

find much demanding the severest censure and very little worthy of praise. Of his early life the play gives us little. He is some fifty years of age when we first meet with him—at an age old enough to begin to think of the serious relations of life and to cast aside the follies of youth. But as he grew in years he grew not in grace.

In whatever difficulty he was thrown, surrounded by the most fatal dangers, yet was he self-possessed—his wits he always kept about him. And herein is where his power lay. Truth he uttered when falsehood would not serve his purpose. No lie was too preposterous for him to coin, and when detected in his falseness would he turn it to his own advantage at the expense of his accusers.

As an example of his lying extempore the following will suffice. A band of travellers consisting of four were robbed by Falstaff and three associates. While they were dividing the spoils, the Prince and Poins as they had previously agreed, rushed upon them crying, "Your money! villains!" The four beat a hasty retreat leaving the money behind. At night they all meet in the same castle and Falstaff upbraids the Prince and Poins for being cowards, and triumphantly relates how the faithful four had taken a thousand pounds, that very morning. When questioned where it was, he draws heavily on his imagination and says; it was taken from us by a hundred—a hundred upon poor four of us. At first he was very moderate, stating he had killed two only. But as he proceeds he adds, and finishes with the startling truth(?) that he had finished eleven. When the Prince gave him the true account of the affair, how that Falstaff himself, with his three accomplices, had fled not from a hundred, but from two, only two; listen to Falstaff's ingenious mode of flattery, combined with a sufficient degree of falsehood.

By the Lord, I knew ye, as well as he that made ye. Why, hear ye, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the

true prince? Why thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the more of myself and thee during my life; I for a valliant lion, thou for a true prince. But, by the Lords, lads, I am glad you have the money.

In this manner does he clear himself of guilt and cause a smile to creep over the face of his listeners.

Considering that a man is to be adjudged a philosopher, because he is never moved by any sudden change, if under all circumstances he appears to be himself, and can bear the ups and downs of this life with no apparent agitation, Falstaff was truly one. No misfortune, not even the beating he received when taken for the witch of Brentford or the punishment he received at midnight in the forest, disguised as Herne the hunter, unnerved him. Everything that befel his lot was as coolly discussed and dismissed from his mind as the necessity of the case demanded.

If there be any redeeming trait in Falstaff's character, it is one only—one which I know not whether to call a vice or a virtue. If a man is sunken into the very depths of degradation, practised vices and committed sins from his youth up, no matter what God-fearing crime he may be guilty of, if he possesses that openness to confess it—a certain degree of honesty to acknowledge it, although there may be no sign of repentance, yet we cannot condemn him as we do those, who try to keep their shortcomings hidden and hold their head proudly up, and try to affect an air of assumed innocence. Whatever company Falstaff kept, his nightly dissipations he was free to confess. Not only to confess but to exult in his baseness to laugh and be merry to his own shame.

If Shakspeare meant to picture Falstaff as a free, easy going profligate, caring nothing for the nobler ends of life, and desiring only to be great among the outcasts, the picture is complete. It presents that phase of life in its truest and most glaring light. The plays were popular in the days of Elizabeth, and Falstaff is a