

the parsons of the Tudor Church. He introduces two of them, Sir Hugh Evans in the "Merry Wives," and Sir Nathaniel in "Love's Labour Lost," and both characters are not only comic but farcical. They are even totally unecclesiastical. Sir Nathaniel plays a ridiculous part in an interlude, while Sir Hugh Evans goes out to fight a duel.

Nowhere, perhaps does Shakespeare depart from his impersonal serenity and impartiality so much as in "All's Well that Ends Well" (I. 3), where he couples in a scoffing allusion "Young Charbon the Puritan" with "Old Poy-sam the Papist," and afterwards says, "Though honesty be no Puritan, yet it will do no hurt; it will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart." Clearly the writer of this had no special sympathy either with young Charbon and old Poy-sam. We may conclude that he disliked anything sectarian or enthusiastic, and was contented with the social religion of his parish.

It is true that Shakespeare had no antipathy to the ancient Church; probably in the absence of any strong doctrinal antagonism its antiquity, its ceremonial, its art would be grateful to his poetic sense. Where the scene of his play is in Roman Catholic times or countries he takes the religious environments and costume with the rest, and introduces friars as ministers of good. This is hardly more significant than his introduction of the gods of Rome in *Julius Caesar*, or of heathenism in *King Lear*, where it harmonizes with the character of the piece. That he had any latent hankering after Roman Catholicism, or that his heart was on the Papal side of the great quarrel between the nation and the Pope, it is impossible to believe in the face of such lines as these:

*King John:* What earthly name to interrogatories  
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?  
Thou canst not, Cardinal, devise a name  
So slight, unworthy, and ridiculous,  
To charge me to an answer, as the Pope.  
Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England  
Add this much more,—that no Italian priest  
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;  
But, as we under heaven are supreme head,  
So, under Him, that great supremacy  
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold  
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:  
So tell the Pope; all reverence set apart  
To him and his usurped authority.

*King Philip:* Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.  
*King John:* Though you and all the kings of Christendom  
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,  
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;  
And, by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,  
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,  
Who in that sale sells pardon from himself:  
Though you and all the rest, so grossly led,  
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish;  
Yet I, alone, alone do me oppose  
Against the Pope, and count his friends my foes.

Much with which the author himself does not agree may be written dramatically; but there are things which, even dramatically, he who does not agree with them will not write. Any one who had the slightest leaning to the Papal side would not have manifestly outraged his own feelings by penning these lines. The passage on Indulgences has a sting in it, if anything in Shakespeare has. The exposure of the false miracles of healing at St. Albans ("Henry VI," second part, ii. 1), may be cited in the same connection, if the passage is by Shakespeare, as we believe that it is.

That there was a good deal of free-thinking among the English of the higher class we gather from Giordano Bruno, who visited England at this time, and observed the state of opinion with pleasure. Bohemia was likely to have her full share of it, and we know that Marlowe and Greene were reputed atheists. But in Shakespeare there is surely neither speculative belief nor speculative unbelief. In certain passages, such as the soliloquy of Hamlet, and the speech of Claudio in "Measure for Measure," he speaks of the mysteries of life and death in a broad, natural, poetic manner, unlike that of an orthodox preacher, but also unlike that of Giordano Bruno. Nobody, surely, would say that when he speaks of our life as "rounded by a sleep," he means to insinuate a denial of the immortality of the soul. "I think nobly of the soul" is put into the mouth of Malvolio, but there is an emphatic ring in it, and Malvolio, though distraught with egotism, is not represented as otherwise contemptible. Shakespeare's theological deliverances or indications might not have passed the Spanish Inquisition, but they would, beyond doubt, have passed the English Privy Council, particularly if it had been presided over by Lord Burghley. It is difficult to produce specimens of an atmosphere; but it will hardly be disputed that while we read Shakespeare it is in a religious atmosphere that we are moving, though the religion is not ecclesiastical like that of Calderon and Lope de Vega, but natural, social and poetic.

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim:  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But while this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in we cannot hear it.

These lines, recited by the prisoner, would almost have saved him from the clutches of the Inquisition. In Æschylus, in Sophocles, in Euripides, more or less of the speculative tendency is discernible. Æschylus may, in a certain sense, be regarded as one of the fathers of Hellenic philosophy. He stands in somewhat the same relation to it in which an epic poet stands to history. The writer of the *Prometheus* must have had his searchings of heart about the popular theology. Not by mere accident did his theme find a continuator in Shelley. But the mental eye of Shakespeare was turned outward, not inward. In the Sonnets, though there is infinite subtlety in the expression of passion, there is nothing metaphysical.

On the other hand there is no trace of fanaticism. The treatment of Shylock expresses not hatred of the misbeliever, but hatred of the extortioner. In the jibes at his religion there is no bitterness. The popular hatred of the extortioner Shakespeare evidently does share, and it is idle to attempt to get Shakespeare out of a supposed scrape by such desperate shifts as the pretence that the play is intended to expose the inhuman treatment of the Jews.

There is certainly not a tinge in Shakespeare of sympathy with Catholic asceticism. "Because thou art virtuous shall there be no more cakes and ale?" The Renaissance, as a revolt against asceticism, running sometimes with heathen sensuality, is pretty well reflected in his dramas, to say nothing of "Venus and Adonis." There is no use in pretending that the passages which the moral Bowdler strikes out are involuntary tributes to the taste of the audience at the Globe Theatre. Evidently Shakespeare delighted in these allusions as much as he did in puns, for which he has so extraordinary a predilection. Of course he does not descend to such ordure as that which we find in his meaner rivals and which stands in hideous juxtaposition to the pure scenes of the "Virgin Martyr." "Al-ways he is Caesar"! But the element is there, and we wish it were not there, let blind worshippers say what they will. The amount of it, however, is moderate for the Renaissance. Shakespeare's page, if it is not clean compared with that of Scott, Thackeray, or Dickens, is clean indeed compared with the pages of Boccaccio. In England there was the same interregnum between the fall of the Catholics and the rise of the Protestant or modern morality that there was in other countries; but participation in a great struggle for national independence and for a European cause, together with the bracing influence of maritime adventure, preserved the manhood, and with the manhood the comparative purity of the nation.

Though Shakespeare is not free from impurity his ethics are perfectly sound. He never tries, like the Rousseauists, to produce an effect by tampering with the moral law or by exciting sympathy with interesting sinners. In rewarding the good and punishing the evil doer he is almost as strict as Dante, while he is incomparably more rational and human than the monkish moralist who puts Farinata, Francesca and her lover in hell. Cordelia dies, it is true; nevertheless she received her crown. In Bacon's writings there is a touch of Machiavelism, as there was more than a touch of it in his career. In the "Essay on Negotiating," for example, among other sly precepts he tells you that it is a good thing to deal in person rather than by letter, "where a man will reserve to himself liberty either to disavow or to expound." But there is no trace of anything of the kind in Shakespeare, though he is not insensible of the pregnant fact that the boundary line between moral good and evil is less sharply defined than the common language of ethics implies.

Virtue itself turns vile, being misapplied,  
And vice sometime 's by action dignified.

In politics, it is pretty clear that Shakespeare simply accepted the national monarchy as in religion he accepted the national church. It would have been strange if his heart had not been with the Court. The Court was the friend of his calling: Puritanism, which was the soul of the rising opposition, was the enemy of his calling, though the writer of "Comus" tried to bring about a reconciliation between Protestant religion and dramatic art through a revival of the pure form of Attic tragedy. It was impossible that Shakespeare should be a legitimist, or in that sense an upholder of the divine right of kings, if he bore in mind the Tudor pedigree and the title of that dynasty to the throne; but he evidently was a hearty monarchist, and fully recognized the sacred character with which the monarchy had been invested by the union of ecclesiastical with political headship consequent on the rupture with the Papacy. "There's such divinity doth hedge a king" is put, it is true, into the mouth of a king whose hedge of divinity is afterwards traversed by his stepson's rapier amidst general sympathy and applause. So the monarch who says that "not all the waters from the rough rude sea can wash the balm from an anointed king," and that "the breath of worldly men cannot depose the deputy elected by the Lord," himself practically illustrates by his catastrophe the limitations of those doctrines. It may be said that both utterances are merely dramatic; but they have an emphatic sound, and what is more to the purpose, they harmonize with the general tenor of Shakespeare's plays in relation to this subject. In "King John" nothing is said about the Great Charter or the abuses of royal power which led the barons to extort it. We have the quarrel between John and the Pope about the appointment of Stephen Langton, in which our sympathies are demanded by the cause of the national sovereign. For the rebellion of the nobles, the "tempest" of which Pandolph "blows up" in the interest of the Church, no other reason is assigned than the supposed murder of Arthur. John is hardly presented as a tyrant, certainly not as the hateful tyrant that he was; and when French invasion comes national sentiment is awakened at once, and the hearts of an English audience are expected to be with the native king. Raleigh, in his "Prerogative of Parliaments," makes one of the personages in the dialogue say of the Great Charter that "it had first an obscure birth from usurpation, and was secondly fostered and showed to the world by rebellion." This was perhaps the esoteric doctrine of extreme courtiers. In general, the memory of the Great Charter seems to have slept during the Tudor reigns. Silence on the subject was evidently most advisable for Her Majesty's and still more for His Majesty's players; no doubt it was also most congenial to their feelings. A presentation of the scene of

Runnymede at "The Globe" would very likely have been treated by the Privy Council as sedition.

The story of Henry VIII. was rather a delicate subject for a dramatist who desired to please the Court. Shakespeare's native breadth of sympathy and dramatic sense probably led him, without any help from the craft of Polonius, to the very treatment which was most politic and acceptable. He takes no part in the quarrel, and is dramatically just to all. Henry he presents simply as a majestic lord, which in a rather material sense the tyrant and uxoricide was. He makes the king state his own case, just as he actually did state it, without in any way raising the question of its moral validity. He glorifies, in a splendid vision of Elizabeth's greatness, the child of the Protestant queen. At the same time he evokes a small measure of sympathy for Catharine, and makes tender and respectful allusion to her daughter. Cranmer, the Archbishop of the Divorce and of the Reformation, receives in an uncontroversial way his fitting meed of honour. For the grand catastrophe of Wolsey's fall we are prepared by his pride, his worldliness, his treatment of Buckingham; but a magnificent eulogy is pronounced on him by the mouth of Griffith. Cromwell also is seen on his better side. Only against "the dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome" is anything like indignation pointed. This presentment would perfectly suit the taste of the Court, which, while it of course accepted the Divorce and the Reformation, would by no means wish to identify itself with the revolutionary aspect of the movement, or even be much gratified by anything insulting to Spain. The trade both of Elizabeth and James was kingship. The leaning of James towards Spain, as the head of the monarchical interest in Europe, was perfectly natural. Elizabeth would have leaned the same way if she had not been bound by her title and her circumstances to Protestantism, or even if the Pope and Philip II. would have let her alone.

The compliments paid by Shakespeare to Elizabeth and James, especially that paid to James in Cranmer's prophecy, are, it must be owned, pretty full-bodied. But they are redeemed from servility, and the air of personal adulation is taken off by the close association of the monarch's praises with the national glory and happiness. Bacon's flattery of James is personal. The advocates of the Baconian theory may here again find an addition, though of the slightest kind, to the difficulties of their theory.

Whatever doubts there may be as to the authorship of other parts of "Henry VI.," there can be none as to the authorship of the part about Jack Cade. No such blow, humorous or serious, has ever been dealt, or could have been dealt, to demagogism by any other hand. The picture suits the demagogue tyrant of Paris as well as it suited the demagogue tyrant of Kent. "There shall be in England seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer" is satire as fresh and true to-day as when it was written? It fits perfectly as a caricature of what the Radical candidate now says to Hodge. Nor could any Labour Reformer or Workingmen's Candidate of our time well read without wincing:—

*George:* I tell thee, Jack Cade, the clothier, means to dress the commonwealth and turn it, and set a new nap upon it.

*John:* So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up.

*George:* O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handicraftsmen.

*John:* The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.

*George:* Nay, more, the King's Council are no good workmen.

*John:* True, and yet it is said—labour in thy vocation: which is as much to say, as—let the magistrates be labouring men; and therefore should we be magistrates.

*George:* Thou hast hit it; for there's no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand.

All due allowance being made for what is merely dramatic, we cannot help seeing that to Shakespeare a rabble, above all a political rabble, is an object of personal aversion. He has even a physical abhorrence of the populace, the expression of which sometimes strikes us as not only anti-popular, but almost unfeeling.

And then he (Antony) offered it (the crown) the third time; he (Cæsar) put it the third time by; and still as he refused it the rabblement hooted and clapped their chapped hands and threw up their sweaty nightcaps and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Cæsar refused the crown that it had almost choked Cæsar.

The passage does not stand alone, and it is rather wonderful how such language can have failed to offend the large portion of the audience at The Globe.

From Coriolanus we expect, as a matter of dramatic propriety, extravagant expressions of aristocrat contempt for the people. But the dramatist has certainly put his full force into the lines (Cor. i. 1):—

[Enter Caius Marcius.] Hail, noble Marcius!

*Mar.:* Thanks.—What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, Make yourselves scabs?

*1st Cit.:* We have your good word.

*Mar.:* He that will give good words to thee will flatter Beneath abhorring.—What would you have, you curs, That like fiere peace nor war? the one affrights you, The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you, Where he would find you lions, finds you hares; Where foxes, geese; you are no surer, no, Than is the coal of fire upon the ice, Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is To make him worthy whose offence subdues him, And curse that justice did it. Who deserves greatness Deserves your hate; and your affections are A sick man's appetite, who desires most that Which would increase his evil. He that depends Upon your favours, swims with fins of lead, And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye? With every minute you do change a mind;

And call him noble that was now your hate, Him vile that was your garland. What's the matter, That in these several places in the city You cry against the noble senate, who, Under the gods you keep in awe, which else Would feed on one another? What's their seeking?