

THE

# HARVARD MAGAZINE.

VOLUME IV.

P. 0001

---

CAMBRIDGE:  
PUBLISHED BY JOHN BARTLETT,  
Bookseller to the University.  
1858.

## THINK AGAIN!

"He that knows better how to tame a shrew;  
Now let him speak; 't is charity to show."

*C. J. Bruce '59*

MR. EDITOR:—

A writer in the Magazine has already awaked to the fact that Shakespeare is not what he is cracked up to be, and proclaims himself a reformer accordingly. But his business will be no very difficult task, if undertaken with characteristic modesty; for few of us either love or read the works of Shakespeare much. As for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, they have long been detested by Juniors and Freshmen generally, and the *Vedas* are now held up by professors to be laughed at by students. Yet these three have been considered the sublimest poems out of the Bible. Does all this show that the delicacies of Tennyson and Browning, or else the inevitable progress of the mind, have given us a distaste for the rudeness and meagreness of these old poets? No. At no time since Shakespeare's day, at least at no time since Nicholas Rowe, have they been so well appreciated. Johnson and Pope, for example, had no kindred feeling with either the Greek or the English poet. This will hardly be questioned, but I will support it by an example or two. Johnson never could wade through Homer, although he was well read on most other branches of Greek literature. He has the following criticism on *Cymbeline*:—

"This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes; but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection and too gross for aggravation."

Pope's perversion of the Homeric spirit in his translation of the *Iliad* is well known; while the absurdity of many of

his emendations of Shakespeare, as proved by Theobald, shows that he had no appreciation of that poet.

Compare such critics with Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Wilson, Douce, Knight, Collier, White, and Wolf, Lachmann, Mure, Tyler, and Gladstone. All of these sit rather as disciples than judges of the authors they criticise; all recognize their unvarying truth. It is not, then, to the age of the world, but to the age of the critics, that we must ascribe a distaste for Homer and Shakespeare in College.

Some devout writer says that almost every healthy mind must be an atheist in one stage of its progress; and it is at least true, that there is a time when we must either apply ourselves to imbibing trustfully the spirit of sublime minds, or rest content with being scoffers. This time comes to most of us in College. If we adopt the latter course, we must turn round; if the other, we are already on the right track. A young man feels sure he sees something unreasonable in Milton or Bacon, or else in the study of natural science in general, or of the dead languages in general, and he is tempted to admire too much his own imitation of the pig's squeal. This ought to be a sign to him that he does not comprehend the author or the science, and he should throw himself into the study of him or it with the more *abandon*.

The argument of the critic of the *Taming of the Shrew* is this:—

Shakespeare makes a radical change occur in the character of one of his heroines.

Radical changes of character never do occur in real life.

*Ergo*, Shakespeare is not true to nature.

He then suggests to Mr. Shakespeare how he was led into so great a blunder, wherein it lies, and how he might have avoided it.

First, for the origin of the error, he says: "We shall find, I think, that this truly artistic design, so clearly shown in

the afterpart of the drama, was an *afterthought*, irreconcilable with Katharina's conduct in the earlier scenes."

Then for the error itself: "Violent she might have been, easily roused to any burst of passion, but there should be no unprovoked outbreak. But listen to her, and judge if Shakespeare has not so far overstepped the line, there can be no consistent return," &c.

Then for the means of avoiding it: "It is the true, masterly, central idea of the play. But was it Shakespeare's idea? It should have been, that is clear. If, however, we refuse to believe that it was, because it ought to have been, his design," &c. That is, if the readers of the Magazine will refuse to believe that it was clear to Shakespeare because it is clear to this critic, he is in a condition to proceed with his argument. The wonder is that a masterly idea occurred, even as an afterthought, to so stupid a block as Shakespeare is represented to be.

But it is useless to quote all this. I deny his major premise. Radical changes of character are certainly improbable, but it is unnatural for improbabilities never to occur. They are extraordinary, but a play in which there are no extraordinary workings of character is simply commonplace. Every one of Shakespeare's plays contains something improbable or extraordinary. The delineation of Hamlet's character, which your critic seems to approve, is so extraordinary, that its meaning is not now settled.

I cannot think why he selected so insignificant a field for the exhibition of this great principle of ethics,—that nothing can change the character,—which is unexpressed indeed, and which perhaps suggested itself as an afterthought to the critic, but which is, in fact, the true, masterly, central idea of his article. His argument would have applied very well to the parable of the Prodigal Son. He might say: "Disclaiming all affected singularity, I feel called upon to present a minority report on one of the parables ascribed to our Lord. A bad man never can turn round and become

good. Thus Paul by his own account, even before his conversion, still acted according to his ideal of right, and, as he thought, to the glory of God. The prodigal son, therefore, ought to be represented as acting under a mistaken notion that it was his duty to travel; that is clear. But if we refuse to believe that it was, because it ought to have been the Evangelist's account, and critically examine, requiring the parable to prove its own excellence, instead of resting on its reputation, we shall find, I think, that this truthful design, so clearly shown in the after-part of the story, was an afterthought, irreconcilable with the prodigal's conduct in the earlier scenes. Zealous he might have been, but there should be no wickedness. But listen, and judge if Luke has not made him so far overstep the line of propriety, that there could be no consistent return. If so, it is proved that the parable never came from the lips of our Saviour."

Now, if Shakespeare brought about an extraordinary result, he also used extraordinary means; namely, the power of love, which has worked a miracle with every Christian.

We condemn the writer's verbal criticisms as much as his general one. People who like gaudy poems had better shelve Shakespeare, and take up Alexander Smith, the Brownings, and Tennyson. And I am afraid they will be disgusted to find that even these poets, except the first, try to avoid showiness, and have a real sympathy with Homer and Shakespeare and the Vedas.

If your critic has a different reason for not admiring certain passages and plays, we suggest that he publish a new and improved edition of Shakespeare,—since he hints he could sometimes do better than he. Those admired passages of which he "ventures to say the sapient critic" (who is this?) "might do as well himself," should be rewritten, and as for the "Taming of the Shrew," let that be made over again, according to its true, masterly, central idea.

The thing has already been attempted by Dryden and others, but it has never succeeded, and we should rapturously hail a really improved Shakespeare.

We are not afraid to meet the critic's arguments, but even if we could not, they are not worth answering. It is an important lesson that must some time be learnt, that our reason must govern, sometimes curb itself. Now our business here in College is not, it is true, to stop originating, for thus we should lose the faculty, but to learn from master-spirits and originate with them, not to controvert them and originate against them. We are not yet men, and are not to arrogate the office of men. A contrary spirit is not one of progress. Thus, a young man thinks he ought to have no model, under the impression that, if he does, he never will have an ideal of his own. A chemist might as well resolve that he never would read a chemistry, in order that he might bring a fresh mind into the department.

When the writer has acquired some understanding of Shakespeare, we shall be happy to discuss the question of whether Shakespeare had a plan, of whether Mrs. Clarke understands Katharina, or of whether Shakespeare's images are commendable. At present, this is all we shall say on the subject.

#### THE NORMAL MAN.

P. S. (*Afterthought.*) After all is said, I must confess your critic's argument is plausible, and if his theory can really be established, — as I must say I think it needs to be, — it will shed much light on Shakespeare's mode of writing and of living. It is well known that Shakespeare founded his play upon an old comedy, called the Taming of the Shrew, published in 1594 (again in 1607, and again by Stevens in his "Six Old Plays"). This also represents the Shrew as reduced to entire subjection, so that, since this idea presented itself to Shakespeare as an afterthought,

we have come at once upon the astonishing fact that Shakespeare began to rewrite plays before he had once read them, seen them played, or knew the plot.

This will lower the authority of Shakespeare, which the writer truly represents as an unfair advantage which Shakespeare has over himself. His *quasi* claim rests, not, as the writer says, on his reputation, but upon his accuracy. But if he wrote plays so that an afterthought so important could occur to him, his accuracy amounts to nothing. Authority, however, is at best an unfair advantage; and it is but charitable to be a little inaccurate.

#### HARVARD AND HEIDELBERG.

"The Must ferments in heat and foam,  
Before the noble Wine can come."

FAUST.

LET us compare German Student Life with our own, taking a University nearly the equal of ours in the number of students and the size of the city of which it forms quite as important a part. The exterior aspects are widely different. In the middle of the busy, crowded, little Heidelberg, stands a huge, plain, old-fashioned building. The roof is peaked, and the sides are covered with faded, rusty-colored plaster. Crowds of animated, healthy-looking young men, equipped with light canes and portfolios, and dressed in every variety of costume, from the seediest to the most dashy, their clothes as well as their long and shaggy hair full of tobacco-smoke, hurry up and down the well-worn stone steps, or lounge under the grated windows. This building contains the various lecture-rooms and offices of the University, and the inside is as plain and old-fashioned as the exterior. Though very different in appearance, it