

able only by a belief in Christ as the Atonement for man's sin; and to make it easier, man was given an example (Christ's life on earth), a promise of salvation, a threat of damnation, and a promise of supernatural help by the indwelling Christ. Pauline Christianity and Doylian Spiritualism have only to be set side by side in this manner to emphasize the utter inferiority of the new revelation as a religion for man. Christianity was a robust struggle against sin, an urgent call to a better life, a stimulus. Spiritualism is a self-indulgent camouflage of sin, an assurance that salvation is easier than we thought it was, an opiate.

Many other minor criticisms readily occur. If transit is painless and easy and salvation almost universal, then the sooner we die the better. Spiritualism weakens the instinct of self-preservation. Not only so, but the social incentive to improve life on earth is impaired. If the guilt of self-destruction does not involve great disability in the next life, then early suicide is very desirable. Further, is this belief a great comfort, is it a comfort at all to be in constant communication with those who have 'passed over'? Immediately they die, they cease to be of this life, their partnership with us in earthly problems is severed. Spirits may conceivably be not only a superfluity, but actually a hindrance to our efficient social effort in this life. Again, why exclude bad spirits from our investigation? If they exist, then bad spirits, *qua* spirits, and their conditions of life in the next world, are facts, and afford a field of investigation which the unbiased scientific mind cannot afford to ignore.

Of course, a sufficient answer to all such criticisms is that the facts are objectively proved; that spiritualists are merely truthful recorders. I am less concerned with external than in-

ternal evidence; and in the teaching of the spirits, as presented by Sir A. Conan Doyle, there hardly seems to me to be sufficient valuable matter to justify the man in the street in making any further inquiry. There is no doubt that spiritualism does meet a need of the age, but the doubt is whether it has not appeared in response to that need. The new gospel certainly does not appeal to me; it is the very reverse of a robust faith; there is a taint of Hedonism, of emasculation, about it which seems to render it fitter to be the faith of drones than of workers or reformers, of eunuchs than of men.

The New Statesman

## A NEW VIEW OF HAMLET

BY J. C. SQUIRE

MR. J. M. ROBERTSON will not, I hope, be again returned to Parliament, if election would mean the interruption of the work he is doing upon Shakespeare. He proposes a general survey of 'The Canon of Shakespeare'; his books on Titus Andronicus and Shakespeare and Chapman were installments of it; and a third fragment is his book *The Problem of Hamlet*, just issued by Allen and Unwin at 5s. net.

He begins with a summary of the views expressed by previous scholars. The æsthetic problem has been discussed for two centuries, in England and Germany especially; 'latterly with the constant preoccupation of finding a formula which shall reduce the play to æsthetic consistency.' Inconsistencies have been found in Hamlet's character and actions; weaknesses in some passages which in other passages do not appear. But 'every solution in turn does but ignore some of the data which motivated the other.' One 'subjective school,' concentrating on Hamlet's character as though he were a

real person all of whose words were actually spoken, calls him vacillating, or the slave of sensibility, or 'the victim of an excess of the reflective faculty which unfits him for action.' The obvious retort is that he is reckless of his life and frequently prompt in action. Why, then, it is answered, does he delay his mission? He does not, is the reply; but the counter-reply is that he is certainly felt to do so and that on the stage far too long a period seems to elapse. Another school here interposes. There was no weakness in Hamlet, but there were material difficulties in his way: the King was always surrounded by his guards and could not be got at. Of this, however, there is no evidence, and many bewildered persons have finally fallen on the comfortable bosom of the theory that Hamlet was mad and that, therefore, nothing he did or said is necessarily explicable or (on that assumption) in the least inexplicable. The reply to this is that Hamlet was obviously not mad, that we take a painful interest in all he thinks; and that Shakespeare was not so mad as to write a play the central figure of which was throughout all the acts puzzling an audience by speeches and deeds which had no cohesion and leading them to take seriously ruminations which were merely ravings. At all events, save among those who pity him as a maniac, Hamlet has few friends. They rebuke his weakness, and 'for not killing Claudius either at the start or in the praying scene, Hamlet has been the theme of a hundred denunciations by zealous moralists.'

Of recent years there has been a general tendency to examine the texts historically; we have grown conscious of faults of the dramatist as dramatist; faults of idleness (if the word can be used of one so productive); faults arising from lack of knowledge and time, from fatigue, from consideration of his

audience, and above all — though this overlaps with the first — faults arising from the material he was using. He took his plots second hand; the crude action and characterization of the moulds frequently failed to suit what he poured into them. *Othello* is one instance; the *Merchant of Venice* is another; *Hamlet* is a third. There was an original barbaric story; there was a play (probably by Kyd) of which Mr. Robertson believes the German *Brudermord* to have been an adaptation. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was based on Kyd's; incidents which are excrescences on it (this is the theme Mr. Robertson develops with great acumen, though he sometimes forces the pace) derive from Kyd's play; and the contradictions are due to Shakespeare's having failed to eliminate stock elements in the story which he had inherited. I think Mr. Robertson sometimes goes too far; Shakespeare may have 'taken on' the feigned madness, but I don't think he failed to make it consistent with our Hamlet. In fact, though much that Mr. Robertson says is convincing, and Shakespeare did undoubtedly fail to produce a thoroughly coherent work of art, I don't find that there is really much that clashes with the hero and his 'pessimism' and introspection.

Even as the play stands, and granted that Shakespeare was to some extent impeded by an inherited plot and the crude characterization of Kyd or another, are its inconsistencies so very hard to swallow? Read the play as Shakespeare finally left it, see it acted uncut; and, whatever minor stumbling blocks there may be in the text, whatever outcrops of a lower deposit that Shakespeare had not bothered to remove, does there not remain dominant a convincing character, a person Hamlet? Is he not as nearly complete, as positive, and as nearly like a living

being as any character in a fiction can be? Should we not know him if we met him, 'larger than human' though he is? Do we find it so easy to define in a phrase the characters of our own friends that we should expect to 'reduce him' (as the phrase has gone) to a 'fixed and settled principle'? His actions may seem inconsequent and his words wild, but is there really any difficulty about what have commonly been supposed to be the larger stumbling blocks? To me the brooding Hamlet of the soliloquies is not intrinsically incompatible with the Hamlet who is a good soldier, and a master of fence, who lunges at Polonius through the arras, leaps recklessly into Ophelia's grave, sends his warders to their death, and boards the pirate ship single-handed. It is one thing to attack a pirate when you see one or to pink an eavesdropper; but even a man constitutionally fearless and, when issues are clear, very prompt in action, might well shrink from murdering his uncle in cold blood. Mr. Robertson quite properly asks whether all the professors who rebuke Hamlet for vacillation in that he missed an early chance of killing his uncle would themselves without hesitation have stabbed a man in the back while he was saying his prayers, however incestuous a beast he may have been. Even looking at the matter from their own point of view, treating Hamlet as a real person, 'not Shakespeare's creation but God's,' those who have argued in so many volumes about Hamlet's weakness of will (largely on the strength of his own distraught self-questionings) show a deplorable lack of imagination. And it is lack of imagination that accounts for the endless discussions as to whether Hamlet was mad: that is to say, whether certain of the actions imputed to Shakespeare's Hamlet are inconceivable as

the actions of a sane man, such as ourselves. Do they know what a highly-strung man is, or what horror is?

He shams lunacy with Polonius; he is brutal to Ophelia. Reader, have you never, when overwrought, said cruel and unjust things to somebody you loved; have you never, at moments of great suffering or mental irritation, stopped on the tip of your tongue words even brutaler and beastlier, which have surged up in a hot wave against the barrier of your normal sense? Suppose it were your mother who had married your father's murderer; suppose the revelation of the crime had come to you suddenly and you were charged (for the ghost is there, and real) to avenge it. Suppose, in spite of your conviction, that you still wanted some last confirmatory evidence and that, while you waited, you were racked by thoughts of all the evil in the world and the impossibility of abolishing a crime by revenge, or of ever quieting your pain again. Suppose, nevertheless, that you *were* set on killing the beast and had to secure a certain opportunity. You might retain, as a rule, your self-command; be capable of attending to business when necessary, or acting on sudden emergencies; have quiet intervals. But might you not — especially as you would probably be unable to sleep (a thing of which there may be a hint in the 'To be or not to be' speech) — be liable to excesses of violent temper, of distracted bitter talk? Dying, Shakespeare's Hamlet restrained Horatio from suicide with the appeal:

O good Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live  
behind me.

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in  
pain  
To tell my story.

So saying, and in his last moments making a clear political arrangement with that decision which was characteristic of him when faced by simple situations, he 'crack'd his noble heart.' But his appeal, though Horatio doubtless responded to it, has fallen on deaf ears elsewhere; and it is his eternal fate to be called a coward by book-worms, and a lunatic by the dull, who have never grasped the fact that others besides lunatics are 'of imagination all compact.' He has been as unfortunate in his death as in his life.

Land and Water

### APPLES

I HAVE always been an amateur of apples, an apple-gourmand even, all in the way of honesty. As a child I hankered after forbidden fruit—the very name is associated with the apple, and these were green and hard; as a boy I made for the apple stall in Norwich Market Place, kept by an aged lady who smoked a clay pipe, on the blessed Saturdays which saw my weekly threepence; as a man I vowed to act upon an old wives' saying and wrote, 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' upon a card set about with sprays of apple blossom, for the mantelpiece of my sitting room. And having performed more than my vow, by consuming an average of three a day all the year round, I can really call myself an amateur of apples after having eaten about 30,000 apples now that I am forty-seven. And why not? If God Almighty first planted a garden, He did not forget the apple tree; only, man had not then the freedom of the tree, and the winning of it was fraught with pain and peril.

It was an evil day for me when my young brother first heard of the Apple-john or John-apple—from Elia it was, Elia on old Thomas King, comedian,

whose face, like one of these, was 'puckered up into a thousand wrinkles'; which apple is said to keep two years and to eat best when shriveled. My name might have been John, my passion is apples; the rest is obvious. 'There's hopes for our apple when he's older,' 'Sour now and sweet tomorrow,' these and such-like were the quips which greeted me till the joke palled. But at least my brother earned his right to quiz, seeing that he gave me every year some new tree to plant in the orchard, or else some folio or tract, venerable in crumbling calf, which bore upon my tastes.

O Quarrendons of long ago, green, with cheeks purple-red as Bardolph's nose; O Orange and King Pippins; O Ribstones, rough without and sweet within and 'holsome where the stomach is weake,' as an early writer has it; O Sunset apples, as we called them (and to this day I do not know their name), sharply angular, gold-colored, all flecked with sunset streaks of red; what to you are all the woolly Newtown pippins in the world?

Two-and-twenty apples doth Pliny name, but yet we know not which it was that Paris gave to the goddess, or with what Meilanion tempted Atalanta and won the race whose prize was Atalanta's hand. Parkinson, the King's Herbalist, as that loyal subject of the Stuarts styled himself, knows but fifty-seven sorts; Hartlib, Milton's friend, some two hundred; we know today a hundred or so more, mere experiments some, others that have hit the public taste, rivals of Cox's Orange Pippins themselves. Yet our old friends are still there, from the flat red Biffin of our Norfolk orchards, harsh when raw, but which, steeped in treacle and water and then dried in a slow oven and eaten cold, becomes a baked apple second to none, to the small sour cider apple of the West and