

I have insisted strongly, and I fear at somewhat wearisome length, on this fact, because, unless we keep it steadily in mind, I do not think we can form a true idea of the literary value of these most marvellous creations of Shakespeare's brain. It is not for us to theorize, still less dogmatize, as to how their great author himself regarded them. What Shakespeare believed no man can know, and certainly no knowledge can be gained from a study of his direct treatment of such subjects. It is rather to be found in by-allusions dropping from other characters,—the almost unconscious thoughts of the great poet. When Glendower says: "At my birth the frame and huge foundations of the earth shak'd like a coward;" Hotspur says: "Why so it would have done at the same season, if your mother's cat had but kittened;" and to "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," he answers "Why so can I, or so can any man, but will they come when you do call for them?" We may, if we please, conjecture that these speeches indirectly express the poet's personal creed; but he treated directly all subjects from the point of view of the audience—he wrote for *them*, to please *them*, not to propound theories, nor to publish his own beliefs.

There cannot be a more striking instance of this than the tragedy of Macbeth, and it is the Supernatural element in the play, above all, that renders the instance so striking. Shakespeare, as is generally conceded, produced this play as soon after the accession of James I. as possible. A brilliant essayist has given a positive authority that the play was not produced till 1610, but that was because the play-house was closed in consequence of the plague. Whenever written, whenever produced, it was written and produced to please the king, as chief among the audience. To please the king he made the play a Scottish one; to please the king he drags in a panegyric on touching for

the king's evil, that superstition almost peculiar to the Stuarts; to please the king he showed that the line of Banquo would descend from generation to generation, until the anointing oil should drop on James' head; but chiefly to please the king he created the witches.

James I. was, in his foolish and curious studies, above all an ardent student of witchcraft. He gloried in the reputation of knowing more about the occult art than any one of his subjects. While King of Scotland he had a wider field for experiment and research than when the twokingsdoms were united under his sway. In Scotland, he was present at all or nearly all the trials of witches, and in one case, at least, gave evidence, and he, probably, was hardly less punctual in his attendance when the poor wretches passed through the last fiery ordeal. As I have already said, the act relating to witchcraft, passed in the first year of his reign, was evidently inspired by his predilection for the subject.

Mr. Dyer, in his admirable work, "Folk Lore in Shakespeare," (to which I am largely indebted) says: "Thus in a masterly manner Shakespeare has illustrated and embellished his plays with references to the demonology of the period, having been careful in every case, whilst enlivening his audience, to convince them of the utter absurdity of this degraded form of superstition." I have written so far solely with the intention of shewing how absolutely I disagree with Mr. Dyer, if, as I think, he intended to include under "demonology," such apparitions and Supernatural agencies as are employed in Macbeth. Shakespeare would not have dared to present a play, to an audience which might possibly have included James I., casting any doubt on the universally-received beliefs about the Supernatural. What he himself believed is beside the question; he wrote as though he believed; he wrote for believers.

I have tried to insist strongly on