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Psychology may best be learned and taught by example. There is nothing more instructive to master and pupil alike than analysis of character and in its development by action and speech to trace the mental structure that so manifests itself. It is not too much to assert that more knowledge of the forces by which the Mechanism of Man is moved and directed, and of the methods of their action, will be obtained from one such examination of the conduct and motives of an individual human being, than could be gleaned from a hundred lectures by metaphysicians dealing only with abstractions, conjectures, and *à priori* argument.

But better even than the study of the Psychology of a Man living or who has lived, is the study of some one of the

creations with which Genius has so largely supplied the world; better, inasmuch as they are more open to inspection, more familiar, and therefore substantially more *real* to us, than any actual personage can ever be. So much of every living man is carefully concealed from view—is, in fact, known only to himself—that he who has most opened his life and thoughts to the inspection of his fellow creatures has doubtless repressed a great deal more than he has revealed. Of all the writers who have produced studies for the Psychologist, SHAKESPEARE is beyond measure the greatest, and of all the characters SHAKESPEARE has created, there is none so much the subject of controversy as Hamlet. Libraries have been written upon him and yet the theme is unexhausted. It is debated as eagerly and hotly as ever. But it is not as a literary controversy that I ask your attention to it. It is as a Psychological study.

The combatants are about equally divided in number and weight. The question over which they contend is contained in three words: "Was Hamlet mad?" "Yes, decidedly," says one party; "Certainly not," shouts the other party. "But he acts the madman," returns the first. "He only shams madness," retorts the other. Proofs are adduced by both parties strongly supporting the contention of each. It seems to me that the continuance of this dispute indicates, as in all debatable questions of science, that somehow the inquirers are upon the wrong path and that to discover the truth we must turn into some other path than that which has been pursued so long without decisive results.

My purpose in this paper is to suggest another view of the question based, not upon the old but upon the new mental physiology. We have emancipated ourselves from the Metaphysicians for the study of mind generally. We have lately taken to deal with mind as we deal with the

subject-matter of all physical science, and banishing *à priori* argument and speculative abstractions, we have begun to build up a real Science of Mind and Soul upon the sure and safe foundation of *facts*. We look about us to see what is the *action* of the Mechanism of Man in its normal and its abnormal conditions; what it *does;* what *phenomena* it exhibits; how Mind and Soul express themselves outwardly. Then, putting all these facts together, we are confident that we can erect as sound and secure a structure for Psychology as has been erected for the other Sciences by the same process.

The purpose of the paper is to employ this modern method of investigation upon the much debated character of Hamlet and see what comes of it—if it may not lead us to something like a solution of the problem, "Madness or no madness?" which has hitherto absorbed almost wholly the thoughts and energies of the combatants.

The method I suggest is that we should first see what is the mental structure of Hamlet, as shown by his acts and words. Then I think it will be found that this mental structure explains the mystery—without resorting to the strange conclusion that the man who says some of the wisest things that ever were uttered was a lunatic.

For remember what madness is. It is *disease* of the structure of the brain, or of some part of it, causing irregular or incomplete performance of some of its functions. Eccentricity, the result of structure, is not madness, nor allied to madness. If natural mental structure—that which was born with him, that which makes him Hamlet and not any other person—will explain his actions in the play, the lunatic theory must be abandoned.

Craniology I hold to be an unproved theory. The doctrine of Phrenology, that the brain is the organ of mind, and that certain parts of the brain have specific mental

functions, I hold to be established, although it is more than doubtful if we have yet ascertained what particular portions of the brain are appropriated to those functions. But I accept, as established, that analysis of the mental faculties which Phrenology has worked out and for which Psychological Science owes to it a debt of gratitude. I employ this division of the mental faculties, not only because it is in my judgment correct, but also because it is generally intelligible.

Hamlet is manifestly of *melancholic* temperament. He lacks the faculty of *Hope*. It is the characteristic of such a disposition to nurse griefs—to look on the dark side of things. His first appearance on the stage introduces us at once to this marked feature. We see the son sighing for his dead father and who would not be comforted. He wears the deepest mourning while all the Court is robed in wedding garments. To his mother's exhortation that he should cease from seeking his noble father in the dust, and her hint that his sorrow was more in seeming than in substance, he answers :

> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black
> That can decide me truly; these indeed "seem,"
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passeth show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

The second in prominence of his mental features is *irresolution*—a character by no means uncommon. It is, in fact, a deficiency of the faculty of firmness and is most conspicuous in minds possessing large capacities for reasoning and reflecting. Such minds habitually hesitate. They have their doubts. They look upon both sides of every question and balance the *pros* and *cons*. They perceive prospective difficulties and objections not apparent to those

who act without preliminary thought. This characteristic is not, as commonly supposed, a form of cowardice. The irresolution that paralyses action is not the product of fear. The judgment sees so much to attract or to warn, as the case may be, that it is unable to come to a decision and pronounce a verdict. Even when resolved to take action, such potent objections present themselves that the mental energies are distracted. The *will* to do is not put forth, as with the inconsiderate — who accept at once an absolute assurance that the course resolved upon is the right one.

This characteristic of the young Prince of Denmark is exhibited throughout the drama. He begins by accepting the Ghost as the true spirit of his father, and at the moment, in the passion of the revelation, he promises to avenge the crime. But he soon begins to reflect, to reason, and then to question the truth of the manifestation. As his thoughts dwell upon it, he discovers all kinds of reasons why he might be mistaken.

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil, and the devil hath power
> To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with such spirits,
> Allures me but to damn me.

Have we not often witnessed the same process among ourselves in relation to other phenomena?

Hamlet is affectionate and fond. He dearly loved his father; he must have been a loving son to his mother until her unnatural marriage revolted him. His friendship for Horatio was firm and enduring. He loved Ophelia with the passion of his youth until the ghostly revelation froze the life-blood in his veins and stifled all better feelings in an absorbing thirst for vengeance. Throughout we can see his love struggling fiercely with his over-mastering passion for

revenge—his conviction that a duty had been imposed upon him to which he must sacrifice the past and all its fond records. How terrible was this mental struggle is shown in that wonderful scene with Ophelia, in which he bids her go to a nunnery. How he wavers between his long cherished love for the girl, whom he believes to have been thrown in his way purposely to try him, and his resolve to sustain his assumed character in the presence of the spies who were watching him. Here again we see the characteristics of the man betraying themselves in his indecision, his cynical philosophy, his reflective habits, his incapacity for action—a character by no means rare in social life. Who has not known men who can *think* profoundly and well, but cannot *do*; who rightly point the way, but want the force of *will* to follow it? That is the character of Hamlet. He is a *moody* man, and, like all moody men, his spirits are sometimes extravagantly high, sometimes wretchedly low. Even his humour is tinged with melancholy, as witness the dialogue with the gravediggers. According to the mood of the moment is the aspect to him of the world and all its belongings. It must be remembered, also, that he was possessed with the superstition that prevailed down to a very recent time. He was a philosopher of the schools, and when Shakespeare embodied this marvellous creation of his genius, even philosophers did not doubt the existence of ghosts. It was a part of the world's creed, and to question it would have been deemed as rank a heresy as atheism. This must be taken into account in any estimate of the character of Hamlet as exhibited in his speech and conduct. He never for a moment doubted that he had seen a visitor from the other world. The doubt that troubled him was not if his senses had deceived him, or imposture trifled with him, but if the Ghost really was the actual personality it professed to be. It *might* be a devil. Was it his father's

spirit, or was it a demon pretending to be his father? He did not doubt for a moment that it was a spirit he had seen, he had no thought that his senses had been deluded.

This was the other side of the question which his hesitating mind presented to him. He believed in the potency of evil spirits. He believed implicitly that they could take any shape and profess any personality for the purpose of entrapping human Souls. It is not difficult to imagine what was the course of reasoning in his hesitating mind and how with him it paralysed *action*.

This, then, is the keynote of the entire drama from the moment of his interview with the Ghost. A clear conception must be formed of his natural temperament, as I have ventured to describe it—reflective but irresolute—thoughtful but inactive,—shocked at first by the shameless marriage of his mother, afterwards learning that she was not merely a wanton, but a murderess, a supernatural revelation enforcing him to vengeance, but his lifted arm paralysed by doubt if the communication was from above or from below. Thus contemplated, his whole conduct seems to me not only perfectly intelligible but perfectly *natural*.

With this necessary introduction, let us proceed to the examination of the drama itself and endeavour to trace in it the revelations of the character we have sketched.

Let us see how this view of the psychological character of Hamlet is sustained by the play.

He is, as already noted, first introduced to us labouring under a fit of melancholy. He is shocked at the marriage of his mother following so hard upon his father's funeral. He has a shadowy suspicion of foul play. "Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle." In this mood he is startled by the intelligence of the appearance of his father's spirit in arms.

He expresses no doubt of the fact, for he feels none. Belief

in ghosts was universal. When Shakespeare made such marvellous dramatic use of the supernatural, it would have been deemed insanity to question that spirits walk the earth.

Then comes the interview with the Ghost; the revelation of that murder "most foul, strange, and unnatural." With one of Hamlet's melancholy temperament such a tale could not but "harrow up his soul, freeze his young blood." And it wrought a sudden change in him. His one object in life thenceforth should be to avenge his father's murder. To this end, in the haste of the moment, he devises that scheme of pretended lunacy which explains the whole future action and apparent contradictions of the play. He will "put an antic disposition on" to avert suspicion from his real purpose. Nothing can be more explicit than his intimation that he was going to assume a character with a distinct and obvious design. Nevertheless, in the face of this express avowal, volumes have been written to contend that Hamlet was really mad.

The voices of his frightened friends remind him that he has a part to play, and his purpose is even then avowed. He had resolved to feign madness with obvious design.

But very soon his constitutional irresolution returns. He doubts, hesitates. I am not sure that he does not—what we see so many do among ourselves—after awhile begin to question his senses and doubt to-morrow what he has seen to-day. If he does not banish the vision altogether, he certainly begins to doubt if it was an "honest" ghost. It was the popular belief that the devil could assume all shapes, even those of angels, for the entrapping of souls, and this reflection made him hesitate again.

Certainly this irresolution, this wavering between duty (for such was vengeance to him) and doubt could not but disturb somewhat a mind not naturally well balanced. He

is harassed by contending emotions and intellectual conflicts. In a fit of his melancholy mood he contemplates even suicide as an escape from that mental disquietude which is the most frequent cause of self-slaughter. But he steadily maintains the assumed character of the madman to those about him —to all observers, except his dear friend Horatio, who is the depositary of his secrets. With him he is at all times sane enough. Can a real madman change thus at will ?

But Ophelia—what of her? His behaviour to her is inexplicable and inexcusable, say the critics, save on the assumption of positive madness. She had not offended him. She could not betray him. We challenge an explanation of this consistent with the sanity of a gentleman described by Ophelia herself, as

> The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> The observed of all observers.

He has loved Ophelia dearly—loves her still; but he knows her to be innocently the tool of her father. His sagacity has divined that she is to be made an instrument to try him. Polonius implicitly believes in the reality of his madness. But the King, with the natural suspiciousness of the guilty, has manifestly in his mind an almost instinctive sense that Hamlet is playing a part, and his conscience tells him wherefore. Consequently he is most anxious, by personal observation, to test him when not himself perceived, and he accepts with eagerness the proposal of Polonius that they should hide and him unaware that he is observed; for which purpose Ophelia is to be set innocently to entrap him into a revelation of his true condition.

His fellow-students are put upon the like watch for the like reason—to learn if his madness was real or assumed. He speedily detects their scheme, however.

The appearance of the Players suggests to him the device of setting a trap for the King. He will have a play that shall tell over again, in the presence of the suspected murderers, the story told him by the Ghost.

Polonius and the King continue their espials. Ophelia is still the bait employed. On his approach in one of his most melancholy and most meditative moods—when his reasoning powers were most active and his faculty of hope in its most extreme depression—again they hide and listen. At first he is not aware that spies are near him and his marvellous soliloquy marks surely not the madman but the philosopher. It is not until he has risen to greet Ophelia that he sees or hears the spies. Then, *and therefore*, he instantly resumes, and abruptly, the "antic disposition" he had put on for a purpose. *Then* follows the extraordinary scene which has been so persistently advanced as conclusive proof that Hamlet was really insane, and this, in spite of his sudden assumption of apparent insanity and the obvious motive for it.

We are indebted to Mr. Henry Irving for having rightly interpreted this much misrepresented scene. Other actors have made of it an incoherent raving. He has given to it its true meaning and expression — a mingling of deep love for the girl with the conscious need for sustaining before the hidden witnesses the character he had assumed. The conflict was hard to bear, the work hard to do, and he tries to stifle the emotions of his love by the affectation of a passion he does not feel. He is conscious of inflicting a terrible agony upon her by those "wild and whirling words;" but the consciousness of the ears that were open behind the arras to catch every syllable that fell from his lips compelled him to a harshness he was far from feeling. At times his affection almost betrays him. But it is exhibited in tone, not in language. Mr. Irving's expression

of this conflict of emotions, his impulse almost to embrace her, and then his restraining endeavour to sustain even by exaggerating, the part he was playing, is to my mind the true embodiment of Shakespeare's design, as it is a triumph of dramatic art—one of those bursts of true genius for which we would gladly forgive the Actor's faults were they ten times more numerous.

Then his advice to the players. Is that madness or anything that anybody but a mad-doctor could torture into madness? He is now no longer irresolute. His mind is made up. The path is plain before him. He had certainly imparted to his bosom friend, Horatio, all his doubts and suspicions; he now confides to him his plot of the play and invites his assistance. It is given cordially, with what result we all know.

Assured now that it was an honest Ghost—persuaded that his college friends Rosencrantz and the gentle Guildenstern were commissioned to watch him, he maintains his assumed character with them.

The reappearance of the Ghost in the midst of his passionate interview with his mother marks the irresolution that had so long held him inactive.

And again at the close of this marvellous scene he tells his mother not to let the King by his endearments

> Make you to ravel all this matter out,
> That I essentially am *not* in madness,
> But *mad in craft.*

The irresolution had again shown itself in the closet when, the King kneeling in prayer and the opportunity for vengeance offering, he failed to avail himself of it—his wavering reasons for inaction plainly proving that he could not make up his mind. Hearing a noise behind the arras he kills Polonius believing the spy to be the King. It was infirmity of purpose still, *not* insanity.

The question has been often asked why, now that he was assured of his uncle's guilt, he did not at once proceed to fulfil the promise he had made to avenge his father's murder? Opportunities could not have been wanting. Why did he quit Denmark, leaving his work undone? Even after his return, so craftily brought about, his purpose remains blunted. He meets the King in the churchyard, but *does* nothing. Even the catastrophe is not of his seeking. He was the intended victim of the passage at arms and the blow that slew the King avenged more his own murder than that of his father. Thus to the last his character is maintained with most admirable consistency. A character meditative not active—highly intellectual and reflective, but wavering, vacillating, doubting. Certainly he is not mad, nor is there the slightest approach to madness. Every act simulating madness is carefully calculated. Madness never yet talked so wisely as he talks when it is not his cue to assume the "antic disposition."

I hope, therefore, to have established something like a case against the Insanity theory so steadily maintained by so many critics, and notably by an eminent M.D. (*a*) who should be an authority upon such a question, seeing that he was, if he is not now, the Principal of a lunatic asylum. I trust, so far as a Psychological investigation of the play can do so, to have satisfied those who may have doubted, that Hamlet really was and did what he has himself described in these passages;

> Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
> How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
> As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet
> To put an antic disposition on—

Again:

Ham. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

(*a*) Dr. Bucknell.

Guild. In what, my dear lord?
Ham. I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hernshaw.

And yet again:

Queen. This is the very coinage of your brain;
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in
Ham. Ecstasy!
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from.

And again:

that I
Essentially am not in madness,
But *mad in craft.*