Shakespeare as anything else but Catholic in thought is grossly to misunderstand it. Perhaps the most telling chapter in his book is the one in which he deals with the drama of that age. He tells us:<sup>2</sup>

"In the estimate of that very elusive business, the vague, half-conscious attitude of the Elizabethan public mind towards religion, no evidence is more important than that of secular literature, and of secular literature the most important is the popular drama. . . . . The purpose of the popular drama is to please. Opinions which we find constantly recurring in the mouths of the characters of Shakespeare or of Massinger were, we may be sure, more than the personal opinions of Shakespeare or Massinger. They must at the least have been opinions which were not offensive to the normal play-goer of the day. Where those opinions are but echoes of the official teaching they prove but little, but, where we find the constant repetition of an opinion that is in opposition to the official

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare - In Fact and in Criticism (New York: 1888), p.228.

<sup>2</sup> Sheed and Ward (London: 1929), p.196.

policy of the Government, we may be sure that that opinion was one widely held in the England of that day."

Hollis then proceeds to gather an impressive collection of things Catholic from the plays of Shakespeare and the other playwrights of the period. It is not his purpose to prove that these men were Catholics, but to show that things Catholic were second nature to the audiences for whom they wrote. Indeed, Hollis is of the opinion that Shakespeare was not of the faith, that he was one of the many pagans of the days in which he lived. The historian in him wants much better proof than the "anti-Catholic Archdeacon of Saperton's" word that Shakespeare "died a papist". Hollis finds none of the evidence in Shakespeare's plays of the strong Catholic faith that is to be found in those of Massinger. He impresses me much more as an historian than as a literary critic, when he would have Hamlet turn to the consolations of the Christian creed instead of thoughts of suicide. Massinger might have had Hamlet do something of the sort, but not Shakespeare, for such thoughts in Hamlet would have been entirely out of keeping with his character. Be that as it may, Hollis scores a point when he maintains that the Ghost's talk of Purgatory, to cite but one of his examples, would never have occurred on the lips of a ghost creation of Charles II's time, whereas it comes

naturally enough from this Ghost creation of the age of Elizabeth, simply because the audience that first heard him speak was an audience with a Catholic mind.

It seems to me, too, that Hollis' answer to the time-honoured contention that King John reveals Shakespeare as anti-papal in spirit and sympathies is also effective. In his reply to Macaulay's contention that "the author of King John and Henry the Eighth was surely no friend to Papal supremacy", he writes:<sup>1</sup>

"The parallels between John and Elizabeth were sufficiently obvious, the temptation to exploit them large, and in that fine scene at the beginning of the third act John defies the Pope, and Pandulph, the papal legate, excommunicates John, with arguments so similar to those used by Elizabeth and by St. Pius or Cardinal Allen that the similarity must have been conscious and designed. So far the lecturers take us. But it is even more important to note that Shakespeare leaves out all the coarse raillery against the Church which he found in the "Troublesome Reign of King John", the original play from which he was copying, and that John's Elizabethan defiance of the Pope after a flash in the pan of success ends in complete fiasco, that Philip Augustus and Louis of France, who show themselves equally indifferent to the interests of the Church, fare no better than John, and that in the fifth act John only keeps his throne by completely submitting to the Papacy on all the points in dispute."

Hollis then goes on to point out that Pandulph, according to Shakespeare's play, is in no sense an admirable

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., pp.208 ff.

character but is victorious in the end, whereas Elizabeth had no desire that her papal antagonists should be considered as bad men but that they should suffer total defeat at her hands. He then completes his argument by reference to the Bastard's comments on the final resolution of the play:<sup>1</sup>

"This England never did (nor never shall)  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms  
And we will shock them; naught shall make us rue,  
If England to herself do prove but true."

It is here that Hollis the historian comes to the aid of sound interpretation when he analyzes that speech:

"When had England helped to wound herself? When the barons had revolted against John owing to his quarrel with the Papacy. How was she now proving true to herself? By her return to her Roman obedience. How often do those who use this quotation know the history to which it refers?"

Whatever of anti-papal bias there is to be found in King John may well be considered as due to the influence of the earlier and definitely anti-papal Troublesome Reign; and the fact that Shakespeare in no sense repeats its scurrilities against the Church and her monasteries serves the better to show where his sympathies lay. If there be anything left upon which to lay a claim to Protestant sympathies in him as

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.209.

a result of that play, they must necessarily suffer in the presence of all the evidence to the contrary to be found everywhere else in his work. If there is anything anti-papal in Henry VIII, all that can be said is that that play was for the most part not Shakespeare's, a fact that is becoming better established as the years go by.

It would be well for us to keep in mind also the fact that it was possible for good Catholics in Shakespeare's day to be decidedly antagonistic towards the political ambitions of the Papacy without revolting from their submission to the Pope as the Father of Christendom. They had not learned the sad lesson of experience that it is dangerous to put too much emphasis upon the distinction between the Pope as a temporal and as a spiritual ruler. As Hollis describes it:<sup>1</sup>

"Ever since the Hundred Years' War, it had been very common for the English Catholics to look upon the Pope at one and the same time as the Vicar of Christ and as an unpleasant and interfering old gentleman. Dangerous as such an attitude was and proved itself to be, yet it was not in itself incompatible with the most strictly orthodox Catholicism. If a man held such opinions, he had every motive for publishing them upon the stage, and it might have been expected that Shakespeare, a man of Catholic sympathies but not a Catholic, would have shared the national dislike for the Italian bishop. He may have done so, but at least it is remarkable how little he displayed it."

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.208.

We might add that such an attitude of mind could have been Shakespeare's if he was a Catholic, and his moderation in expressing it would be the more easily explained.

Hollis' belief that Shakespeare was something of a pagan, founded as it is on the conviction that there is an evident indifference to the doctrines of the old faith in his work, is quite another thing, and falls in line with the argument of those who find in his plays no evidence of an interest in the controversies of his day and conclude from this that he was a disinterested spectator to the rivalries of the sects. To me it seems that Hollis has overlooked a great deal of evidence in reaching his conclusion. To take but a single example, the King's speech in Hamlet,<sup>1</sup> regarding the power and effects of prayer and the requisites of repentance is sound doctrine finely expressed. Claudius is an intelligent man, showing even greater intelligence than Horatio. Indeed, he is the only one in the play who shows any genuine knowledge of theology and his villainies seem the more gross as a result of it. He analyzes his state with a precision and clearness that reveals him as one well instructed in the power of prayer, the effects of sin and the obstacle it presents to grace, as well as the requisites of repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, Sc.3.

A moral theologian could do no better although he might be more scientific in the mode of presentation. To expect that in Claudius would be to demand too much, for Claudius is a layman, not a cleric.

Claudius feels within himself the evil effects of sin preventing him from prayer:

"Pray can I not,  
Though inclination be as strong as will:  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;  
And like a man to double business bound,  
I stand in pause where I shall first begin  
and both neglect."

He knows the power of prayer and what God's mercy can do:

"What if this cursed hand  
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,-  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down?"

The thought comforts him and he rushes on to conclude that his state is far from hopeless, only to be cast down by the further thought that pardon is impossible without renouncing the old life and restoring the crown to its rightful owner:

"But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?  
That cannot be; since I am still possess  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,-  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen."

He knows there is no escape from Divine justice, that intrigue

is useless in dealing with God, that he must stand alone, without counsel, before his Judge. He knows that his soul is struggling in the grip of sin, realizes the wretchedness of his state, yet has not the courage to do what is necessary to overcome it:

"O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engaged!"

He cries out to God's good angels to come to his aid, forces himself to an attitude of prayer; and, after the departure of Hamlet rises with the cry of the confirmed sinner resigned to despair:

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below!  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Now, this speech does not indicate that Shakespeare was a man given to prayer; but it does indicate that he did understand what true prayer is, and the qualities of soul that must attend on prayer. It does not indicate an effort on Shakespeare's part to indulge in a dissertation on the effects of sin and grace; but it does show that he had a layman's grasp of the Christian doctrine concerning them. It is no sermon on the true repentance that must run before pardon; but it is evidence that Shakespeare understood the necessity of it. To expect him to go out of his way to bring into his plays doctrine which his characters could never hold and be what they are, is asking

him to do something that the best of Catholic laymen never think of doing. Catholics are generally realists, and always realists if they are good Catholics; and they do not go about looking on life and quoting doctrine. Doctrines of faith do form the foundations of their thoughts but one must examine closely even his own thoughts to discover it; and, to discover it in the thoughts of others requires an exposition on their part which only the odd ones ever think of making. Doctrine is almost second nature to the ordinary Catholic and that is what it is with Shakespeare. Here and there it comes seeping through to the front much as the national characteristics of Englishmen come popping up out of his ancient Romans and medieval Italians and Danes; and the fact that it weaves itself so naturally into the fabric of his plays is all the more striking proof of the fundamental Catholicity of his thought. He may have been a wayward Catholic; he may have been an apostate; he may never even have 'died a papist', as the Archdeacon of Saperton asserted;<sup>1</sup> but there can be no doubt that, like most men of his period, he certainly thought as a Catholic.

There may be something of truth in P.H. Ditchfield's observation:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christopher Hollis, *The Monstrous Regiment* (London: 1929), p.206.

<sup>2</sup>*The England of Shakespeare* (London: 1917), p.50.

"It is difficult to determine what part Shakespeare took in these controversies. Some have declared him a Puritan, which he was not. . . . Perhaps wearied with the controversies of his age, he burst forth:

'In religion, what damn'd error but some sober brow  
Will bless it and approve it with a text.'"

Whatever may have been Shakespeare's attitude towards the religious controversies of his age, it is quite apparent that Bassanio (not a bad sort of fellow, and the one who showed his wisdom by choosing the right casket in the suit for the hand of Portia) was no supporter of the Protestant contention of the right of private interpretation of the Bible.

However, to contend that Shakespeare stood aloof from all interest in the religious controversies of the age is an unwarranted assumption. If we stop for a moment to remember the power of the Masters of the Revels, or to think at all of Shakespeare's theatre sense and sagacity, we shall hardly expect to find him indulging in the petty bickerings of amateur theologians. As Stephen Hales has written:<sup>1</sup>

"Had he (Shakespeare) been a professed theologian or historian, there would have been a reason in such complaint. As a playwright, the very last thing he would bring into his dramas would be those controversial topics that would be most likely to break up his audiences in factions and endanger his theatrical license."

That the most brilliant mind of his age, a mind that

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., p.22.

ranks with the greatest minds of all time, could rest content within the narrow limits of money-grubbing theatrical production, while humanity around him was being shaken to its very depths by the clash of ideas, philosophies, heresies and schisms, is a contention which cannot stand. As a dramatic artist he stands supreme in his own age and without a peer in all ages. Since the art of arts is to hide art, we may look for a subtlety in him, baffling, perhaps, to the Master of the Revels, but not so baffling as to fail to convey a lesson to humanity. His mind was too great to descend to the petty bickerings of quacks, yet great enough to penetrate to the heart of life's miseries. Life's joys and sorrows, its comedies and tragedies, these were the objects of his thought and the material out of which he fashioned his plays. He may not have been conceited enough to think of himself as a teacher of men, but that is what he was and has continued to be. He saw the world through medieval eyes, understood it with a medieval mind, and his work, whatever his religious practise may have been, is the product of the Middle Ages, the flower of its thought in drama. If we are ever going to understand it, we must bring to our study minds attuned to the thought of those ages which men still dare to call Dark, in the midst of the darkness of our times; for where Shakespeare's plays are

concerned, modern measures must fail. It is only by seeing the world as he saw it that we can ever hope to understand him, or his plays, or the characters which make them what they are.

PART TWO

A STUDY OF HUMAN CHARACTER

ACCORDING TO THE MIND OF SHAKESPEARE

## CHAPTER III

### HUMAN CHARACTER IN ITSELF

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason!  
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express  
and admirable! in action how like an angel! in  
apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world!  
the paragon of animals!<sup>1</sup>

These are Hamlet's words; they are Shakespeare's also. They express his conception of the dignity of man. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and with honour." It is precisely because he looked upon man as one made to the image and likeness of God that there is such poignant regret in the downfall of Shakespeare's heroes. A great man or woman has failed in life's struggle in spite of his greatness; and, though we may feel that death for him is an escape, as A.C. Bradley claims,<sup>2</sup> it is an escape with a diminished honour. We feel this regret the more deeply because we have, in a sense, beheld the image of our defeats, petty and great, in the conflict that rages in and around us.

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<sup>1</sup>Hamlet, Act II, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup>Shakespearean Tragedy (London: 1932), p.324.

Man, for Shakespeare, is not merely an individual. He is a person, with body and soul, faculties and powers, with an intelligence and a will, passions and appetites. Yet is he a fallen being, and must endure the battle of life which, in final analysis, is the battle which rages within himself between his higher and lower nature. The world outside this little kingdom presents its difficulties and hindrances; but, if a man be master of himself, he will be master of his environment.

"Angels and minister of grace (may) defend us"<sup>1</sup>

and

"Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's  
In deepest consequence.";<sup>2</sup>

but, in final analysis, it is man himself who determines whether the help of angels will bring victory and a happy ending, or the deceit of devils, hurl us down to defeat in tragic catastrophe.

For Shakespeare, the ideal condition of man is that in which intellect and will, in perfect accord with one another, rule with calm restraint, not tyranny, over the lower powers of the soul. In this, he is neither the Manichean

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, Act I, Sc.5.

<sup>2</sup> Macbeth, Act I, Sc.3.

puritan who regards the passions and appetites as worthy only to be beaten out of existence, nor the modern emotionalist who would drive intelligence and will from power and give man over to the dictates of the "heart". Rather is he the medieval Christian who regarded man as a rational animal, essentially good in all his parts. He knew that man is the highest of all God's earthly creatures by reason of intelligence and will which raise him to a dignity a little less than the angels and reveal him as made to the image and likeness of God. However, he was conscious, too, that man is not an angel, but possessed of animal powers that must be disciplined if man is not to wreck his life; and he knew full well that most of life's wrecks are due to the riot of these powers.

"Humours" in revolt are responsible for the downfall of many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Antony and Cleopatra, Othello. Romeo, more than all the rest, cries out against fortune and his stars. If we may judge from the prologue with which the play begins, Shakespeare, with the romance of youth upon him, seems to have planned such a role for him. But if we examine the play closely, we shall find that, though chance does play an important part in his life, it is uncontrolled emotion that really directs his course.

For him, "Love is a smoke raised of a fume of sighs";<sup>1</sup> and his intelligence and will dwell sleepily in the haze of it. He rushes out of love with Rosaline and into love with Juliet. He hears his intelligent friend, Mercutio, conjure him as

"Romeo! humours! madman! lover!";<sup>2</sup>

and whispers to the night:

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound";

and turns to pour out professions of his new love to Juliet, over-riding her instinctive fears that their exchange of love is

"Too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning which doth cease to be  
E'er one can say 'It lightens'."<sup>3</sup>

The exchange of love is made, and the marriage arranged between them. They marry with a rashness that condemns Friar Lawrence forever as an imprudent man. Romeo comes forth to Verona's streets, a man walking on air, only to come sharply in conflict with reality. He tries to brush Tybalt aside with love's gentle answer; and, when he is jostled out of its glorious haze by Mercutio's death, the gentle warmth of love turns suddenly to a consuming fire of hate. He slays

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<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc.1.

<sup>2</sup> Act II, Sc.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Tybalt, cries out that he is fortune's fool, and dashes away to hide in Friar Lawrence's cell.<sup>1</sup> He is, indeed, a fool, but not through the machinations of Fortune. He is rather his own passions' fool, and, in the end, it is his wild impetuosity that brings tragedy to himself and his young wife. He hears that Juliet is dead; and renders unavailing her courageous adventure into seeming-death by crying out, in foolish fashion, defiance to his stars, and rushing off to a suicide's death. Whatever sentimental critics may think of it, I cannot help but feel that Shakespeare, at least in his maturity, must have called it madness, not manliness. Certainly, it is this that precipitates catastrophe, not the Fates, nor the stars, nor even chance.

Romeo is a victim of passion and a wild imagination; Hamlet, of inordinate love; Antony and Cleopatra, of the lust for pleasure; Lear, of pride and anger; Othello, of rash judgment. In each, some passion overrides intelligence and enslaves the will. In each and every one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, there is a lack of balance, begotten of disorder in the faculties. Although it generally does, this disorder need not always arise from the rebellion of lower nature. It may arise from the tyranny of the higher faculties,

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<sup>1</sup>Act III, Sc.1.

in pride or ambition, or the lust for power. In that case, the tragedy becomes more terrible and confounding. Shakespeare's medieval mind grasped the full import of pride especially, and the disaster, to the individual and society, which follows when man's highest faculties lose sight of the end for which they were created and tyrannize over this little kingdom, man. Such is the case with Richard III, and still more, with Lear.

If one loses sight of the centre of disorder in the faculties of the Shakespearean hero, he cannot hope to understand the conflict that follows, and which, as E.E. Stoll claims,<sup>1</sup> makes the play. If one fails to grasp the responsibility of the hero for that disorder, he must inevitably be baffled by the catastrophe which follows as nature's own punishment upon it. Of no play is this more true than of Lear.

Now to comment in general fashion on this epic drama must seem pure folly; but I cannot refrain from pointing out what seems obvious to me about it. The Lear society is depraved with a depravity that is the rottenness of Hamlet's Denmark run its full course. In Hamlet morality is based on sentiment that is not wholly divorced from intelligence; but

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<sup>1</sup>Art and Artifice (Cambridge: 1934), pp.1 ff.

in Lear, morality is founded on sentiment alone. It is naturalism at its worst. Kent excuses<sup>1</sup> the adultery of Edmund's origin on the grounds that the issue is such an excellent specimen of manhood, physical manhood. Edmund declares Nature his goddess;<sup>2</sup> and, knowing no reason why the legitimate should be preferred to the illegitimate, bids 'gods stand up for bastards'. Everyone senses evil in filial ingratitude and the violence attendant upon it; but no one seems to know why it is wrong. The cruel vices of Goneril and Regan are, strictly speaking, not less moral than the virtues of Cordelia, for all three are simply unmoral. Vices in the former and virtues in the latter rise instinctively out of these women, and are in hardly any sense related to intelligence and will. The same is true of Lear and Gloster. Dissolution has laid hold of this society because it has been torn away from basic morality. Law and order are gone, and human sentiment is chaotic.

Whence comes this disorder? From the disordered mind of the aged King and his aged satellites, Gloster and Kent. Lear has ruled a long time, and pride has been his master. The only time he thinks of the gods is when he calls

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<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc.1.

<sup>2</sup> Act I, Sc.2.

upon them as ministers of his rage. Lear has been a law unto himself. He has been the Grand Master of his world, its little god; and his whims have been the only law which his children and subjects have known. Now he has grown old and decrepit, and the whims of others rule the state. He appeals to sentiment;<sup>1</sup> but sentiment has lost its force, because it has been divorced from its origin. He appeals to law,<sup>2</sup> but there is no law other than human whim. In distress he appeals to reason,<sup>3</sup> but abused reason is entirely inadequate to handle the situation: he slips into insanity.

Moral chaos is the prelude to civil disaster; the state rushes on to catastrophe. There are only two of the principal characters who have shown any reverence for the gods or any rational grasp of the moral law. Edgar rises above his fellows as a man of restraint, patience, and understanding. He endures the tyranny of his father's stupid anger, and bears no grudge, but in the end saves him from his own folly.<sup>4</sup> Affection in Edgar is truly human because it is based on reason, even though it arises without the conscious thought of intelligence. He is a prudent man and with prudence

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<sup>1</sup>Act II, Sc.4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Act II, Sc.4.

<sup>4</sup>Act IV, Sc.6.

leads his father back from the folly of suicide to endure with fortitude the miseries that have befallen him. Albany, too, is a man with a man's ability to see through the crimes of those around him. From him we acquire the impression of human apostasy in the social thought of the Lear world. When he hears of the death of Cornwall, with a simple remark he tells us something about this immoral society that we may have sensed but never completely grasped before:<sup>1</sup>

"This shows you are above,  
You justicers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily revenge."

It is as if this man, standing in the background, has been watching events, drawing his own conclusions, judging his own world and its follies. It is as if he had begun to doubt the divine governance of the world, and, in Cornwall's death has received a revelation of its never-ending power. Like most Englishmen, he will not tolerate chastisements through foreign agents; but when the battle is over, to the best of his ability he metes out justice to the offenders.<sup>2</sup> Albany is a real man, though not necessarily a strong one, who reverences the gods and is guided by sane reason; and with Edgar, he is spared when natural disorder brings down nature's own punishment on

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<sup>1</sup> Act IV, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> Act V, Sc.3.

the heads of all the offenders. Of all the principals, they alone are spared.

Even Cordelia perishes, - as she should. Barrett Wendell points out<sup>1</sup> "the undue compactness" of the style of King Lear, and tells us that it is "fresh evidence of Shakespeare's abnormal mental activity". Shakespeare has left us abundant evidence in this play that he was doing nothing haphazardly when he was writing it; and, if critics have any respect for his intelligence, they will hesitate before accusing him of fault when he numbers Cordelia among the slain. Wendell points out<sup>2</sup> that "the intensity, the concentration of the play, make critics speak of it as Shakespeare's masterpiece"; but he complains of its lack of simplicity, and says that "a masterpiece should possess not only the complexity but also the simplicity of greatness." Could it not rather be that the play possesses a simplicity so simple that the modern sentimental mind stumbles over it? Certainly, if we judge it according to modern sentimental standards of morality, we shall be horrified at Cordelia's death.

The story of King Lear was first told by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, and according to that story

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare. A Study in English Literature (Scribner's: New York, 1901), p.289.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.299.

Lear regained the crown and was succeeded on the throne by Cordelia. Lounsbury tells us<sup>1</sup> that we cannot excuse this breach, on Shakespeare's part, of the principle of poetic justice on the grounds that he gets it from his sources. I quarrel with the premise that there is a violation of poetic justice. The very fact that the greatest of all English dramatists has deliberately departed from the old story is an a priori argument that there is no poetic injustice in the death of Cordelia (an undue reverence, perhaps, for genius, but sound enough to make sane minds hesitate and inquire into the work closely before passing judgment), I am convinced that if we examine the play closely we shall find that Shakespeare is right and his critics wrong.

The catastrophe of Lear comes as a result of moral chaos in the society it depicts, and Cordelia is as much a part of that moral chaos as her wicked sisters or Lear himself. If we judge her according to medieval standards, she is as unmoral as any one in the play; and, in a sense, it is she who precipitates the tragedy.<sup>2</sup> She is proud and whimsical like her father, and differs from Goneril and Regan only in that she is naturally as good as they are naturally bad.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist (New York: 1901), p.406.

<sup>2</sup> Act I, Sc.1.

She is a beautiful animal, kind and gentle at most times, but quite capable of a rash violence not unlike her father's. It takes little stretching of the imagination to picture a Lear that was not unlike her in gentleness and kindness in his youth, for he has the loyalty of his older followers Kent and Gloster; and that could never have been the case if all his life he had acted as he does in the beginning of the play. Nor does it call for much imagination to conceive of Cordelia's becoming as rash in her old age as her father is, simply because she, like him, is governed by emotion, not by reason. As Goneril says:<sup>1</sup>

"The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-ingrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them."

We have every reason to suspect that Cordelia's old age would be quite as choleric. The undisciplined soul is prone to disorder, and the violence we describe as choleric is one phase of it.

What virtues she possesses are not really virtues, for they have scarcely any relation to morality. They are simply manifestations of a naturally gentle disposition and are in no sense under the complete governance of her higher

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<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc.1.

nature. With proper rearing and discipline, which she certainly never received from Lear, she would become a glorious woman; but, undisciplined as she certainly is, we can expect from her nothing but the same riotous passion which Lear manifests in his old age. The signs of it are already evident in her young and gentle life. She is simply a chip off the old block. She is annoyed with the insincerity of her sisters' professions of love. She becomes indignant, takes unto herself the role of the martyr, convinced of her own sincere love for her father. She will be heroic, and rebuke these sisters; and in trying to do so, strikes out at Lear, stirring him to the rage in which he banishes her. Unreasoning pride controls them both and she goes away to France without his blessing, simply because she will not bend. She leaves him to "his dog-hearted daughters"<sup>1</sup> knowingly and willingly rather than retrace her steps. Passion precipitates the tragedy, Lear's passion and Cordelia's; and, in the end, although their passionate reconciliation is soul-stirring, it is impossible not to feel that it keeps Cordelia from thinking clearly in the crisis that is upon them.<sup>2</sup> She seems hardly aware of the fact that both their destinies are being determined in battle.

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<sup>1</sup> Act IV, Sc.3.

<sup>2</sup> Act IV, Sc.7.

If ever Shakespeare's art, founded on sound moral principles, rises above the sentiments of his audience and critics alike, it is in the catastrophe of Lear. In no play does he manifest a keener knowledge of the principles recognized in the Middle Ages as the foundation of all morality, and the disaster that must inevitably follow in society when they are forgotten. Whether we regard Lear as a manifestation of the evils of anthropocentrism in society, or simply a portrayal of nature's punishments for man's failure to lead the good and rational life, we must realize in it that Shakespeare was no mere dabbler in the problem of human life but a studied thinker well acquainted with the moral teachings of the Middle Ages which he consciously expressed in art.

Today, men are prone to fall back on sentiment as the basis of morality and to consider its laws as forever changing to meet the sentimental shifting of men's thought. With Shakespeare that was not the case, for he saw clearly, as the realists of the Middle Ages saw, that the laws which govern human life are as permanent as the essential nature of humanity. He knew that if man is not to make a wreck of his life, he must be guided by intelligence and will, interpreting and obeying the laws of his nature. Today, men are likely to see no difference, as far as morality is concerned, between

the man who is gentle and kind because it is his nature to be gentle and kind, and the man who knows that such is the proper way to be, and forces himself, perhaps against his natural inclination, to be so. The modern mind may admire the man who fights nature to be good, but it is inclined to give the palm to the man who needs not to struggle. This is but an evidence of the basic difference between the thought of the Middle Ages and of our own, and explains the difficulty the modern man finds in accepting the catastrophe of Lear.

Cordelia is a beautiful and appealing young animal, utterly unmoral and, along with her father, responsible for the tragedy. When she dies, it would be incorrect even to number her among the innocents suffering with the wicked. St. Thomas tells us<sup>1</sup> that for a man to be truly virtuous, his virtues must arise out of an exercise of reason and will. Therein, man acts as man, in orderly fashion that is free from

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<sup>1</sup> Virtus moralis potest quidem esse sine quibusdam intellectibus virtutibus, sicut sine sapientia, scientia et arte; non autem potest sine intellectu et prudentis. Sine prudentia quidem esse non potest moralis virtus; quia moralis virtus est habitus electivus, id est, faciens bonum electionem. Ad hoc autem quod electio sit bona, duo requiruntur: primo ut sit debita intentio finis; et hoc fit per virtutem moralem, quae vim appetitivam inclinatur ad bonum conveniens rationi, quod est finis debitus; secundo, ut homo recte accipiat ea quae sunt ad finem, et hoc non potest esse nisi per rationem recte consiliantem, judicantem et praecipientem; quod pertinet ad prudentiam et ad virtutes ei annexas..... Unde virtus moralis sine prudentia esse non potest. (Sum. Theol. I-II, Q.LVIII, a.4.)

the riot of passions because he is governed by prudence which is the heart and centre of the truly moral life. Without prudence, man tends ever to chaos. Such is Shakespeare's thought in the chaos of Lear; and, in it, every person, including Cordelia, who is a part of the chaos through the rule of passion within him, suffers in the final reckoning. For Shakespeare the good life is the moral life, and the moral life is the rational life.

Now, as I have already pointed out, his method of teaching, if it was his purpose at all consciously to teach, was not that of the moralizing dramatists around him. He held up the mirror to nature without bothering to interpret the image reflected there. His concern was to see that the image was a true image in all its parts. As a result, the moving pictures which he presents to us of the lives that are his centre of interest, are complete and full. Conflict brings out all that is good and bad in his heroes. He knew, as few men have ever known, the play of forces in man and around him, and has given us, in his plays, such complete and perfect studies that it is natural for us to become absorbed in psychological analyses when we direct our minds to them to fathom the mysteries they seem to contain. Hamlet, Lear, for that matter any one of these great dramas, is a veritable

laboratory for psychological investigation. But if we restrict our study to this phase of his work, we shall fall far short of understanding or appreciating the lives of his heroes. We shall be examining results instead of causes.

Critics with the psychological bent are using methods foreign to Shakespeare's age and thought. Those methods certainly can be applied as criteria in judging the realism of presentation; but they are quite inadequate to investigate the cause. Certainly Shakespeare never used them as the groundwork of life; and, if the modern empirical psychologist finds the results achieved much in keeping with what he should expect to find in real life, it is simply because Shakespeare, understanding the moral principles which guide life and beget definite psychological results in the lives of men, was able to work out the lives of his heroes in a manner startling to the psychologist. But inhibitions, and reflexes, and nervous systems, as such, were certainly not the preoccupations of Shakespeare's mind when he was writing his plays; and if we confine our study of Shakespeare to his evident knowledge of these things, without their names or the scientific theories that have called them forth, we can only hope to skim the surface.

The psychological analysis of life is something quite new in the world, and belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The moral analysis was more in keeping with Shakespeare's age, and it is the only one that can hope to penetrate to the mystery of Shakespeare's plays. The psychological analysis is the kind we should expect from that modern confessor whom we call the psychoanalyst; the moral one, the kind that is proper to the medieval confessor whom we call the spiritual director. The empiricist may label Hamlet's fears that the Ghost is the devil, as morbid pretexts proceeding from the heat oppressed brain, or something of the sort; but Shakespeare certainly did not think of them as such. He understood the melancholy disposition of his hero and knew that such people are subject to diabolic influences. It is an unfounded assumption that, because Shakespeare wrote plays that can hold modern audiences, he possessed the modern scorn for 'the superstition of diabolic influence', and was therefore different from the people of his own age, who certainly considered the devil as very active among men. When Hamlet says,<sup>1</sup>

"The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil: and the devil hath power  
T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Act II, Sc.2.

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits  
Abuses me to damn me."

he is speaking after the thought of the Middle Ages that realized in melancholy the prelude to insanity, and believed (not without reason) that insanity is often due to diabolic possession. To indulge in psychoanalysis here is to waste time, for it was certainly not the thought of the author.

Furthermore, to indulge in psychoanalysis when dealing with Hamlet's procrastination is to shoot wide of the mark. It does provide interesting data for such investigation, but it certainly evades the thought of the author. He knew, as a medievalist, that procrastination is only one of a multitude of evils that rush in upon the soul when it is given over to the spirit of melancholy. He is merely expressing the thought of his time which is treated with such fullness by St. Thomas.<sup>1</sup>

In final analysis, the downfall of Hamlet and Lear and, for that matter, of any one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, is to be traced to disorder within the soul of the hero himself. Heredity and environment, the external conflict

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<sup>1</sup>Cum acedia tristitia sit de spirituali boni divino, vitium capitale necessario est; cujus filiae sunt: malitia, rancor, pusillanimitas, desperatio, torpor circa praecepta, ac mentis evagatio. (Sum.Theol. II-II, Q.XXXV, a.4.)

in its broadest sense, do play their part in shaping his life. He may have been born with a proneness to the disorder that overthrows him; he may be surrounded by a set of circumstances that ally themselves with that proneness; but, in final analysis, it is the hero's own fault that allows it to grow to real disorder that masters him and casts him down before the difficulties of life. The conflict in a Shakespearean tragedy comes from what the hero does, not from what he is. To ignore the moral life of Romeo, Lear or Cordelia through preoccupation with psychological results in their lives, is to shut one's eyes to the responsibility that Shakespeare certainly imputes to them, and to be appalled with the catastrophe that befalls them. It is to subject them to Fate. It is to attribute to them only the so-called liberty which modern determinism allows to man, which is in no sense the liberty attributed to man by medieval thought. In spite of his efforts to avoid it, the psychoanalytic critic of Shakespeare's plays is forced to regard the catastrophe of a tragedy as proceeding from the action of Nemesis or a god who regards man as his plaything. Such a critic becomes conscious of something amiss, and struggles against his own conclusions. The argument about didacticism in Shakespeare comes to the fore, and study is

directed away from the plays themselves, while the pros and cons debate a question that is entirely beside the point simply because they fail to see that the catastrophe is nothing more than nature's own punishment for the violation of her laws.

## CHAPTER IV

### HUMAN CHARACTER IN THE MAKING

The tendency to indulge in psychological analysis in the study of Shakespeare's plays is a pardonable one. For the most part, the conflicts rage around characters that are fairly well formed by the time we meet them; and it is natural for us to view these conflicts from there on in the light of what the characters are, without asking how they came to be what they are. Now, there is at least one notable exception in which we are introduced to a hero while his character is still amaking, and become witnesses of the struggle involved in bringing him forth as "the grand hero of the Shakespearean world".<sup>1</sup> I refer, of course, to Prince Hal. We first hear of Hal in the opening scene of the First Part of Henry IV, when his father tells of his wildness and expresses the wish that he and Northumberland could exchange sons:

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<sup>1</sup>R.G. Moulton, Moral Systems of Shakespeare (New York: 1903), p.12.

"O that it could be proved  
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged  
In cradle clothes, our children where they lay,  
And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!  
Then should I have his Harry, and he mine!"

Thus is Hal introduced to us as something of a problem child. He is young and wayward; and we look forward to meeting him. We meet him and he proves to be all that his father has given him out to be, except that he is a pleasing lad. From there on we watch him as he grows to the full-blown man, triumphant over his weaknesses and hailed joyfully by the nation as its King. He rejects the companions of his wayward years and rides forth to do battle with England's foes. He becomes the Ideal King of the Shakespeare world. The revelation of the making of this King is a revelation of Shakespeare's thought with regard to the moral making of character.

Now, I am convinced that Shakespeare remembered something of the technique of the old Moralities while he was developing the character of Prince Hal. That development was his great purpose in the sub-plot of the two parts of Henry IV; and I am convinced that we shall come to a more sympathetic understanding of all that goes on in that sub-plot if we keep this in mind. I can think of nothing in all Shakespeare, unless it be in the catastrophe of King Lear, wherein the author has clung more tenaciously to his purpose and to truth

in the face of annoyance to his public, no better example of his superb knowledge of the moral fabrication of a good man, no more evident manifestation of the superiority of his judgment over the judgment of audiences and critics alike, than in his treatment of the development of the character of Prince Hal and his relations with Falstaff. It shows beyond doubt that, however interested Shakespeare may have been in box-office returns, his art came first.

"They say, best men are moulded out of faults;  
And, for the most part, become much more the better  
For being a little bad."<sup>1</sup>

This thought, expressed by Marianna, is I think Shakespeare's thought in the making of Prince Hal. It is not to be taken in the sense that the sowing of wild oats is good; rather, in the sense that gold is tried in the fire. The ideal man, for Shakespeare, is no namby-pamby, without fault largely because he has never been tempted; but the man who rises above temptation that is fierce because it is attractive. Such is Henry V, the Grand Hero and the Ideal King, when he rises triumphant in the Fifth Act of the Second Part of Henry IV.

I have suggested that the poet had something of the old Moralities in mind when he was working on this play. In

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<sup>1</sup>Measure for Measure, Act V, Sc.1.

Everyman, for instance, virtue and vice along with other abstractions are presented in allegory around the abstraction Everyman. In Henry IV the same thing is done, with this difference that abstractions are presented in the concrete form, not of allegorical characters, but of real persons of flesh and blood. Thus, from the very beginning of the play, foils are introduced to the character of Prince Hal in the persons of Hotspur and Falstaff.

According to Bolingbroke, Hotspur is "the theme of honour's tongue", "sweet Fortune's minion and her pride". He is the personification of one of those two great failings of youth, the irascible and the concupiscible. There is nothing of pleasure-seeking in the life of Hotspur. He is one of those commonly described as 'hard-boiled'. He is the very embodiment of vicious strength. Side by side with the heady growth of stern passion within him have developed the kindred vices which climbers and politicians are apt to consider virtues. Bolingbroke overlooks whatever is vicious in the life of Hotspur as he gazes with wonder on his glorious deeds and manly accomplishments. In Hotspur, pride and vanity and self-seeking appear as virtues:

"Now, by my sceptre and my soul to boot,  
He hath more worthy interest to the state  
Than thou, the shadow of succession;  
For, of no right, nor colour like to right,

He doth fill fields with harness in the realm;  
 Turns head against the lion's armed jaws;  
 And, being no more in debt to years than thou,  
 Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on  
 To bloody battles and to bruising arms.  
 What never-dying honour hath he got  
 Against renowned Douglas! whose high deeds,  
 Whose hot incursions, and great name in arms,  
 Holds from all soldiers, chief majority  
 And military capital  
 Through all the kingdoms that acknowledge Christ:  
 Thrice hath the Hotspur, Mars in swaddling clothes,  
 This infant warrior, in his enterprises  
 Discomfited great Douglas: ta'en him once,  
 Enlarged him, and made a friend of him,  
 To fill the mouth of deep defiance up,  
 And shake the peace and safety of our throne."<sup>1</sup>

Bolingbroke admires him even after he has become a rebel, and holds him up before Hal as one worthy of imitation. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare has deliberately departed from chronicle in making him of Hal's own age and has embellished his character with the pronounced signs of all the qualities that go with pride and irascibility.

Be it said to Hal's credit that he feels no inclination to share in the glory. He sees through the sham of it. To Hotspur's annoyance, Hal "doffs the world aside",<sup>2</sup> Hotspur's world of vain glory and worthless praise. When he stands over the dead body of Hotspur at Shrewsbury, with none of the self-satisfaction that Hotspur would have shown in like circumstances,

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<sup>1</sup> I Henry IV, Act III, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Act IV, Sc.1.

but with a touch of pity at human greatness spoiled by folly, Hal reveals his sane judgment in victory as he has shown his manly prowess in battle:<sup>1</sup>

"Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!  
 When that this body did contain a spirit,  
 A kingdom for it was too small a bound;  
 But now two paces of the vilest earth  
 Is room enough:-----  
 Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven,  
 Thy ignomy sleep with thee in the grave  
 But not remember'd in thy epitaph!"

As if to drive home the fact of Hal's absolute freedom from any pride or self-seeking after praise, Shakespeare at this point has Falstaff lay claim to the glory of killing Hotspur, a glory which Hal willingly foregoes.

It is interesting to note the fine distinction Shakespeare makes here between the use and abuse of the passions. Both Hal and Hotspur are men of spirit, men of passion; but in one passion is the master, in the other, the man. Passion in Hal is a servant to carry him through valiant deeds that have the right end in view; in Hotspur, passion is a force that drives him on to seek the praises of men, without thought of the damage that he is doing to the public peace. Now all this is in perfect accord with the teachings of St.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Act V, Sc.4.

Thomas,<sup>1</sup> who expresses the mind of the Middle Ages. St. Thomas tells us that passion considered in itself has no relation to morality except by reason of its relationship to the will and reason, but that it becomes good or bad in so far as it is directed to a good or bad end by the action of reason and will.

There is no question of Hal's being brave and skilful in the use of arms, of his power to undertake and master arduous tasks, of his being a spirited fighter when occasion arises. Indeed, the fact that he overcomes Hotspur in battle is a clear proof that he is stronger in these things even than he. Yet we never think of calling him a 'hare-brain'd Hotspur governed by a spleen',<sup>2</sup> for the simple reason that he is governed by reason. In Hal the passions of the irascible appetite are allies of virtue and of assistance to him in his own defence and in the defence of society. In Hotspur, they are the allies of vice because they are used by a mind disordered

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<sup>1</sup> De passionibus dicendum videtur, quod scilicet species actus vel passionis dupliciter considerari potest: uno modo, secundum quod est in genere naturae; et sic bonum vel malum morale non pertinet ad speciem actus vel passionis; alio modo secundum quod pertinent ad genus moris, prout scilicet participant aliquid de voluntario et iudicio rationis; et hoc modo bonum et malum morale possunt pertinere ad speciem passionis secundum quod accipitur ut objectum passionis, aliquid de se conveniens rationis vel dissonum a rationis. Sum.Theol. I-II, Q.24, a.4.

<sup>2</sup> I Henry IV, Act V, Sc.2.

by pride and ambition and blind to its own true interests as well as the rights of society.

Hal has his weaknesses, but pride is not one of them, nor ambition, nor ungoverned irascibility. In thus depicting his future ideal monarch, Shakespeare reveals his keen medieval and Catholic sense of what a good king must not be. He may, in his youth, show inclinations to fall a prey to the weaker vices that afflict mankind. In that he is only human, and the stern problems of life may stiffen his resolution against them. But if he is afflicted with pride and ambition in youth, the odds are greatly against him; for he has within himself the fountainhead of all vices. In that, he is not humanly weak, but diabolically strong and becomes a menace to society. The weaker vices of humanity, in a king, are degrading; but they affect chiefly only himself and those immediately around him; but pride is the tyrant, the destroyer of the state. St. Thomas, speaking of anger, the handmaid of pride, tells us that among all the passions of the soul, it does the greatest violence to reason.<sup>1</sup> After comparing it with concupiscence, he tells us that the disorder of anger is by far the more serious because it leads

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<sup>1</sup> ...ira inter caeteras passiones manifestius impedit iudicium rationis, secundum illud Psalm. XXX, 10: Conturbatus est in ira oculus meus. (Sum.Theol. I-II, Q.48, a.3.)

us to do those things that are harmful to our neighbour.<sup>1</sup>

Then, in dealing with pride he tells us that it must be considered as the fountainhead of all vices, of all capital vices the capital.<sup>2</sup>

Hotspur personifies it, thus playing a foil to Hal who will have none of it, scoffs at it during the first half of the play and slays it in the second, at Shrewsbury. From this quarter, Hal suffers no trial of temptation unless it be that his politic father urges it upon him, making life so miserable for him behind the scenes that Hal is driven to seek escape from it in the tavern where men are at least real and without sham in the pursuit of pleasure. It is there that Hal meets his real temptation and trial.

In the second scene of the First Part, we are introduced to Hal in person, and Falstaff. In the latter, Shakespeare has again drawn from the Moralities. The fact that 'this huge hill of flesh', this 'reverend vice', 'this gray iniquity'<sup>3</sup> is given the more concrete name of Falstaff, in no way detracts from the fact that he is playing the role of

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<sup>1</sup> ...incontinentiae irae est, ut plurimum gravior, quia ducit in ea quae pertinent ad proximi nocumentum. (Sum.Theol. II-II, Q.156, a.4.)

<sup>2</sup> ...aliquid principalius capitalibus vitiis. (Sum.Theol. II-II, Q.163, a.8.)

<sup>3</sup> I Henry IV, Act II, Sc.4.

the other great temptation of youth, concupiscence. After all, Shakespeare, although writing a play of the moral trials of youth, was not writing a Morality play. He was writing a history play filled with real men and women. To introduce a purely allegorical character into the midst of them would be to introduce a jarring note. Besides, he knew full well that he would lose nothing, but rather gain by giving Concupiscence genuine personality and life, rather than antic flesh. Is it not in this guise that vice first presents itself to youth? Falstaff, gormandizing in the flesh, revelling in vice, is a more tangible and potent mis-guider of Hal's youth than he could ever have been as the Gray Iniquity or the Reverence Vice of the Moralities; and he is as much the embodiment of concupiscence as he would have been if Shakespeare had substituted 'Sir Concupiscence' for 'Oldcastle' when he changed the name to 'Falstaff'. The very fact that Hal speaks of him as 'this reverend vice' and 'this gray iniquity' is an indication of the trend of Shakespeare's thought and purpose.

R.G. Moulton says:<sup>1</sup>

"The truancy of the Prince is no more than the wider, fuller nature rebelling against the limitations of out-worn ideals. Bolingbroke and those about him

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<sup>1</sup>Moral Systems of Shakespeare (New York: 1903), p.12.

belong to the past; theirs is a life bounded by the narrow horizon of feudalism."

Here is a strange mixture of modern psychology and the comparatively modern heresy of "progress". In an age of heresies, this one had not yet broken upon the world when Shakespeare was writing his plays. Christopher Dawson (whose authority cannot be questioned) tells us<sup>1</sup> that it was first formulated by the Abbe de St. Pierre after the War of the Spanish Succession. And as for inhibitions, - they were called moral restraints in Shakespeare's age, and were applied with greater rigour by the reforming Puritans than by the unreformed people who clung to the "out-worn ideals" of the Middle Ages. Then, to construe Hal's riots as a revolt against feudalism or anything that had to do with feudalism, looks to me like putting the cart before the horse. If there is one thing evident in the two Parts of Henry IV, it is that "Bolingbroke and those about him" constitute the party that is opposed to feudalism. With Hal's help, they go far to smashing feudalism when they defeat the nobles. To me it seems astounding that one of the intelligence of R.G. Moulton should shoot so far wide of the mark.

And Mr. Hudson, whose sentimental writings have exercised an almost universal influence over the minds of

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<sup>1</sup>Progress and Religion (London: 1929), p.vii.

college students in America, is quite as far from the truth. He tells us that the delineation of Hal's character "has something of peculiar interest from its personal relation to the author". He then goes on to tell us:<sup>1</sup>

"Here, for once, he (Shakespeare) relaxes his strictness of dramatic self-reserve, and lets us directly into his own conception of what is good and noble: in his other portraits, we have the art and genius of the poet; here, along with this, is also reflected the heart and conscience of the man."

Then Mr. Hudson straightway reveals that he has missed both the author and his Hal, probably because he has laid too much emphasis on the 'heart' in both, and not enough on their intelligence and will.

Hudson's starting point is perfectly correct. Shakespeare does give us a glimpse into his thoughts of what a good and noble man really is; but Hudson has not interpreted the vision. Writing of Hal he says:<sup>2</sup>

"In the air of the court there was something, he hardly knew what, that cut across his grain....  
...Dissimulation, artifice, official fiction, attentiveness to show, and all the course of dealing where less is meant than meets the ear, were too much the style and habit of the place: policy was the method, astuteness the force, of royal counsels; and plain truth was not deep

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, His Life, Art, and Characters, Ginn & Co. (Boston: 1885), Vol.2, p.117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.119.

enough for one who held it so much his interest to hoodwink the time.....

To the Prince's keen eye all this was evident, to his healthy feelings it was offensive; he craved fellowship of something more fresh and genuine; and was glad to get away from it, and play with simpler and honester natures, where he could at least be frank and true, and where his spirits might run out in natural freedom."

That fault might be found with the court of Henry IV can be taken for granted. What court has there ever been without faults little and great? On the whole, there is little evidence of corruption in Bolingbroke's court more than in the best of them. That Hal ever stopped long enough to examine it, or even to sense its faults, is a pure assumption. Life at court may have irked him; but that he saw more honesty in Falstaff and his cronies is an even more gratuitous assumption. I willingly allow that he found life in the tavern more congenial; but that it was any moral sensibility that drew him to its licentiousness, I see no reason whatever to accept. His soliloquy, at the end of the first scene in which he appears, obviously reveals that his conscience is bothering him; and the kindest interpretation we can put upon the decidedly caddish thoughts contained in that soliloquy, is that they are merely crude salve to soothe his conscience in the pursuit of pleasure.<sup>1</sup> To interpret them in any other

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare (London: 1916), p.114.

light is to impose, from the outset, upon the character of Prince Hal, a nasty policy and a selfish vanity entirely out of keeping with his part in the play as a whole, and as bad as any that stains the name of Bolingbroke. Throughout the two Parts of Henry IV, down to the very end and including the rejection of Falstaff, Hal reveals a generosity and loyalty to his friends that contradicts any interpretation that finds selfishness in him or in that soliloquy.

To me, it is perfectly obvious that it is no virtuous dislike of anything at the court that drives Hal to the 'more virtuous' life of the tavern. Certainly there is nothing in that first soliloquy to indicate that this is the case, nor is there in any of his conversations with his cronies. On the contrary, what he says in the 'play extempore', even though it be only in jest, leaves us under the impression that he knows he is not behaving as he should:<sup>1</sup>

"Swarest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man, - a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoll'n parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuff cloak-bag of guts,....."

When the sheriff comes looking for Falstaff, it becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Part I, Act II, Sc.4.

apparent that, though trying to play off jest for jest, Falstaff has realized that Hal's speech has been half fun and whole earnest; for he bluntly challenges Hal's loyalty with an analysis of his state that drives Hal to lie for him.<sup>1</sup>

"Dost thou hear, Hal? never call a true piece of gold a counterfeit: thou art essentially mad, without seeming so."

It is as much as to say, "Jest if you will, as if you were not one of us; but now that the test is come, be honest and admit that you are as wicked as the rest of us."

On the morrow when Hal stands before his father, there is nothing to indicate his dislike of anything at court, other than his annoyance with tale-bearers. He calmly and humbly admits that he has been at fault; and claims only that he has not been as bad as he has been reported:<sup>2</sup>

"So please your majesty, I would I could  
Quit all offences with as clear excuse  
As well as I am doubtless I can purge  
Myself of many I am charged withal:  
Yet such extenuation let me beg,  
As, in reproof of many tales devised,-  
By smiling pick-thanks and base news-mongers,  
I may, for some things true, wherein my youth  
Hath faulty wander'd and irregular  
Find pardon on my true submission."

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Part I, Act III, Sc.2.

Certainly there is nothing here to indicate that the Prince considers himself to have been virtuously given in running away from the court to the tavern. It is reasonable, of course, to believe that the sight of Falstaff<sup>1</sup> 'snorting like a horse' in sweaty sleep behind the arras, with his pockets crammed with tavern reckonings for an 'intolerable deal of sack and one half-penny worth of bread', has served somewhat to open his eyes to his true state; but, if such be the case, it is no warrant for our belief that he ever considered it either virtuous or intelligent to seek the company of Falstaff.

Hudson seems nearer the true solution of the case when he speaks of Hal's 'healthy feelings' and his eagerness to get away from the court to a place and company 'where his spirits might run out in natural freedom'.<sup>2</sup> However, why Hudson should interpret Shakespeare as intending us to see any virtue in these escapades of the Prince, is more than I can understand - even if it be simply a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils: Hal had no need of choosing either of them. Is it not more true to think that Shakespeare intended us to see in Hal a spirited young man with normal

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Act II, Sc.4.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., p.119.

healthy feelings which give him the urge to break away from the artificial restraints of the court? In Falstaff's company, those restraints are gone and his untamed natural inclinations can 'run out' in a freedom approaching license. He loves pleasure and seeks it; and seeks it with a recklessness that is not unlike that with which Hotspur seeks fame. The only difference is that the recklessness of the pleasure-seeker is not as dangerous to reason as is that of the seeker of glory. But both are dangerous pursuits; and Hudson is entirely mistaken when he says,<sup>1</sup> "that during his intercourse with Falstaff the Prince was all the while growing better".

To accept that statement, it would be necessary to ignore the first two acts of Part I, wherein Hal progresses along the path of waywardness, from a mere pass of pate with Falstaff, to robbing in fun and lying in earnest to circumvent the law. We must stop our ears also, to the report that Hal has grown violent in the court and has 'struck the Lord Chief Justice over Bardolf'.<sup>2</sup> Instead of 'growing better', he is daily growing worse while he is with Falstaff; and it is only when the war comes to separate them that Hal begins his painful reform.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>2</sup> II Henry IV, Act I, Sc.2.

It becomes perfectly evident that Shakespeare, in his creation of the ideal king, deliberately set about the delicate task of bringing to his audience a human being, weak enough to suffer the trial of temptation, yet strong enough to weather the storm and come glorious to glorious manhood, with the marks of the struggle upon him. In the two Parts of Henry IV, he takes him through the storm and out of it. As I have already shown, Shakespeare reveals him, in contrast to Hotspur, as free from pride which makes men inhuman; but at the same time, in comparison with Falstaff, he reveals him as inclined to the riot of concupiscence, which is entirely human. Hal's inclinations are not to the vices of the spirit, but to the weaknesses of the flesh. Shakespeare knew that every man has his weakness; and, evidently he believed that concupiscence is less likely to ruin a man than pride, that virtue and grace are more likely to triumph over the inordinate weakness of the flesh than over the inordinate strength of the spirit. Besides this, he knew that the humility which a good man is bound to acquire in such self-conquest will probably give to him the kingly virtue of understanding the weaknesses of others. "Power is made perfect in infirmity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> II Corinthians, XII, 8.

It is thus that the greatness of Henry V arises out of the infirmity of Prince Hal. During the first two acts of the First Part, he gives rein to his weakness, promising himself always a noble reform. During the first two acts of the Second Part, he is revealed as discovering that reform is difficult, that it will be no easy matter to bring to pass what he has promised himself. He finds that he 'remembers the poor creature, small beer'<sup>1</sup> - his way of telling us that he finds within himself a yearning for the old life of frolic. He is bitter, with the bitterness of reform. There is raging within his soul a struggle between his higher and lower natures; and, for the nonce, the power of the lower nature triumphs: before the close of the scene in which the struggle has been revealed to us, he breaks through his weariness and bitterness, with the abandon of a struggling victim of alcoholism, who uncorks a bottle: he accepts the low transformation proposed by Poins, "from prince to prentice", and goes off to "see Falstaff bestow himself in his true colours".

By showing Hal as thus falling anew to the old temptation, Shakespeare reveals his keen grasp of the ways of temptation and reform; and adds another touch of realism

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<sup>1</sup>Act II, Sc.2.

to the character of the Prince. Hal's character is strong, but he is human. He is no superman or saint. He is not one thing one day and, by a simple act of his will, another the next day. He reforms the hard way of lapses and recoveries. Fortunately for him, he is to see Falstaff as he plans, "in his true colours"; and they are not pleasant. The Doll Tearsheet scene is more effective than anything else in breaking the spell of sensuality's dream. At the end of that scene, Hal pulls himself together, rebukes himself for wasting time "when tempest of commotion" threatens destruction, and bids Falstaff good night. There is something final about that "good night". Evidently he has become disgusted with Falstaff and speaks to him with little of the old warmth. It is simply "Falstaff, good night".<sup>1</sup> The next time he will speak to him it will be to say coldly:<sup>2</sup>

"I know thee not old man: fall to thy prayers.  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!  
I have long dreamed of such a kind of man  
So surfeit - swelled, so old, and so profane;  
But being awak'd, I do despise my dream."

But before this consummation of reform, Hal finds it necessary to pass through further trial. Between the Doll Tearsheet scene and the scene of final reconciliation

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<sup>1</sup> II Henry IV, Act II, Sc.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Act V, Sc.5.

with his father, Hal does not appear but his name is mentioned. Falstaff speaks of him familiarly, and Clarence informs us that "he dines in London with Poins and other his continual followers!". His spirit writhes through the scenes in the agony of self-conquest; and we have no way of judging his progress other than a favourable analysis of his character by his father,<sup>1</sup> and the information that Clarence has a place in Hal's affections. However, the fact that Hal comes to us merely by report, prepares the way for that tremendous scene of final reconciliation with his father.

As prelude to that scene, the young Prince's sincerity of feeling is revealed to us when he makes the mistake of thinking his father's sleep his death; and we are in no way surprised when he patiently endures the molten fire of rage and suspicion which the King pours out upon him when he calls him back, weeping, to his presence. That fierce torrent of anger may well be considered a purging fire that burns away the last shreds of the old ties to the haunts and associations which Falstaff, Sir Concupiscence, dominates. From that fire Hal rises with a profession of love and loyalty that rings with sincerity and understanding. He is free, at last, from all restraints of false shame. He is free, too,

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<sup>1</sup>II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

even of the pardonable pride and suppressed fury of his reply in the first reconciliation scene which drew from his father the prophetic response:<sup>1</sup>

"A hundred thousand rebels die in this.  
Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein."

Humility, sincerity, loyalty, love that is frank and open, constitute now the tenor of Hal's speech; and as it brings joy to his father's heart, it brings to the audience the conviction that the real Hal, the glorious uncrowned Henry V stands before us. Power has been made perfect in infirmity, and England has reason to rejoice in the thought of better days ahead. All that follows is but an epilogue to what has gone before, a prelude to what is to follow.

To all this, Falstaff has waddled through the scenes as foil and background, because he has been the very embodiment of the forces against which Hal has been forced to battle. That battle has raged ever since the night when word was brought to the tavern of the Northumberland revolt. It has come to a victorious conclusion only after the announcement of the complete overthrow of the rebels. There have been two wars waged concomitantly; the war of the King with the nobles, and the war of Hal with his passions; and

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<sup>1</sup>I Henry IV, Act III, Sc.2.

the two have been intimately bound up with each other. To Hal rebellion has come as a grace to stiffen his moral fibre; to Falstaff it has been the occasion of falling deeper and deeper into the mire. To the personality, Falstaff, Hal has been loyal, for he has procured him a commission which he in no way deserved, has let him take the glory of killing Hotspur, has given him a page as a mild suggestion to lead a more respectable life. All these Falstaff has turned to abuse. He has abused the King's press, wasting his ill-gotten gains in deeper licentiousness; his reputation in the wars as means to further fraud; and the page "he has transformed ape" so that even Poins is moved to say:<sup>1</sup>

"O, that this good blossom could be kept from  
cankers."

The personification or allegory has served its purpose when Hal's reformation is completed in the final reconciliation scene; the person, Falstaff remains to be disposed of.

Samuel Johnson says:<sup>2</sup>

"As this play was not, to our knowledge, divided  
into acts by the author, I could be content to  
conclude it with the death of Henry IV."

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<sup>1</sup> II Henry IV, Act II, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> Humphry, W. Johnson on Shakespeare, Oxford University Press, 1916, p.124.

This would have freed Shakespeare from a nasty predicament. He had introduced Falstaff for the sake of the personification; but the creative muse had run riot to the joy of his audience and, now, to the grief of the author. The personification has put forth flesh in a personality of tremendous appeal to an audience of men and women who, as Hal was at first, have been carried away with the glitter and sparkle with which sensuality is wont to clothe itself. No matter how bestial Falstaff becomes in the Second Part, no matter what his crimes, we cannot forget his wit and humour. Furthermore, in some way his soft humanity wins our sympathy because we see in it our own weaknesses. We pity him and are prone to cover up the true malice of his playfulness. I can well imagine Shakespeare's chagrin when, with the play nearly finished, he found it necessary to dispose of this "huge hill of flesh".

Be it to his credit that when he found no way around it, he had courage to face it. With the displeasure of his audience a certainty, he pursued his theme to the bitter end. Henry V's first act in the administration of justice is to pass judgment on his friend. But it is justice tempered with mercy. He banishes him, not from England, but from "within ten miles of (his) person". He appeals to him

to reform; and, that he may reform, he adds to his former favours a pension,<sup>1</sup>

"That lack of means enforce (him) not to evil:",  
and promises him,

"As we hear you do reform yourselves  
We will, according to your strengths and qualities,  
Give you advancement."

Samuel Johnson cannot understand the necessity of committing Falstaff to the Fleet; but whether we are to consider this order as coming from Hal or as the Lord Chief Justice's interpretation 'of the tenour of (his) word', we may consider that it was merely a temporary precaution against Falstaff's strange ability of wriggling out of tight corners.

Sentimentality has uttered a wind of words in condemnation of this closing; but to me it is simply another indication of Shakespeare's realism and his knowledge of spiritual combat. Hal has long since freed himself from the restraints of false shame and respect for the unreasonable opinions of men. He pleads with Falstaff to prepare for a more important judgment, and urges upon him medieval and Catholic cures for sensuality:<sup>2</sup>

"Make less thy body hence and more thy grace,  
Leave gormandizing, know that the grave doth gape  
For thee thrice wider than for other men."

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Act V, Sc.5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Sentimentality tells us that it is mean and unkind to speak thus to the poor old man; but Christian intelligence tells us that Hal is showing Falstaff a kindness that few men would be generous enough to risk in the face of sentimental public opinion.

I cannot help marvelling at the honesty and intelligence of the author's art. It shows a wit keener still than Falstaff's in getting out of a corner, because, unlike him, it sacrifices nothing that is really worth while. Nay, more, it puts the final touch on Hal's reformation; for it shows that Hal, rejoicing over his escape from the clutches of sensuality, is humble enough to recognize that, though beaten, sensuality still lives within him. Sentiment may complain, but Hal knows that Falstaff is a proximate occasion of sin to him; and, with a wisdom born of sad experience, he puts him out of his life. All this is the realism of medieval spirituality which compromising modernity finds difficult to understand and impossible to appreciate.

Some might ask why it is that Shakespeare does not keep his promise<sup>1</sup>

"To continue the story with Sir John in it  
and make you merry with fair Catherine of France",

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<sup>1</sup> Epilogue.

why he merely has the Hostess tell the pathetic story of his death. The answer is, I believe, twofold: first, that the personification can serve no further purpose, and the person has already cost him enough trouble; and secondly, because reform in Falstaff would be so miraculous as to be unreal, and to have him in the play anywhere but in the company of the King and Queen would be unsatisfying, for his wit is flat without Hal. To introduce him, unreformed, into Hal's company, would be to mar the character of the Ideal King.

I have pursued a rather lengthy analysis of the two Parts of Henry IV because, in the treatment of Hal, we have, I think, the most complete expression of Shakespeare's philosophy of human character and its relationship with the moral life. In Hal we have neither the comic nor the tragic hero, because he is too great to be comic and too well balanced to be tragic. Nowhere else in Shakespeare do we find anything like the perfection of true manhood that is found in his Ideal King. In him there is a fundamental soundness that is real and human, that is tried by its own weaknesses and conquers by its own strength. The problem of grace that plays such a part in the making of a great man receives scarcely any treatment at all, but it is not

forgotten. Shakespeare leaves that to the theologian, for to him it is something beyond his field. But if the theologian wishes to examine the play closely he will find that Shakespeare has never once forgotten it in the sense that he has excluded it. With his medieval mind the action of grace is handled as if by second nature, as something that is bound up with men's acts, everywhere working with the hiddenness of the action of Divine Providence. Thus, for Hal, rebellion comes as an actual grace lifting him out of the path of dalliance; evil overplays its hand in the lewdness of Falstaff with Doll; and his father's harsh speech cracks the spell of self-respect and remorse and makes Hal reveal his true feelings. Thus might the theologian discover in the life of Hal the permitting Providence of God, guiding the life of a good man and using even evil for his advancement. Shakespeare has overlooked nothing, for his realism is a realism that includes the whole of life and not merely a part of it; and the whole of life includes the action of grace, even though Shakespeare does not mention it.

When we study Shakespeare's men and women in themselves, we discover the medieval mind at work - medieval, because for Shakespeare the study of human characters is not merely psychological but moral, not merely moral but psychological. For Shakespeare, human character is a composite of virtue and vice, not merely a history of reflexes and synapses, of impulses stimulated and inhibitions imposed. But this does not imply that psychology or the study of the human soul as the subject of virtue and vice had no place in the creation of Shakespeare's men and women, or that it must have no place in our study of these creations. On the contrary, the very fact that these characters are so real, so true to life, is evidence that proves beyond question that Shakespeare was deeply studied in the inner springs of human acts and in the nature and effect of the external forces that play upon them.

Nor does it imply a disregard for the body's part in the life of man, a disregard arising from an exaggerated interest in the soul's workings. Shakespeare was no angelist after either the Platonic or the Cartesian fashion. He was an Aristotelian, or better still a Thomist, not in the complete sense of the philosopher pursuing an exhaustive study

of the relationship between the body and the soul, but in the practical sense of one who accepts the conclusions of the philosopher and uses them. For him the soul is not a pure spirit trammelled up in the body, an Ariel prisoned in knotty entrails of a pine. For him man is a body and a soul, a body that moves by the soul, a soul that lives in a body, a soul with faculties and powers, of which some are organic and some are not. Hamlet's neurosis is a physical effect of the workings of his mind and his affections. Falstaff's bulk does, in a sense, explain some of his viciousness. Macbeth's crimes beget a fatal nervousness, and Lady Macbeth's, insanity. Psychologists of the modern experimentalist school find much in Shakespeare to warrant the belief that he knew men well as these psychologists seek to know him. But the superabundance of that evidence must not be allowed to blind us to evidence of another sort. It is that which establishes the fact that behind all these psychological elements, or bound up with them, is the moral power which makes his men and women fundamentally responsible for their acts. It is the sense of sin.

PART THREE

A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF REVOLUTION

## CHAPTER V

### THE SPIRIT OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE

"Most Englishmen, when they consider the steady if gradual emancipation of one group of their countrymen after another, probably feel that the price paid for order has been worth paying even if it has been a heavy one."<sup>1</sup>

Thus does Professor Powicke describe the spirit of the modern Englishman, and thus does he reveal him as in harmony still with the spirit of his ancestors. If there is one thing more apparent than anything else in the history of the English nation as Professor Powicke relates it, it is the desire for order and civil peace. And side by side with this desire was a conviction closely associated with it. It was the conviction in the mind of the nation that the king was "the source of justice and the guardian of order, but (that) he neither created the law nor imposed a system of order."<sup>2</sup> There is and always has been the social conviction that the law arises from the same will

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<sup>1</sup> F.M. Powicke, Medieval England, Thornton Butterworth Ltd., (London: 1931), pp.216 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., p.196.

of the nation expressed in custom, custom more sacred even than the positive expression of the law itself. The king is its embodiment and loyalty to the king its protection; but the king himself is subject to it.

"He was responsible to God, but he was not entrusted by God with a dominion which made him an irresponsible person, - the ruler must never lose his authority, and if he rules justly and firmly, he will retain his authority, for local administrators are still his servants, tied to him by traditions of personal loyalty. He is king, and though no longer descended from the gods, his prestige is protected and enhanced by the teachings of the Church, by the solemn rites of his coronation, and the trappings of royalty."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Powicke is writing here particularly of the attitude of medieval Englishmen towards their kings; but the past tense merges naturally into the present; for the spirit still survives to explain the fact that, although stripped of many of the powers his ancestors exercised, the King of England today is much more than a mere figurehead, and very genuinely the centre of national unity and the bond of empire. This survival from the past is rooted in the Catholic heart and mind of the Middle Ages, and is not the least among the Christian principles which stir the English nation to resist the aggression of pagan Nazi philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup>  
F.M. Powicke, op.cit., pp.196 ff.

It explains much in the present; it explains more in the past. It explains the success of the iniquitous Tudors and the failure of the certainly not more iniquitous Stuarts. As a Catholic, I have often wondered at the apparent lethargy of English Catholics, who allowed Henry VIII and Elizabeth to tear England away from the Church and to despoil her glorious shrines and abbeys. I have read of corruption and weakness in the hierarchy, infidelity and impiety in the laity; but have never been satisfied with this as an explanation. In spite of the truth that such conditions existed, were there not many good and pious English bishops, priests and laymen with the typical English spirit of resistance to tyranny? No doubt there were multitudes of fervent Catholics. St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher were certainly not the last of England's saints and scholars, and a nation of infidels never produced the saintly martyr priests of Elizabeth's England.

But fervent Catholics would be the very Englishmen in whom the spirit of medieval England would burn most ardently. Imbued with that spirit, so well expressed in the "De Regimine Principum" of St. Thomas, they would be the very people most eager for peace and order. With England threatened from without as she was, we may rest certain that they would

enter whole-heartedly into that spirit of the nation which arises again today to meet her enemies. Their rulers might be tyrants but they represented the majesty of England. As Professor Powicke says:

"The king in parliament could be foolish, short-sighted, and capricious. But on the whole, the king in parliament was in fact, as well as in theory the reflection of the various interests in the community, the expression of its collective wisdom, the safeguard and interpreter of custom and the common law, the inevitable court of appeal in times of national crisis."<sup>1</sup>

That was the spirit of Catholic England; and the true representative of Catholic England would be the last to stir up revolt even against the vicious and incorrigible Tudors when England's enemies were gathered against her.

But even if England had had no such foes, the fervent Catholics would have been the last to revolt. All England remembered<sup>2</sup> with horror the civil strife of the days that had gone before when the Yorkists and Lancastrians had torn to shreds the peace and order of England in the Wars of the Roses. Under any conditions, would fervent Catholics have urged a repetition of those horrors? Most of them would certainly have been at least slow to do so, and bad Catholics

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., pp.41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., p.42.

would have been indifferent; so that fanatics of either class could have found little enthusiasm among their brethren to encourage them in revolt. It was the Catholic spirit of medieval England that allowed the non-Catholic spirit of modern England to live.

The Catholic spirit, true to the warning contained in the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup> with regard to the dangers of revolution, would shun revolution and endure tyranny lest civil strife should bring in its train still greater dangers to the State. Kings and queens might tyrannize, but they would die, and perhaps be followed by others who would repair the injuries done by their fathers; but to assault Majesty was to endanger further peace and order and hopes for the future.

It was this that was responsible for Catholic support in the national policy of the Tudors in spite of Tudor tyranny, just as it was probably the lack of it that led to the overthrow of the Stuarts. How strong the Catholic party was in the days of Charles I is a question into which I have no desire or need to go. The cause itself would lead to divided loyalties among Catholics, for the issues were not clear. The fact remains that it was the spirit of the Middle

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<sup>1</sup>On the Governance of Rulers, trans. by G.B. Phelan, Sheed & Ward (London: 1938), Chap.V.

Ages in the nation as a whole that stood out against the Stuart claims of Divine Right. It found strange allies in the Calvinists; but it was the revolt of the medieval ideas of majesty that saw in Divine Right an attack on majesty itself, and opposed it.

It was around this medieval conception of majesty, and to a great extent growing out of it, that Shakespeare found the principles of social ethics which guided him in the writing of his plays. These principles are at work in all his plays, but we shall find them most easily if we look for them in his histories and tragedies, for there the violence of conflict holds them in relief. When all is running smoothly in life, men are apt to overlook and take for granted the causes of good order and peace. It is only when departure from sound principles brings disorder and distress, that we begin to inquire about the truths that guide the lives of men. There is nothing like a stoppage of the water supply to make city folk conscious of water mains and sources. So is it with social ethics. In the histories for the most part all is not well; in the tragedies there is always catastrophe. Here both Shakespeare and his audience are necessarily more conscious of the principles clashing in the lives of the men and women he creates. And it is there I shall strive to find the social ethics of Shakespeare.

I shall direct my attention chiefly to the histories related to the Lancastrian and Yorkist struggles for mastery, and to the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Together all Shakespeare's plays may constitute a single magnificent pattern. These plays are a particular part of it and form its vital centre; and I feel that I am making my way to the very heart of our problem when I direct my attention to them. In all the history dramas from Richard III to Henry V, there is one prevailing theme: the disastrous results of violence done to anointed majesty. Here Shakespeare portrays in dramatic form an object lesson which illustrates the truth that it is, at best, dangerous to revolt against tyranny. In Hamlet, Shakespeare takes up the other side of the question and reveals what ills a nation may suffer when, for some reason like "craven scruples" or "thinking too precisely on the event", or selfishness, revolt is shunned by one who represents the voice of the nation.

In general, this is what I shall strive to show as the more substantial food of Shakespeare's thought during the years of middle life, when he was neither the youth bursting upon London with the romantic verse of Romeo and Juliet, nor the sage, retiring to Stratford with the mellow poetry of the Comedy of the Tempest; but, the sober realist looking upon

life, with ever less laughter and ever more tears. But before entering upon this study it might be well to examine briefly the times in which he worked and the spirit of the people with whom he lived, for it is beyond question that there is an intimate relationship between those times, that spirit and his thought.

It is entirely unnecessary for us to enter into a discussion of the dates and chronological order of Shakespeare's plays. It would be incorrect to claim that all controversy has come to an end with regard to this difficult problem, but as far as I have been able to discover, there is no serious disagreement about the part of it that is of particular interest here. It is generally agreed that the order in which the plays I am to consider were written was as follows: the three Parts of Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II, the two Parts of Henry IV, Henry V, and Hamlet. Furthermore, although there may be reasonable disagreement about the date at which each one of these plays was written, it is safe to say that they were all written some time between 1591 and 1604. Without entering into a discussion of all the controversy which rages around the various Quartos and Folios, it seems safe to suggest that although Hamlet was probably written sometime before 1603 when the First Quarto appeared,<sup>1</sup> even the Second

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<sup>1</sup>H.H. Furness, New Variorum Hamlet (Philadelphia: 1918), Vol. II, p.36.

Quarto, which appeared in 1604,<sup>1</sup> does not mark the last of Shakespeare's efforts to make it a finished piece.<sup>2</sup> In any case, it is safe to say that the Hamlet we know did not appear in print before 1604, and we have no reason for supposing that the play in this form dates earlier than that year. In other words, the plays we are to consider date between Shakespeare's twenty-seventh and fortieth years, or during the last years of Elizabeth's reign and the first of that of James I.

And what of that period of English History? Professor Dunning tells us that,

"...in the welter of Tudor absolutism there was no room for more than a single doctrine of political theory, and that was the doctrine of passive obedience. Some rather trivial expositions of this principle constitute the chief output of English speculation until the latter part of Elizabeth's reign. The only important exception was the "Utopia" of Sir Thomas More, which was published, though not in England, early in the reign of Henry VIII."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.36. Furness quotes Halliwell: My sad and strong belief is that we have not the materials for the formation of a really perfect text; and that now at best we must be contented with a defective copy of what is in many respects the most noble of all the writings of Shakespeare. .... There is nothing to show that he had not meditated a complete edition under his own superintendence while in his retirement at New Place. It would be a more reasonable supposition that the preparation of such an edition was prevented by his untimely death.

<sup>3</sup> A History of Political Theories, Macmillan (London: 1931), Vol.2, pp.206 ff.

And the explanation of this state of the English mind is found in the words of the same author:<sup>1</sup>

"A single idea summed up the conscious creed of the Englishmen; namely, that the interest and indeed the safety of the nation depended upon an unhampered and efficient monarch."

But the time of national peril was over and England was externally at peace. Internally there could have been little of it in spite of seeming so. Men were thinking if they were saying little. Already the seed of revolution was germinating, and though James would not live to feel it, it would break in the reign of his son and lead him to the block. During the thirteen years while Shakespeare was writing the histories and tragedies which I have chosen for study, the Essex plot occurred, and the Gunpowder plot followed within two years. Those sixteen years for Catholics were years of waiting and hoping and despairing, while they prayed for the Queen's salvation and looked forward to the reign of Catholic Mary Stuart's son, only to have their expectations defeated by his submission to the influences which had made their lives miserable during the reign of Elizabeth.

Meanwhile Elizabethan license went on in the luxurious court of the aged Queen and did not lose its hold in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

that of her successor. There was atheism in the council of majesty if not in the heart and mind of the Queen and King. The new aristocrats grew fat on the spoils of the Church, and the new beggary crawled in hunger and nakedness through the lanes of London, to be treated not with the food and shelter the monasteries of the Church had given them, but with the spectacle of her priests being hanged-drawn-and-quartered. The fading years of Elizabeth's life had brought an increase rather than a lessening of the misery of Catholics, and their hopes in James were dashed to earth soon after his coming. Guy Fawkes must have been only one of a multitude whose patience and long-suffering had reached the breaking point when the Gunpowder plot was laid.

And meanwhile men went on thinking, and among them Shakespeare. It is an ill wind that blows no man to good. Under happier circumstances his plays might not have been what they are. The very times in which he lived were of necessity an incitement to study the principles that lie at the base of society and govern it. And where would he find them discussed? That is hard to say. Perhaps in the Mermaid where thinkers gathered. Perhaps in the writings of Fortescue who copied so much from St. Thomas Aquinas. Perhaps, but not

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<sup>1</sup>Dunning, op.cit., p.201.

likely, in the writings of St. Thomas himself. There was no need of that, for since the renaissance theory of Divine Right was only beginning to seep into an England unfriendly to it, we must conclude that the political thought of England was still medieval; and the political thought of the Middle Ages was the thought of St. Thomas.

Bede Jarrett tells us:

"To go through any of the numerous writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is, in every case that we have examined, to light upon traces of his words and thoughts. If, as rarely happens, he is not actually quoted by name, his words are nevertheless used, and used in such a way as to imply that they are a definite and familiar statement of the case. Almost more perhaps than as a philosopher did the influence of Aquinas as a canonist last throughout our period, especially in his treatise of laws."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Professor Dunning gives testimony of the influence of St. Thomas' doctrine through Fortescue, on into the reign of James I. He writes:<sup>2</sup>

"Though it is hard to see in the time of Henry VIII and his children much relation between Fortescue's theory and the actual system, the Lancastrian Chancellor's doctrine became under James I a strong and oft-cited authority for Parliamentary opposition. Sir Edward Coke, in particular found much edification in the theory of one who was, like himself, an incarnation of the Common Law, and through

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<sup>1</sup> Theories of the Middle Ages, Ernest Benn Ltd. (London: 1926), p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., p.205.

Coke, the spirit of Fortescue was transmitted to all the adversaries of the crown in the Puritan Revolution."

Coke quotes Fortescue and Fortescue quotes St. Thomas, or uses him, forgetting to acknowledge his source; and both are accepted simply because the ideas they express are as commonly accepted as the common law itself. The political doctrine of St. Thomas was common property and the habitual thought among Englishmen of the period, and next to St. Thomas himself I know no better exponent of it than Shakespeare. What St. Thomas does in clearcut logic, Shakespeare does in vivid drama.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ENGLISH HISTORIES INSPIRED

Shakespeare's entrance into the field of dramatic history was strange and, I believe, fortuitous. As a reviser of the work of others he could not choose his themes, and the themes he found himself correcting were but a part of a larger one. He entered the field much after the manner of the man who finds himself in the theatre in time only for the closing scenes of a play. The play in Shakespeare's case was a tragedy, and he arrived in time for the denouement and catastrophe.

As a reviser of the work of others, he was launched into the story of the Wars of the Roses. As a collaborator probably, he finished the story with the Tudor rise to power in Henry VII's victory on Bosworth Field. I am convinced that it was the catastrophe which led up to that victory, that inspired him to pursue the course he followed in all his other English histories. Through fifteen acts of Henry VI he had watched English society disintegrate, its order gone, its peace torn to shreds, its leaders becoming more and

more wolfish; and it was he who played the leading part in dramatizing the story. With cold logic he had been interpreting the chronicle of Henry VI; and with cold logic, he directed the collaboration which unfolded the catastrophe of Henry VI in the horrors of Richard III.

Of those four plays, Professor Grierson says:<sup>1</sup>

"The difference between Shakespeare and Marlowe becomes clear in those plays where Shakespeare is most obviously the disciple of his young predecessor, and taking over from him as heroes the ambitious, unscrupulous, ruthless Machiavellians. Suffolk, Margaret of Anjou, Clifford, Richard, Duke of York, they rise above one another in a crescendo of shrill ferocity and ruthless ambition till the limit is attained in the 'bloody boar', Richard, Duke of Gloucester and later King of England. But Marlowe is in close imaginative sympathy with these aspiring heroes, whether Tambourlaine or Dr. Faustus, as on one side of his nature Milton is with the dauntless Satan. Marlowe himself was in desire and dream, at any rate, one

Still climbing after knowledge infinite  
And ever moving with the moving spheres,

sympathetic with the soul which exults in the  
thought that

All things that move between the quiet pole  
Shall be at my command.

To Shakespeare, this type of character is, when  
all is said and done, a monster:

Why should a man desire in any way  
To vary from the kindly race of men?"

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., pp.120 ff.

I agree completely with the Professor when he says that Shakespeare "artistically and ethically disliked super men"; and with the conclusion:<sup>1</sup>

"With whomever he may have collaborated, or whoever may have written what was revised, it is he (Shakespeare) who has given to these plays the final impression they convey, and that is of the horrors of civil war and a greedy wolfish nobility."

Here, then, was Shakespeare's introduction to the story of what to him were England's woes of yesterday. Is it going too far to say that to him they may have seemed related, as cause to effect, to England's woes of his own day? It is hardly conjecture when we conclude at least that he could not have dwelt with logical mind upon these events of the past and their consequences without asking himself how such things could be. To me it seems simply ridiculous to imagine that Shakespeare the genius could dwell for weeks and months on the diabolical acts of Richard III and not ask himself how humanity could produce such a monster of inhumanity; or to imagine that, with his thoughts full of him, Shakespeare could wander off looking around haphazardly in the chronicles for another theme. He might turn to comedy or tragedy, but when his mind came again to dwell on the history of England, it would seek out something he conceived

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.121.

as related to his former theme. I am convinced that his work in Henry VI and Richard III was the logical inspiration of all that followed in the other plays of English chronicle. I am convinced, too, that the relationship he sought in King John and found in Richard II was a causal relationship with the abominations of Richard III.

To Shakespeare humanity in its softer kindlier side was something beautiful, glorious. He could pity human weakness and sympathize with human failings, perhaps even to a fault. Is it not this that presents a difficulty (not insurmountable) to the Christian mind when it strives to understand and appreciate the sentiment of the closing scenes of Antony and Cleopatra, and the suicide of Romeo and Juliet? But with the harder, sterner side of humanity, he had little sympathy, and with cruelty, utterly none at all. Vanity in Hotspur is amusing, but he would lose much of his appeal if it were not for his obvious and sincere love for Kate. From Richard of Gloucester all tender feelings, all human weaknesses are abstracted, and the vanity, which in Hotspur is amusing, turns to ruthless pride, so that we find ourselves straining the point when we try to give him credit for his cleverness and the courage he shows on Bosworth Field. What a being to challenge Shakespeare's thought! How could he escape asking

himself how such a creature could ever have come into existence, and existing, have been allowed by men to tyrannize over them?

Gloucester is an inhuman monster. He despises human frailty and knows with satisfaction that he "was not made for sportive tricks" and lacks "love's majesty to strut before a wanton ambling nymph".<sup>1</sup> So he determines "to prove a villain, and hate the idle pleasure of these days". Rather than man, he seems a fallen spirit, diabolic of intelligence and ruthless of will. He preys upon society, a society enervated by human violence to the point of licentious weakness that is suspicious, gullible, superstitious, lethargic, and no match for his cunning and courage. He makes one think of anti-Christ. He is master of deceit and of men's hearts and minds. Pity is beyond him, though he understands it sufficiently to use its signs for show. He plays with human sentiment, laughs at human convention, tramples underfoot the laws of God and man. He is hated by his enemies, feared by his associates, loved by no one, and runs his fearful course through a storm of curses, including his mother's, unmoved by any of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc.1.

He thirsts for power, power in the abstract. His ambition is like no other in all Shakespeare, He delights in the thought of becoming king, and in remaining king when he has achieved it. But it is not the possession of the crown and all that it means that pleases him. Rather is it the exercise of the skill and cunning with which he achieves it and holds it. He delights in the thrill of conquest, the delight of thwarting men and beguiling them. His joy is in the frustrating of men. He sees through men and attacks them in their weaknesses, and masters them for the fun of doing it, Anne, Hastings, Buckingham, with romantic shows, and hatred of enemies, and love of property. And he goes with a chuckle to Bosworth Field because he seems to have won Elizabeth's consent to his marriage with her daughter by offering promises of security and noble station.

Was there ever man more devilish? His life in the play that portrays it is a veritable hurricane of evil that breaks over humanity and tosses it about in helpless confusion. It begins with a rush in the opening speech wherein the hero prologues his purpose. It mounts through hypocritical romance, to fratricide, mass murder; and finally, at its vortex, achieves its purpose with a blasphemous travesty of piety wherein God's fallen priests lend colour to beguile the

representatives of the common man into accepting and condoning, in ignorance, the violation of sovereignty.

From there on, this spirit of evil unmask itself, first to its accomplice, then to the nation as a whole. Buckingham falls, and the nation is shocked by the murder of the Princes in the Tower. Queen Anne disappears, and her husband ranges through the land, cursed and feared by all. One might be pardoned for coming to the conclusion that Richard III is the Devil in disguise. But to Shakespeare he is not Satan, but the human slave of Satan, a man degraded to the lowest depths of depravity, a depravity not merely of the senses and the appetites, but a depravity of the intelligence and will. He is the very embodiment of totally disordered man - man disordered in his highest faculties.

Yet is he no abstraction, no allegorical creature, but a man of flesh and blood, with a twisted soul housed in a twisted body. But he is a man all the same. And Shakespeare takes pains to remind us of the fact. He makes Anne tell us so; and lest we have failed to catch the point, he makes us discover it for ourselves. In his waking hours, Richard is master of his thoughts, but when he is asleep, then do his unnatural villainies come to plague him: ghosts

haunt him in the night. Yes, Richard is human; and when he goes forth to battle, however much we may shudder at the thought of his spiritual condition and his unpreparedness to meet his Judge, we cannot help but admire, with grudging souls, the courage he displays in final defeat and death. His crimes have caught up with him as they inevitably must with him who would play the role of the devil in the midst of men.

Here is no ordinary character to be studied in chronicle, created in drama, and forgotten on the morrow; and he who thinks that Shakespeare could have been wrapped up in him, as he must have been, and then proceed to forget him, can have no appreciation of the tendencies of the mind of any kind of man, let alone the mind of the artist and thinker. We ourselves cannot read Richard III without finding our thoughts falling back to the society that produced him, the disintegrating society of Henry VI. But that was not enough for Shakespeare. He knew enough about that society with its corruption and bestiality. His thought was to discover the source of that corruption.

One might have expected him to continue the story with a drama of Henry VII. Why did he not? And why did he turn back in the chronicle to the reigns of King John and

Richard II? I can only feel that censorship was the reason. After all, Elizabeth was the granddaughter of Henry VII. True, Shakespeare would later collaborate in the writing of a drama of her father, but that would be after Elizabeth had passed from the scene, and James I would be a more or less disinterested spectator. Censorship seems to me to explain it, that and the ethically curious mind of the author which could not have been otherwise than convinced that the plays which he had been writing told but the end of the story. But if censorship barred the way to a sequel to Richard III, it was wide open to a probing of its background. He would search for the beginnings of the disorder, the disorder which had culminated in the disordered mind of Richard of Gloucester.

## CHAPTER VII

### REVOLUTION UNJUSTIFIED

In the field of history drama, King John and Richard II follow Richard III from his pen. Now I am convinced that Shakespeare was looking for the first steps in the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses when he set about writing King John. But he did not find them there. Too much of merry England lay between King John and Henry VI. But he did find them in the reign of King Richard II, in the violence done anointed majesty by the first of the long line of greedy wolfish nobles who made England a shambles in the Wars of the Roses.

Professor Powicke tells us that,

"...under the guidance of the Church kingship (in the Middle Ages) received something of a sacramental character; (that) the violation of the king's peace or dignity was made an increasingly heinous offence."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, he tells us that,

"...if the ruler obviously sought his own and failed to interpret the ways of God, if he isolated himself from his subjects, and drew a sharp line between his

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.167.

own will and the body of rights and customs which kept his people together, then he was a tyrant, and might with much probability look forward to a violent death."<sup>1</sup>

Here are two principles of medieval political thought which meet and seem to clash in the tragedy of Richard II: the sacred character of majesty, and the right of rebellion. Shakespeare leaves us in no doubt that he was aware of the former; and the teachings of John of Salisbury and St. Thomas of Aquin, which played an important part in shaping political thought in the Middle Ages, make it unlikely that he was ignorant of the latter.

That Shakespeare grasped the national consciousness of the sacred character of the king is made evident by the fact that expressions of it are found on the lips of several of the characters of his play. Thus when Bolingbroke appears before his uncle York, that aged councillor, deeply conscious as he is of the follies of his King, breaks forth:<sup>2</sup>

"Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle:  
I am no traitor's uncle; and that word 'grace'  
In an ungracious mouth is but profane.  
.....  
Comest thou because th' anointed king is hence?"

Again, listen to the Bishop of Carlisle:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>2</sup> Act II, Sc.3.

"Fear not, my lord: the Power that made you king  
Hath power to keep you king in spite of all.";<sup>1</sup>

and to the thought which that speech inspires in the King  
himself:

"So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,-  
Who all the while hath revell'd in the night,  
Whilst we were wandering with the Antipodes,-  
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,  
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,  
Not able to endure the sight of day,  
But self-affrighted tremble at his sins.  
Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

This speech of the King may, indeed, be interpreted  
as an expression of those claims with which he annoyed his  
subjects when he asserted that he was the "entire Emperor of  
his realm",<sup>3</sup> but the words of the noble Bishop of Carlisle  
in the Abdication Scene cannot:

"What subject can give sentence on his king?  
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?  
Thieves are not judged but they are by to hear,  
Although apparent guilt be seen in them;  
And shall the figure of God's majesty,  
His captain, steward, deputy elect,  
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,  
Be judged by subject and inferior breath,  
And he himself not present? O, forbend it, God,  
That in a Christian climate, souls refined

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<sup>1</sup>Act III, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup>Act III, Sc.2.

<sup>3</sup>Powicke, op.cit., p.185.

Should show so beinous, black, obscene, a deed!  
 .....  
 Prevent, resist it, let it not be so,  
 Lest child, child's children cry against you 'woe!'.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop of Carlisle in that scene rises like an interpreting chorus above his fellows. Though one may feel that Richard is at fault in giving himself over to the passionate poetry and pathetic which he pours out upon the council of the nation, it is impossible not to realize that a dreadful injustice is being done him. It is true that he has been a failure as a king, but the failure seems to have been in not resisting the aggressions of the Northumberland crowd, rather than in the tyranny which has served them for an excuse. Our sympathy is with the fallen king, and Carlisle is our spokesman and the spokesman of the nation when he voices his objection to the violation of anointed majesty. The rabble of the nations, led astray by their leaders, will strew dust upon the dethroned king as he passes through the streets, and will cry out, "God save thee, Bolingbroke"<sup>2</sup> in acclamation of his successor; but we and the Nation and Shakespeare are convinced that a crime has been committed: by Richard in his failure to be true to his own majesty, and by the rebels in their violation

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<sup>1</sup> Act IV, Sc.1.

<sup>2</sup> Act V, Sc.2.

of it. Our minds will catch Shakespeare's conviction and shudder for the nation when, on the lips of the murdered Richard, we hear kingly judgment and a prophecy:<sup>1</sup>

"Exton, thy fierce hand  
Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's own land."

Shakespeare, in beginning the story of Lancastrian rule, leaves us in no doubt with regard to his belief in the almost sacramental nature of kingship.

Now with regard to Shakespeare's knowledge of the medieval claims to the right of rebellion, we can say only that because medieval political theory was still the thought of Elizabethan England, it is safe to conclude that he was aware of it and probably accepted it. I shall try to show his acceptance of it in the study of Hamlet. But for the present let us turn our attention to this thought of the Middle Ages.

Clement Webb, who may well be regarded as an authority on the writings of John of Salisbury, analyzes his theory of tyrannicide thus:<sup>2</sup>

"The tyrant is the devil's image as the true prince is God's; he may be slain, while the true prince should be revered. John's approval of tyrannicide is often quoted. . . . . The overthrow of the

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<sup>1</sup> Act V, Sc.5.

<sup>2</sup>John of Salisbury, Methuen & Co. (London: 1932), pp.66 ff.

laws by the tyrant is the supreme treason and may be avenged by any citizen. Any citizen indeed who fails to avenge it when he can, is thereby proved false to himself and to the commonwealth. His language perhaps seemed less startling to himself than it has to some of his later readers. It was a natural development of the republican rhetoric which he found in classical writers; and we have no reason to think that he was ever disposed to make a practical application of it. In his later correspondence, he commonly wrote of Frederic Barbarossa, who was supporting an anti-pope at the time, and so was in John's eyes schismatic as 'the Teutonic tyrant'. Yet nowhere does he hint at the lawfulness of assassinating him, even when he rejoices at the Pope's suspension of him from his imperial dignity and release of his subjects from their allegiance."

In John's teachings the fundamental idea of the right of rebellion is, no doubt, included in the expression of the right to slay the tyrant; but there seems to be some confusion of thought when he does not follow it with the idea of the right to assassinate the tyrant. The confusion may arise out of the eclectic quality of his teachings and his thought. In St. Thomas the ideas expressed in the Policraticus<sup>1</sup> of John of Salisbury, receive full and logical treatment and become, through St. Thomas' influence, the most widely accepted political thought in Europe during the Middle Ages, and in England, down to and beyond the time of Shakespeare.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom II, Lib.VIII, Cap.17.

In the Summa Theologica<sup>1</sup> of St. Thomas we find him treating of sedition and maintaining that it is, by its very nature, opposed to justice and the common good and, therefore, ex suo genere a mortal sin. But to the objection that it is a praiseworthy thing to deliver the multitude from tyrannical power, he replies simply that the rule of a tyrant is not just because it is not directed to the common good but to the private good of the ruler, and that, for that reason it is not sedition to overthrow him, unless, indeed, it be that in overthrowing the tyrant the multitude of the nation suffer more than it did from his tyranny.

Obviously St. Thomas recognizes the right of a nation to rise against a tyrant who, by his tyranny, has ceased to have a claim in justice on the loyalty and obedience of his subjects. This was entirely in keeping with the English notion of kingship: that the king was subject to the law and that the oath of allegiance to the king was a bilateral contract

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<sup>1</sup>"...dicendum, quod regimen tyrannicum non est justum, quia non ordinatur ad bonum commune, sed ad bonum privatum regentis..... Et ideo perturbatio hujus regiminis non habet rationem seditionis; nisi forte quando sic inordinate perturbatur tyranni regimen, quod multitudo subjecta majus detrimentum patitur ex perturbatione consequenti quam ex tyranni regimine. Magis autem tyrannus seditiosus est, qui in populo sibi subjecto discordias et seditiones nutrit, ut tutius dominari possit: hoc enim tyrannicum est, cum sit ordinatum ad bonum proprium praesidentis, cum multitudinis nocumento." (Sum.Theol. II-II, Q.42, a.2 ad 3.)

which was dissolved when the king failed in the duties of his office and trespassed against the common law of the nation. It was likewise in keeping with the English attitude toward revolt even against a tyrant, to fear that in overthrowing the tyrant worse evils might rush in upon the state.

In a treatise on government written for the King of Cyprus, and variously known under the titles De Regimine Principum and De Regno, ad Regem, St. Thomas describes and explains the duties of a ruler and discusses the merits of the various forms of government.<sup>1</sup>

In modern times men are prone to insist on rights and privileges. It is interesting to note that the question of rights in the works of the Great Doctor of the Middle Ages, seems of secondary importance to the question of duties. There seems to prevail in his work, and, for that matter, in the works of most of the moralists of the Middle Ages, the conviction that if everyone performs his duties there will be no need of insisting upon rights. And so it is in the treatise On the Governance of Rulers.

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<sup>1</sup>The treatise has been translated into English by Father Phelan, Ph.D., of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. It is from this translation that I shall draw further upon the teachings of St. Thomas.

After discussing the nature of human society and showing that it is natural for men to live in society, St. Thomas passes on to show that it is necessary that there be government in society if things are to be ordered to the common good. It becomes apparent that the power of the king, then, arises out of the very society that he governs.<sup>1</sup> It is not from the agreement of men that they live in society, but from the very nature of men; and so, too, it is not by nature of a contract among men that government is established, but from the very need of order in society. But it is by reason of a contract that a certain king rules his people. In other words, a certain king is king because he is accepted as king by the common will of the nation he rules. How that acceptance on the part of the nation is expressed is beside the point. St. Thomas recognizes all forms of government from that which comes to office by election in the modern sense of the term, to absolute monarchy that comes to office by hereditary succession. The rightful one in each state is the one accepted by the people. The people's choice is God's choice; for as society, human society, arises from the nature

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<sup>1</sup> This doctrine is opposed alike to the theory of Divine Right, which held that the king received his authority directly from God without the consent of the people, and to the Social Contract of Rousseau, which held that the rights of government come from an entirely free contract between men.

of man, and government out of the nature of society, so the choice of a ruler or government by a human society (which may be a city, state or a nation in the modern sense), is rooted in the nature which God created when he made man.

After showing clearly that society and kingship have their origin in nature, St. Thomas concludes:<sup>1</sup>

"If, therefore, it is natural for men to live in the society of many, it is necessary that there exist among men some means by which the group may be governed. For where there are many men together, and each one is looking after his own interests, the group would be broken up and scattered unless there were also someone to take care of what appertains to the common weal. In like manner the body of a man, or any other animal, would disintegrate unless there were a general regulating force within the body which watches over the common good of all the members. With this in mind Solomon says (Prov. XI.14): "Where there is no governor, the people shall fall."

It is when he is dealing with the overthrow of tyranny that he states the principle that the rule of a king comes from the will of the people:<sup>2</sup>

"It would be dangerous both for the multitude and for their rulers if certain persons should attempt on their own private presumption, to kill their governors, even tyrants. For to dangers of this kind usually the wicked expose themselves more than the good. For the rule of a king, no less than that of a tyrant, is burdensome to the wicked, according to the words of Solomon: (Prov. XX.26):

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., pp.35 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., pp.58 ff.

"A wise king scattereth the wicked". Consequently, by the presumption of this kind, danger to the people from loss of their king would be more imminent than relief through removal of the tyrant.

Furthermore it rather seems, that to proceed against the cruelty of tyrants is an action to be undertaken, not through the private presumption of a few, but by public authority. First of all, if to provide itself with a king belong to the right of the multitude, it is not unjust that the king set up by that multitude be destroyed or his power restricted, if he tyrannically abuse the royal power. It must not be thought that such a multitude, is acting unfaithfully in deposing the tyrant, even though it had previously subjected itself to him in perpetuity; because he himself has deserved that the covenant with his subjects should not be kept, since, in ruling the multitude, he did not act faithfully as the office of a king demands."

It becomes obvious from these words that St. Thomas believed, founding his teachings on reason, and supporting them with reference to Scripture, that the right of choosing the governor or king lies with the multitude of the nation; but that, for the common good, it is the duty both of the multitude and the individual to obey the mandates of their king once he has been chosen. On the other hand, it is likewise apparent that he considered it within the rights of the multitude to overthrow their king should he become a tyrant. But it is the right of the multitude, not of a single individual or powerful group within the multitude acting without its consent. For such a clique to undertake such a

thing would be in the nature of sedition and entirely irregular because of the dangers to the multitude.

If may well be considered a fact that it was this same conviction that explains the fear of conspiracies which Professor Powicke finds among the people of medieval England. He writes:<sup>1</sup>

"The slowness of the emergence of our idea of the political as distinct from the ordinary criminal is due to the conservative attitude to law and order. Indeed, what we call the political criminal was long regarded as the worst offender of all..... In the precarious life of the Middle Ages unlicensed combination was regarded as the first step to revolution. This view justified the attack on the abuse, far more serious than is often imagined, known as livery and maintenance, especially in law courts. The deep-rooted distrust of combinations which we still feel is based on the experience of these times."

Was it this distrust of combinations that led Shakespeare to reveal the true seed of revolt against Richard, that ends in violence to anointed majesty, as springing to life among the nobles gathered at Ely House outside the death-chamber of John of Gaunt? One is prone to consider Bolingbroke as the leader of that revolt, but it is not Bolingbroke. His return from banishment with an army of followers is certainly in the nature of revolt against tyranny, and our first thought may be that his action is the spark which kindles the

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., pp.214 ff.

fires, but that is hardly the truth. Shakespeare reveals those fires as already burning in the hearts of the nobles; and it is Northumberland, the disgruntled bully who fans them to flame and turns the violent demands of Bolingbroke for his personal rights to national revolt. It is a combination of grumbling nobles led by Northumberland which is really responsible for the overthrow of Richard - that, and Richard's own failure to meet revolt with action instead of poetry.

The partisan quality of that revolt, the fact that it is the work of a few rather than the nation as a whole, becomes apparent in the meeting of those nobles which occurs immediately after the death of Gaunt and the departure of the King to his Irish Wars. Here we find them complaining of the exactions of Richard; but their complaints against his tyranny are shot through with the evidence that the real cause for complaint is Richard's failure to honour them above his favourites. Northumberland's seeming interest in national well-being rings with hollowness and insincerity. True to the guile he will later show in cowardly fashion in Henry IV, he urges the nobles on to express their annoyance with Richard and bids them speak with candour. He binds them by insinuation to secrecy - forms them in a combination:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Act II, Sc.1.

"Nay, speak thy mind: and let him ne'er speak more  
That speaks thy words against thee to thy harm."

Complaints flow fast, mixed with pity for the wronged Bolingbroke. Northumberland is shocked at Richard's vileness:

"His noble kinsman:- most degenerate king!";

but the truth peeps through, and we cannot help but feel that, were he in power and a favourite of this 'degenerate king', he would sing another tune:

"Now, afore God, 'tis shames such wrongs are borne  
In him, a royal prince, and many more  
Of noble blood in this declining land.  
The king is not himself, but basely led  
By flatterers; and what they will inform  
Merely in hate 'gainst any of us all,  
That will the king severely prosecute  
'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs."

He will show little concern for his heir when later, stirred up by the seditious spirit of his father and his uncle, Hotspur will be left to face the forces of the king at Shrewsbury without his father's support. Then, Northumberland will not have the support of the crowd, but now he feels certain that all will be well with revolt. Bolingbroke and many more besides have arrived in the kingdom, and, with the nobles disgruntled, all looks well. Because he is by nature a rebel, he comes to the front as the leader of the nation to turn Bolingbroke's true grievance to his purposes. In the uprising that follows, Bolingbroke may be the "name of the

war", but Northumberland is its overbearing leader, stirring up pell-mell and confusion with the help of Richard's own folly, and leading Bolingbroke on and on until he will find it necessary, in the public interests, to take the crown which Richard will offer him. Whatever we may think of Bolingbroke, we must admit that he speaks the truth when later to Warwick he pours out his heart's misery:<sup>1</sup>

"But which of you was by-  
 You, cousin Neville, as I may remember-  
 When Richard - with his eyes brimful of tears,  
 Then check'd and rated by Northumberland,-  
 Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy?  
 'Northumberland, thou ladder by the which  
 My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne',  
Though then, God knows, I had no such intent  
But that necessity so bowed the state,  
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss:-  
 'The time shall come', thus did he follow it  
 'The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head,  
 Shall break into corruption'.

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare considered the revolt against Richard as seditious, and Northumberland the leader of that sedition. Bolingbroke is merely the strong silent party come to demand his rights, but caught up in the grasp of forces which he is compelled to take over and master for the good of the nation. Before Flint Castle,<sup>2</sup> there is in him none of Northumberland's irreverence, and to

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<sup>1</sup> II Henry IV, Act III, Sc.1.

<sup>2</sup> Richard II, Act III, Sc.3.

the lament of the Duke of York,

"-alack the heavy day  
When such a sacred king should hide his head!"

he can only reply by urging him:

"Mistake not, uncle, further than you should."

Bolingbroke is aware of the dangerous position in which he has been placed by the total uprising that has taken up his cause, and even here at Flint Castle we catch something of the strength that later asserts itself against the disobedient spirit of Northumberland. He sends him to trumpet forth his presence to the Castle and the King within its walls, but the message he sends with Northumberland is respectful:

"Through brazen trumpet sent the breath of parley  
Into his ruin'd ears, and thus deliver:-  
Henry Bolingbroke  
On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand,  
And sends allegiance and true faith of heart  
To his most royal person."

It is Northumberland who adds insolence and irreverence to the message:

"The king of heaven forbid our lord the king  
Should so with civil and uncivil arms  
Be rushed upon! Thy thrice-noble cousin  
Harry Bolingbroke doth humbly kiss your hand;  
And by the honourable tomb he swears  
That stands upon your royal grandsire's bones  
And by the royalties of both your bloods,-  
Currents that spring from one most gracious head.-  
.....  
His coming hither hath no further scope  
Than for his lineal royalties, and to beg  
Enfranchisement immediate on his knees."

There is certainly insolence here that can best be caught by reading the speech aloud in keeping with the spirit expressed by his comment immediately afterwards:

"Sorrow and grief of heart  
Makes him speak fondly like a frantic man."

In the Abdication Scene<sup>1</sup> it is the same thing.

Bolingbroke has little to say. Indeed he seems brooding in the midst of the council which has come to witness Richard's bestowal of the crown on him. It is Northumberland who does most of the talking, and in that talking he shows himself the bully he is. He would have the dethroned Richard read a catalogue of his crimes; and, when Northumberland's urging has brought tears to the eyes of Richard, it is Bolingbroke who puts an end to the baiting. It is then that Northumberland shows his hand and the dark quality of the deed that is being perpetrated upon the nation. He argues the point with Bolingbroke, and shows the need for Richard's confession:

"The commons will not, then, be satisfied."

The commons must be satisfied; and we catch the idea that the commons are having the wool pulled over their eyes: this is not according to the will of the multitude, but to the machinations of a clique. The protest of the Bishop of

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<sup>1</sup>Act IV, Sc.1.

Carlisle sounds the sane will of the nation.

It is Richard, now dethroned and on his way to Pomfret, who passes judgment on this crime committed against the nation; and the setting in which it is cast lends it power and gains our sympathy. Richard is parting with his Queen. There is something of the awfulness of the cry of the Jews, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children", in Northumberland's last insolence:<sup>1</sup>

"My guilt be upon my head, and there an end.  
Take leave, and part; for you must part forthwith."

Richard's reply is soul-stirring and final:

"Doubly divorced! - Bad men, you violate  
A twofold marriage,- 'twixt my crown and me,  
And then betwixt me and my married wife.-  
Let me unkiss the oath 'twixt thee and me;  
And yet not so, for with a kiss 'twas made.-  
Part us, Northumberland;....."

The revolution has been seditious, as St. Thomas would call it, and the clique of men who have carried it through have been 'bad men'. Richard himself has had a part in it, for he has let slide the opportunity, all too apparent in the loyalty of men like York who spoke the feelings of the nation: he has failed to act with courage as it behooves a monarch to do. That he had been unjust there can be no doubt; but, from the time when returning from the sea he has "stood

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<sup>1</sup>  
Act V, Sc.1.

upon his England once again", his genuine love of his native land has been built up by the author. Our sympathy has gone out to him, - and our annoyance that he should have given himself over to poetic mouthings instead of kingly action.

He has been a likeable man but a poor king. He has isolated his subjects and played with his favourites, seeking his pleasure. He has been a capricious king, not a bad or wicked one. His very tyrannies have been the result of caprice, not of deep-seated malice; and his greatest offence, greater even than the Machiavellian practice in the death of Thomas of Gloucester, has been the betrayal of the nation into the hands of wicked men. His caprice has given them excuse to revolt and he has not met the revolt with courage.

But that is not to justify the revolt. Bolingbroke, whom it has brought to power, understands that better than any of his followers. When word is brought to him of Richard's death, he feels the shadow of sin fall over his life and he cries out:

"Exton, I thank thee not; for thou hast wrought  
A deed of slander, with thy fatal hand,  
Upon my head and all this famous land."<sup>1</sup>

But wherein has the revolution been unjust? Has not King Richard been a tyrant? Has not the will of the nation

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<sup>1</sup>Richard II, Act V, Sc.6.

acquiesced in his dethronement? Has not the mob in scorn scattered dust upon his head as he passed through London streets? And have they not cried out: "God bless thee, Bolingbroke"? Has not the choice of the multitude of the nation dethroned the tyrant Richard and placed King Henry in his place? Richard has been a tyrant only in caprice. The fact that Shakespeare believed that a sin has been committed in dethroning him appears beyond question from his treatment of all that followed in the reign of Henry IV. And the sin was not merely in the murder of Richard, direful as that sin is depicted. Sin haunts the crowned Bolingbroke down to the day of his death, sin punished in the nation with civil war, which in spite of all Henry's efforts to forestall it, "daubs the thirsty entrance" of England's soil "with her own children's blood".<sup>1</sup> On his deathbed Henry IV may be mindful of the murder of Richard, but it is not of that he speaks. That had followed on his usurpation, but he had no part in it, and had not desired it. The thought that plagues his conscience is of a crime against the nation in which he had been forced to play a part.

"How I came by the crown, O God forgive:  
And grant it may with thee in true peace live!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I Henry IV, Act I, Sc.1.

<sup>2</sup>II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

The nature of the sin is found clearly explained in the writings of St. Thomas On the Governance of Rulers.

There we find:

"Indeed, if there be not an excess of tyranny it is more expedient to tolerate for a while the milder tyranny than, by acting against the tyrant, to be involved in many perils which are more grievous than the tyranny itself. . . . . Even if one should be able to prevail against the tyrant, from this fact itself very grave dissensions among the people very frequently ensue: the multitude may be broken up by factions either during their revolt against the tyrant, or, concerning the organization of the government, after the tyrant has been overthrown. It also happens sometimes, while the multitude is driving out the tyrant by the help of some man, he, having received the power, seizes the tyranny, and fearing to suffer from another what he did to his predecessor, oppresses his subjects with a more grievous slavery. For this is wont to happen in tyranny, namely that the second becomes more grievous than the one preceding, inas much as, without abandoning the previous oppression, he himself thinks up fresh ones from the malice of his heart. . . ."1

In the revolt against the tyranny of Richard, Bolingbroke had not been the real leader. The real leader had been Northumberland, who in the badness of his heart hoped to make of Bolingbroke the tool of selfish ambition. He and some around him, notably Worcester his brother, fit perfectly the description of the typical revolutionship described by St. Thomas. They are bad men, with no national feelings and only

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.56.

selfish aims; and I am certain that Shakespeare believed England happy in the fact that the leader whom these bad men had planned to set up as their puppet turned out to be a strong and conscientious ruler. As Shakespeare depicts him, he is one conscious of his participation in a crime against the good order and peace of the nation, but determined to stand between her and the evils these bad men would inflict upon her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PENALTY OF SEDITION

As Shakespeare depicts him, the man who has received from Richard the Crown of England, is in many respects a great and good man. Hotspur in his rage may speak of him as 'this ingrate and canker'd Bolingbroke', 'this vile politician';<sup>1</sup> and while we cannot agree with the former, we are inclined to accept the latter. In spite of this, we cannot fail to recognize that he is a good man and in many respects a great king. His own description of his youth brings out clearly an almost vile policy to gain the esteem of the public, a vanity not unlike that of Hotspur:

"Had I so lavish of my presence been,  
So common hackney'd in the eyes of men,  
So stale and cheap to vulgar company,-  
Opinion, that did help me to the crown,  
Had still kept loyal to possession  
And left me in reputeless banishment,  
A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.  
By being seldom seen, I could not stir  
But, like a comet, I was wonder'd at;  
That men would tell their children, 'This is he';  
Others would say, 'Where, which is Bolingbroke?'  
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven

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<sup>1</sup> I Henry IV, Act I, Sc.3.

And drest myself in such humility  
 That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,  
 Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,  
 Even in the presence of the crowned king."<sup>1</sup>

But in spite of this, we cannot deny that he thinks and acts wisely and well, with the interests of the kingdom at heart. In its hour of crisis, when villains are striving for power, England has reason to rejoice that it is he who takes over the powers of Majesty.

But a shadow has fallen over his life. It hangs over him in the Abdication Scene of Richard II, while he sits brooding in the midst of the council, saying little, letting Northumberland hold the floor. It falls on him and darkens his life forever, when he hears Exton's announcement of the murder of Richard. He is aware of sin in which he has participated, the sin of sedition, and the sin of regicide; and though he has really had no part in the one and has not desired it, he knows that he has been an accomplice at least in the other. True, Richard's folly has joined with the spirit of sedition to bow the state until Bolingbroke and greatness 'have been compelled to kiss'. In this thought of necessity, Henry might find salve for his conscience - but not its cure. In him the crown seems 'but as an honour snatcht with boisterous hand'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I Henry IV, Act III, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

It seems to him, to his former accomplices, and (he thinks) to the nation as a whole, as if he holds a doubtful title to the crown. And yet he must go on; for he alone can stem the tide of evil set abroad within the state. He must give good government to England and secure the peace, not only in his own time, but in the future as well, when his son will succeed him on the throne.

Now, something of this shadow of doubt which darkens his life falls upon the audience, especially a modern audience. We sympathize with him in his struggles with the rebels, but we feel somehow a consciousness of doubt with regard to his title. He is a usurper, a holder of stolen goods; and when he comes to hand over to his son the reins of government, the thought arises (I have found it particularly in the minds of undergraduates), how can this stolen property be inherited justly by Prince Hal?

Hal has no doubt in his mind with regard to his right and duty in the matter:<sup>1</sup>

"My gracious liege,  
You won it, wore it, gave it me,  
Then plain and right must my possession be:  
Which I with more than a common pain  
'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain."

Henry IV himself on his deathbed has no doubt about the matter

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<sup>1</sup>II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

either. All his life the shadow has bothered him in his own thoughts; and similar thoughts in the rebels have brought confusion and disorder to his whole reign. But he dies in peace and the shadow passes from the throne:<sup>1</sup>

"God knows, my son,  
 By what by-paths and indirect crookt ways  
 I met this crown; and I myself know well  
 How troublesome it sat upon my head:  
 To thee it shall descend with better quiet,  
 Better opinion, better confirmation;  
 For all the soil of the achievement goes  
 With me into the earth. It seem'd in me  
 But as an honour snatcht with boisterous hand;  
 And I had many living to upbraid  
 My gain of it by their assistance;  
 Which daily grew to quarrel and to bloodshed,  
 Wounding supposed peace; all these bold fears  
 Thou see'st with peril I have answered;  
 For all my reign hath been but as a scene  
 Acting that argument: and now my death  
 Changes the mode; for what in me was purchased,  
 Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort;  
 So thou the garland wear'st successively.  
 .....  
 How I came by the crown, O God forgive:  
 And grant it may with thee in true peace live!"

Thus does Henry sum up his own right to the throne and the right of his son to succeed him, and I am convinced that it is a summation that was acceptable to Shakespeare's first audiences.

The problem is, of course, that of the right of a usurper to the obedience and loyalty of his subjects, and is

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid.

bound up inextricably with the medieval ideas of the right of royal succession, which, in turn, arise out of the medieval theory of the royal power itself. Now, the modern mind is apt to think of royal succession as much the same as that by which a son inherits the wealth of his father; but such was not the thought of the men of the Middle Ages. True, the medieval prince generally, almost always, succeeded to the throne of his father; but he did so only by the will of the people. The medieval mind never lost sight of that principle, in spite of the growing tendency on the part of kings to consider that it was their right to bequeath their thrones to their sons, and in spite also of the desire of the people that the royal marriage would give them an heir to the throne: that was the surest way to avoid trouble on the death of a king. But before the royal heir ascended the throne he found himself compelled, in the ceremony of his coronation, to admit that he received his powers, not from his father, but from the people he was to govern.

Thus, in L.G. Wickham's translation of Percy Ernst Schramm's A History of the English Coronations, we read:<sup>1</sup>

"'Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!' The doctrine underlying this famous proclamation of the French herald is that the successor to the

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford, 1937, p.1.

throne enters upon his office at the moment of his predecessor's death, and it has been summed up in the epigram that the king never dies. The King is always there; but from time to time, a herald proclaims that his name has been changed.

This legal doctrine has been of importance especially in France; but it has by no means been confined to that country. It was based upon the assumption that before the King's death there was no doubt at all who the successor to the throne was to be. This was worked out, however, but slowly, and only during the Middle Ages. The maxim that the King never dies is primarily a consequence of absolutism, a form of government adopted in Europe at the close of the medieval period. But even in France it conflicted with other maxims, and it had to be accommodated with them somehow. These maxims were that, if the successor is to become King in the fullest sense, he must first be inaugurated into the government by legal and ecclesiastical rites."

From this starting point, Schramm launches out into a complete and penetrating treatment of the rise of hereditary right to the throne, and the struggle of the people, through their parliaments, to restrict it. He shows clearly that, over the centuries, the people of the Middle Ages looked for their kings in the direct line of the blood royal, but that, at the same time, parliamentary powers were ever more insistent upon their right to give or not to give their approval to such succession. He writes:<sup>1</sup>

"Doubt cast upon hereditary right, and the mutability of Acts of Parliament - such is the note of insecurity sounded by the age of the Wars of the

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.175.

Roses, when might and not right decided the inheritance of the crown.

It would be superfluous to pursue the confused course of events in the middle of the fifteenth century and expatiate in detail on the manner in which, by fair legal means or foul, the situation was eventually legalized. Here we can but look at the result. Once more the word 'election' is heard, and the advantage lies with Parliament. There is therefore nothing surprising in the decision taken by Parliament, in 1485, when, by the assent of the Lords and at the request of the Commons, the inheritance of the crown of England, &c, was vested in Henry VII, 'and the heirs of his body forever, and in none other'. The new King was consequently designated at his coronation not only as the 'rightful and undoubted inheritor by the laws of God and man, to the crown of England' but as 'elected, chosen and required by all three estates of this same land'."

Shakespeare, as we might expect, does not enter into a discussion of Henry's right to the crown, but the dramatic impression conveyed is much the same as that which Schramm quotes from G. Lapsley's The Parliamentary Title of Henry IV, wherein he says that:<sup>1</sup>

"Henry IV made the validity of a parliamentary title indispensable to royalty."

In Shakespeare's Richard II, the parliament which elects Henry to the throne is certainly a partisan one, made up of his supporters and including only a sprinkling of his opponents, notably the Bishop of Carlisle; but the fact remains that the impression conveyed is that the people as a whole accept its

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<sup>1</sup>Op.cit., p.173.

acts. Duped and misguided they may be, but they do accept Bolingbroke for their King and hail him in London streets over Richard, crying out, "God save thee, Bolingbroke!"<sup>1</sup> while they heap abuse upon Richard. Now, that London mob is certainly not the 'multitude of the nation', but it speaks for the nation as it always did in the Middle Ages. Such too is the dramatic effect. The nation has chosen Henry for its King; and, by whatever "by-paths and indirect crookt ways (he may have) met this crown", he recognizes his right and accepts the duty which it imposes upon him. All else is seeming and the mere shadow of usurpation to plague him with the natural results of violence done to anointed majesty.

Such is Henry's firm conviction; and, beyond doubt, it must have been the easily accepted conviction of Shakespeare's first audiences, for it agrees perfectly with the theory of sovereignty generally accepted in the Middle Ages, so well expressed by St. Thomas, and still the political creed of sixteenth century England: that the king rules by the will of the people, and that, once they have given their consent, the people must obey him. In discussing the rights of kings to this obedience, even though they be usurpers, St. Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> Richard II, Act V, Sc.2.

tells us<sup>1</sup> that the people have, without doubt, the right to resist a usurper, but that once they have accepted him as their king, they are bound in conscience to obey him so long as he fulfils his duties. Of course, if he tyrannize over the people, the multitude of the nation has a perfect right to take back the allegiance they swore to him, for he has violated the pact that made him king; but till that happens, he is king in the full sense of the term.

Strangely enough, it is to this latter principle that the rebels appeal when they seek the support of the Commons against this puppet who has determined to be their master. His Grace of York 'who turns insurrection to religion' maintains to Westmoreland that he is no seditionist, but one fighting in the interests of the commonwealth against a king whose rule has laid upon it insupportable burdens. He has come:<sup>2</sup>

"To diet rank minds sick of happiness,  
And purge the obstructions which begin to stop  
Our very veins of life."

But that is not the motive to which Worcester and Northumberland

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<sup>1</sup> Qui per violentium dominium surripit no efficitur vere praelatus vel dominus; et ideo cum facultas adest, potest aliquis tale dominium repellere: nisi forte postmodum dominus verus effectus sit per concensum subditorum, vel per auctoritatem superioris. (II Sent., D.XLIV, Q.II, a.2.)

<sup>2</sup> II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.1.

draw Hotspur's attention at the beginning of the revolt. It is rather to one which found little favour with the men of the Middle Ages: the right of a king to name his own successor independently of the will of the people - Richard had named Mortimer as his successor. Worcester gives direction to Hotspur's ranting that the King has trembled at the name of Mortimer, with:<sup>1</sup>

"I cannot blame him: was not he proclaimed  
By Richard that is dead the next of blood?";

and Hotspur accepts the lead with alacrity:

"But, soft, I pray you; did King Richard then  
Proclaim my brother Edmund Mortimer  
Heir to the crown?"

It is thus that civil war is renewed in the kingdom: with a false appeal to a true principle, and a true appeal to a false one. Their cause is a rotten one and Worcester knows it:<sup>2</sup>

"But yet I would your father had been here.  
The quality and hair of our attempt  
Brooks no division: it will be thought  
By some, that know not why he is away,  
That wisdom, loyalty, and mere dislike  
Of our proceedings, kept the earl from hence:  
And think how such an apprehension  
May turn the tide of fearful faction,  
And breed a kind of question in our cause;  
For well you know, we of the offering side  
Must keep aloof from strict arbitrement,  
And stop all sight-holes, every loop from whence  
The eye of reason may pry in upon us:"

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<sup>1</sup>I Henry IV., Act I, Sc.3.

<sup>2</sup>I Henry IV., Act IV, Sc.1.

Worcester knows that Henry IV is the rightful King, and candidly admits the seditious quality of their revolt.

Here, then, are the two forces that meet in conflict in both Parts of Henry IV: on the one hand, the rightful King, and on the other, the same malignant, self-seeking nobles who violated anointed majesty in Richard II and are now attempting to violate it again in Henry IV. But Henry is no Richard. His reply to them is action, not words. He knows his duty and performs it. He is wide awake to their tactics and shows himself a thorough-going man of action. He defeats them at Shrewsbury and from there on their power dissolves in spite of the mighty preparations which thunder through the Second Part. Henry has succeeded where Richard failed. He has secured the peace of England.

Or has he? In the heat of Shrewsbury and the preparations that lead up to it, he has little time for the shadow that darkens his life, the sense of sin committed and to be atoned for. Indeed, his very activity on behalf of England's peace and freedom from sedition may seem to him something in the nature of atonement for the crime he has committed against her: he is making restitution by overthrowing the forces of disorder. Certainly the idea of atonement mingles with his thoughts, for the desire of going on a crusade to the

Holy Land - a common mode of kingly penance - is never entirely absent from his mind. True, policy leads him to think of busying "giddy minds with foreign quarrel".<sup>1</sup> But, if that be his only thought, why must he go so far afield? France lies just across the Channel and Hal will find it more to his liking. But, while rebels range abroad through the land, there is no time for concentrated thoughts on either atonement or the crusade. They must be shoved aside for more peaceful times, and when those times come, sickness and a yet more pressing necessity hold his attention.

Throughout the Second Part, interest in the rebels wanes. Hotspur is dead and even the subtle Worcester has passed from the scene. Mowbray and the Archbishop are feeble substitutes, and, although they seem to be supported by greater numbers, they never constitute a real threat. They succumb to Lancaster's trickery without a blow being struck, and their confederates in other parts of the land are dismissed from the scene with nothing more than a quiet report of their overthrow. A struggle and, in a sense, a rebellion of another sort holds the stage.

Like the rebellion of Hotspur it is introduced into the play in the opening scene of the First Part when Henry IV

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<sup>1</sup> II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

says:

"Yea, there thou makest me sad and makest me sin  
 In envy that my Lord Northumberland  
 Should be the father to so blest a son,-  
 .....  
 Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,  
 See riot and dishonour stain the brow  
 Of my young Harry."

It gains momentum, too, just as the rebellion of Hotspur is about to clash with the forces of the King. In that first meeting between Bolingbroke and his son, which takes place just before the departure to meet the rebels, Henry strikes the keynote of the struggle which will become the centre of interest in the Second Part. His words are significant, for they express a fear that is part of the shadow over his life:<sup>1</sup>

"I know not whether God will have it so,  
 For some displeasing service I have done,  
 That, in his secret doom, out of my blood  
 He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me;  
 But thou dost, in thy passages of life,  
 Make me believe that thou art only markt  
 For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven  
 To punish my mistreadings."

These words may, in a sense, be considered as the prologue to the King's first battle against what seems to him the very genius of sedition of which both Hotspur and Hal are merely the satellites, and Hal, the more dangerous. Hotspur is one he can meet in battle and overthrow; but Hal is his wayward

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<sup>1</sup>I Henry IV, Act III, Sc.2.

son, whose waywardness arms cannot touch nor discipline control. Henry IV sees it as something which will bring peril to the state chiefly after he himself is dead and no longer able to combat it; and he has a half-superstitious fear that it comes as retribution for the sins he has committed.

In that first battle with this malignant power, then, Henry resorts to the only method he knows to reach his foe. He scalds Hal with hot and bitter speech, recalling the follies of Richard, his wild life and disorderly conduct, and the degradation into which he dragged majesty while he "enfeoft himself to popularity". He storms on to show that Hal is another Richard degrading himself "with vile participation", and reaches a pitch of anger and misery when, after telling of the revolt of Hotspur and his allies, he cries out:<sup>1</sup>

"But wherefore do I tell these news to thee?  
 Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,  
 Which art my near'st and my dearest enemy?  
 Thou that art like enough, - through vassal fear,  
 Base inclination and the start of spleen-  
 To fight against me under Percy's pay,  
 To dog his heels, and court'sy at his frowns,  
 To show how much thou art degenerate."

And as with Hotspur, so here he wins the first battle of the war. He feels that he has won when he hears Hal's firm reply, and declares his victory with:

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid.

"A hundred thousand rebels die in this:-  
Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein."

But that is only the first skirmish. It carries him through the battle of Shrewsbury and leaves him with a feeling that Sedition has lost a much more important agent than Hotspur in the fighting of that day. In the aftermath of Shrewsbury he discovers, or thinks he discovers, that he has been wrong: he thinks Hal has returned to the old waywardness. He sees only the carefully guarded externals of Hal's life and fails to understand, even if he may suspect, the tremendous struggle that is going on within the soul of the young Prince. He can only watch and wait and fear; and one comes more and more to the conclusion that it is this watching and waiting and fearing that is carrying him to his grave. Is it not this to which he refers in the night, as he stands looking out over the roofs of the sleeping town, himself sleepless, when he says to Warwick:<sup>1</sup>

"Then you perceive the body of our kingdom  
How foul it is; what rank diseases grow,  
And with what danger near the heart of it."

While others take up the campaign against the rebels, he is fretful and uneasy about Hal. He passes from hope to fear and back again. Hal has been his preoccupation and he has

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<sup>1</sup>II Henry IV, Act III, Sc.1.

come to a better understanding of his character:<sup>1</sup>

" he is gracious, if he be observed:  
 He hath a tear for pity, and a hand  
 Open as day for melting charity:  
 Yet, notwithstanding, being incensed he's flint;  
 As humorous as winter, and as sudden  
 As flaws congealed in the spring of day."

Obviously he is speaking only of the Hal that we have met ourselves in the Second Part, the Hal that is morose and whimsical as he struggles with his weakness and is ashamed to show his sorrow at the sickness of his father. Henry is slowly getting to know his son, but he has not yet come to a full appreciation of his character; and, when he hears that he is dining again "in London with Poins and other his continual followers", he falls back into the old despair:<sup>2</sup>

"Most subject is the fattest soil to weeds;  
 And he, the noble image of my youth,  
 Is overspread with them: therefore my grief  
 Stretches itself beyond the hour of death:  
 The blood weeps from my heart, when I do shape,  
 In forms imaginary th' unguided days  
 And rotten times that you shall look upon  
 When I am sleeping with my ancestors."

These are the thoughts that fill the King's mind with anxiety, and this is the real conflict of the Second Part of Henry IV, the conflict of majesty with the spirit of sedition. The activities of the rebels have almost ceased to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Act IV, Sc.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

be of any importance to either Henry or to Shakespeare. Into the midst of this other conflict, which seems to increase in violence as the King feels death approaching, the announcements that Glendower is dead, and the Archbishop and his followers taken, and Northumberland "by the shrieve of Yorkshire, overthrown", come like the reports of far off, almost forgotten things, and the King sinks down in a faint, as if he is aware that tangible enemies are gone from him and that he is left to face unprepared, one that eludes his grasp.

He awakes from the faint to find the crown gone from his pillow and to hear that Hal has been left alone with him and it: here at last elusive sedition has become real and tangible; Hal has seized the crown! He calls him to him and launches out at him with a fury he never showed to any of his other enemies, because it is unreasoning. In that dreadful passion, wherein he casts aside all policy, utter simplicity takes hold of both father and son. Henry lays bare the thoughts that have been devouring him, thoughts which he has only hinted at before;<sup>1</sup> and Hal lays bare his soul, tearing from it the mask of unconcern which fear of imputations of hypocrisy has led him to wear.<sup>2</sup> The scene is one of revelation.

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<sup>1</sup>I Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

<sup>2</sup>II Henry IV, Act II. Sc.2.

understanding, reconciliation, and, in the end, of peace. Henry's battle with the force that made him King and disrupted the nation is finished, and he passes from the scene with the praise of God upon his lips and satisfied that his atonement is complete:<sup>1</sup>

"Laud be to God! even there my life must end.  
It hath been prophesied to me many years,  
I should not die but in Jerusalem;  
Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land:-  
But bear me to that chamber; there I'll lie;  
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die."

Here, one might have expected that Shakespeare would have finished play. Why did he not? Why does he give a whole act of it, not to the reign of Henry IV, but to that of his son? Many answers might be and have been given to that question. To me there seems but one. Shakespeare's theme, in the three plays which we have been considering, has been not merely the History of Richard II and the History of Henry IV, but the evils of sedition and the efforts of a good king to overcome them, not only in the present of his own reign but in the future of that of his son. Out of that sedition he has shown the rise of a new dynasty of kings. Majesty, the Majesty of England in conquest with the forces of disorder, that has been his theme; and it is not complete without a manifestation of the victory

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<sup>1</sup>II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.

of Hal over the disorderly forces within himself, and the glad acclaim of the nation as he ascends the throne.

The Fifth Act achieves this glorious end. Justice shines forth in the young King Hal when he advances the Lord Chief Justice<sup>1</sup>, making him his counsellor and adviser; strength of character that is wise, and firm, yet benevolent, when he rejects Falstaff after providing for his old age. It is thus that the conflict which rages through the two Parts of Henry IV is brought to an end - conflict with the body of sedition, in Act the Fourth, with the announcement of the overthrow of the rebels; conflict with its soul, in Act the Fifth, with the victory of Hal over himself, and the acclaim of the nation.

But what has become of the search for the beginnings of sedition and disorder and the corruption of society, which I have claimed as the inspiration of Shakespeare's English histories? There is nothing of the spirit of sedition in Henry V. It is but a sequel to Henry IV, recounting the glorious deeds of Henry V, his triumphs over the French and the hearts of his subjects. Must I then abandon my thesis?

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<sup>1</sup>  
II Henry IV, Act V, Sc.2.

I see no reason for doing so. Mortimer's presence in the first Part of Henry VI with his tale of Richard II's fall and Bolingbroke's rise to power, of the Percie's revolt and his own imprisonment, creates the impression of a relationship with Henry IV too close to be explained away by the suggestion of chance search in the chronicles on Shakespeare's part. How, then, may we account for the fact that he ends these histories on a note of triumph in Henry's marriage with the Princess Kate? The answer to that question is found, I think, in the Epilogue to Henry V:

"Thus far, with rough unable pen,  
 Our bending author hath pursued the story;  
 In little room confining mighty men,  
 Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.  
 Small time, but in that small, most greatly liv'd  
 This star of England: fortune made his sword;  
 By which the world's best garden he achieved,  
 And of it left his son imperial lord.  
 Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd king  
 Of France and England, did this king succeed;  
 Whose state so many had the managing,  
 That they lost France, and made his England bleed:  
 Which oft our stage hath shown; and for their sake,  
 In your fair minds let this acceptance take."

As he has been pursuing the original theme, Shakespeare has become more and more interested in the creation of Prince Hal. The artist is stronger in him than the thinker, and, as his interest in Hal grows, his interest in the problem of sedition wanes. But he does not entirely lose sight of it.

He recalls it to the mind of the audience by means of a chorus after closing Henry V in triumph. He has simply grown tired of the theme. He speaks of himself as 'our bending author' and recalls to his hearers the fact that the rest of the story has been often told before.

Why will he not provide the nexus between Hal's triumph and the beginning of those other plays 'which oft our stage hath shown'? Any answer to that question must be in the nature of conjecture. Perhaps he cannot see the way clearly before him. Perhaps he sees in the early death of glorious King Hal an act of divine judgment on the nation for the sin it committed when it violated the Majesty of Richard;; and because he feels as Grierson does, that he has no business making such a theme the subject of a play, he decides to leave it alone. I am under the impression, however, that the original inspiration had simply grown cold within him, and that he felt no inclination to continue.

## CHAPTER IX

### REVOLUTION JUSTIFIED

There is scarcely any phase of life that is not of interest to Shakespeare. Indeed, it would be a difficult task to point out any one phase of it that is more interesting to him than any other. Love, and hate, and ambition, certainly are sources of unfailing interest in his plays; but most often they are but elements in the unfolding of larger schemes, forces that enter into and shape the life, not only of individuals, but of human society. His heroes and heroines are interesting in themselves, but they are of even greater interest in their effects upon the lives of others, the society in which they move and have their being. Interest centres naturally upon them, but it is the supreme achievement of Shakespeare's art that they are in no sense isolated beings. They are but members of the human family and their success or failure reaches out and leaves its mark upon it. His interest is not so much with underlings, although he does not overlook them, as it is with the great ones, princes and kings and leaders, who pass their lives, not in

the shades of obscurity, but in the full flush of prominence where their triumphs and failures stand out clearly to the eyes of men and touch their lives.

The passions and appetites, the loves and hates and ambitions, the strength and weakness of his people, therefore, become but the elements or causes that go together in the fabrication of larger schemes, the portrayal of composite pictures of human society. It may be that he fixes his attention on passion in the abstract, as is the case with Antony and Cleopatra; but there, a universality rises out of the concrete presentation of the individual lives that are his medium, and we feel that his theme touches a wider circle of humanity, wider even than the Roman Empire itself which rises out of the downfall of the hero and heroine. But generally speaking, Shakespeare remains in the world of concrete and practical problems, which he presents with telling realism because he never loses sight of the abstract and universal principles which lie beneath and control the concrete world he is presenting.

Now, among these concrete and practical problems of life, that of revolution is far from being an unimportant one. Revolution was in the air when he was writing and was one of his favourite themes. In the English Histories, as I have shown, he chose to dwell on the evils that follow in the wake

of sedition. In Hamlet he reveals the other side of the picture: the evils that rush in upon the state when true majesty bows beneath a tyrant and fails to overthrow him. Although in his English Histories Shakespeare reveals himself as a lover of peace and order, he shows clearly in Hamlet that he was no craven pacifist preferring seeming peace and the semblance of order under a genuine tyrant, to the horrors of civil war. Whether or not there was any connection between this turn of his mind and the field-day that Cecil and Topcliff were enjoying during the last days of the reign of Elizabeth, we can never hope to know for certain. The fact is that these were the days when his mind was dwelling on Hamlet and his failure to act as the true Prince of Denmark in the overthrow of the tyrant Claudius. It must also be conceded a fact that Hamlet was not long from his pen when Chettle found reason to chide him for silence when all the bards of England were singing the praises of the deceased Queen. But these thoughts are merely asides and have no importance in the interpretation of his play.

Of all the plays of Shakespeare, there is none that has called forth so much critical comment and conjecture as Hamlet. From this we have reason to conclude that it above all others, except, of course, Lear - before that most men

sink down in amazed befuddlement - is a play filled with perplexing problems. His madness, melancholy or neurosis, his procrastination and moral cowardice, his love for his parents, his love for Ophelia and so on, these phases of the play have used up the energies of the critics and the paper and ink of the printers. And with what results? I have often wondered if it would be possible to find one of our major critics who is thoroughly convinced that his pet explanation of Hamlet's procrastination is the true one. Dogmatizing is, of course, absurd in matters of this sort; but there are many degrees of certitude between conjecture and dogma; and I am sure that if there had not been something wrong with our approach to the subject, we should have achieved something more solid than the eclectic maze that now involves the critics in endless dispute. One cannot come away from the study of these works of learned and intelligent men without the feeling that they have failed to get at the heart of the mystery.

Now, in spite of what Professor Grierson says on the subject,<sup>1</sup> I am convinced that Shakespeare most certainly did know what was the matter with Hamlet; and the reason for his failure in life is there for us to find if we look for it

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Grierson writes: "Neither Hamlet nor Shakespeare (if I may say so) quite understands what has gone wrong." Cross Currents, p.115.

in the right place. I am convinced that the manner of our approach to the problem has been wrong. We have been studying phases of the play without studying the play. We have been devoting our attention to problems in the play without examining the 'argument'. Some will say, of course, that the uncertainty of such study is half the charm of the play, but that is very much like maintaining that doubt is the object of the intellect, and that half the fun of life is in not being sure what it is all about. The presence of a unifying theme is obvious enough in the unity of the play. If we wish to understand the various elements that are so united, we must look for the unifying principle or theme, or as Shakespeare would call it, the 'argument'.<sup>1</sup> To ignore that and centre our attention on any one of the elements or phases of the play, would be much like trying to discover the cause of a boil on a man's chin without bothering to examine the chin and the health of the man whose chin it happens to be.

On looking back over several years in which Hamlet and his problems have been major preoccupations with me, curiously enough I find that criticism of this sort has led me to all the conclusions that I am about to set down: I have

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<sup>1</sup>"For all my reign hath been but as a scene  
Acting that argument." (II Henry IV, Act IV, Sc.4.)

never been satisfied with the explanations given by the critics for the presence of Fortinbras in the play; and I have found simply unacceptable the often repeated contention that Hamlet sinks under a burden too heavy to bear. If Hamlet's burden is too great for him, Shakespeare has violated one of the first principles of his tragedy: that the hero is responsible for his failure. If Hamlet is utterly incapable of carrying his burden, then the tragedy is not merely pathetic but horrible - which it is not. Then, to say that Fortinbras is set in the play as a foil to Hamlet, that he brings action to the play or that he is brought in to finish it with a flourish, or that he constitutes a framework for the drama, any of these or all of them together seem to me an indictment of Shakespeare's art. Fortinbras, under those circumstances, is a mere appendage jarring to the unity of the play. We hear of him and forget him. Then he marches across Denmark and he marches back again. He provokes Hamlet to sobering reflection, and he returns to bury him. Under those conditions he may give symmetry to the play but it is a forced symmetry, and his final entrance borders, at least, on anticlimax. And that is not the dramatic impression of his part.

Dissatisfaction begets dissatisfaction, and I found myself questioning another almost axiomatic contention with

regard to the character of Hamlet: that he is a moral coward. What is a moral coward? Browning might have considered a brigand without the courage to stab his victim, a moral coward. But would Shakespeare have done so? Hamlet seems scrupulous about murder and many other forms of vice. He admits that "conscience doth make cowards of us all".<sup>1</sup> But is it real cowardice to follow one's conscience when one's whole being is straining to violate it? Are not Hamlet's sudden flashes of anger simply nature running away with an ordinarily strong will in a moment of weakness?

Questions of this sort and a feeling of helplessness with regard to them made me turn away from him to the society around him. It is there I think that we shall find the beginning of Hamlet's trouble and the source of the burden that he is called upon to carry. It is in Hamlet himself that we shall find the cause of his failure to carry that burden.

As we turn our attention on the society which Shakespeare presents as the background of the play, one thing becomes apparent: its moral depravity. But whence comes that moral depravity? If we examine the impressions we receive as the play unfolds itself, we shall find that whatever the original cause of it may have been, Claudius seems now its fountain-

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, Sc.1.

head. Many have noticed the disease imagery that is associated with him, but it is not only disease imagery that conveys the impression of his baneful influence. He is "a canker"<sup>1</sup> on the body politic, "a mildewed ear blasting his wholesome brother",<sup>2</sup> but he is also "a cut-purse of the empire and the rule".<sup>3</sup> He is a murderer and a villain and, in short, a menace to society.

From the very beginning of the play there is something malignant vaguely sensed. The Ghost casts its spell over the whole opening and prepares us for something dire and unnatural. In the first court scene, the King's speech begets a vague suspicion of gloss which Hamlet's attitude helps to augment. What that gloss hides, we cannot say. Indeed, we are hardly aware of it at all, except that our sixth sense has caught it and has prepared us for Hamlet's further suggestion of something rotten in the state when he informs us of the incestuous marriage. Even his language conveys something of moral taint to our nostrils:<sup>4</sup>

"Fie on't! O, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.

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<sup>1</sup> Act V, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> Act III, Sc.3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Act I, Sc.2.

.....  
 O, most wicked speed, to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
 It is not nor it cannot come to good:  
 But break, my heart,-for I must hold my tongue!"

Horatio's story of the Ghost simply adds to the general feeling and we are fully prepared to agree with Hamlet when he cries out at the end:

"foul deeds will rise  
 Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes."

On the platform where they watch,<sup>1</sup> Hamlet expresses the deep disgust and annoyance he feels towards the voluptuous wassails of the King. He senses the bad effect they are having on the nation within itself and the injury they are doing its good name abroad. He sees the King as the centre of it all:

"The King doth wake to-night and takes his rouse  
 Keeps wassail, and as the swaggering up-spring reels;  
 And drains his draughts of Rhenish down,  
 The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out  
 The triumph of his pledge."

Hamlet is entirely out of sympathy with it all, and sees it as a vicious 'mole of nature' and tells us that whatever virtue there may be in Denmark,

"Shall in the general censure take corruption  
 From that particular fault: the dram of eale  
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
 To his own scandal."

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<sup>1</sup>Act I, Sc.4.

On the heels of Hamlet's denunciation of this license, the Ghost enters with a tale of crime that makes us forget the voluptuousness of the King's wassails in the horror we are made to feel of his more dreadful crimes. Not only is he a voluptuary, but a murderer. Not only is he a murderer, but a seducer. His dreadful wickedness reaches out to corrupt all around him:<sup>1</sup>

"Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts  
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power  
So to seduce!"

The insistence of the Ghost's whole speech is on the unnaturalness of Claudius' crimes and their power to seduce. We feel that the Queen is only one of his victims. With consummate art, Shakespeare conveys the force of it to our very senses, and we actually feel the touch of malignant vice like a foul disease, as the Ghost describes the loathsome effects of the King's poison on the body it slays.

"A most instant tetter barkt about  
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust  
All my smooth body."

We catch the force of this contagion as the play proceeds. The unmoral nature of the Queen, her utter insensibility to her moral condition,<sup>2</sup> impresses us with the feeling

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<sup>1</sup>Act I, Sc.5.

<sup>2</sup>Act III, Sc.4.

that she is the victim of a lethe dullness which she has contracted from association with this vile King. But it is not only the Queen. Poor Ophelia, pale and lovely, too has caught it without knowing it. The canker has galled the infant of the spring. She hears her brother's frank speech<sup>1</sup> without a blush and seems lethargically insensible to the nastiness of her father's insinuations about her lover. She submits to Polonius' bidding without a struggle. Her very meekness and innocent appreciation of the possibility of suspected badness in Hamlet bring out the callous condition of the society in which she moves and has her being. She too has suffered the clammy touch of a lethe that makes her unmoral. She sees no fault in allowing herself to be used as a decoy to entrap her lover.<sup>2</sup> And when she goes mad with grief, the songs on her lips reveal the involuntary corruption that has been poured into her innocent soul by this vile court. Her Saint Valentine<sup>3</sup> song tells the story of lewdness all around her which she has contracted without knowing what it is.

And the King is the source from which it springs. Even old Polonius, ancient in lechery, seems infected with it, not so much in that he has caught it from the King - he is too

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<sup>1</sup>Act I, Sc.3.

<sup>2</sup>Act III, Sc.1.

<sup>3</sup>Act IV, Sc.5.

old for that - as in that his old vices thrive in the warmth of the King's hotter vices. Polonius is crusty in vice, and knowing. He is not unmoral like the Queen and Ophelia; he is simply immoral. He sends Reynaldo<sup>1</sup> to find out what Laertes is doing in France, not to check him from vice, but to guard him from acquiring a bad name through the vices he practises. Reynaldo may put on Laertes imputations of vice, that startle Reynaldo, but he must do it 'quaintly'. It is not so much the vice itself that interests Polonius as the way it is described. If Laertes will only be as men and women are in the court of Claudius, all will be well: poisoned within but showing a fair exterior, whited sepulchres full of rottenness and dead men's bones.

But voluptuousness is only one phase of the badness and corruption that spring from Claudius. This is the poison of his soft vices; there is also the poison of his hard vices as well. He is a murderer and brings others into the bloody circle of his crimes - Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes. The manner of his acquiring the throne is something of a mystery. The Queen seems an insensible part of it; so does Polonius. We sense intrigue with these possibly suspicious but willing agents. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hang on the

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<sup>1</sup> Act II, Sc.1.

borders of further intrigue; and Polonius enters fully into it,<sup>1</sup> too dull of wit, perhaps, to understand the part he is playing. But Laertes enters into it with his eyes wide open,<sup>2</sup> and plots with Claudius the murder of Hamlet. One catches the impression of a growth of Machiavellian dangers to the state in this growing openness of the King's murderous passion for safety in the enjoyment of the fruits of stolen royalty.

It is to save the state from all this that the Ghost returns from Purgatory; it is not merely for personal vengeance.<sup>3</sup>

"If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;  
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be  
A couch for luxury and damned incest."

Claudius is the supreme tyrant and must be overthrown. His tyranny is not like that of Richard II, in excess and to be endured rather than endanger the security of the state. His tyranny is excessive because it is undermining the moral health of the nation. He must be overthrown for the security of the nation. The Ghost returns to plead with true and living majesty to rise in defence of this nation which old Hamlet governed well in life and still loves in the midst of purgatorial torments.

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, Scs. 3 & 4.

<sup>2</sup> Act IV, Sc.7.

<sup>3</sup> Act I, Sc.5.

The Ghost appeals to Hamlet as his son, but also as the true heir to the throne. Now, we are apt to place, as Hamlet does, all the emphasis on sonship and forget entirely his princship; and, by so doing, we are prone not to hear or to ignore, as Hamlet does, the warning which the Ghost annexes to that appeal for vengeance on Claudius. We have been caught up in pity's affection for Hamlet, and, with that affection, we have contracted his hatred for the King. Nature revolts in us, and we are eager to see him get what he deserves. The Ghost's warning against evil goes unheeded.

"But howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind,"

We are moved by his deep concern for Gertrude and hear only what follows:

"nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother ought."

The Ghost's words constitute a strong appeal to the affections, strong forces in human relationship, doubly strong in Hamlet. Through inordinate affection for his son, old Hamlet has left him poorly prepared for the battle of life. It has left him soft, dependent on family ties, and entirely lacking in that indispensable virtue of kingship,<sup>1</sup> the power

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<sup>1</sup>The impersonal in both Octavius and Henry V may well be considered the mainspring of regal greatness in them.

to look on problems of state impersonally, the power that makes a king think first of the needs of the nation he governs and only after of himself and those dear to him. Hamlet has loved as no prince can ever hope to love if he is to rule wisely. Here on the windswept platform, the old affection reaches out across the barriers of death and is Hamlet's undoing. He has no thought of the nation. His mind seethes with thoughts of personal wrong and personal revenge.

"O all you hosts of heaven! O earth! what else?  
 And shall I couple hell?— O, fie!— Hold, hold my heart  
 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
 But bear me stiffly up.— Remember thee!  
 Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee!  
 Yea, from the tables of my memory  
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
 That youth and observation copied there;  
 And they commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain,  
 Unmixt with baser matter."

First steps are always important in the conflicts of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, because they are always wrong ones and set them on paths that lead them to their doom. They do not cease to be free, for they can at all times change their course; but they never do, simply because the fault that has led them to take the first wrong step, continues to be their guiding force. So is it with Hamlet. He is in the grip of personal feeling and never thinks once of his duty as a Prince.

It is unfortunate that Laertes is not here to tell him what he told Ophelia concerning him:<sup>1</sup>

"His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;  
For he himself is subject to his birth:  
He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends  
The safety and health of this whole state;  
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body,  
Whereof he is the head."

When Laertes spoke thus to Ophelia, he was merely speaking a typical Polonian generality, but one that is nevertheless true; and it applies with even greater force here on the platform that it ever could in the choice of a wife. But Hamlet never gives it a thought as he takes his first false step. He thinks only of himself and the wrong done to his father. He enters the path of the assassin, a path which not even John of Salisbury, for all his rhetoric fury against tyrants, would suggest or approve,<sup>2</sup> a path which St. Thomas positively forbids<sup>3</sup> as one that leaves the nations open to the danger of the even greater tyranny of mob rule in private killings. The practice which Hamlet tries to adopt is one banished from civilized society as far back as the time of

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<sup>1</sup>Act I, Sc.3.

<sup>2</sup>Clement Well tells us: "Yet nowhere does he (John of Salisbury) hint at the lawfulness of assassinating him (the tyrant)." John of Salisbury (London: 1932), p.66.

<sup>3</sup>St. Thomas says: "It would be dangerous both for the multitude and for their rulers if certain persons should attempt on their own private presumption to kill their governors, even tyrants." On the Governance of Rulers, p.58.

Draco in the history of Ancient Greece. It is one that begets endless feud and murder.

St. Thomas<sup>1</sup> tells us that when the tyrant is to be overthrown, "It is an action to be undertaken, not through the private presumption of a few, but by public authority". Now it might be argued that if there is any person in Denmark who represents the sovereignty of the nation and with the right to institute action against Claudius, that person is Hamlet. That is perfectly true if we consider Hamlet as Prince of Denmark; but Hamlet does not act as Prince, but as the son of a dear father slain. He chooses, not to act after the medieval fashion, grand in arms, but after the Machiavellian fashion, furtive in assassination, and he will fail. At the moment of his choice his burden becomes too heavy for him, for it is a burden that only a nation can carry, that no man can carry alone, and, least of all, Hamlet.

In the heat of passion, he chooses to play the game the King's way, and he cannot hope to succeed for two reasons: Claudius is a master of the art, and Hamlet's whole nature disqualifies him for any part in it. This is a game only for bad men like Claudius, and Hamlet is not a bad man. It is a part fit only for Shakespeare's Murderers, and they generally

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

travel in pairs. Hamlet is no murderer, and he is setting out to play the game alone.

Professor Bradley's explanation<sup>1</sup> of Hamlet's procrastination is interesting, penetrating; but it is not the explanation for the simple reason that it does not penetrate far enough. It concerns itself only with secondary causes at best, that might better be considered as results instead of causes. Emotions suffering from soul-shock in Hamlet certainly do react upon his nervous system to produce something akin to melancholia and the lethargy that follows upon it; but if he had chosen the part of the active prince instead of the sneaking assassin, soul-shock would have been his ally rather than his enemy. True, it might be objected that this soul-shock has been responsible for the choice he makes; but, if we stop there in our analysis of the forces at work in that choice, we deliver Hamlet from all responsibility and declare him in no sense a tragic hero after the manner of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. He becomes the victim of a fate that gave him this disposition, that controls him, and now, rushes him into a set of circumstances he is entirely unqualified to handle.

The fact is that this emotional disposition of Hamlet is of his own making, and is part and parcel of the immoral

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespearean Tragedy (London: 1932), pp.118 ff.

tone of the court, which reaches its highest expression in the immorality of Claudius. Passion rules this court and has ruled it for a long time. Intelligence has been enslaved, and morality is little more than sentiment. The only differences between Hamlet and Claudius are to be found in the fact that Hamlet is sentimentally good, and Claudius sentimentally wicked, and in the further fact that, of the two, Claudius is the more intelligent and hence, the more wicked. Hamlet's greatness is to be found in the greatness of his sentimental nature. It is this that draws us to him, and it is this that brings about his downfall, for it leaves him open to the turmoil of the senses and emotions, of love and hate, sentimental goodness and passionate fury.

As Crown Prince, Hamlet has basked selfishly in the warmth of affection that he has found in the hearts of his father and mother, and has given utterly no thought to his duty as heir to the throne, to discipline emotion and form his intelligence and will to the mastery which a king must have if he is to rule wisely and for the good of his subjects. Death has struck suddenly, taking from him at once his father and mother. In the midst of his grief and mourning, inordinate now as his love has been, his moral sentiments have been shocked by the incestuous marriage of his mother. Emotional blindness

to duty has seized on his mind, and he has done nothing while the Claudius clique has snatched from him the throne and the crown. Too much emphasis has been placed, I think, upon the use of the word 'election' in connection with Claudius' ascent to the throne. The only meaning that Shakespeare's first audiences could have taken from it was the one it conveyed in the ceremonial of the English coronation: the approval of the people to the succession. Hamlet has done nothing to secure the approval of the people, and Claudius has "popt in between the election and his hopes".<sup>1</sup> There is something strikingly sound about the King's words when he rebukes Hamlet, in the second scene of the play, for unmanly grief. It has left him lethargic while Claudius has been usurping the throne, and it blinds him to his duty when he hears the Ghost's tale of regicide and incest. His thought is born of passion, not of intelligence, and is thoroughly immoral.

But Hamlet is a naturally good man; for, though conscience in him rests largely on sentiment, his sentimental leanings are to virtue rather than vice. Conscience cries out against the act that the policy of passion dictates. In cold blood he cannot murder; and, in cold blood, the assassination of Claudius seems like murder to him. Feeble intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> Act V, Sc.2.

under the thrall of emotion may argue with him that he is justified; but conscience, inspired by naturally good sentiments, will not be convinced. It is only when the white heat of passion sweeps in upon him that he can override conscience in violent acts; and no sooner is the act of violence done than conscience rises to rebuke him. In passion he slays Polonius, rushes on to heap abuse on the dead body, and then launches out into a tirade against his mother. The passion passes, and after pleading with his mother in pitiful fashion to turn away from vice, he stands over the dead body of the old counsellor and laments:<sup>1</sup>

"For this same lord,  
I do repent: but heaven hath pleased it so,  
To punish me with this, and this with me,  
That I must be their scourge and minister."

Like all Shakespeare's emotional heroes found in crime, he is conscious of a force that controls him. He jumps to the conclusion that it is something beyond his power, something in the nature of Fate. He would lay his acts to heavenly interference, but it is not heaven, nor Fate, but his own failure to master himself.

Hamlet has undertaken a Machiavellian revenge, but his better nature bars the way. He resorts to a substitute

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, Sc.4.

for violent action; he enters into a game of cat-and-mouse with the King, salving his emotions with a certain sadistic satisfaction in the painful perplexities that he imposes on all around him; and meanwhile he argues with his conscience. He soothes his emotions with the further thought that he is only waiting for his opportunity, but he knows that assassins do not wait for opportunities but make them for themselves. Passion and conscience jostle him in endless dispute. His soul is in turmoil, and he thinks of running away from it all by the road of suicide, but conscience again bars the way. He cannot escape and he flies into a rage against himself, calling himself names because he has called the King names and done nothing more than call him names. Conscience comes to his aid and suggests that the Ghost may not have been an honest ghost, that it may have been the devil seeking to take advantage over him in his weakness and his melancholy. But the 'Mousetrap' disproves the thought. Elated, emotions take over control, driving him to the white heat necessary for crime. On the way to his mother he peeps into the King's chamber.

The scene that follows may well be considered the climax of the play, for from then on his fortunes definitely decline. Here, however, conscience and emotion seem, for a

moment, to meet in compromise:<sup>1</sup>

"Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;  
And now I'll do't:- and so he goes to heaven;  
And so am I revenged:-"

There is an instinctive exultation in the thought that he can commit murder without running the risk of incurring the worst guilt of the crime, that of sending his victim unprepared to meet his Judge. He creeps across the room towards the King. But conscience will not accept the compromise. Still is the act murder, and Hamlet's gorge rises at the thought of running the King through in cold blood; sentimental conscience still, but strong enough to prove an immovable force against hate. The emotion of hatred for his uncle is rushing him on to the deed, only to be brought up short by the immovable force of his conscience. There is a violent clash and sentimental conscience wins for the nonce, only to be rushed off into a more heinous crime because it is a sentimental conscience instead of an intelligent one. Conscience wins and loses; hatred loses and wins. Hamlet is not even aware of the heinousness of the thought that lays hold of his mind and gives him an excuse for not committing the lesser crime here and now. Hatred has kept him, all along, from realizing the course of true justice that has been his right; and now, it carries him into

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<sup>1</sup>

Act III, Sc.3.

a course that is positively forbidden him. Straining the point we might argue that this Prince has the right, if he so choose, to appoint himself as headsman of the state; but he has utterly none to go beyond the pale of human justice. And that is what he does. He would hurl the soul of Claudius down into hell:

"that would be scann'd:  
 A villain kills my father; and, for that,  
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
 To heaven.  
 O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
 .....  
 No.  
 Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:  
 When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage;  
 Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed;  
 At gaming, swearing; or about some act  
 That has no relish of salvation in't;-  
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven;  
 And that his soul may be as damn'd and black  
 As hell, whereto it goes."

Hamlet's sentimental conscience does not think to grapple with the crime which hatred suggests as a substitute for murder, simply because it is beyond its ken. Suddenly he is lured into a career which he will continue to follow down to the end, a career that few assassins would think to pursue. Sentiment may make him squeamish about killing in cold blood, but it does not prevent him from framing the warrant that will carry Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in England; and the new form of hate will impress itself upon that warrant:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Act V, Sc.2.

"That, on the view and knowing of these contents,  
Without abatement further, more or less,  
He should the bearers put to sudden death,  
Not shriving time allowed."

The writing of the warrant is the closest Hamlet ever comes to acting in cold blood; and indicates at once his trend towards genuine vice quite in keeping with the heinousness that saved the King from death, and the lack of any rational basis for his moral sensibility. Hamlet may claim to have acted in the heat of passion, but the act itself, long drawn out as it must have been, refutes the claim. The fact was that the natural squeamishness which keeps him ordinarily from killing the King, did not exercise the influence over his mind while wielding the pen that it does while wielding the sword. Hamlet's conscience is not the practical judgment of intelligence directing him in the moral life, but the practical influence of sentiment keeping him from being the assassin he wants to be.

The simplest and truest explanation of Hamlet's procrastination, then, is to be found fundamentally, not in his nervous system, but in the failure of intelligence to guide him in the way of truth, and the failure of the will to master sentiment. Hamlet's insanity is an insanity of the mind rather than that of the brain. Such is the fundamental cause; and the

immediate cause flows out of it in his being directed by sentiment and passion into the wrong course of action from the very beginning. For Shakespeare, the wise and good life is the rational life. He knew the dangers that threaten the life of man when he is guided by emotion and not by reason. He knew that such men are wont to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel; and this is what Hamlet does. He finds it impossible to use a sword in slaying the King, who ought to be slain; but he does not hesitate to use a pen in murdering his two schoolfellows, who in no sense have done anything worthy of death. Hamlet is like a leaf blown about by the wind, sinking under a burden that he was never intended to carry alone. Tossed about by emotion, he knows not what course to follow; and, through the influence of emotion, he is finally caught off his guard, when the real assassins, Claudius and his young ally, are closing in for the kill. Emotion has led him to act roughly with Laertes at Ophelia's grave, emotion rebukes him for it and makes him eager to play a friendly bout with him in the hope that he will find in it an opportunity to make amends. In that bout he dies.

Now, one might ask what Hamlet could have done. If we are to judge from the foils that Shakespeare has set over against him, the answer is simply this, that Shakespeare

thought he should have taken the medieval path of revolution. Laertes returns from France to hear that his father has been buried hugger-mugger. He suspects foul play and "wants not buzzers to infect his ear".<sup>1</sup> Apparently there are people in Denmark willing enough to stir up trouble; and they succeed in doing so. Laertes finds a mob around him in no time. He storms the palace and takes it. True enough, he is turned aside from his purpose by the King; but we have reason to believe that Hamlet would not have been thus turned aside for the simple reason that, unlike Laertes, he knew who it was that killed his father. The fact is then that Hamlet could have gathered a following to go against the King. There would have been no reason to tell the people about the Ghost, and if he had, he very likely would have found them ready to accept the story. It would have been good propaganda to gather the superstitious malcontents of the kingdom.

Nor would it have been only the malcontents who would have followed him. The King tells us himself that Hamlet is loved by the people;<sup>2</sup> and we have reason to believe that there are many more in the land besides Horatio and Marcellus who regard the young Prince with affection begotten of his own

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<sup>1</sup> Act IV, Sc.5.

<sup>2</sup> Act IV, Sc.7.

gentle disposition and friendliness. There is a familiar respect in Bernardo as well as Horatio and Marcellus that tells us that there are many more besides who would have needed no more than a call to arms from him to bring them to his standard. This talk of the difficulty of using the testimony of the Ghost forgets entirely the force of mob psychology, and blinds itself with visions of courts sitting on the case. There would have been no court but the court of the common consent of the nation.

But Laertes is not the only foil to Hamlet. Fortinbras is an even better one. Laertes is not a prince. Fortinbras is, and therefore has a right to be associated with the main plot figures. He enters the play much as Hamlet does himself. He is a subject of the conversation that takes place on the platform in the first scene of the play. Horatio tells us about him, and in that telling we discover that he is very much of a parallel to Hamlet himself. He is the son of a dear father slain, in battle, not in murder; and he is setting out to avenge his father's defeat. The active diplomacy of Claudius prevents him, but he does not give up. He lacks much of the motive that is driving Hamlet on, and is easily turned aside to make war on the Poles. He crosses Denmark, with its King's permission just in time to meet Hamlet, also turned aside, on

his way to take ship to England; and, as if wishing to direct us to the true solution of Hamlet's problem, Shakespeare finds occasion in the meeting of Hamlet with the forces of Fortinbras, to provoke Hamlet to soliloquy.

That meeting is like a last and final grace to Hamlet, and he lets it pass because as ever he thinks only of a personal revenge:<sup>1</sup>

"How all occasions do inform against me,  
To spur my dull revenge."

Personal feeling is like an obex to reason. He becomes pre-occupied with thoughts that seek to explain why he delays; and none of them answers the question. He realizes that this passage of Fortinbras is a spur to him; but it fails to move him because he is not in the right frame of mind. He is still thinking of assassination and they are calling him to revolution.

" Examples gross as earth, exhort me:  
Witness this army, of such mass and charge,  
Led by a delicate and tender prince;  
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,  
Makes mouths at the invisible event;"

For a moment Hamlet hangs on the answer:

"Rightly to be great  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
When honour's at the stake."

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<sup>1</sup> Act IV, Sc.4.

But he turns away from it, back to his old thoughts of sneaking, snivelling assassination, and after mulling them over, burst forth with what must ever seem like inane mouthing, considering the fact that he is going off willingly to take ship for England:

"O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts bebloody, or be nothing worth!"

Until this point in the play, Fortinbras has been a hidden foil. Here he comes into the open, and remains in it to the end. Through emotion Hamlet has failed the nation he was born to defend against tyranny. He has sought his own without thinking once about the people who really are his subjects. The Ghost has returned from death to exhort him, but as the old Hamlet was in life, so is he in death. He has laid too much stress on kinship and not enough on Kingship, although he has not forgotten it altogether. The dynasty of the Hamlets is drawing to a close. It is only right and just that the sceptre should be taken away from them and given to a Prince worthy of the name. To the victor belong the spoils. By Hamlet's own voice Fortinbras is called to the throne of Denmark.

Now, some of those who like to think that Hamlet's burden is too heavy for him may object that Hamlet would have been useless as a soldier. But that is certainly not the

truth, and Shakespeare has gone out of his way to show that he would not have failed as a soldier. To be a soldier in those days, a Prince needed to be a fighter, not merely a desk general. Throughout the play, Shakespeare has spread out evidence of Hamlet's prowess in battle, and as if he fears that we have failed to grasp the significance of that evidence, he has Fortinbras tell us about it again:<sup>1</sup>

"Let four captains  
 Bear Hamlet like a soldier, to the stage;  
 For he was likely, had he been put on,  
 To prove most royally: and, for his passage,  
 The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
 Speak loudly for him.-"

But what evidence have we to support these words of Fortinbras? To begin with, Hamlet possessed that which is necessary for success in arms, a fearlessness that allows him to say with truth, "I do not set my life at a pin's fee".<sup>2</sup> He thinks quickly and acts quickly when he does not pause to ruminate and fall prey to emotion that is soft. He has spirit too, which in battle would have made him dangerous to the enemy. Then, he was a swordsman capable of making things hot for Laertes, one of the best in Europe if what Lamont has said is true.<sup>3</sup> Above all, he has the power to draw men to him; for the very thing that makes him soft and squeamish about taking life, wins for him the affections of real men, like Horatio

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<sup>1</sup> Act V, Sc.2.

<sup>2</sup> Act I, Sc.4.

<sup>3</sup> Act IV, Sc.7.

and Marcellus, and keeps them loyal to him even when they seem to have had every right to leave him to his own moddiness. He has the same attractive power that Hal possesses, even if the principle from which it rises is different.

But he lacks the very thing that makes Hal a success among men. He is not guided by reason and will, and therefore cannot think impersonally. He has the same fault that makes the life of Bolingbroke miserable to the day of his death. He has the spirit of a commoner, not that of a Prince. He must have love, affection. That is always the motive behind every action of his life, and it is his own fault that he fails in life. He has not disciplined himself, but has allowed himself to become affection's sop in youth and affection's fool in age when love's opposite, hate, has taken over control of his destiny.

Majesty has failed in Denmark; and Denmark rues it. It becomes the subject of a foreign power. Viewing the fate of Denmark from far off in the theatre seats today, we may look upon it as for the best in that Fortinbras will very likely rule the country well. Such was the case too with William the Conqueror in England; and we have no reason to believe that the Danes will take any more kindly to the change than did the Saxons. To the first English audience it must

have so appeared, as it must also appear to us, if we but look at it as medieval minds did. Hamlet's failure as Prince is not merely his own but the nation's.

Now sentimental minds may find it impossible to accept this simplification of the problems of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark - and to me it is a simplification which draws the whole play together in a grand plan. But I suspect that Shakespeare expected us to study his work with something more than sentiment as our guide. Anyone who reads his plays with care will discover that Shakespeare certainly never believed that sentiment is a safe guide for life, even though he looked upon it as one of life's most charming phases. The fact is that most of us are guided more by sentiment than we should be, and it is a simple thing for us to fall under the spell of it much as Hamlet does himself, when we are following him through the struggle that ends in his death. Just as we are caught up in the charm of Falstaff to the point of condoning his faults, and being annoyed with Hal when he rejects him, so too are we caught up in the affections of Hamlet to the point of seeing things through his eyes. It is not a safe method to follow if we wish to understand his difficulties and his failure. Rather must we resort to the calm judgment of intelligence that controls sentiment in ourselves while we penetrate to the mystery

of Hamlet, with sympathy for him in his very human weakness even while we realize that it is a fault of his own making.

As Professor Stoll has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, Prince of Denmark is only one of the many revenge plays which satisfied a popular demand, that expressed itself in the enthusiasm which kept Kyd's Spanish Tragedy on the boards during a 'long run' for those days; but the Hamlet we study is unlike all the others, unlike even the Hamlet of the First Quarto. The revenge plays which were the associates of the genuine Hamlet, as it has come to us, with the revisions which distinguish it even from the First Quarto, have that melodramatic quality that overrides ethics and startles the audience with violence only. This Hamlet discards melodrama and brings to the audience a tale of violence that is human, not bestial; violence that is still sufficiently under the control of reason to present an ethical unity, that demands the attention of our intelligence as well as our passions, and that puts the play in a class that is beyond the artistic criteria with which we judge the others. It is in this that Shakespeare shows himself superior to his source material, if the older Hamlet was his source, and if the Spanish Tragedy was in any way (as it seems certain it was), an inspiration to his art. It is in this

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<sup>1</sup>Art and Artifice, Cambridge U.P. (London: 1934), pp.90 ff.

that he shows himself superior to his fellow playwrights. Popular demand might lead him to try his hand at a play of revenge, but it could not keep him from applying to revenge the ethical principles which he had received as a legacy from the ages that had gone before him, in the Christian thought of the Schoolmen.

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