

The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded: King Lear

Delia Bacon

My abridgement of *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakspeare Unfolded* approximate half of the original edition of 1857. However, all of the abridged version was written by Delia Bacon. Though I've deleted and juxtaposed her words I've added none of my own.

One of the mysteries of the Shakespeare authorship mystery is why this task hasn't been undertaken before. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who arranged for its publication and provided its Preface, pleaded with the author to "shovel the excesses out of the book." He admitted he had only read isolated chapters of it. Ralph Waldo Emerson who stated that the work "opened the subject so that it can never again be closed" had delved into even less of it. More essentially, the excesses made it easy for professional critics to dismiss its contentions without considering them.

Delia Bacon was not blameless. Radical and original concepts demand a clarity of presentation. Her torrential paragraphs, so often repetitive, demanded a scholar's patience and persistence. Nor could many readers match her classical knowledge. And so her masterwork reached but a small minority of the audience for which it was intended.

The extracts which appear in this journal have been well selected by the editor, for it is Delia's exploration of King Lear which best expresses her contentions.

The "Leir" legend has long been a rich source to fictioneers, from popular hacks to literary prizewinners. But none have ventured beneath the surface of

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the story, so that it remains a classical family tragedy within conventional bounds. In the judgment of one esteemed Elizabethan scholar "*King Lear* is Shakespeare's play about retirement." But Delia considered it to be much more than that. To her it was "the grand social tragedy about the human social need in all its circumstances." Viewing the title character in the light of Francis Bacon's "prerogative instances," she found him to be "an impersonation of absolutism—the very embodiment of pure will and tyranny in their most frantic form."

Similarly, she discovered in other characters and other plays more undercurrents of Bacon's *Great Instauration*. She could not accept that they were merely an explosion of genius motivated by financial gain, but were a deliberate desideratum for mankind.

In the final paragraph of Hawthorne's Preface he wrote "It is for the public to say whether my countrywoman has proved her theory." I hope my abridgement will help them to do so.

Elliott Baker
London

Lear's Philosopher

Thou 'dst shun a bear,
But if thy way lay towards the raging sea,
Thou 'dst meet the bear i' the mouth.

Chapter I Philosophy in the Palace

I think the king is but a man, as I am — King Henry
They told me I was everything — Lear

It was not possible that the divine right of kings be openly dealt with in the presence of royalty itself, except by persons endowed with extraordinary privileges and immunities. Such persons were not wanting in the retinue of that sovereignty, working in disguise and laying the foundations of that throne in the thoughts of men which would replace old principalities and powers.

Poor Bolinbroke, fevered with the weight of his ill-got crown, might surely be allowed to mutter to himself, in the solitude of his own bed-chamber, a few general reflections on the quite incontestable fact that nature refused to recognize this artificial difference in men, classing the monarch with his poorest subject. The poet appears to have had some experience of this mortal

ill. He might seem, to a severely critical mind, to pursue his philosophical inquiry a little too curiously into the awful secrets of majesty, openly searching what Lord Bacon reverently tells us the Scriptures pronounce to be inscrutable, namely the heart of kings.

The profoundly philosophical suspicion that a rose or violet did actually smell to a person occupying this sublime position very much as it did to another would, in the mouth of a common man, have been sufficient to make a star-chamber matter. That thorough-going analysis of the trick and pageant of majesty would come only from the mouth of the brave and gentle hero of Agincourt. He says, talking in the disguise of a private, "I think the King is but a man as I am, the violet smells to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness, he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the light wing. When he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are."

In the same scene, the royal philosopher soliloquises on the same delicate question. "And what have kings that privates have not, too, save ceremony,—save general ceremony? And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?—What is thy soul of adoration?" A grave question. Let us see how a poet can answer it.

Art thou aught else but place, degree and form,
Creating awe and fear in other men?
Wherein, thou art less happy, being feared,
Than they in fearing?

(Again and again, this man has told us that he cherished no thought of harm to the king; and those who know what criticisms of the state he had authorized have charged him with falsehood and perjury on that account. But he thinks that wretched victim, on whose head the crown of an arbitrary rule is placed, is the one whose case most of all requires relief. He is the one, in this theory, who suffers from this unnatural state of things, not less, but more than his meanest subjects.)

What drink'st thou oft instead of homage sweet
But poison'd flattery? O! be sick, great greatness,
And bid thy ceremony give thee cure.
Thinkest thou the fiery fever will go out
With titles blown from adulation?
Will it give place to flexure and low bending?

Though the author, for reasons of his own, has seen fit to put them in blank verse, they are questions of a truly scientific character, questions of vital consequence to all men. But here it is the physical difference which accompa-

nies this so immense human distinction, which he appears to be in quest of. It is the control over nature with which these "farical titles" invest their possessor that he is pertinaciously bent upon ascertaining. We shall find that this is not a casual incident of the character or the plot, a thing which belongs to the play and not to the author. This is a poet who is perpetually haunted with the impression that those who assume a divine right to control and dispose of their fellow-men, ought to exhibit some sign of their authority; some superior abilities, some magical control, some light and power that other men have not. How he came by any such notions, the critic of his works is not bound to show. But the poet of Shakespere's stage, be he who he may, is in some way deeply occupied with this question. It is a poet who is possessed with the idea that the true human leadership ought to consist in the ability to extend the empire of man over nature, in the ability to unite and control men and lead them in battalions against those common evils which infest the human conditions and to the conquest of those blessings which the human race have always been vainly crying for.

When, by the mystery of his profession and art, he contrives to get the cloak of factitious royalty about him, he asks questions which another man would not think of putting. Walking up and down the stage in King Hal's mantle, then, that very dubious question—

Canst thou when thou command'st the beggar's knee,
Command the health of it?

What mockery of power is it? This might have seemed to savour somewhat of irony. It might have sounded like a taunt upon the royal helplessness. Thus it is that THE KING dares pursue the subject, answering his own question.

No, thou proud dream
That playst so subtly with a king's repose;
I am a king that find thee; and I know
"Tis not THE BALM, THE SCEPTRE, and THE BALL,
THE SWORD, THE MACE, THE CROWN IMPERIAL,
the inter-tissued ROBE of gold and pearl,
the FARCED TITLE—

Mark it—the FARCED title! A bold word, even with a king to authorize it.

Not all these laid in BED MAJESTICAL,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave
Who, with a body filled, and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest crammed with distressful bread...

What malice could a philosophic poet bear a wretched fellow that cannot sleep, that lies on the stage in *Henry the Fourth*, with the crown on his pillow, pining for the Elysium that his meanest subject commands? Whatever view we may take of it, this is a comprehensive exhibition of the mere pageant of royalty. The liberty of a great Prince to repeat to himself, in the course of a stroll through his own camp, certain philosophical conclusions could hardly be called in question. As to that most extraordinary conversation in which, by means of his disguise, he becomes a participator, it would ill become anyone to take exceptions to it. Yet it is a conversation in which common soldiers are permitted to speak their minds freely. It is a dialogue in which these men are allowed to discuss one of the most important institutions of their time from an ethical point of view. And it was none other than the field of Agincourt that was subjected to this philosophic inquiry. It was under the cover of that renowned triumph that these soldiers could venture to search so deeply the question of war in general. It was in the person of its imperial hero that the statesman could venture to touch so boldly an institution that gave to one man the power to involve nations in such horrors.

It is here that the king proceeds to make that important disclosure that all his senses have but human conditions, and that all his affections, though higher mounted, stoop with the like wing. He pursues this question of the royal responsibility until he arrives at the conclusion that every subject's duty is the king's, but every subject's soul is his own. He shows that there is but one ultimate sovereignty, one to which the king and his subjects are alike amenable, which pursues them everywhere with its demands and reckonings and from whose violated laws there is no escape. The king struggles vainly against the might of the universal nature. But he might as well "go about to turn the sun to ice by fanning its face with a peacock's feather."

It is easy to see what this particular form of writing offered to an author who wished to "infolde" his meaning. Many things, dangerous in themselves, could be shuffled in under cover of an artistic effect. And thus King Lear—that impersonation of absolutism, the very embodiment of pure will and tyranny—is taken out from that hot bath of flatteries to which he had been so long accustomed. With speeches of his supremacy, copied well nigh verbatim from those which Elizabeth's courtiers habitually addressed to her, still ringing in his ears, he is hurled out into a single-handed contest with the elements and anatomized alive before our eyes. Once conceive of the possibility of presenting the action and dumb show of this piece upon the stage at that time and the dialogue, with its illimitable freedoms, follows without any difficulty. For the speeches the monarch makes, with all the levelling of their philosophy, with all the unsurpassable boldness of their political criticism, are too natural and proper to the circumstances to excite any surprise or question.

A king, nurtured in the flatteries of the palace, was unlearned enough in the nature of things to suppose that the name of a king was anything but a shadow

when the power which sustained its prerogative was withdrawn. Such a one appeared to the poet to be engaging in an experiment very similar to the one in progress in his time, in that old, decayed, riotous form of military government which had chosen its dependence on the popular will and respect as fitting for its suppression of the national liberties. It was, of course, modified in the play or it would not have been possible to produce it then. But traced to its natural conclusion in the development of the plot, the presence of an insulted, trampled, outcast majesty on the stage furnishes a cover of which the poet is continually availing himself for putting the case he is always pleading. In the poet's hands, the debased and outcast king becomes the impersonation of a debased and violated state, the victim, too, of a blindness and fatuity on its own part, but not — that is the poet's word—NOT yet irretrievable.

Thou shalt find
I will resume that shape, which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever; thou shalt, I warrant thee.

But that constitutes only a subordinate part of that great play, a play which comprehends in its new philosophical reaches the most radical questions of a practical human science, questions which the modern ages at the moment of its awakening, found itself already compelled to grapple with.

Chapter II Unaccommodated Man

Consider him well. Three of us are sophisticated.

This is the grand social tragedy. It is the tragedy of an unlearned human society. It is the tragedy of a civilization in which the grammar and the relations of sounds and abstract notions to each other have sufficed to absorb the attention of the learned; a civilization in which the social elements, the parts of life and their unions and their prosody, have been left to spontaneity and empiricism and all kinds of rude, arbitrary, idiomatic conjunctions and fortuitous rules; a civilization in which the learning of "words" is invented and the learning of "things" omitted.

There was but one language in which the speaker for countless hearts, tortured and broken on the rude machinery of unlearned social customs and lawless social forces, could tell its story. His illustrated book of it comes to us filled with his ever living subjects and resounding with the tragedy of their complainings. It requires but a little reading of that book to find that the author of it is a philosopher who is strongly disposed to ascertain the limits of that thing in nature which men call fortune. He is greatly of the opinion that the combined

and legitimate use of those faculties with which man is beneficently “armed against the diseases of the world” would limit those fortuities and accidents and vicissitudes that men, in their indolent despair, charge to Fate or ascribe to Providence. This philosopher borrows an ancient fable to teach us that this is not the kind of submission which is pleasing to God, that it is not the kind of suffering that will ever secure his favour.

The weakness and ignorance and misery of the natural man—the misery too of the artificial man as he is, the human liability to injury and wrong, the unborn pre-destined human arts and excellencies which man must struggle to reach—that is the scientific notion which lies at the bottom of this grand ideal representation. It is the human social need, clearly sketched, laid out scientifically as the basis of the human social art. In the poetic representation of that state of things which was to be redressed, the central social figure must, of course, have its place. It is the Poet, his new movements hidden under its old garb, who comes upon the selfish, arrogant old despot in the palace and prescribes to him a course of treatment. And the royal patient, once it has taken effect, is ready to issue it from the hovel’s mouth in the form of a general prescription and state ordinance.

Take physic, POMP;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may’st shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.
Oh, I have taken too little care of THIS!

This is that Poet who represents his method of inquiry and investigation to the eye. This is that same Poet who surprises a queen in her swooning passion of grief and bids her murmur to us her recovering confession.

No more, but e’en a woman; and commanded
By such poor passion, as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.

The first perception of a falling off in the ceremonious affection due to majesty is so faint that Lear dismisses it from his thought. The process continues through all its swift dramatic gradations to the direct abatement of regal dignities. “It is worse than murder,” the poor king cries in the anguish of his slaughtered dignity and affection. So bent is the Poet upon this analytic process that he seems at one moment to be giving a literal finish to his process. But the fool’s scruples interfere with the philosophical humor of the king, and the presence of Mad Tom in his blanket suffices to complete the demonstration. It is the king who generalizes. It is in the tempest that Lear finds occasion to give out the Poet’s text. “Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest

the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the cat no perfume:—Ha! here's three of us are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal, as thou art. Off, off you lendings."

It is man in his relation to nature, in his dependence on artificial aid, that this tempest wakes and brings out. "The naked creature" were better in his grave than to answer with his uncovered body that extremity of the skies "that doth from his senses take all feeling, else save what beats there." It is the personal weakness, the moral and intellectual as well as the bodily frailty, which are common to the King in his palace and Tom o' Bedlam in his hovel. It is this exquisite human frailty and susceptibility, still unprovided for, that fills the play throughout with the outcry of its anguish.

Thus it is that this poor king must be brought out into the wild uproar of nature, stripped of his last adventitious aid and reduced to the authority and forces that nature gave him, ready in his frenzy to second the poet's intent. All his artificial, social personality already dissolved, all his natural social ties torn and bleeding within him, there is yet another kind of trial for him as the royal representative of the human conditions. For the universal interest of this experiment arises from the fact that it is not merely as the king that his illustrious form stands to undergo this fierce analysis, but as the representative of that outward life which all men carry about with them, incorporating in their very personality the prejudices and passions of others and the variable tide of this world's fortunes.

The fact that this blow to his state is dealt to him by those to whom nature had so deeply bound him is that which overwhelms the sufferer. It is that which he seeks to understand, but his mind cannot master it. His brain gives way, the mental confusion begins. The poet takes pains to clear this complication. It is the wound in the affections which untunes the jarring senses of "this child-changed father." It is that which invades his identity. "Are you our daughter? Does any one here know me?" That is the frozen wonder which Goneril's first rude assault brings on him. He curses her, but his curses do not sever the tie.

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter.

Or rather a disease that's in my flesh

Which I must needs call mine.

Filial ingratitude!

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand

For lifting food to it?

This is the poet's conception of man as he is, not the abstract man of the schools, nor the logical man that the Realists and Nominalists went to blows for. As to the man of the old philosophy, "His bones were marrowless, his blood was cold, he had no speculation in those eyes that he did glare with." The New Philosopher will have no such skeletons in his system. He is getting his general

man out of particular cases, buiding him up solid from a basis of natural history. There will be no question as to whether he is or is not. "For I do take," says the Advancer of Learning, "the consideration in general, and at large, of Human Nature, to be fit to be emancipated and made a knowledge by itself."

This particular point which poor Lear is illustrating here, "that our affections carry themselves beyond us," is the view the same Poet gives in accounting for Ophelia's madness.

Nature is fine in love; and where 'tis fine,
It sends some precious instance of itself,
After the thing it loves.

Lear searches to the quick the secrets of this "broken-heartedness," this ill to which the human species is notoriously liable.

Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all,—
O that way madness lies; let me shun that,
No more of that.

While he is still undergoing the last extreme of the suffering which the human wrong is capable of inflicting on the affections, he comes in the Poet's hands to exhibit the unexplored depth of that which casts him out from the family of man and leaves him to contend alone with great nature and her unrelenting consequences.

To wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure,
Must be their school-masters,—

is the point which the philosophic Regan makes. But while the Poet notes the special relationship, he does not limit his humanities to the ties of blood or household sympathies or social gradations.

Because this representation is artistic and dramatic and not simply historical, the Poet must exhibit in dramatic appreciable figures the undefinable historical suffering of years. The wildest threats which nature in her terrors makes to man had to be incorporated in this great philosophical piece. In all the mad anguish of that ruined greatness and wronged natural affection the Poet, relentless as fortune in her sternest moods, will bring out his great victim and consign him to the rain and the lightning and the thunder and bid his senses undero their "horrible pleasure." For the senses, scorned as they had been in philosophy, have their full honest report to make to us. And the design of this piece required that the grand departments of human need should be brought together in this one man's experience so that a deliberate comparison can be

instituted between them.

The Poet will tell us plainly, once and for all, whether man is in any condition to dispense with the Science and the Art which puts him into intelligent and harmonious relations with nature in general. It was necessary to the purpose of the play to exhibit the extreme of that social evil which ignorant and barbarous ages build under the tyranny of our fine institutions. The careful reader of this play will find that the need of arts is that which is set forth in it, the need of arts more nearly matched with the subtlety of nature. But let us collect the results of this experiment.

Raised by that storm of grief and indignation into a companionship with the wind and rain and lightning and thunder, the king strives in his little world of man to out-scorn these elements. This is the experiment which the philosopher will try in the presence of his audience. With anguish in his heart, the crushed majesty, the stricken old man, the child-wounded father, laughs at the pains of the senses. The physical distress is welcome to him. He calls to the unconscious, soulless elements and bids them to do their worst.

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.

That is the argument. This is a distinction appreciable to the human mind.

I never gave you kingdoms, called you children;
You owe me no subscription; why then let fall
Your horrible pleasure?

When the storm has done its work and he is faint with struggling with its fury, he still maintains the argument.

Thou thinkest 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin; so 'tis to thee.
But where the greater malady is fixed,
The lesser is scarce felt.
 The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,
Save what beats there.
 Pour on, I will endure,
In such a night as this.

When the shelter he is at last forced to seek is found, he shrinks back into the storm again because "it will not give him leave to think on that which hurts him more." So nicely does the Poet balance these ills and report the swaying moment. It is a poet who does not take commonplace opinions on this or any other such subject. It would have been more in accordance with the old poetic notions if this poor king had maintained his ground without any misgiving. But

this is a poet of a new order. Though his verse is not without certain sublimities of its own, he is observing nature and reporting it as it is. Notwithstanding all the poetry of that passionate defiance, it is the physical storm that triumphs in the end. The contest between that little world of man and the great outdoor world of nature was too unequal.

Man's nature cannot carry
The affliction nor the fear.

Unable to contend any longer with "the fretful element," "exposed to feel what wretches feel," he finds at last that art—the wretch's art—that can make vile things precious. No longer clamoring for "the additions of a kind," but glad to divide with his meanest subject that shelter which the outcast seeks on such a night, we have reached a point where the action of the piece becomes luminous and hardly needs the player's eloquence to tell us what it means. The author of *The Advancement of Learning* remarks that a representation, by means of these "transient hieroglyphics," is much more moving to the sensibilities and leaves a more vivid and durable impression on the memory than the most eloquent statement in mere words. "What is sensible always strikes the memory more strongly, and sooner impresses itself than what is intellectual. Thus the memory of brutes is excited by sensible, but not by intellectual things." And thus he proposes to impress that class which Coriolanus speaks of, "whose eyes are more learned than their ears," to whom "action is eloquence."

When the road from the palace to the hovel is laid open, when the hovel where Tom O' Bedlam is nestling in the straw is produced on the stage and the King stoops to creep into its mouth, we do not need a chorus to interpret for us or to wait for the Poet's own deferred exposition to seize the obvious meanings. One catches that there is something going on in this play which is not all play, something which "the groundlings' were not expected to get in their six-penn'orth" at the first performance. That witty and splendid company who made up the Christmas party at Whitehall on the occasion of its first exhibition there, rustling in silk and glittering in wealth that the alchemy of the storm had not tired, were not informed of it, though there was a gentleman of blood and breeding among them who could have told them what it meant.

They told me I was everything.

Storm-battered as he is, the poor King shrinks back from the shelter he had bid his loving attendants to bring him to. Why? Because he has not told us why he is there. This one man's tragedy is not the tragedy that this Poet's soul is big with. It is the tragedy of the Many, not the One, the tragedy that is the rule, not the exception. The Monarch is at the door of the Many. The scientific Poet has

had his eye on that structure and will make of it a thing of wonder that shall drive our entomologists and conchologists to despair and drive them off the stage with their curiosities and marvels. There is no need of a Poet's going to the supernatural for unemployed machinery. "There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out."

The Monarch has come down from that dizzy height on the Poet's errand. He is there to illustrate that grave abstract learning which the Poet has put on another page. Notwithstanding the learned airs it has, it is not learnign but "hte husk and shell" of it. This philosopher puts it down as a primary Article of Science that governments should be based on a scientific acquaintance with "the natures, dispositions, necessities and discontents of the people." In his *Advancement of Learning*, he suggests that, considering the means of ascertaining them at the disposal of the government, these points "out to be." He puts the case of discovering much that was new in the course of an accidental personal descent into the lower and more inaccessible regions of the Common Weal. This is the crystal which proves the most transparent for him.

The Monarch is at the hovel's door, but he cannot enter. There is no shelter for him in this Poet's economy because the great lesson of state has entered his soul. He is thinking of "the Many," he has forgotten "the One." He thinks it selfish to engross the luxury of the precious straw while he has subjects with senses like his own still out in this same storm unbonneted. In the searching delicacy of that feeling with which he now scrutinizes their case, they seem to him less able than himself to resist its elemental tyranny. It is this strangely philosophic king who is chosen by the Poet as the chief commentator and expounder of that new political and social doctrine which the action of this play is suggesting.

In that one night's personal experience, the king has been taking lessons in the art of majesty. The alchemy of it has robbed him of the external adjuncts of a king, but the sovereignty of Mercy, the divine right of Pity, the majesty of Human Kindness breathes through his lips from the Poet's heart.

I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
 Poor, naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm.—

There are no empty phrases in this prayer. The petitioner knows the meaning of each word in it:

How shall your housless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you
 From seasons such as these? Oh, I have taken
 Too little care of this.

It is never the custom of this author to leave the diligent student of his performances in any doubt whatever as to his meaning. It is a rule that everything in the play shall speak and reverberate his purpose. He has the Teachers trick of repetition, but he is so rich in magical resources that he does not often find it necessary to weary the sense with sameness. He is prodigal in variety. It is a Proteus repetition. But his charge to Ariel in getting up his Masques always is,

Bring a corollary,
Rather than want a spirit.

It would be dangerous, not merely wearisome, to bring too near together those sentences wherein the scanses of meaning lie packed. The curtain must fall and rise again, ere the outcast duke, his eyes gouged out by tyranny, can dare to echo the thoughts of the outcast king. Turned forth to smell his way to Dover, led by one whose qualification for leadership is that he is "Madman and Beggar, too," Gloucester explains it to us.

't is the time's plague when madmen lead the blind.

Thus it is that this secret understanding with the king betrays itself.

Gloucester.	Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man That slaves your ordinance, that will not see Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly; So distribution should undo excess, And each man have enough.
Lear.	Oh I have taken Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp; Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, Thou thou may'st shake the superflux to them, And show the Heavens more just.

It is very seldom that two men in real life, coincide so exactly in their trains of thought and in the niceties of their expression in discussing it. The emphasis is deep indeed when this author graves his meaning with such a repetition enforcing the philosophic subtleties. He is abroad in this play, full of errands to wilfull men, charged with coarse lessons to those who will learn through the senses only great Nature's lore—that "slave Heaven's ordinance—that will not see, because they do not feel."

Chapter III
The King and the Beggar

Armado: Is there not a ballad, boy, of the King and the Beggar?

Moth: The world was very guilty of such a ballad some three ages since: but I think, now 'tis not to be found; or, if it were, it would neither serve for the writing, nor for the tune.

Armado: I will have the subject newly writ over, that I may example my digression by some mighty precedent.

Love's Labour's Lost

The king's philosophical studies are not yet completed; for he is in the hands of one who is bent on exploring those subterranean social depths that the king's prayer has just glanced at. The terms of true human pity in which he expresses it has no learned speech, no tragic dialect, or "its phrase of sorrow might conjure the wandering stars and bid them stand like wonder-wounded hearers." In the Poet's time, this was played in its own native shape and custom, daring as the attempt might seem.

The author is not satisfied with the picturesque details of that misery with its "looped and windowed raggedness," its "houseless heads," its "unfed sides." It must be more palpably presented with its proper moral and intellectual accompaniments before the philosophic requisitions of this design can be fulfilled. For the design of this play includes the defects of that which passed for civilization. That wild cry of human anguish which pervades it is the embodiment of that deeply-rooted opinion of mankind which the New Philosopher is known to have entertained. It is one which could hardly have been produced from the philosophic chair in his time, or from the bench, or at the council-table in such terms as we find here.

Those who persuade themselves that it was an historical exhibition for the amusement of audiences of the Life and Times of that ancient Celtic king of Britain will be prevented from ever attaining the least inkling of the matter. For this Magician does not get out his book and staff and put on his Enchanter's robe for any such effect as that. It is not enough in the revolutionary sweep of this play to bring the monarch from his palace and set him down at the hovel's door. It is not enough to show us, by the light of Cordelia's pity, the "swine" in that human dwelling and "the short and musty-straw" there.

The poet himself will enter it and drag out its human tenant into the day of his immortal verse. He will set him up for all ages on his great stage. This must be completed before this doctrine of "man as distinguished from other species" can be artistically exhibited. It is this vivid exhibition of man as he is which brings out the true doctrine of human society. The other, the common method, has failed.

The man of the new science looks with forebodings on those storms of

political revolution that were hanging then on the world's horizon. That is not the kind of change he meditates. His is the subtle, all-penetrating Radicalism which imitates the noiseless processes of nature. There is wild gibberish heard in the straw and out rushes Tom O' Bedlam with his "elf locks," his "blanketed loins," his "begrimed face," with his shattered wits, his madness, real or assumed. We know that there is gentle, noble blood under that horrid guise. It is the out-cast heir of a dukedom, compelled for the sake of prolonging life to that shape, as other wretches were in the Poet's time.

Here are some of the prose English descriptions of this tragedy which show that the Poet has not exaggerated his portrait. "I remember, before the civil wars, Tom O' Bedlams went about begging," Aubrey says. Randle Holme, in his *Academy of Arms and Blazon*, includes them in his descriptions as a class of vagabonds "feigning themselves mad." "The Bedlam is in the same garb, with his long staff," etc., "but his cloathing is more fantastic and ridiculous; for being a madman, he is madly decked and dressed all over with rubans, feathers, cuttings of cloth, and what not, to make him seem a madman, when he is not other than a dissembling knave."

In the *Bellman of London*, 1640, there is another description. "He swears he hath been in Bedlam, and will talk frantickely of purpose; you see pinnes stuck in sundry places of his naked flesh, especially in his arms, which paine he gladly puts himselfe to; calls himself by the name of Poore Tom; and coming near anybody, cries out 'Poor Tom's a cold.' Some be exceeding merry and doe nothing but sing songs fashioned out of their own braines; some will dance; others will doe nothing either laugh or weepe; others are dogged and sullen both in looke and speech."

Our young dukeling Edgar says—

The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;

But the poet is not contented with the minuteness of this description. The Jesuits had then been at work in England endeavoring to cast out "the fiend" from the many possessed persons. It appeared to this great practical philosopher that this creature, fetched up from the subterranean social abysses of his time, presented a very fitting subject for the practitioners professing superior influence over the demons that infest human nature. He has brought him out for the purpose of inquiring whether there is any exorcism which can meet his case or that of the great human multitude. Tom, thinking an occasion has arrived for defining his social outline, takes it upon himself to answer—

Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, swallows the old rat, and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of this standing pool; who is whipped from tything to tything and stocked, punished and imprisoned...

The point to be noted here is that this mad humor does not appear in the vein of that old-fashioned philosophy which has been rattling its abstractions in the face of human misery for so many ages. The helplessness of this human creature suggests to the royal sufferer that there ought to be some relief for the human condition, and his inquiries and discoveries are all stamped with the unmistakeable impress of that new philosophy which was not yet out of the mint. That philosophy, we are told elsewhere, concerns itself with the ideas as they exist in nature as causes, not as they exist in the mind of men as words.

From the moment in which Tom O' Bedlam makes his first appearance on the stage, the king has no eyes or ears for anything else. This startling juxtaposition was not intended by the poet to fulfill its effect as a mere passing *tableau vivant*. The relation must be dramatically developed in spite of the displeasure of the king's attendants. They seek in vain to part these two men. The king refuses to stir without him. He has a vague idea that the Bedlamite is in some way connected with the subject and, in spite of their disgust, the king's friends are obliged to take this wretch with them. The rough aristocratic contempt manifested by the king's party for this poor human victim of misfortune is made to contrast with their boundless sympathy and tenderness for the king, while the poet finds the mantle of his humanity wide enough for both.

As for the king, that new accession of his mental disorder which leads him to regard this man as a source of new light on human affairs is one of those exquisite physiological exhibitions of which only this artist is capable. The philosophic domain which that new road leads to appears to be considerably broader than that very vivid, but narrow, limitation of its fields which Mr. Macaulay has set down in our time. This philosopher that Lear inclines to has sounded the new science "from its lowest note to the top of its key."

One cannot but observe that Poor Tom's researches in this new field of practical philosophy do not appear to have been followed up since with any marked success. Modern philosophers do not exhibit that palpable bearing on practice, to which Tom so severely inclines. For he is one who would make "the art and practice part of life the mistress to his theoretic." Mr. Macaulay is not the only person who appears to think that does not come within the range of anything human. Many of our scholars are still of the opinion that "court holy water" is the best application in the world for him. For our philosophers are still determined to reason without taking into account the circumstance with which "nature finds itself scourged."

King Lear's own inquiries include the two great branches of the new philosophy. His mind is bent on the pursuit of causes. And though in the paroxysms of his mental disorder he is apt to confound them, this very confusion serves to develop the breath of the conception beneath. In the midst of the uproar of the tempest, he does begin with the physical investigation. He puts the question, "What is the cause of thunder?" But his inquiry does not stop there, where all philosophy has stopped ever since. It is the tempest in his mind that most concerns him. His practical philosopher must explore the conditions of that and find the conductors for its lightnings.

Then let them anatomize Regan; see what
breeds about her heart: Is there any cause
in nature that makes thee hard hearts?

A very fair subject for philosophical inquiry, one would say and as profitable and interesting perhaps as some that so profoundly engage the attention of our men of learning. It is perfectly clear that the author, whoever he may be, is very much of Lear's mind on this point. He does not depend upon Lear alone to suggest his views. There is never a person of this drama that does not do it.

Chapter IV The Use of Eyes

All that follow their noses are led by their eyes, but—blind men

It is not merely in the direct discourse on questions of physical science or in Cordelia's invocation to "all the blessed secrets—the unpublished virtues of the earth" that the new physiological science which this work embodies may be seen. It betrays itself on every turn. The subtle relations of the moral and physical are noted here as we do not find them in less practical theories of nature. It is the scientific doctrine of MAN that is taught here, that man must be human in all his relations or "cease to be."

All the play is filled with the uproar of one continued outrage on humanity. It is not by accident that the story of the illegitimate Edmund begins the piece before Lear and his daughters make their entrance. The whole story of the base-born one who makes brutal, spontaneous nature his goddess and his law was needed to supply the deficiencies in the original plot. The story of the Earl of Gloucester was essential for the same purpose. Cordelia's agonized invocation to the forces of nature is continually echoed by the Poet, but with a broader application. It is not alone for the cure of the malady and infirmity with which the poor king is afflicted that he would open his Prospero book. "Nature's infinite book of secresy," he calls it elsewhere—"the true magic."

All the interior phenomena which attend the violation of duty are omitted here. The Poet has left us no room to suspect the tenderness of his moral sensibility or the depth of his acquaintance with these. The object on which our sympathies are concentrated is—

One more sinned against, than sinning.

It is at the conclusion of a long and elaborate discussion in which Gloucester refers to the influence of the planets that the base-born Edmund treats us to a prohibited piece of harmony. "Fa sol la mi." That particular conjunction of sounds was forbidden by the ancient musicians on account of its unnatural discord. The monkish writers on music call it diabolical. Edmund is disposed to acquit the celestial influences. He does not believe in men being—

Fools, by heavenly compulsion; knaves and thieves, by
by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by
an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that they
are evil in, by a divine thrusting on.

He has another method of accounting for what he is. This question of "the several dispositions and characters of men" and the inquiry as to whether there be "any causes in nature" of these degenerate tendencies, is a very important point with him. That which in contemplative philosophy corresponds to cause, in practical philosophy becomes the rule, the founder of it tells us. The play cannot be studied effectually without taking into account the date of his chronicle, that stage of human development in which the mysterious forces of nature were still blindly deified. The religious invocations with which the play abounds are not, in the modern sense of the term, prayers, but only vague, poetic appeals to the unknown, unexplored powers in nature. When all the new movement of human thought was still hampered by the narrowness of "preconceived opinions," the poet was glad to take shelter here, as *Macbeth* and other poems, for the sake of a little more freedom.

He is far from condemning "presuppositions" and "anticipations," but wishes them kept in their proper places. To undertake to face down the powers of nature with them is mistaken because these powers do not yield to human beliefs. Those terrible appeals to the heavens which King Lear launches are anything but pious. The boldness which shocks our modern sensibilities becomes less offensive if we take into account that they are not made to the object of our present religious worship.

That divine Ideal of Human Nature to which "our large temples, crowded with the shows of peace," are built, had not yet appeared at the date of this history. Paul had not yet preached his sermon at Athens in the age of this supposed King of Britain. Though the author was indeed painting his own age

and not that, there was such a heathenish and diabolical state of things to represent, that this discrepancy was not shocking.

It is the stars.
The stars above us govern our conditions,
Else one self mate and mate could not beget
Such different issues.

It is not astrological theory which Kent is made to advocate here. It is the absence of any known cause and the necessity of supposing one where this difference he expresses is so obtrusive. Poor Tom appears in possession of a much more orthodox theory and Lear, in his madness, speculates upon this same question. The natural differences in human dispositions has seized the eye of this great scientific practitioner and he is making a radical point of it. The doctrine of this play is that those same powers which are at work in man's life are at work without it also; that they are powers which belong, in their highest form, to the nature of things in general; and that man himself, with all his special distinctions, is under the law of that universal constitution.

Poor Lear, when he undertakes to put his absolute power in motion, appears to treat the subject in the most savage and despairing manner. In his scorn for the failure in human nature from which he is suffering so deeply, he proposes a law which shall obliterate that human distinction. That is anything but the Poet's remedy. The moral disgust in which the knowledge of human good and evil betrays itself breaks forth in floods of passion that overflow the bounds of articulation. The radical nature of this question of natural causes is already indicated in the play when the king betrays the selfishness of that fond preference for his younger daughter and the frenzied paroxysm of rage and disappointment which her unloving, as it seems to him, reply creates. These are the terms in which he undertakes to annul the natural tie and disown her—

The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied and relieved,
As thou, my sometime daughter.

And when his "dog-hearted daughters" have returned to his own bosom the cruel edge of unnatural wrong, this is the greeting which Goneril receives on her return to her husband.

Albany: She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither,
and come to deadly use.

Goneril: No more; the text is foolish.

Albany: Tigers, not daughters, —

It is the distinction between man and the brute creation which the Poet paints so vividly for the purpose of inquiring if there is not some more potent provisioning of man for his place in nature. "Milk-liver'd man!" replies Goneril, speaking not only in her own behalf. The words have a double significance and the Poet glances through them at the state of things.

Milk-liver'd man,
That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honour from thy sufferance;

Albany has talked of tigers and head-lugged bears. He has called upon the monsters of the deep in illustration of the state of things. But this descent to the lower nature from the higher appears to the scientific mind to require yet other terms. These comparisons, drawn from the habits of animals who have no law but blind instincts, do not suffice to convey the Poet's idea of human dereliction. It is the human and not the instinctive element that rules. The process which his hands are inclined to undertake is not half so cruel as the one which this woman has practised on herself while pursuing her "horrible pleasure" at the expense of madness and death to another. In that act she has slaughtered in cold blood the divine, angelic form of womanhood which great nature stamped upon her. She has desecrated not only the common form of humanity, but that lovelier soul which womanhood in its integrity must carry with it.

That is the Poet's reading. He is not one of those "Milk-livered men" who have not an eye discerning their honour from their sufferance. He is not one of those Moral Fools that Goneril alludes to, who think it enough to cry Alack! without inquiring what it is that makes that lack. His play is full of the practical application which Gloucester sums up—

'Tis the Time's plague when Madmen lead the Blind.

The whole play is one magnificent intimation that eyes are made to see with and that there is not so natural and legitimate use of them as that which human affairs were crying for. It is that eye which extends human vision far beyond individual sensuous experience, which is able to converge the light of universal truth upon particular experience. That is the eye which he finds wanting in human affairs. The play is pointing everywhere the Poet's scorn of "Blind men, who will not see because they do not feel," who wait for the blows of fortune to teach them the lesson of Nature's laws.

It is that same combination of sense and reason which the *Novum Organum*

provides for. But with the aid of the persons of the Drama, the new philosophy is carried into departments which would have cost the author his head to look into. Written in "with a goose-pen" those practical axioms pass for unconscious, unmeaning, spontaneous felicities. "Canst thou tell why one's nose stands in the middle of his face?" says the Fool. "Why, to keep his eyes on either side of it, that what a man cannot smell out he may spy into." The nose has not stood in the middle of the author's face for nothing. There has been some prying on either side of it and to good purpose.

It is in the second act that poor Kent, in his misfortune, furnishes another avowal on the part of this learned critic for a practical philosophy. He sits in the stocks because he could not adopt the style of his time with sufficient earnestness. It is from that seat that he puts his inquiry,—

Kent: Why, fool?

Fool: We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there is no labouring in the winter. All that follow their noses are led by their eyes, but blind men.

Kent: Where learned'st thou that, fool?

Fool: Not in the stocks, fool.

"I have no way; and therefore want no eyes" says another victim of that absolute authority which is abroad in this play. This is his prayer:

Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
That slaves your ordinance; that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly.

His eyes had been taken out of his head by the persons then occupying the chief offices in the state.

Lear: A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.
Look with thine ears.

His account of how it goes contains what one calls elsewhere in this play, ear-kissing arguments. "Get thee glass eyes and like a scurvy-politician pretend to see the things thou dost not." That was not the political eye-sight which this statesman and seer proposed to leave the times his legacy should fall on, whatever he might be compelled to tolerate in his own.

Surely this is a poet whose eye passes lightly over the architectonic gifts of univalves and bivalves, and entomological developments of skill and forethought. Here is a naturalist intent on that great chrysalis which has never been able to publish its Creator's glory, who would not think it enough to bring all the unpublished virtues of the earth to the relief of the bodily human

maladies. He is a man who is able to ascend to the actual principles of things and so base his remedies for social evils on the forms which have efficacy in nature instead of on certain chimeras or so-called logical conclusions of the human mind.

Nature, in the sense in which Edmund uses that term, is not this poet's goddess or his law. He is far from contending for the freedom or that savage, selfish nature to which the natural son of Gloucester claims his services are due. The poet teaches that the true and successful Social Art must be based on a science that recognizes the double nature in man. It is one thing to quarrel with the imperfect social arts, and it is another to prefer nature in man without arts. But it is impossible that the true social arts should be stumbled on by accident or arrived at by empirical groping.

The cause in nature of the phenomena of human life, appeared to this philosopher too important to be left to mere blundering experiment; too subtle to be entangled with the philosophy in vogue in his time. It did not seem to him that men who have eyes that were meant to see with should go on in this groping, star-gazing, fatally stumbling fashion any longer.