

in Belgium, and the League of Mercy. The tercentenary falls in a year which witnesses the most colossal and most awful war in history; and it is pertinent, and will perhaps prove not uninteresting, to inquire whether Shakespeare has any message, either for the belligerents, or for the world, or for both, in the heart-searching crisis through which we are passing. We think he has; and though it is true that in Shakespeare, as in the Bible, a peg can be found on which to hang any sort of sermon, we believe that it is possible without any undue pressing or straining of the poet's words to find in them a definite and clear-
 visioned pronouncement on such a situation as that which faces us to-day. We believe that the Shakespeare message is one of stern insistence on the paramount necessity of a clear conscience for all concerned in the great undertaking to which the nations have put their hands—of benediction and blessing to those who have clean hands, and of heavy and deadliest woe to those 'whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.'

Let us first take the Shakespeare teaching strictly in relation to the war, as it is definitely set forth for us in the great tragedy of *King Richard III.* The scene is laid on Bosworth battlefield. There is the tent of Richmond, and here the tent of the blood-stained Richard. Shakespeare does not look through partisan lenses—he is not a professional moralist—he is no theologian—but his words are not the less telling on that account. What are these forms that rise in the dead midnight between the two tents? There are eleven ghosts here. Shakespeare is behind every one of them. They utter nothing that he does not put into their lips; when they speak, he speaks; and it is, perhaps, a pardonable exaggeration to say that, when Shakespeare speaks, Nature speaks:—

'Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow!

Think how thou stabb'dst me in my prime of youth
 At Tewksbury: despair, therefore, and die!

So speaks the first ghost at Richard's tent.

'Be cheerful, Richmond; for the wronged souls
 Of butchered princes fight in thy behalf;
 King Henry's issue, Richmond, comfort thee.'

So speaks the same ghost at Richmond's tent.

'When I was mortal, my anointed body
 By thee was punched full of deadly holes:
 Think on the Tower and me; despair, and die;—
 Harry the Sixth bids thee despair and die.'

So speaks the second ghost at Richard's tent.

'Virtuous and holy, be thou conqueror!
 So speaks the same ghost at Richmond's tent.
 'Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow!
 I, that was washed to death with fulsome wine,
 Poor Clarence, by thy guile betrayed to death!
 To-morrow in the battle think on me,
 And fall thy edgeless sword: despair and die!'

So speaks the third ghost at Richard's tent.

'Good angels guard thy battle! Live and flourish.'

So speaks the same ghost at Richmond's tent.

'Let us sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow.'
 So speak the ghosts of Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan, at
 Richard's tent.

'Awake! and think, our wrongs in Richard's bosom
 Will conquer him;—Awake, and win the day!'

So speak the same ghosts at Richmond's tent. The
 ghost of Hastings rises. The ghosts of the two young
 Princes rise:

'Dream on thy cousins smothered in the Tower.
 Let us be lead within thy bosom, Richard,
 And weigh thee down to ruin, shame and death!
 Thy nephews' souls bid thee despair and die.
 Sleep, Richmond, sleep in peace and wake in joy;
 Edward's unhappy sons do bid thee flourish.'

The ghost of Queen Anne rises:

'Richard, thy wife, that wretched Anne, thy wife—
 That never slept a quiet hour with thee,
 Now fills thy sleep with perturbations:
 To-morrow in the battle think on me,
 And fall thy edgeless sword: despair and die!

Thou quiet soul, sleep thou a quiet sleep;
 Dream of success and happy victory;
 Thy adversary's wife doth pray for thee.'

The ghost of Buckingham rises:

'The first was I, that helped thee to the crown;
 Oh! in the battle think on Buckingham,
 And die in terror of thy guiltiness!
 God and good angels, fight on Richmond's side,
 And Richard falls in height of all his pride.'

The ghosts vanish. Finally, Richard wakes in his
 tent:

'O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!
 The lights burn blue.—It is now dead midnight.
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
 I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not.
 Fool, of thyself speak well; fool, do not flatter.
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
 And every tongue brings in a different tale,
 And every tale convicts me for a villain.
 Perjury, perjury in the high'st degree,
 Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree;
 All several sins, all us'd in each degree,
 Throng to the bar, crying all,—Guilty! Guilty!
 I shall despair.—There is no creature loves me:—
 And, if I die, no soul will pity me:—
 Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
 Find in myself no pity to myself?
 Methought, the souls of all that I had murdered,
 Came to my tent; and every one did threat
 To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard!
 —*King Richard III.*, Act v., Scene 3.

'Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow.'

So speaks Shakespeare; so, the ghosts; so, natural
 law; so, that great Being Who is behind natural
 law.

This is the Shakespeare teaching generally. Take
 the massive and commanding tones in which he sounds
 the strength and beauty of a good conscience:

'In the great hand of God I stand.'

Why? Because I am following my conscience in
 opposing a bloody tyrant.

'And thence

Against the undivulged pretence I fight
 Of treasonous malice.'

—*Macbeth*, Act ii, Scene 3.

Here are the peaceful cheering notes again:—

'What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!
 Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
 And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.'
 —Second Part, *King Henry VI.*, Act iii., Scene 2.

'Be just, and fear not;
 Let all the ends thou aimest at, be thy country's,
 Thy God's, and truth's; then, if thou fall'st, O
 Cromwell,

Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.'

—*King Henry VIII.*, Act iii., Scene 2.

'Now, for our consciences, the arms are fair,
 When the intent of bearing them is just.'

—*King Henry IV.*

'My wooing mind shall be expressed
 In russet Yeas and honest Kersey Noes.'
 —*Love's Labor Lost*, Act v., Scene 2.

'That which you speak is in your conscience washed.'
 —*King Henry V.*, Act i., Scene 2.

'What motive may
 Be stronger with thee than the name of wife?
 That which upholdeth him, that thee upholds,
 His honor. Oh! thine honor, Lewis; thine honor.'
 —*King John*, Act iii., Scene 1.

'A peace above all earthly dignities,
 A still and quiet conscience.'
 —*Henry VIII.*, Act iii., Scene 2.