

therefore feel himself under the disagreeable necessity of endeavouring to refute objections so condemnatory; only, Goldsmith's objections are so numerous, for he worked upon his design with extraordinary vigour of determination, that to try to refute them all would be a task intolerably tedious: he may however confine himself to those that relate to the reasoning of Hamlet; and those after all are alone worthy of serious notice and may perhaps be so presented that any one, on referring to the essay (XVI.) to save needless repetition, can satisfy himself as to their validity or invalidity.

"The soliloquy in Hamlet, which we have so often heard extolled in terms of admiration, is, in our opinion, a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argumentation or the poetry * * * We shall see how far he argues like a philosopher. In order to support this general charge against an author, whose very errors have helped to sanctify his character among the multitude, we will descend to particulars and analyze this famous Soliloquy."—GOLDSMITH.

His first objection is based upon the following part of a sentence of the text:—

"Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And, by opposing, end them."—SHAKES.

He says: "The obvious and indeed the only meaning that can be implied in these words is:—'or exert his faculties in order to surmount it,' (misfortune).

It is to be remarked that the sentence in the Soliloquy from which the above quotation is taken a part of a restatement of the question—"to be or not to be" and that this part so restated is only a rhetorical or poetical amplification of the alternative—"or not to be." Goldsmith's objection is based upon a complete misunderstanding of the question proposed and restated. He thus fabricates for Hamlet what there is no reason to believe ever entered his mind. The concept involved in the alternative—"Non esse cur velis vivere" is *Suicide*.

"He (Hamlet) owns himself deterred from Suicide by the thoughts of what may follow death:

"—'the dread of something after death—
What undiscovered country from whose bourne
No traveller returns'"—SHAKES.

This might be a good argument in a heathen or Pagan, and such indeed Hamlet really was, but Shakespeare has already represented him as a good catholic, who must have been acquainted with the truths of revealed religion, and says expressly in this play:

—had not the Everlasting fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-murder did slaughter"

Moreover he had just been conversing with his father's spirit piping hot from Purgatory."—GOLDSMITH.

The passage from the Soliloquy given by Goldsmith is produced by him as an instance of the inconsistency or "badness" of Shakespeare's reasoning, as part of the "general charge" which he has undertaken to "support." He says, "this might be a good argument in a heathen or Pagan, but—" But what? It is to be observed that he is now proceeding to show that Hamlet's reasoning is "bad" and it is interesting to mark the process by which he imagines he has attained his object. Now, all that follows "but" in this connection is an attempt to prove that Hamlet was a good Catholic or Christian. The whole of his proof consists in the assertion of this fact. He does nothing more. He is so careless of form in this case that he does not even affirm that Hamlet's argument

is "bad" but leaves the ellipsis—his favorite "ergo" to be supplied by the reader. The ellipsis supplied, his argument is this:—"This might be a good argument in a heathen or Pagan but is a 'bad' argument in a Christian. This is all that proceeds from the promising 'but.'" To apply his own language—"this conclusion would justify the logician in saying, negatur consequens." A mere assertion cannot be admitted as a substitute for proof when proof was that which it was undertaken to be given and this more especially when it was undertaken to show the fallacy of another person's reasoning.

Shakespeare has sometimes been charged with inconsistency, because, as it is alleged, Hamlet, who was a heathen, is represented as having the knowledge and expressing the sentiments of a Christian and as an instance of this inconsistency the passage quoted has been adduced.

Though it be wandering from our course and may render the march through a very dry country, somewhat longer than is necessary, the call to examine this charge is almost irresistible.

It may be admitted at once that Hamlet is represented by Shakespeare to be a Christian, to be acquainted with the truths of revealed religion and with the institutes and peculiar practices of the early church. How then, it is asked, could such a Christian, as Hamlet speak of "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns"? It may be said in answer, that the after-death state or country is undiscovered. Most theologians hold that it is a place and a place whose locality or position remains hitherto undetermined, *i. e.*, it is an undiscovered country, if country it may be called.

Again, Hamlet says:—"from whose bourne no traveller returns" when he had just been conversing with his father's spirit" etc. It is to be remembered that Shakespeare in Hamlet's monologue is speaking of men, of men's thoughts, of their emotions and passions and purposes. He says nothing of spirits and spirits are not men; what men ever returned? It is true that Shakespeare had a complete conviction of the existence of spirits and of their appearance here on earth but he never classed spirit and man as co-ordinate. It was not long Hamlet doubted whether the spirit of his father had returned:

"The spirits that I have seen
May be the devil; and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape: yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me."

That many spirits have returned after death is a truth of revealed religion (Mat. XXVII. 52, 53 and no doubt to Shakespeare was a truth well-known; but, as aforesaid, Hamlet is speaking of what belongs to men and, it may be presumed, refers to the authentic information they might be expected to supply.

Where wert thou, brother, those four days?
There lives no record of reply,
Which, telling what it is to die,
Had surely added praise to praise,
Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unrevealed;
He told it not; or something sealed
The lips of that Evangelist.—Fen.

—had not the Everlasting fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-murder (slaughter).—SHAKES.