

Once, a great many centuries ago there was a camp in the weary wilderness of Sinai, the camp of a people who were journeying from a bad country of plagues and flesh pots and taskmasters, of dark religions and horrible rites and grim barbarism, journeying to an undiscovered country, they hoped a better one. In the midst of the camp was a tabernacle. Without that tabernacle was the court of the people, where the multitude came and went, and babbled and worshipped; tradesmen, bondmen, lepers, things unclean. Within was a court where only the priests came, where the Levites performed their holy offices. And within that there was still another chamber, where only the high priest might enter, who carried God's fire in his censer. And as it was then, so it is now. There is another people journeying by slow stages into something better, something dim and undefined, lying off yonder beyond the peaks of Sinai. And with us we carry all that has been most worthy in our race, the memory and work of the great, our tabernacle, and the rest we leave to perish by the wayside, and the sands blow over them and they are forgotten. And we have our Holy Thing, which no man may profane without swift vengeance from our hands or from heaven's. And this holy ground of ours in Elsinore. Our civilization is not a thoughtful or a scholarly one, but in its own rough way it is loyal to Hamlet. That play and the Magna Charter are the two most worthy things that the Anglo-Saxon people has done from its beginning. Other nations have written great tragedies, tragedies of man's heart and of his passions, but we alone have this tragedy of the soul, and of man's divinity. For Hamlet is not a play of love or action or impulse, but of thought, and of those deep and secret motives which deal with the soul alone, which fix the relations between it and the man himself, which decree its doom, which "summons it to heaven or to hell."

When a young player appears in Hamlet, he is our natural enemy. We regard him as a thief and a robber until he has proved that he is mightier than we. It is not for us to prove that he cannot play Hamlet, but for him to prove that he can. Just how far Mr. Walker Whiteside proves this it would be impossible to say after hearing him only once. But of so earnest, poetic and noble a work as he presented Wednesday evening, I can find little harsh to say. I have not seen all the Hamlets of history as Mr. Whiteside's New York critics seem to have done. Probably Mr. Whiteside knows a great deal more about Hamlet than I, that is his business. I can only judge him by what he makes me feel and know about it, for that also is his business. To me Mr. Whiteside's Hamlet is original and all his own, not because it is unlike Booth's or Keane's or Irving's—whom I never saw,—but because if one scene of it is stolen, it is all stolen, every look, every gesture, every breath he draws in it. It is the work of one man; it is the suffering of one man.

Several people asked me Wednesday evening if I did not think that there was a gloomy monotony about this particular Hamlet. There certainly was, but I think that gloom is necessary to Mr. Whiteside's conception of the part, and that if he varied it he would be false to the best artistic instincts within him. To me, personally, it is the only true way of playing Hamlet. I cannot see in Hamlet the sportive wit that Mr. Lowell saw. There is wit, certainly, but it is more gloomy than the spoken pathos; it is the terrible ghastly sort of wit that masks suffering. It is a gloomy play. In most plays the inciting circumstances of the tragedy occur after the play opens, but Hamlet's father was

dead and his mother false to his memory before the play begins. As in Macbeth, the clouds of the tempest are already lowering when the curtain rises. From that oath in the glimmering dawn upon the bleak turrets of Elsinore, his own dark fate is upon him. It follows him like the ghost, completely surrounds him, and locks down upon him, the Wagnerian operas. Like the curse of the Nibelung ring in fine scholarly quality that is difficult to define. He emphasizes the shrinking, almost feminine delicacy of the Prince, which a more robust actor misses altogether. There are moments when his reading is not convincing, is mechanical and almost weak, like his reading of "The time is out of joint, O cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right," which was light and melodramatic. I think he will make that line deeper and more prophetic in time. For in that moment, looking into the reddening east, Hamlet saw his destiny unrolled before him, laid bare by the retreating clouds of night; he saw his sacrifice, that he was to be the instrument of fate, that he was to suffer for wrongs not of his doing, live for ends not his own, carry upon his shoulders the sins of a whole court. In that moment of elemental spiritual conflict he saw that his own life and his own love were not for him, saw them go out forever, as the curtains of the tempest shut out a star. After that, no more of the fair Ophelia. For him that was indeed a momentous dawn.

Mr. Whiteside's Hamlet may be weak, but he is noble. When he died Horatio did not say, "Good night, sweet Prince," but we, who watched, said it for him. As a play, it seems impertinent to write of Hamlet, after all that has been written and said and sung of it before. But as long as every spring the primroses blossom in the fields of Avon, and every summer the wild thyme blows about Anne Hathaway's cottage, we may all of us turn to that sacred and greatest name of our race and do it reverence. To reverence is the privilege of the small, as well as of the great. We may turn in awe and wonder to that greatest drama, that polar star in the glittering firmament of art, whereby all men gauge their work, and by whose magnitude we measure all the distances of heaven. And it shines not only for that astronomer whose business is with the planets and worlds, but for the herdsman, that he may drive his flock aright through the night, and for the fisherman to steer by on the lonely deep. It is ours, as Christ is ours. I never see it but there comes back to me that overpowering sense of its gigantic moral and artistic scope. Take that one scene in which mad Ophelia metes out to Laertes and the king and queen their destiny in flowers, where else is there anything so delicate? And then that complete immolment of Hamlet's personal life and passion to the great demands of his soul, of ethical justice, that great struggle with the Titanic powers of fate. Beside that all the finished dramas of the French seems the hollow work of clever pigmies. It took the Saxon mind to recognize soul needs like that. The French write cleverer plays, the Italians more impassioned ones, but all that is greatest and highest in Anglo-Saxon character is there, in Elsinore. It is the same power, the same over soul that bullded the Gothic cathedrals. Someway the artists of the north seem to get so much nearer God. They are not craftsmen, they have no law but inspiration, they are priests in verse and prophets in stone.

And yet they say that Hamlet is a study in failure. Well, it was failure

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that was greater than success. Whoso loseth his life shall find it. So did Giordano Bruno fall when he was burned in Italy, so did Huss fall when he was burned in Switzerland, so did Christ fall when he was crucified in Judea. Their kingdoms were not of this world, their lives did not save this world, but their memories have. They gave the world the ideals, by which we live, for which we die. For sometimes even in this world where "good is oft interred with our bones," the greatness of a man's soul may outline the weakness of his arm. After all good is good, eternal, triumphant over weakness, defeat, failure. The "unlit lamp and the ungirt loin" is not the end. "Other heights in other lives, God willing."

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