

SHAKESPEARE ON PURGATORY.

A NOTE ABOUT THE GHOST IN "HAMLET."

The following commentary from the pen of Mr. F. C. Burnand, the humourist and editor of *Punch*, is worth reading as a curiosity:—

In his interesting and charmingly written book, "Jewels of the Mass," the indefatigable Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has this passage:

Our own great poet who has touched all things, and the Catholic mysteries above all, with an unerring knowledge that is almost inspired, has left the best and most hideous image of the poor purgatorial soul and its sufferings (p. 62.)

And then he gives an extract from the speech of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Frequently have I heard this passage adduced as a proof that Shakespeare held the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, and that he meant to exhibit the "poor Ghost" as coming thence for awhile, and, at cock-crow, returning thither. What with the upheaval of the Reformation and the revival of the ancient learning of Greece and Rome, there was in Elizabeth's time a muddle of Christian tradition and pagan legend sufficient to provide Shakespeare with the material for creating the Ghost of Hamlet's father. The Ghost makes use of the ancient Catholic words "unhousel'd," "unanealed," and describes his murder to Hamlet thus:

"No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head."

Also he informs his son how he is bound

To fast in fires

'Till the foul crimes, done in my days of nature,
Are burnt and purged away.

But though this is consistent with a part of the true doctrine of Purgatorial suffering, yet the Ghost himself is rather a "goblin damned" than a "spirit of health," for the souls in Purgatory are joyfully suffering as being sure of heaven at the end; and most certainly no soul in Purgatory, even if permitted to revisit "the glimpses of the moon"—and some souls (as I remember reading in a Saint's life, though I cannot just now give chapter and verse for my authority) suffer a portion of their Purgatory after death in a particular spot on earth—no soul in Purgatory could possibly cherish a thought of revenge, nor be permitted to return to earth in order to incite any one to commit murder. And this, be it remembered, is the sole object of the Ghost appearing to Hamlet. He says:

Avenge my foul and most unnatural murder.

And he goes on, perfectly alive to the heinousness of murder in the abstract:

Murder most foul as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

Yet it is for the express purpose of urging his son to commit what in circumstances the most "extenuating" is a crime "most foul," that this Ghost—a most unprincipled ghost—has come from Purgatory! No, his Ghost came from the poet's brain; and he is nothing like so beneficent a ghost as is the melancholy shade of Cæsar who, emerging from the same fertile headquarters, announces himself to Brutus as "his evil spirit," and solemnly warns his assassin that their next meeting will be at Philippi, when Brutus will come to him, not he to Brutus. And, by the way, this brief but awful apparition is a far grander conception than the communicative, loquacious, and remorselessly unforgiving ghost of Hamlet's father. Hamlet's father is "fasting in fires" like Dante's brother-in-law, Forese Donati, who, suffering among the gluttonous, utters no word of vengeance against the cooks who had assisted him to the grave of the *gourmand*. The Ghost of Hamlet's father is a malevolent spirit; he suited Shakespeare's purpose, and pleased a contemporary English audience, which wasn't quite clear as to what it believed on any subject, let alone the state of a soul immediately after death, neither bad enough for Hell nor good enough for Heaven.

That Shakespeare touched up his Ghost with what he had heard of "purgatorial fires" is as evident as that the Ghost's sentiments would be more in keeping with those of a pagan spectre in a Greek tragedy, than with those of a soul from Purgatory in a play where the *dramatis personæ*,

as we see from the maimed rites at Ophelia's grave, are professedly Christian. The souls in Purgatory are "in a state of grace," as St. Catharine of Genoa writes, "knowing the truth, and knowing therefore how grievous is any obstacle which hinders their approach to God." Therefore it is that the souls in Purgatory "long," as Mr. Fitzgerald feelingly puts it, "for that drop of cold water to their tongues" which every Mass brings to them. "There is," says Mr. Fitzgerald, "something touchingly expressive in the form of this prayer which asks for the dead 'a place of refreshment, light and peace,' and it has been pointed out that refreshment, or *refrigerium*, is a relief of a cooling kind suggested by the burning pains of their situation." The Ghost of Hamlet's father tells us of his awful sufferings without any alleviation, except during the few moments allowed for conversation with his son, which he very naturally protracts as much as possible; and yet there is one most important thing omitted by this Ghost, something that would have at once dispelled any doubts as to his orthodoxy, and that is, he forgets to ask Hamlet to have Masses said for the repose of his soul. Of course I am aware that he could not, consistently, have asked for a Mass and a murder in the same breath. He does not, indeed, bid Hamlet "remember" him, but the meaning of this is as clear as that of the now familiar injunction to "remember Mitchelstown." The Ghost simply means "Remember my murder and avenge it as quickly as possible, as I shan't be perfectly happy until you have stained yourself with crime and dispatched your uncle to — well, to another place!" But had he been from Purgatory, a hopefully expiating, sorrowfully loving, Catholic ghost, he would have said, "Pray for me, my son, remember me before the altar, have Masses said for the repose of my soul. Let me taste the consolation of 'a place of refreshment, light and peace.' Warn your mother and uncle of the awful peril they stand in. Implore her, and him through her, to repent before it is too late." Had Shakespeare clearly comprehended the true doctrine of Purgatory he could not have given us the ghost of a Catholic coming back to earth on a devilish errand.

F. C. B.

A WOMAN ON A STREET CAR.

There are women who can preach, lots of women who can teach,
And several make a living at the law;
There are females who can fight, and a few who take delight
In their knowledge of the hammer and the saw;
There are some who lead a band, near a million write shorthand;
There are instances of women tending bar,
But to save her very life, be she widow, maid or wife,
A woman can't get off a moving car.

There are feminine M. D.'s, and some women who raise bees;
There are artistes and pianistes by the score,
Lady managers and clerks, there are girls in ironworks,
And the softer sex keeps books in every store.
Capt. Miller is a Mrs. (on a river steamer this is),
And a great success she's made of it thus far,
But whate'er their craft or trade is, it seems as if the ladies
Can never learn to 'light from off a car.

In each "box" of Mr. Yerkes, while the slender cables jerk us
From Division street to Randolph in an hour,
There's a gaudy-coloured picture which is likely to afflict your
Sense of proper chiar'oscuro, though its pow'r
Of description is tremendous, how inertia will upend us,
Hurt our elbow, and our silk hat's polish mar.
But the women never heed, though instruction sure they need
In the noble art of getting off a car.

There is many a lovely girl, neat and pretty as a pearl,
Who knows everything from algebra to cake,
But whose pride it sorely humbles when so clumsily she tumbles
Just because she took the handrail next the brake.
Oh, maidens, face the grip if you do not want to slip;
"Face ahead," the couplet says, "to save a jar."
If you'll stop and think a minute you will see there's something in it,
This knowing how to get off from a car.

—Chicago News.



"What is the way to be happy," he asked, "when you are under a women's thumb?" "Don't squirm."

There is a policeman in Boston who has carried a club for fourteen years, and has never struck anything but attitudes in all that time.

Johnny Dumpsey—Pa, what is an empty dream? Mr. Dumpsey—It is the kind of dream you have, my son, when you go to bed hungry.

Duties on foreign cereals may be removed in France. Some people here would like to see a prohibitive duty put upon American serials.

The Chinese word for "hash" is the longest and most difficult word to pronounce in the language. In the English language it is the most difficult word to define.

The editor of a Chicago newspaper announces that he is unable to support either Cleveland or Harrison. It is suspected that it is about all he can do to support himself.

Chicago men are said to mark their entrance into the inner shrine of the temple of culture by saying "luncheon" instead of "lunch." In Kansas City the same stage is marked by the use of the word "victuals" instead of "grub."

Young Softus (who is to escort the unattractive Miss Vinaigrette to dinner)—But, my dear boy, how am I to entertain her? How can I flatter her when she's so homely? How—? Old Boy—Don't do it. Speak only of the ugliness of others. She'll idolize you!

A correspondent tells the following: "I have a brother—a wee chap—who sometimes says things very odd. One day, as he was disposing of some bread and milk, he turned around to his mother and said: 'Oh, mother, I'm full of glory! There was a sunbeam on my spoon, and I swallowed it.'"

A young widow, in erecting a monument to the dear departed, cleverly avails herself of the opportunity to inscribe upon the tomb: "Sacred to the memory of Mathuzia Bezuchet, who departed this life, aged sixty-eight years, regretting the necessity of parting from the most charming of women."

Livery Stable Proprietor to Young Man—"What made the horse run away?" Young Man—"A cow jumped out of the bushes by the road and frightened him." Livery Stable Proprietor—"He's a small horse. Couldn't you hold him?" Young Man—"Yes, but I couldn't hold him and the girl, too."

Wiggins—"Arabella, darling, may I kiss you?" Arabella—"Yes, sweetest, but kiss me on the left cheek, please." Wiggins (doing so)—"And may I ask, dearest, why the left cheek?" Little brother (poking his head through the door)—"Because Jack Wiggless has been kissing her right cheek all the afternoon and it's tired." The engagement is not yet announced.

Tramp—Could you give a bite to a poor man who hasn't eaten anything for—

Lady of the house (shouting shrilly)—Tige! Tige! Come here, Tige!

T. (softly)—You are calling your dog, madam. I want you to understand that I don't eat dog. I'm no Indian.

And he strode away in silent dignity.

"I left a cheque for \$10,000 among the wedding gifts," said the bride's father to his prospective son-in-law, on the eve of a fashionable wedding last week, "and after the ceremony you will please tear it up. That's the style now-a-days, Frank." "Ye-es," hesitated Frank, "that's the style, I know, but I'm afraid it's too late to tear it up now, as I went down to the bank this morning and had it cashed."

"Judge," said the Montana lawyer, as he leaned back in his chair and threw one foot up on the table, "I object to the witness answering that question, and I'm ready to argue the point. It stands to reason—" "So will you, young man," roared the judge, "if you've got any speech to make. Get up on your feet or I'll clap you into the calaboose for contempt of court." And the young lawyer stood to reason.

The *Harvard* has this on Method of Modesty:—

He was such a pleasant fellow,
So polite, so polished, too;
Everywhere we went together
He would murmur—"After you!"

Did we reach a door together,
He would never first go through,
But would wait and let me pass him,
Saying softly—"After you!"

Was there anything we wanted,
And was not enough for two,
He would always let me have it,
Always murmured—"After you!"

So it was on each occasion,
Whatsoe'er the case might be;
He would never be the leader
But was always after me.

He has borrowed fifty dollars,
Maybe 'tis a passing whim,
But he has not since been heard of—
And now I am after him.