Greek poet, if a wise poet, could not address himself geni­ally to a task in which he must begin by shocking the sen­sibilities of his countrymen. And hence followed, not only the dearth of female characters in the Grecian drama, but also a second result still more favourable to the sense of a new power evolved by Shakspeare. Whenever the com­mon law of Grecian life did give way, it was, as we have observed, to the suspending force of some great convulsion or tragical catastrophe. This for a moment (like an earth­quake in a nunnery) would set at liberty even the timid, fluttering Grecian women, those doves of the dove-cot, and would call some of them into action. But which ? Precisely those of energetic and masculine minds ; the timid and feminine would but shrink the more from public gaze and from tumult. Thus it happened, that such female charac­ters as *were* exhibited in Greece, could not but be the harsh and the severe. If a gentle Ismene appeared for a moment in contest with some energetic sister Antigone (and chiefly, perhaps, by way of drawing out the fiercer character of that sister), she was soon dismissed as unfit for scenical effect. So that not only were female characters few, but, moreover, of these few the majority were but repetitions of mascu­line qualities in female persons. Female agency being sel­dom summoned on the stage except when it had received a sort of special dispensation from its sexual character, by some terrific convulsions of the house or the city, naturally it assumed the style of action suited to these circumstances. And hence it arose, that not woman as she differed from man, but woman as she resembled man—woman, in short, seen under circumstances so dreadful as to abolish the effect of sexual distinction, was the woman of the Greek tragedy.@@1 And hence generally arose for Shakspeare the w ider field, and the more astonishing by its perfect novelty, when he first introduced female characters, not as mere varieties or echoes of masculine characters, a Medea or Clytemnestra, or a vindictive Hecuba, the mere tigress of the tragic ti­ger, but female characters that had the appropriate beauty of female nature ; woman no longer grand, terrific, and repulsive, but woman “ after her kind”—the other he­misphere of the dramatic world ; woman running through the vast gamut of womanly loveliness ; woman as eman­cipated, exalted, ennobled, under a new law of Christian morality ; woman the sister and co-equal of man, no lon­ger his slave, his prisoner, and sometimes his rebel. “ It is a far cry to Loch Awe and from the Athenian stage to the stage of Shakspeare, it may be said, is a prodigious interval. True; but prodigious as it is, there is really nothing between them. The Roman stage, at least the tragic stage, as is well known, was put out, as by an extin­guisher, by the cruel amphitheatre, just as a candle is made pale and ridiculous by daylight. Those who were fresh from the real murders of the bloody amphitheatre regarded with contempt the mimic murders of the stage. Stimula­tion too coarse and' too intense had its usual effect in mak­ing the sensibilities callous. Christian emperors arose at length, who abolished the amphitheatre in its bloodier fea­tures. But by that time the genius of the tragic muse had long slept the sleep of death. And that muse had no re­surrection until the age of Shakspeare. So that, notwith­standing a gulf of nineteen centuries and upwards sepa­rates Shakspeare from Euripides, the last of the surviving Greek tragedians, the one is still the nearest successor of the other, just as Connaught and the islands in Clew Bay are next neighbours to America, although three thousand watery columns, each of a cubic mile in dimensions, divide them from each other.

A second reason, which lends an emphasis of novelty and effective power to Shakspeare’s female world, is a peculiar fact of contrast which exists between that and his corre­sponding world of men. Let us explain. The purpose and the intention of the Grecian stage was not primarily to develope human *character,* whether in men or in women ; human *fates* were its object ; great tragic situations under the mighty control of a vast cloudy destiny, dimly descried at intervals, and brooding over human life by mysterious agencies, and for mysterious ends. Man, no longer the re­presentative of an august *will,* man the passion-puppet of fate, could not with any effect display what we call a cha­racter, which is a distinction between man and man, ema­nating originally from the will, and expressing its deter­minations, moving under the large variety of human im­pulses. The will is the central pivot of character ; and this was obliterated, thwarted, cancelled, by the dark fata­lism which brooded over the Grecian stage. That expla­nation will sufficiently clear up the reason why marked or complex variety of character was slighted by the great principles of the Greek tragedy. And every scholar who has studied that grand drama of Greece with feeling,—that drama, so magnificent, so regal, so stately,—and who has thoughtfully investigated its principles, and its difference from the English drama, will acknowledge that powerful and elaborate character, character, for instance, that could employ the fiftieth part of that, profound analysis which has been applied to Hamlet, to Falstaff, to Lear, to Othello, and applied by Mrs Jamieson so admirably to the full de­velopment of the Shakspearian heroines, would have been as much wasted, nay, would have been defeated, and in­terrupted the blind agencies of fate, just in the same way as it would injure the shadowy grandeur of a ghost to indi­vidualize it too much. Milton’s angels are slightly touched, superficially touched, with differences of character ; but they are such differences, so simple and general, as are just sufficient to rescue them from the reproach applied to Virgil’s “ *fortemque Gyan, fοrtemque* *Cloanthem* just suf­ficient to make them knowable apart. Pliny speaks of painters who painted in one or two colours ; and, as respects the angelic charactere, Milton does so ; he is *monochroma­tic.* So, and for reasons resting upon the same ultimate philosophy, were the mighty architects of the Greek tra­gedy. They also were monochromatic ; they also, as to the characters of their persons, painted in one colour. And so far there might have been the same novelty in Shak­speare’s men as in his women. There *might* have been ; but the reason why there is *not,* must be sought in the fact, that History, the muse of History, had there even been no such muse as Melpomene, would have forced us into an acquaintance with human character. History, as the re­presentative of actual life, of real man, gives us powerful delineations of character in its chief agents, that is, in men ; and therefore it is that Shakspeare, the absolute creator of female character, was but the mightiest of all painters with regard to male character. Take a single instance. The An­tony of Shakspeare, immortal for its execution, is found, after all, as regards the primary conception, in history : Shakspeare’s delineation is but the expansion of the germ already pre-existing, by way of scattered fragments, in Ci­cero’s Philippics, in Cicero’s Letters, in Appian, &c. But Cleopatra, equally fine, is a pure creation of art : the situa­tion and the scenic circumstances belong to history, but the character belongs to Shakspeare.

In the great world therefore of woman, as the inter­preter of the shifting phases and the lunar varieties of that

@@@, And hence, by parity of reason, under the opposite circumstances, under the circumstances which, instead of abolishing, most em­phatically drew forth the sexual distinctions, viz. in the *comic* aspects of social intercourse, the reason that we see no women on the Greek stage ; the Greek comedy, unless when it affects the extravagant fun of farce, rejects women.