

# THE OWL.

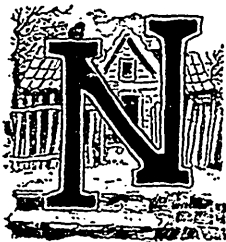
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## LADY MACBETH.

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NO poet, ancient or modern, has represented woman in colors and forms so true and yet so exalted as Shakespeare. He was the first dramatist who exhibited, in characters of life-like and undying freshness, all that is great and beautiful in the female nature, without undue idealization. He painted the shade as well as the light, but never applied to vice the colors of virtue.

His characters, however, although true to nature, are never commonplace, are never selected from the throng that crowd the highways of human existence. They are chosen rather from the rarer types of mankind and womankind, and the true connoisseur will appreciate them the more for standing above the common level without losing touch with the earth.

In order to bring creatures of such an exceptional mould within the pale of human interest, Shakespeare loves to place the scenes of his dramas, whenever their subjects demand it, in the dim, distant past, which allows a wider scope to the display of human character and destiny, free from the restrictions which a more definite time and place would impose upon him.

The character of Lady Macbeth is one of those types that are acceptable only in connection with the special setting in which they appear in their plays. Taken from its surroundings and transported to a different age it would cease at once to represent to us the full truth; whereas from

the first opening of that drama our imagination is impressed in a manner that we naturally expect such characters as it brings before us, and yet perceive no violation of human nature or of poetic truth. But, although Lady Macbeth, with her whole mental equipment, requires for her scene of action just such a world as the one she moves in, in which the historical and the legendary characters of a rude age are still warring with each other, she nevertheless exhibits in her fundamental organisation a common element, which appeals to all ages, and in which the eternal laws of morality find an adequate reflection. Thus every great artistic creation depends for its mysterious charm upon a similar elementary combination by means of which it impresses us, on the one side by the spirit of its own special world, whereas on the other it is endeared to us by features of our common humanity.

The scene of the tragedy of Macbeth is the blood-stained Scottish heath with its strange objects that excite the imagination, its misty perspectives, its phantomlike fogs, its gloomy gorges and fantastic peaks, its uncanny legends and ghostly superstitions. Delusive forms flit past our view; we know not whether they are real or the creation of our own heated fancy. We imagine we can almost seize them, but they vanish into thin air.

Amid such surroundings we first meet Macbeth, with eyes fastened upon the lips of the Fated Sisters who reveal to him the high destiny which the future has in store for him. This gladsome news, however, affects him in a manner contrary to our expectation. It quite overpowers him, and dismay and terror are depicted upon