mighty changeable planet, that lovely satellite of man, Shakspeare stands not the first only, not the original only, but is yet the sole authentic oracle of truth. Woman, therefore, the beauty of the female mind, *this* is one great field of his power. The supernatural world, the world of apparitions, *that* is another : for reasons which it would be easy to give, reasons emanating from the gross mythology of the ancients, no Grecian,@@1 no Roman, could have con­ceived a ghost. That shadowy conception, the protesting apparition, the awful projection of the human conscience, belongs to the Christian mind : and in all Christendom, who, let us ask, who, who but Shakspeare has found the power for effectually working this mysterious mode of being? In summoning back to earth “ the majesty of buried Den­mark,” how like an awful necromancer does Shakspeare appear! All the pomps and grandeurs which religion, which the grave, which the popular superstition had ga­thered about the subject of apparitions, are here converted to his purpose, and bend to one awful effect. The wormy grave brought into antagonism with the scenting of the early dawn ; the trumpet of resurrection suggested, and again as an antagonist idea to the crowing of the cock (a bird ennobled in the Christian mythus by the part he is made to play at the Crucifixion) ; its starting “ as a guilty thing” placed in opposition to its majestic expression of of­fended dignity when struck at by the partisans of the sen­tinels; its awful allusions to the secrets of its prison-house; its ubiquity, contrasted with its local presence ; its aerial substance, yet clothed in palpable armour ; the heart-shak­ing solemnity of its language, and the appropriate scenery of its haunt, viz. the ramparts of a capital fortress, with no witnesses but a few gentlemen mounting guard at the dead of night,—what a mist, what a *mirage* of vapour, is here accumulated, through which the dreadful being in the centre looms upon us in far larger proportions than could have hap­pened had it been insulated and left naked of this circum­stantial pomp ! In the *Tempest,* again, what new modes of lifc, preternatural, yet far as the poles from the spiritualities of religion. Ariel in antithesis to Caliban ! What is most ethe­real to what is most animal ! A phantom of air, an abstraction of the dawn and of vesper sun-lights, a bodiless sylph on the one hand ; on the other a gross carnal monster, like the Mil­tonic Asmodai, “ the fleshliest incubus” among the fiends, and yet so far ennobled into interest by his intellectual power, and by the grandeur of misanthropy!@@, In the *Midsummer-Night's Dream,* again, we have the old traditional fairy, a lovely mode of preternatural life, remodified by Shakspeare’s eternal talisman. Oberon and Titania remind us at first glance of Ariel : they approach, but how far they recede: they are like—“ like, but, oh, how different !” And in no other exhibition of this dreamy population of the moonlight forests and forest-lawns, are the circumstantial pro­prieties of fairy life so exquisitely imagined, sustained, or ex­pressed. The dialogue between Oberon and Titania is, of itself, and taken separately from its connection, one of the

most delightful poetic scones that literature affords. The witches in Macbeth are another variety of supernatural life, in which Shakspeare’s power to enchant and to disenchant are alike portentous. The circumstances of the blasted heath, the army at a distance, the withered attire of the mysterious hags, and the choral litanies of their fiendish Sabbath, are as finely imagined in their kind as those which herald and which surround the ghost in Hamlet. There we see the *positive* of Shakspeare’s superior power. But now turn and look to the *negative.* At a time when the trials of witches, the royal book on demonology, and popular su­perstition (all so far useful, as they prepared a basis of un­doubting faith for the poet’s serious use of such agencies) had degraded and polluted the ideas of these mysteri­ous beings by many mean associations, Shakspeare does not fear to employ them in high tragedy (a tragedy more­over which, though not the very greatest of his efforts as an intellectual whole, nor as a struggle of passion, is *among* the greatest in any view, and positively *the* great­est far scenical grandeur, and in that respect makes the nearest approach of all English tragedies to the Grecian model) ; he does not fear to introduce, for the same appal­ling effect as that for which Æschylus introduced the Eu- menides, a triad of old women, concerning whom an Eng­lish wit has remarked this grotesque peculiarity in the popular creed of that day,—that although potent over winds and storms, in league with powers of darkness, they yet stood in awe of the constable,—yet relying on his own supreme power to disenchant as well as to enchant, to create and to uncreate, he mixes these women and their dark machi­neries with the power of armies, with the agencies of kings, and the fortunes of martial kingdoms. Such was the sove­reignty of this poet, so mighty its compass !

A third fund of Shakspeare’s peculiar power lies in his teeming fertility of fine thoughts and sentiments. From his works alone might be gathered a golden bead-roll of thoughts the deepest, subtilest, most pathetic, and yet most catholic and universally intelligible ; the most characteristic, also, and appropriate to the particular person, the situation, and the casc, yet, at the same time, applicable to the cir­cumstances of every human being, under all the accidents of life, and all vicissitudes of fortune. But this subject offers so vast a field of observation, it being so eminently the prerogative of Shakspeare to have thought more finely and more extensively than all other poets combined, that we cannot wrong the dignity of such a theme by doing more, in our narrow limits, than simply noticing it as one of the emblazonries upon Shakspeare’s shield.

Fourthly, we shall indicate (and, as in the last case, *barely* indicate, without attempting in so vast a field to offer any inadequate illustrations) one mode of Shakspeare’s dra­matic excellence which hitherto has not attracted any spe­cial or separate notice. We allude to the forms of life, and natural human passion, as apparent in the structure of his dialogue. Among the many defects and infirmities of the

@@@, It may be thought, however, by some readers, that Æschylus, in his fine phantom of Darius, has approached the English ghost. As a foreign ghost, we would wish (and we are sure that our excellent readers would wish) to show every courtesy and attention to this apparition of Darius. It has the advantage of being royal, an advantage which it shares with the ghost of the royal Dane. Yet how different, how removed by a total world, from that or any of Shakspeare’s ghosts ! Take that of Banquo, for instance : how shadowy, how unreal, yet how real ! Darius is a mere state ghost—a diplomatic ghost. But Banquo—he exists only for Macbeth ; the guests do not see him, yet bow solemn, how real, how heart-searching he is.

@@@a Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed. For all Shakspeare’s great creations are like works of nature, subjects of unexhaustible study. It was this character of whom Charles I. and some of his ministers expressed such fervent admiration ; and, among other circumstances, most justly they admired the new language almost with which he is endowed, for the purpose of expressing his fiend­ish and yet carnal thoughts of hatred to his master. Caliban is evidently not meant for scorn, but for abomination mixed with fear and partial respect. He is purposely brought into contrast with the drunken Trinculo and Stephano, with an advantageous result. He is much more intellectual than either, uses a more elevated language, not disfigured by vulgarisms, and is not liable to the low passion for plunder as they are. He is mortal, doubtless, as his “ dam” (for Shakspeare will not call her mother) Sycorax. But he inherits from her such qualities of power as a witch could be supposed to bequeath. He trembles indeed before Prospero ; but that is. as we are to understand, through the moral superiority of Prospero in Christian wisdom ; tor when he finds himself in the presence of dissolute and unprincipled men, he rises at once into the dignity of intellectual power.