and attempting to account for the fact we may pass in rapid review a few of the female characters of Shakespeare so as to become duly sensible of the gain which would have accrued from the employment of so skilled a pencil in the idealizing of woman in her highest estate of honour, and grace, and influence. That the great artist was sensitively appreciative of all that is excellent in woman as daughter, sister, lover and wife, and equally observant of the sex in its grosser, even down to its most degraded types, abundantly appears. With what consummate skill he suggests rather than depicts the ætherial Miranda—in comparison with whom Titania is "of the earth, earthy;" with what artlessness she opens all her soul to a passion which in the seclusion of the enchanted isle had never before obtained an entrance to it; while with as rare a tact there is compressed into a single line

> "I am never weary when I hear sweet music."

all that is necessary to an understanding of the winsome disposition of fair Jessica. What need be said of his Juliet, so true in its conception, so finished in its most trivial detail. Each term descriptive of her, each thought attributed to her, is "a gem of purest ray serene" in a setting of fine gold.

> "Else would I tear the cave where echo lies
> And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
> With repetition of my Romeo's name."

These lines are matchless in the skill with which the energy of the most intense passion is qualified without weakening by the delicacy of the terms which express it. Katharine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, "Disdain and scorn still sparkling in her eyes," is unique in the long extending line of Shakespearian female portraiture. In his pourtrayal of wifely goodness Shakespeare far outvies all other dramatists, ancient and modern. Lady Percy sees perfection even in her "Heart's Dear Harry's" natural defects; and the parting scene between her and her "good lord" is every whit as tender and affecting as that between the Hotspur of Troy and his Andromache. Hermione branded with foul suspicion yet nerving her true, brave heart to

> "Be patient till the heavens look
> With an aspect more favourable;

Richard II's amiable queen who with heroic self abnegation, thoroughly womanly, vows for the King's sake to lay aside

> "All heaviness and entertain a cheerful disposition;

and even though the order of mention is somewhat of an anti-climax, Mesdames Page and Ford are true types of woman as a wife.

These few meagre references must suffice. The writer would now venture with becoming timidity to show wherein the great dramatist fails. The subject is profoundly interesting from the light which may be incidentally thrown, perchance, on the obscure personal history of this laureate of all time. We know absolutely nothing of Shakespeare's childhood. He himself is silent about it; babbling tradition has not a word to say. Was the early home-life of the poet so devoid of interest, so blank of that dearest of eartly joys, maternal pride, and petting, that Shakespeare had no personal experience on which to draw when in after days he undertook to delineate mankind? At a distance of over three centuries hurt and wrong no one by the suggestion of such a theory to account for a fact which seems to need some theory to account for it.

But deferring far a while the consideration of this and other suggestions, let us first see whether it is absolutely necessary to go in quest of a theory—in other words whether there is anything to be either explained or accounted for. The most direct way in which this matter could be settled would be to challenge Shakespeare's admirers, all the world over, to show that in the vast crowd of typical characters whom his genius has vested with immortality, motherhood is represented. And such a challenge the writer would not hesitate to give, throwing down as the gage of battle the assertion that in this Shakespeare has not done woman the honour due her. In the allocation of his tributes of esteem he has given his gold to Desdemona, his frankincense to Juliet, and his myrrh to Miranda, and has even "tipped" Dame Quickly very liberally. But in his admiration of maids, wives and widows, he has with an oversight, unpardonable in him save on a theory yet to be propounded, and in any case much to be deplored by students of his works—done scant honour to woman at her best, as a mother.

The theory postponed, we enter upon the proof of this assertion, which, if made good, makes the finding of some theory necessary. In the play of "Romeo and Juliet" we have two mothers, Lady Capulet and Lady Montague, both of whom may be dismissed with a word. In representation on the stage, Lady Montague having neither said nor done anything very remarkable, in the middle of the first scene of the second act glides gracefully behind the scenes, and is at liberty to put on her bonnet and go home; while the other maternal veteran, Lady Capulet, lingers on the stage, only to utter a few ear-piercing shrieks over the corpse of poor love-killed Juliet. Turning to Shakespeare's best-known play, and the one which has most attracted and perplexed the great master's students, "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," we would say that the controversy as to whether the Prince's madness was real or feigned seems, from one point of view, most unreasonable, for such a mother as Gertrude would account for any degree of mental aberation in her luckless progeny. The plot of the "Winter's Tale" does not afford much scope for the display of maternal feeling; a few lines in the opening scene of the second act comprise all that the dramatist has thought fit to say in the way of depicting the maternal instincts of wrongly-suspected Hermione—

> "Take the boy to you, he is so troublesome,
> 'Tis past enduring——"

may be true to nature, but is certainly not a gush of motherly tenderness. There must be excepted four lines at the end of the play, as void of soul as a washerwoman's bill—

> "You gods! look down
> And from your sacred vials pour your graces
> Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own,
> Where hast thou 'been preserved?'"

It will hardly be contended that "All's Well that Ends Well" is much richer in maternal sentiment than the play last referred to, or that in the Countess of Rousillon we have a much more amiable type of womankind than in Sir Walter Scott's Lady Douglas. Shakespeare, one might think, in this character desired to do some stiff formal dame of Elizabeth's splendid court a dis-service similar to that which he had done the shallow-pated Justice Lucy. A less affectionate parting between mother and son could scarcely be conceived than that between the Countess and Bertram, on the latter's departure for the court. Instead of a gush of maternal fondness and regret, we have a string of aphorisms as wise and as chilly as "Poor Richard's" sayings, far colder if not wiser than those of Polonius to his son Laertes. The passages are so similar in occasion, thought, and phrase, that one inevitably suggests the other. But if the Countess is cold and hard, Tamora, another of Shakespeare's mothers, is positively vulpine. Far kinder must have been the she-wolf at whose dugs Romulus and Remus suckled. Hideous as the hags singing their hateful chant around the hissing cauldron on the heath, there is nothing supernatural to relieve the horror which her words and deeds excite, nor is it at all lessened by the recollection of her wrongs. Rapidly nearing the bottom of the brief catalogue, we come next to Volumnia, mother of the haughty Coriolanus. Here, as is sometimes the case, the poet is less faithful to universal nature than to local history, which imagination, prejudice, lapse of time, and changes of social condition severally tinge, while human nature in all ages, lands, and circumstances essentially is one and the same. Volumnia is a typical Roman matron rather than a real *mother*. The play is so well known that illustration may be dispensed with.

It has been said that one of the most interesting of adjuncts to history would be a chronicle of things which *might have happened*, or would certainly have happened under circumstances slightly different from those which, combining, brought about certain results. This ingenious suggestion may be applied to the history of literature as well as to that of peoples, and with an equally interesting outcome. The books which distinguished authors might have written, had their surroundings been somewhat different from what they were when they took pen in hand; or the tenour of the works they actually wrote, had the accidents of the writing been only slightly changed—these may be matter of idle speculation, but to those who can afford to speculate and have an inclination that way, there is open an infinitely wide field for such self-indulgence. To the true student what an author, with whom his mind is *en rapport*, does not say is of as much interest as what he does say. To our thinking Shakespeare nowhere shows his acquaintance with "the deep things of man" more finely than in not investing Lady Macbeth with the station, much more with the sacred attributes—the yearnings and passions—of motherhood. A lesser genius might have essayed it.

Far above all his other representations of maternity we place Shakespeare's Constance, in "King John." It would not be going too far to say that Constance is the *only* carefully-executed delineation of the idea of maternity to be found in the thirty-seven plays which bear his superscription, though they do not all bear his image as well. The analysis of this character has been designedly reserved from the belief that in depicting it the poet did his best. If he failed in this his failure was utter. He failing, we need a greater than Shakespeare, or if a theory yet to be suggested be sound, a dramatist somewhat less than Shakespeare to do justice to maternity.

Shakespeare's "Constance," it cannot be denied, is a powerfully drawn character. To a certain extent it is true to the sex, but over and over again its truth is the sex's dishonour. Voluble as a Billingsgate fishwife, and as little regardful of feminine proprieties, she loads her enemies with heaps of abuse; and, when failing to coerce them into just treatment of herself and her son, bewails both in a requiem, each note and word of which shows the low order of womanhood in which she must be ranked. She loves her son, but it is the love of a lioness for her whelps, or a she grizzly for her cubs, the only difference being in the mode by which the animal instinct has expression. She roars in pentameters, but the fury is as instinctive as that which inspires the inarticulate growl of the tawny mothers of the jungle and prairie. Shakespeare utters through the puppets of his own creation few things more fiercely keen than those in the jangle between Constance and the Queen. Motherhood apart, Constance is a true woman, in the impetuosity with which she rushes from rumour to belief and from belief to further inference; in the haste with which denunciation follows on the heels of the sense of wrong endured; in the virulence of her attack on a female rival; in forgetfulness of the possible evils of precipitance. The first score lines of the third Act are word by word womanly, and, despite their artificiality, no equal number of lines in any English writer contain more truthfulness to nature than they; while the lines which occur a little further on, commencing "With my vexed," &c., are only a paraphrase into the formal diction of the stage of the housemaid's sensation of "a flutter all over." In her haughty moods, likewise, she is as faithfully typical of her sex.

> "I will instruct my sorrow to be proud,"

will compare in dignity with any line in *Prometheus Vinctus*, and the mine of thought in the passage a little further on in the play,

> "Here I and sorrow sit,
> Here is my throne, let kings come bow to it."

is with the most diligent working exhaustless of thought-wealth. The royalty of suffering; the impatience of the wrong; the superiority of those who endure to those who do and enjoy; the community of all ranks in sympathy with those who suffer—all these suggest themselves to the thoughtful reader of these most pungent and pregnant lines.

The play of "King John" deserves to be far better known than it is. Few of the great dramatist's compositions or compilations are interesting on such a variety of accounts. In wealth and quaintness of diction, in smartness of repartee, in audacious disregard for all the unities, in like contempt or ignorance of history, in vivid portraiture, notably in the Bastard who speaks as many lines as the King himself, in affecting pathos and vigorous declamation, in many other noteworthy characteristics, the play deserves to rank with Shakespeare's best. But of the many things which make it so interesting to the student who is independent of the popular award of comparative merit, not the least is that for which it is here singled out. Our great writer never rose higher in his conception of maternity than in "Constance." And how high did he rise? Or, to change from interrogation to regretful exclamation, how signally did he fail to rise! Having fought bravely in his interests and failed, her darling Arthur becomes little more to her than "a thing of beauty" that has ceased to be "a joy for ever." Her mind, when not agitated by frenzied hatred of those who have done her wrong, is wholly filled with the image of his physical charms. She recalls no trace of his moral loveliness; all that was attractive in her lost boy is material; not the faintest scintillation of the spiritual brightness which encompasses her noble son penetrates the gloom of her smitten heart,

> "Liker in feature to his father Geoffrey
> Than thou and John in manners."

To Arthur—

> "If thou that bidd'st me be content wert grim
> Ugly and slanderous to thy mother's womb
> Full of unpleasing &c."
> I would not care, I then would be content
> For then I would not love thee......
> But thou art fair."

So in the last and most heart-rending wail—

> "Father cardinal, I have heard you say
> That we shall see and know our friends in heaven,
> If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
> For since the birth of Cain the first male child
> To him that did but yesterday suspire
> There was not such a gracious creature born,
> But now will canker sorrow eat my bud,
> And chase the native beauty from his cheeks;
> * * * * * *
> When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
> I shall not know him; therefore, never, never,
> Must I behold my pretty Arthur more."

Then to Philip's somewhat cruel rebuke—

> "You are as fond of grief as of your child."

The answer is—

> "Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
> Puts on his *pretty looks*, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments *with his* form."

The citation of these passages may not please those whose admiration of Shakespeare will not suffer any abatement of or endure any attempt to qualify it to make it reasonable and just. But it cannot be helped. The passages quoted are unspeakably beautiful, but the sentiment is as far removed in quality, in very nature rather, from that which courses wildly or flows gently through the true mother's heart as the most gorgeously sober image in Madame Tassaud's is from the rudest rustic that ever stared open-mouthed upon it.

A few words of explanation will bring this chapter of imperfect criticism to a close. The writer may be wrong from first to last, but he has not intentionally done dishonour to him who more than any other has helped to make "the whole world kin."

So far from it, and here is the theory which the present writer would offer for Shakespeare's failure to give us in dramatic embodiment those passions and modes of acting when he has given us almost every other. His was too clear a vision, too sensitive a nature, too reverent a spirit. If at all it was with slow hesitating step and timid eye he approached to gaze upon the bush burning with hallowed mysterious fire. He saw, and seeing so clearly, was silent as to what he saw. Better this, by far, than that with Dædalian hardihood he should have ventured where for the most courageous and ingenious to venture must be sure discomfiture. Q.