

tone of a good man shrinking from a detestable action. Lady Macbeth answers him—answers him powerfully—answers him unanswerably. But how? Schlegel tells us she uses the sophisms that throw a false splendour over crime. Nothing could be more untrue. She uses no sophisms at all—either here or in other passages. I beg you, for we are now at the heart of the matter, to give your most attentive hearing to the argumentative part of Lady Macbeth's share in this conversation. "Was the hope drunk," she says—

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dressed yourself? hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale  
At what it did so freely?

An admirable metaphor this: bold, realistic, and to the purpose; appropriate to the moment and the scene, while the coarse revels of a half-barbaric castle during a royal visit were actually audible, as these two debated the miserable issue on which hung the life which of all others in the world they should have held sacred. "From this time," says Lady Macbeth, knowing her power over her husband, and probably seeing that her apt, rough simile has seized upon his quick imagination—

Such I account thy love. Art thou afraid  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that  
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"  
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

If this plain speech needs a paraphrase, and perhaps it may, for Dr. Johnson said it contained no argument, it should run somewhat as follows:—"Come," says the wife, "no sentiment, no harking back, and no cowardice! Duncan has been just as good to you yesterday. If there were any sound reason of policy why you should give up the idea of murdering him, you would state it. But you do not. You merely lack courage to do what you desire. Surely you are not so poor a creature as to prize the esteem of men without deserving it! Surely it is better that men should hate you in a proud position, resolutely won, than that you should despise yourself in a lower position, in which you remain, not from virtue, but from cowardice. If you were a good man, and had religious scruples—if you were a humane man, as I used to think you, and shrank from cruelty—I could understand you objecting. But this mere quaking, without any principle in it, is beneath contempt."

When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And, to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man.

Then Lady Macbeth—her mind fixed solely on her one principle, that if you are not prevented from perpetrating evil by scruples, it is contemptible to be hindered by mere fear or irresolution—bursts into the celebrated rhapsody in which she describes how remorselessly she would have slaughtered her babe if she had sworn to do it. This produces a very slight effect on her husband. When she asked him whether he was content to live like the poor cat i' the adage, she threw out one of those obvious light outworks of morality which are prompt enough in most extempore defences against temptation—a line and a half which Dr. Johnson said must make Shakespeare immortal if all the rest of his works perished: Who dares do more than becomes a man is none. But this is soon forgotten. While his wife has been talking of dashing her infant's brains out, his mind has lit on the one point that is practical. "If they should fail." And then comes the most significant incident of all. As yet Macbeth has not the dream he needs. His wife's bold moral theory does not stimulate or assimilate with his mean instincts. He is just as little inclined either to deserve or to lose the world's esteem as ever. He is not screwed to the sticking-place. What happens? Lady Macbeth hints at the plan of putting the murder upon the drunken officers of the king's bedchamber. In a moment her husband—this highly moral and noble character, whom only supernatural soliciting and a bad wife can bring within sight of an evil project—is all agog.

Bring forth men-children only;  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males.

With wonderful quickness he improves on his wife's dastardly suggestion:—

Will it not be received,  
When we have marked with blood those sleepy two  
Of his own chamber, and used their very daggers,  
That they have done't?

LADY MACBETH.

Who dares receive it other,  
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar  
Upon his death?

These happy thoughts are quite sufficient for the virtuous Macbeth.

He is almost as comfortable as a man can be who is bent on a desperate enterprise, with hardly "virtue enough to be faithful to his own villainy." "I am settled," he cries,

And bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
Away and mock the time with fairest show:  
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

After this, I must say that it seems to me too bad that it should be levelled at any actor as a reproach, that he makes Macbeth craven and abject. What is the man else? What greatness has he except in the field—in vivid eloquence—and in a desperate death at bay? It is no weakness indeed to shrink from crime. To recoil from a misdeed which promises wealth or power is to many a nature a task requiring vast strength of moral principle. No one would call Macbeth a coward for being horrified at the thought of murder. To break into the human temple and steal the life of the building must always be indescribably horrible. There is no image that any of us can conjure up that more thrills our moral sensations, though we may be barely able to conceive the feelings of a homicide. But Macbeth was meanly wicked, because his mind did not revolt from the deed, but only from its accompaniments and consequences.

At the same time, it must be confessed that in these two scenes, in which the character of Macbeth is fixed, the representation of Mr. Irving—which has been severely censured as too craven—does not exactly bring out the idea of the text. I hesitate to take objection lightly to anything in that wonderful performance, because it is superior, with all its faults, to any other that I have seen, and because I shrink from seeming to be among the crowd of empty depreciators by whom the steps of original greatness are always dogged. But in order to distinctly mark the true Macbeth, the new Macbeth must be rigidly as well as sympathetically scrutinized.

Now, it seems to me that while Irving has most truly and firmly caught the character of Macbeth, he has not quite so successfully apprehended Shakespeare's method of displaying that character. Shakespeare depends more on light and shade. Irving relies too much on a prevailing dun colour. His first scene is faultless. When the dim rocks of the witch-prelude have vanished, and the heath is revealed, upon which the returning generals meet the imperfect speakers who prophesy their fortunes, Macbeth enters on a rising ground, and the striking profile of the actor is seen clear-cut against the murky sky, as he gazes with the keenness a great general never quite lays aside across the gloomy country. He turns to the audience, and in a single gaze, as in "Hamlet," fixes the character of the whole performance. Is this right? It would not be if Macbeth were, according to the received notions, the amiable tool of a wicked woman and an irresistible destiny. But it is right, because the dramatist has given the actor the means of knowing beforehand the restless, acquisitive moral nature that lives within Macbeth's warlike exterior. As he stands there in clear outline against the lurid sky, no one could fancy him an ordinary successful general on his way home from victory to honour. There is more in him, and the overplus is high-reaching, gloomy, and mischievous. Such a disposition, insatiably ambitious, fretful over the need to do ill deeds in order to satisfy unbounded desires, but never genuinely turning away from temptation that promises advantage, is tinder for the sparks of the witches' promptings to fall on. At the first contact the glimmering tracery of evil suggestion flits and flutters through Macbeth's being. Honest Banquo—too little regarded by lovers of the play, one of the finest examples in poetry of unsmirched and unsmirchable humour in a mind quick to comprehend inducements to evil and to note the yieldings of others to brilliant temptation—honest Banquo sees almost everything that is passing through his colleague's mind. There is very little secret about it. Before he meets the witches, Macbeth has thought of murder. From the moment when they call him king he dwells on murder. From the instant when, being greeted Thane of Cawdor by the king's messenger, he has earnest of the fulfilment of their weird prophecy, he means murder.

## 2. THE ENGLISH EDUCATION BILL OF 1876.

On May 19th Lord Sandon explained the elaborate and somewhat complex provisions of the Ministerial Education Bill in a lucid and admirably arranged speech, which repeatedly elicited expressions of cordial approval from both sides of the House. It was quite understood that there can be no serious criticism of the Bill until it comes up for its second reading; but the following are its main provisions. He said that although there was school accommodation for three millions and a quarter children, and a school population of 2,300,000, there were only 1,850,000 under instruction, so that 450,000 had to be accounted for. These were not to be found in the private adventure schools, and, in fact, he was at a loss to know where they were. The education that the country desired to give, however, was ready; there were the