

Was Hamlet Mad ?

Dick—Hello, Joe, do you know your memory lines for this afternoon ?

Joe—Now, I don't half believe in this *memorizing* anyway. Do you ?

Dick—I don't care much about it. But, say, what do you think of the whole play of *Hamlet* anyway ?

Joe—Well, I've read it over a couple of times, and I like it all right ; but I think Shakespeare might have saved us all an immense amount of trouble, if he had settled, once for all, some of those questions like Hamlet's madness and his mother's guilt, instead of allowing them to remain doubtful, and putting us all to the trouble of making a special study of the play, to find out what Shakespeare's idea really was. I don't believe he was sure about the matter himself. So you think Hamlet was really mad ?

Dick—It's a pretty hard question to decide, but I think he was mad at least part of the time. I suppose he wasn't as mad as he pretended, and was supposed to be, but I think his mind was a little unhinged by the revelation of his uncle's crime and his mother's guilt, which was so much greater than even he had supposed it to be.

Joe—Well, I'd like to hear you prove the stand you take, for I don't believe he was mad at all. He had a scheme of revenge to carry out ; and to protect himself in the meantime, he feigned madness in order to divert suspicion.

Dick—First of all, in several places in the play, mention is made of how sullen and moody Hamlet had been ever since his father's death. He had been nursing his grief, and his mind was in just the condition in which it would be most likely to be affected by any shock. Then came Horatio's sudden announcement of the appearance of the ghost, and then Hamlet's own interview with the ghost. The ghost's story of the awful crime of Hamlet's uncle and his mother's extreme guilt, and the earnest exhortation to revenge, was likely to have a great effect on anyone, and a very