

An Interpretation of Richard II.

ALTHOUGH the drama of Richard II. is based on history and would seem unfitted by the limitations of history for the expression of any ideal truth, yet there is abundant opportunity in the development of the characters for a Shakespeare to express his estimate of true kingship.

In the tragedy of "Richard II." we find the conflict to be between: two ideals of kingship—that of Richard, that a king is king by divine right of birth; and that of Bolingbroke and Shakespeare, that a king is king by divine right of fitness. The divine right of Richard is that of the early absolutism, reappearing in English history for the last time in the Stuart dynasty; the divine right of Shakespeare is the divine right of democracy, which estimates a "call" to a work by supreme fitness to do that work. It is obvious that if Shakespeare wishes to establish his ideal of divine right, it must be shown that Richard is not deposed by mere force of arms; in fact, that force of arms plays the most insignificant part in the solution of the difficulties of the time. That this is the plan pursued by Shakespeare is sufficiently clear from the absence of all military conflict, but chiefly from the emphasis which is placed throughout the play on the over-ruling of Heaven, not only by its workings, invisible to men at the time and acknowledged only after the event, but also by the expressed belief of the principal agents of Richard's overthrow as to the supremacy of God.

As evidence of the interposition of Heaven, tending to Richard's downfall, I may mention his opportune departure for Ireland, his detention there by adverse winds, the dispersion of the Welsh army in consequence of omens, the unexpected meeting of Richard and Bolingbroke at Flint Castle, and the fact that the

first formal intimation of Richard's deposition comes from his own lips and is conveyed to Bolingbroke by York, who could not be thought the agent of Bolingbroke to force such an offer. These things all seem to show that Bolingbroke was compelled to his destiny as clay is moulded by the potter's hand. As evidence of the attitude of the principal characters towards belief in the supremacy of Heaven, I may cite several passages. The first is found in Act I., Scene 2.

But since correction lieth in those hands
Which made the fault that we cannot
correct,
Put we our quarrel to the will of Heaven,
Who, when they see the hours ripe on
earth,
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders'
heads.

* * * * *

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy annointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death; the which, if
wrongfully,
Let Heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.

—Gaunt to the Duchess of Gloster.

Other passages are Act III., 3, 16-19; III., 3, 77—; V., 2, 35—.

In the development of a play, Act I. should contain the seeds which grow into the full play in the following acts; in the case of a tragedy, Act I. should also exhibit the main character in the height of power and prosperity, and hint at the cause of his downfall and disgrace. Accordingly in Act I. we find Richard exhibited in a position of authority and power, even Heaven fighting for him, apparently. This is the chief significance of the introduction of scene 2, between scenes 1 and 3. The Duchess of Gloster asks Gaunt to avenge her husband's death, but Gaunt tells her to complain "to God, the widow's champion and defense." Therefore, in accordance with the ideas of the time, that God decided duels for the right (as Scott represents in the second duel between Ivanhoe and Bois-Guilbert), she prays "that her husband's wrongs may sit on