

THE THEME OF "THE TEMPEST."



AMONG the numerous productions of Shakespeare's genius, none perhaps is more suggestive of true moral principles and of higher conceptions than *The Tempest*. Multiple, inconsequence, appears the theme of this drama to the cursory reader, according as he deduces it from the general impression, or from the words of the personages brought on the scene.

In several passages of the play we are struck by the presentation of the idea that man though by nature ever subject to higher power, nevertheless always nourishes an innate but futile desire for complete liberty. He hates dependence, and strives to escape from it ; but if his endeavors to throw off the yoke of one master succeed, he unconsciously bends the head before a new tyrant perhaps more inhuman than the first. Ariel, Caliban, Ferdinand, Alonso, Prospero himself, are evident examples of this inconsistency of man.

No less striking than the first truth, is the thought of a Providence, watchful and paternal, who disposes all for the best. Trials, sufferings and dangers, contribute either to withdraw man from the path of sin, or to test his love and strengthen his virtue.

Besides these themes which seem to have an equal claim to our meditation, there is a third, which, if not the most salient, is certainly developed in a manner calculated to produce the deepest impression, and is resumed in an aphorism full of sense and vigor :

"The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance !"

Words indeed noble, heroic, sublime even, on the lips of a man whom injustice and ingratitude have reduced to the lowest depth of misery !

Unjustly bereft of his ducal crown, by an ungrateful brother, Antonio, banished from his dukedom by order of the king of Naples, an enemy to him inveterate, and exiled on a savage island, Prospero sees at last the long desired dawn of deliverance and of the return of fortune. By a providential disposition, the king, his court, and Antonio are at sea on a voyage from Tunis.