

SHAKESPEARE'S CONCEPTION OF THE IDEAL KING
AS REVEALED IN HENRY V AND HAMLET

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CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

The reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) marks the beginning of the modern era in English history. All classes were for the first time united in a spirit of patriotic pride at the steady growth of England's greatness. The nation had become a world power of first rank, and her people were thrilled with a new sense of strength. This was Shakespeare's England.

Everything had flourished in the England of Elizabeth while Shakespeare was young. The sense of belonging to a people with great memories and achievements behind them, the consciousness of living in an age when the glorious culture of antiquity was being resuscitated and when great personalities were claiming for England a lofty and assured position--these feelings mingled in his breast with the vernal glow of youth itself.

This was the time of great intellectual developments. England was enjoying the fruits of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Great scholars had already come bringing the rich learning of antiquity. The mental horizons of Englishmen were enormously enlarged. Education had felt the quickening impulse, and as a result schools were established, raising the standard of national intelligence many degrees. Men met at the taverns and discussed the matters that were nearest their hearts. Great writers--Sydney, Spenser, Bacon,

Marlowe, Lyly, Jonson, Shakespeare, and a host of others-- gave to this period the name of the "Golden Age" of English literature. "I have taken all knowledge to be my province," said young Francis Bacon with splendid audacity.

Restlessness and curiosity caused England to seek afar in new worlds for greater glory. Seamen like Drake and Gilbert set out in tiny boats on perilous voyages of discovery; courtiers like Raleigh would plant colonies and seek for Eldorados in western lands; others like Hakluyt, fired with a passion for exploration from reading books of adventure and unable to leave England, made collections of the voyages and discoveries of others. There was no land too distant for them to cast longing eyes upon, no seas too rough for them to sail. Nothing could daunt their unconquerable wills.

England had come through the War of the Roses and was content with her government--"the crown was security, the center and safeguard of national life."¹ Spain had felt the humbling power of England's fleet. The Great Armada had been destroyed, and England was supreme on the sea--the power of her ancient enemy, Spain, broken.

But the real joy of living seemed to be centered about the court. There was much exuberant joy and outward splendor of life. Fondness for rich dress, gorgeous trappings, dancing, music, magnificent pageants, gave to Elizabethan life such dash and color, such irrepressible buoyancy, as

¹. J. R. Green, History of the English People, VI, p. 476.

no other period of English history can lay claim to. There was about the queen that glamour of romance that won the chivalric devotion of her people. Many were the triumphal progresses made through her kingdom, many the costly banquets, many the revels, many those who cried out "Long live good Queen Bess!" The beloved jewels of the court, Raleigh, Essex, Sydney, Leicester, and others, adorned a place already glittering.

It was this glamorous England that Shakespeare portrayed in his earlier plays. The historical dramas mark Shakespeare's relation to the new sense of patriotism, the more vivid sense of national existence, national freedom, national greatness, which give its grandeur to the age of Elizabeth. England itself was now becoming a source of literary interest to the poet.

At the close of the century, when Shakespeare is at the height of his power, his world darkens around him. While friends are falling and hopes fading, Shakespeare's mind seems to have been going through bitter suffering and unrest. The change in the character of his dramas gives a sure indication of his change of mood. The first joyousness, the keen delight in life and man which breathes through his earlier works disappear. Disappointment, disillusion, a new sense of evil and foulness seem to underlie life. The simple, frank trust is gone. Failure seems everywhere.

Perhaps, this change in the character of Shakespeare's plays can be explained in part by the change in the national

mood of England. Elizabeth herself was not the same; she was no longer young. She had always been excessively vain; but her coquettish pretences to youth and beauty reached their height after her sixtieth year. She was bent on being flattered unceasingly and obeyed without demur. Those who possessed the greatest power in her court were those who could best please this vain and capricious queen. Shakespeare was aware that many of worth and valor sued in vain for favor, that there was constant bickering among rivals, and that the time spent in revel might well have been used to fulfill responsibility that belonged to those who would rule. He saw those whom he loved fall into disfavor and lose their lives because of that disfavor.

The unity of England was broken also in religion. Elizabeth, although a Protestant of necessity, had nothing but contempt for the growing Puritanism of the time. The Puritans did not approve of the frivolity, moral corruptness, and show of the court. Shakespeare himself has much to say of outward show and glittering appearances. He knew glittering London also as the walled city with dirty narrow streets. In those streets moved not only the nobleman in his velvets and the fashionable gallant, but the beggar, the pickpocket, the crippled and the hungry. In the distance loomed the gloomy towers grimly decorated with the ghastly heads of criminals.

Queen Elizabeth had ruled England many years. It was evident to everyone that in a short time she must go the way of all mankind. All eyes were turned toward the throne, and

the pertinent question was who should be the next ruler. Elizabeth had provided no heir for the throne. It was no consolation to her to know that the people thought she was old and near death--in fact, waiting for her to die and that not too patiently. There were many plots with various claimants to the throne. She detected some of these plots and brought many to execution for treason; these executions did not make her popular with those who saw their leaders struck down. Shakespeare was cold toward Elizabeth after the death of Essex; it was noticeable that he did not join with the other poets in the threnodies on her death and even after being urged refrained from writing a single line in her praise.

It is important to remember that Shakespeare was an Elizabethan; he lived and worked with Elizabethans; he wrote plays primarily intended to be played before Elizabethans. At this time there was no longer complete subservience to authority. Men expressed their thoughts quite freely; Shakespeare expressed his through the drama. There is much evidence that tends to prove the Shakespeare's characters were drawn partly from contemporary political figures.² He was closely connected with the court, and he must have had some very definite ideas concerning the character of the sovereign. It seems that Shakespeare's ideas regarding kingship would appear, expressed or implied, in the plays which he wrote during the last years of Elizabeth's reign--

² Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 105.

especially those dealing with English history.

In Richard II, written in 1595, Shakespeare shows that the people had a right to depose a king; in Henry IV (1597-98) the putting down of Hotspur's rebellion was a triumph of monarchy over feudalism; Henry V (1599) points out the type of king England should have; and Hamlet (1602) portrays the failure of a man who should have ruled as king but did not because of weakness. It will be the plan of this paper to set forth what was evidently Shakespeare's conception of the ideal king through a study of the two character, Henry V and Hamlet.

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE'S CONCEPTION OF THE IDEAL
KING AS REVEALED IN THE HENRY TRILOGY

"Shakespeare's ideal England is an England grouped around an ideal king, devout, modest, simple as he is brave, but a lord in battle, a born ruler of men with loyal people about him and his enemies at his feet."¹ Shakespeare has set forth such a character in the person of Henry V, who evidently embodies his conception of the ideal king. Henry is a man of high and strong passions but master of himself; therefore, emotionally stable. He is a man of thought, but his thoughts do not stand as impediments to action. He prepares for the time when he will be king and assumes the responsibilities of kingship as royal duty.

This paper will deal with the character of Henry V as Shakespeare depicts him because Shakespeare with his Elizabethan attitude toward art has, in a sense, whitewashed the faults of the youth as history depicts him, and idealized the king. And why not? Was not Henry the ancestor of Queen Elizabeth, beloved queen of England in the flood tide of the Renaissance, and he of whom she was most proud? It is not surprising that Shakespeare, with such good material as the genuine character of Henry V to work from, succeeded in creating the ideal king in such a manner that even the most dis-

¹ J.R.Green, History of the English People, VI, 479.

criminating of his contemporaries who were representative of the Renaissance were pleased with this great ruler.

The first essential in Shakespeare's ideal king is royal birth and a justifiable claim to the throne. Although Henry V was not born a prince, he was a direct descendent of Edward III. His father, Lord Bolingbroke, took the throne from his cousin, Richard II, by force, and became Henry IV. Bolingbroke says to his son, the future Henry V:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown; and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head:
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation;
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth. 2

We see here that the king regrets the indirect means by which he gained the crown and prays that it will rest more peacefully on his son's head. To which the prince answers:

My gracious liege,
You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me;
Then plain and right must my possession be:
Which I with more than with a common pain
'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain. 3

Just before the battle of Agincourt Henry V realizes the fault of his heritage and his plea is made thus:

Not today, O Lord,
O, not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard's body have interred new;
And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears

² II, Henry IV, IV, 5, 182 ff.

³ Ibid. IV, 5, 192 ff.

Than from it issu'd forced drops of blood:
 Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
 Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
 Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
 Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
 Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do;
 Though all that I can do is nothing worth
 Since that my penitence comes after all,
 Imploring the pardon. 4

The French king recognizes Henry V as truly a king and fears his royal heredity when he says:

This is the stem
 Of that victorious stock; and let us fear
 The native mightiness and fate of him. 5

Thus we see that Shakespeare seems to have made an effort to justify Henry's claim to the crown, and that Henry was recognized as king by contemporary rulers.

Shakespeare evidently had very definite ideas of the training necessary for a king. In the case of prince Hal it is training through experience. As a member of the royal household he is familiar with life at court. But he also knows how the common folk of England live. He knows what goes on in the taverns and on the streets of London. His manner of gaining this information naturally leads him into association with people out of his class and into the doing of questionable things. Much of what the prince does is hard to justify, but in the following pages, which will take up the study of this early training, we will set forth Hal's relation with his father and his associates. It is true that

⁴ Ibid. V, 1, 280 ff.

⁵ Ibid. II, iv, 62 ff.

he is a source of neverending worry and disappointment to his father. And it is true that his way of life is a matter of concern for the people, who feel that the rough ways of the prince must necessarily be the manners of the future king. But it is also true that the prince learned things in this manner that he could never have learned otherwise.

In those turbulent days when his father was wresting the throne from Richard, young Prince Hal gives little promise of being England's future ideal king. The first reference to the young prince is found in Richard II. Lord Bolingbroke in speaking of his son says:

Can no man tell of my unthrifty son?
 'Tis full three months since I did see him last:
 If any plague hang over us 'tis he.
 I would to heaven, my lords, he might be found;
 Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
 For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,
 With unrestrained loose companions--
 Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,
 And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;
 While he, young, wanton, and effeminate boy,
 Takes on the point of honour to support
 So dissolute a crew. 6

In the play Henry IV we see the king still worrying about his son, who is now the Prince of Wales. He envies Lord Northumberland because he is the father of the noble Hotspur--

Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride:
 Whilst I by looking on the praise of him,
 See riot and dishonour stain the brow of my young Harry. 7

He wishes that it could be proved that some fairy had exchanged in cradle his son and young Percy. Then he would have the

⁶ Richard II, V, iii, 1 ff.

⁷ I Henry IV, V, i, 83 ff.

valiant young Percy for his son and heir.

And indeed there seems to be cause for worry. Prince Hal, in company with Falstaff and other low but merry company, is engaged in drinking, rioting, and carousing. Among them they play some very rude and hurtful jokes upon the people and upon each other. Shakespeare justifies the prince's conduct, however, by giving a definite purpose to this early misconduct. This purpose is revealed in one of the prince's soliloquies:

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
 The unyok'd humour of your idleness:
 Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
 Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
 To smother up his beauty from the world,
 That when he please again to be himself,
 Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
 By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
 Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
 If all the year were playing holidays,
 To sport would be as tedious as to work;
 But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
 And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents,
 So, when this loose behaviour I throw off,
 And pay the debt I never promised,
 By how much better than my word I am
 By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
 And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 I'll so offend to make offence a skill;
 Redeeming time when men think least I will.⁸

Such reasoning on the part of the youth makes us to exclaim:
 What a king is here! He is right. The people expecting the
 worst see the king brighter by contrast with his unpromising
 youth.

⁸ Ibid. I, ii, 217 ff.

The king does not understand his son's conduct; he has nothing but condemnation for him. He tells him that he is like Richard, a common sight, and that he stands in danger of Hotspur, who is admired by the people. The first sign of hope that the king has in his son is the prince's request to lead the troops against Hotspur. In this the prince promises to wash away the shame of past intemperances by taking all the glory away from Hotspur or to perish in the attempt. He says:

I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
 And in the closing of some glorious day
 Be bold to tell you that I am your son;
 When I will wear a garment all of blood
 And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
 Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it:
 And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
 That this same child of honour and renown,
 This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight
 And your unthought Harry chance to meet.

As the time passes the prince slips back into his place among the merry friends of the taverns. There is a difference, however, in the heartiness in which the prince enters into the sports offered by his companions. In the middle of one excellent jest word comes to the prince that he is being sought and he breaks off his merry-making:

By heaven, Poins, I feel me much to blame,
 So idly to profane the precious time,
 When tempest of commotion, like the south,
 Borne with black vapour, doth begin to melt
 And drop upon our bare unarmed heads.
 Give me my sword and cloak. Falstaff, good night.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid. III, ii, 132 ff.

¹⁰ II Henry IV, II, iv, 395 ff.

There is one other way besides actual experience that Hal learns and that is by listening to counsel. It is an humble and attentive prince that sits by his dying father's bedside learning from one of experience how best to direct the affairs of the kingdom. The practice of listening to the advice of learned men of experience is one that Hal carries with him through the days of his kingship.

So much for the youth Prince Hal and his preparation for the kingship. In this brief sketch we see the seed of the future greatness of the king, His Majesty Henry the Fifth.

Shakespeare does not tell of the coronation ceremonies in this play. But from the time when the prince becomes king he is a changed person.¹¹ From this complete reformation we have proof that the prince has been using his earlier experience as definite training for kingship. Witness the testimony of the two bishops, Canterbury and Ely, concerning Henry's changed character:

Cant. The king is full of grace and fair regard.
Ely. And a true lover of the holy church.

¹¹ DNB records that on Passion Sunday Henry V was crowned at Westminster in the midst of a violent snowstorm. Some regarded this as an omen that the new king had put off the winter of his riotous youth, and the incident is made the occasion by numerous writers for introducing a reference to a marked change in Henry's character on his accession to the throne. It is stated that on the night of his father's death the new king visited a recluse at Westminster and to him made confession of his former life, and promised amendment. At any rate, from the time when he was crowned king, he was temperate, chaste, and courteous in his dealings with others, making it a point of honour to be affable to all men. He had a high conception of his rights as a king and of his sacred duty to his people.

Cant. The courses of his youth promis'd it not.
 The breath no sooner left his father's body
 But that his wildness, mortified in him,
 Seemed to die too; yea, at that very moment,
 Consideration like an angel came,
 And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him,
 Leaving his body as a paradise,
 To envelop and contain celestial spirits.
 Never was such a sudden scholar made;
 Never came reformation in a flood,
 With such a heady currance, scouring faults;
 Nor such Hydra-headed wilfulness
 So soon did lose his seat and all at once
 As in this king.

Ely. We are blessed in the change.

Cant. Hear him but reason in divinity,
 And, all admiring, with an inward wish
 You would desire the king were made a prelate:
 Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
 You would say it hath been all in his study:
 List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
 A fearful battle rendered you in music:
 Turn him to any cause of policy,
 The Gordian knot of it he will unloose
 Familiar as his garter; that, when he speaks,
 The air, a charter'd libertine, is still,
 And the mute wonder lurketh in man's ears,
 To steal his sweet and honey'd sentences;
 So that the art and practic part of life
 Must be the mistress to this theoric. 12

King Henry possesses the qualities of character that endear him to the people. He loves to have fun and can enjoy a good jest as much as anyone. He is greatly drawn to Falstaff and that is not hard to understand. One has only to listen to Falstaff's story of how he was set upon and robbed, or hear him impersonate the king to understand why the prince enjoys his company. The prince finds it great fun to rob the robber, outwith the schemer, and out-bully the bully. Though coarse, at times, the wit is intellectual.

¹² Henry V, I, i, 22 ff.

Falstaff is no common clown. The "old lad of the castle" is a whole show in himself. Oh, the great acts he must have put on for his "sweet Hal"! Truly, it is argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest forever".¹³

A little incident happens during the war with France which shows that Henry still loves a good jest. Henry is going about incognito among his soldiers. He falls into an argument with one William, and accepts a glove as a pledge to continue the quarrel if the two ever meet again. The king knows, however, that it is beneath his dignity and an unfair advantage for him to meet the challenge himself. So he cleverly turns the matter over to Fluellen, who receives a blow on the ear for his trouble. The king does not miss the fun; he appears on the scene in time to explain matters. He accepts William's apology and gives him the glove filled with crowns.

With matters of state and war on hand Henry has little time for jesting. But in the last act of Henry V we see our king in a merry mood suggestive of the days of Prince Hal. The war is won, the kingdom united, and Henry is busy making love to Princess Katharine, who speaks very little English. It is a real holiday of the spirit with Henry. Although he speaks but little French, he is quite playful; he makes jokes at his own expense, and sweetens his way to the lady's heart by genial frankness and simplicity of manner. He says:

¹³ I Henry IV, II, ii, 104 ff.

If thou canst love a fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth sun-burning, that never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there, let thine eye be thy cook. I speak to thee plain soldier: if thou canst love me for this, take me; if not, to say to thee that I shall die, is true; but for thy love, by the Lord, no; yet I love thee too. And while thou livest, dear Kate, take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy, for he perforce must do thee right, because he hath not the gift to woo in other places; for these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rime themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again. What! a speaker is but a prater; a rime is but a ballad. A good leg will fall, a straight back will stoop, a black beard will turn white, a curled pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither, a full eye will wax hollow, but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon; or, rather, the sun, and not the moon; for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly. 14

When Katharine asks if it is possible for her to love an enemy, of France, he answers:

No; it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate, but, in loving me, you should love the friend of France; for I love France so well, that I will not part with a village of it; I will have it all mine; and, Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine. 15

The modest nature of Henry is shown early in the trilogy in contrast with Hotspur's arrogance. Despite the king's high estimate of Hotspur when he points him out as a model for prince Hal, we are forced to draw other conclusions concerning him that set off the prince favorably. Although Hotspur evidently had little to say at the time Henry took the throne from Richard, now that he is angry

¹⁴ Henry V, V, ii, 151 ff.

¹⁵ Ibid. V, ii, 179 ff.

at the king he cannot think of enough kind things to say of "that sweet lovely rose," Richard, or enough vile names to call "this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke." Reckless of all danger that could come from disobedience to the king concerning the prisoners he shouts:

And if the devil come and roar for them,
I will not send them: I will after straight
And tell him so; for I will ease my heart,
Albeit I make a hazard of my head. 16

He is also commanded not to mention the name of Mortimer again, but he continues to rave:

Nay, I will; that's flat:
He said he would not ransom Mortimer;
Forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer;
But I will find him when he lies asleep,
And in his ear I'll holla "Mortimer!"
Nay,
I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak
Nothing but "Mortimer" and give it him,
To keep his anger still in motion. 17

No one can reason with Hotspur until he calms down and then he is likely to burst out again in rage at the least provocation. He heeds no advice. He does not confide in or trust his wife simply because she is a woman. He quarrels with those who are of his own faction over matters that have little or no direct bearing on the plan in hand. An example is his argument with Glendower:

Glen. . . . at my nativity
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets; and at my birth
The frame and huge foundation of the earth
Shak'd like a coward.

16 I Henry IV, I, iii, 125 ff.

17 Ibid. I, iii, 219 ff.

Hot. Why, so it would have done at the same season, if your mother's cat had but kittened, though yourself had never been born.

Glen. I say the earth did shake when I was born.

Hot. And I say the earth was not of my mind, If you suppose as fearing you it shook. 18

And finally, he underestimates his enemies. Of the prince he takes very little heed. He speaks of him as:

The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,
And his comrades, that daff'd the world aside,
And bid it pass? 19

Another time he says:

But that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales,
But that I think his father loves him not,
And would be glad he met with some mischance,
I would have him poison'd with a pot of ale. 20

Before the battle the untried prince challenges the mighty Hotspur to a single combat. Vernon says of the challenge:

I never in my life
Did hear a challenge urg'd more modestly,
Unless a brother should a brother dare
To gentle exercise and proof of arms.
He gave you all the duties of a man,
Trim'd up your praises with a princely tongue,
Spoke your deservings like a chronicle,
Making you ever better than his praise,
By still dispraising praise valu'd with you;
And, which became him like a prince indeed,
He made a blushing cital of himself,
And chid his truant youth with such a grace
As if he master's there a double spirit
Of teaching and of learning instantly.
There did he pause, But let me tell the world,
If he outlive the envy of this day,

18 Ibid. III, i, 13 ff.

19 Ibid. IV, i, 94 ff.

20 Ibid. I, iii, 230 ff.

England did never owe so sweet a hope,
So much misconstru'd in his wantonness. 21

Henry has no desire to detract from the honor of his friends or foes. Of his brother, who surprises him by his conduct in battle, he says:

By God, thou hast deceiv'd me, Lancaster;
I did not think thee lord of such a spirit:
Before, I loved thee as a brother, John;
But now, I do respect thee as my soul, 22

In the battle in which Hotspur is mortally wounded Hotspur cries out:

O, Harry! thou hast robb'd me of my youth.
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me. 23

To which, the prince with great compassion for the brave

Percy answers:

Fare thee well, great heart.
Ill weaved ambition how much art thou shrunk!
When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
But now, two paces of the vilest earth
Is room enough: this earth, that bears thee dead,
Bears not alive so stout a gentleman. 24

After the battle we find that most of the leaders of the rebellion have been slain or taken captive. There is one among the captives, Lord Douglas, who has won the admiration of the prince. The prince asks a boon of the king that he may dispose of the captive lord. The boon granted, he gives to his brother, John of Lancaster, the honourable bounty of

21 Ibid. V, ii, 51 ff.

22 Ibid. V, iv, 17 ff.

23 Ibid. V, iv, 77 ff.

24 Ibid. V, iv, 87 ff.

freeing Lord Douglas:

Go to the Douglas and deliver him
Up to his pleasure, ransomless, and free;
His valor shown upon our crests today
Hath taught us how to cherish such high deeds,
Even in the bosom of our adversaries. 25

Further proof of Henry's modest nature is in his response to the Dauphin's insult. The Dauphin in answer to Henry's claim to the French throne sends a message saying the English king savored too much of his youth and therefore quite suitable for his spirit was this tun of treasure, which turned out to be a cask of tennis balls. Henry answers thus:

We are glad the Dauphin is so pleasant with us;
His present and your pains we thank you for;
When we have match'd our rackets to these balls,
We will, in France, by God's grace play a set
Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.
Tell him he hath made a match with such a wrangler
That all the courts of France will be disturb'd
With chaces. And we understand him well,
How he comes over us with our wilder days,
Not measuring what use we made of them. 26

Although there is a note of defiance in this answer, Henry does not boast of winning. Even the French ambassadors were impressed with the gracious reception of the Dauphin's taunt. The next time the Dauphin spoke of the English being--

... so idly king'd
Her sceptre so fantastically borne
By a vain, giddy, shallow, humorous youth,
That fear attends her not. 27

the answer was:

25 Ibid. V, v, 27 ff.

26 Henry V, I, ii, 259 ff.

27 Ibid. II, iv, 26 ff.

O peace, Prince Dauphin!
 You are too much mistaken in this king.
 Question your Grace the late ambassadors,
 With what great state he heard their embassy,
 How well supplied with noble counsellors,
 How modest in exception, and withal
 How terrible in constant resolution,
 And you shall find his vanities forespent
 Were but the outside of the Roman Brutus,
 Covering discretion with a coat of folly;
 As gardeners do with ordure hide those roots
 That shall first spring and be most delicate. 28

And finally, Henry is modest in victory. He gives God the praise and credit for the victory of Agincourt, and commands his men to do likewise. In comparing the loss of some ten thousand of the flower of French nobility to the eleven or twelve hundred of the English dead Henry says:

O God thy arm was here;
 And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
 Ascribe we all; when without stratagem,
 But in plain shock and even play of battle,
 Was ever known so great and little loss
 On one part and on the other? Take it, God,
 For it is only thine!....
 Come, go we in procession to the village;
 And be it death proclaimed through our host
 To boast of this, or take that praise from God
 Which is his only. 29

The third quality of Henry's character that makes him beloved is his love of justice--tempered with mercy. He knows that of all the cares belonging to the crown the chief one is justice. To maintain justice he chooses wise and good men who are unafraid to do their duty. He knows that much of justice depends upon the judge's attitude toward God as the giver of Christian precepts and the principles of justice.

28 Ibid. II, iv, 30 ff.

29 Ibid. IV, viii, 102 ff.

He himself is just, as is shown in his dealing with the Chief Justice.

Sir Thomas Elyot tells the story of a favored servant of the prince's who is brought to judgment for ill-conduct. In anger the prince appears and demands his release. The judge refuses, whereupon the prince sets upon the judge so that the onlookers think that he will slay him. Even as the enraged prince rushes upon him the judge sits still, declaring with dignity the majesty of the king's place of judgment. He speaks as follows: "Sir, remember yourself; I keep here the place of the king, your sovereign lord and father, to whom you owe double obedience, wherefor, eftsoons in his name, I charge you desist of your willfulness and unlawful enterprise, and henceforth give good example to those which hereafter shall be your proper subjects."³⁰ He then for contempt and disobedience commands the young prince to await the pleasure of the king. The prince, abashed, does as he is commanded, but his servants go immediately in disdain to the king. The king is greatly pleased with the judge who has not feared to administer justice, and more pleased with a son who could obey the decrees of justice.

Although Shakespeare does not reveal all this story, soon after Henry is crowned king, there stands before him this judge who has commanded him to prison. Trembling, yet sustained by the thought that he has done his duty, the judge appears to know the king's pleasure. He knows that

³⁰ The Governor, I, p. 198.

the young prince has loved him not and doubts not that as king he will take revenge for the indignities that have been laid upon him as prince. After the judge has made his defense he is surprised to hear the prince answer thus:

You are right, justice; and you weigh this well;
 Therefore still bear the balance and the sword;
 And I do wish your honours may increase
 Till you do live to see a son of mine
 Offend you and obey you, as I did.
 So shall I live to speak my father's words:
 'Happy am I, that have a man so bold
 That dares to do justice on my proper son;
 And not less happy, having such a son,
 That would deliver up his greatness so
 Into the hands of justice.' You did commit me:
 For which, I do commit into your hand
 The unstained sword that you have us'd to bear;
 With this remembrance, that you use the same
 With the like bold, just, and impartial spirit
 As you have done against me. 31

We see here no desire on the part of the king to bear a grudge--rather to reward faithful service. He further promises to listen to the advice and counsel that the judge may offer.

Another instance of justice tempered with mercy is shown in the case of Falstaff. In the midst of war preparation the king remembers to command Falstaff's release from prison, excusing his conduct because he has drunk too much wine. When urged to let Falstaff suffer for an example to others of like breed, the king answers with a plea of mercy:

Alas, your too much love and care of me
 Are heavy orisons 'gainst this poor wretch!
 If little faults, proceeding on distemper,
 Shall not be winked at, how shall we stretch our eye
 When capital crimes, chew'd, swallow'd and digested,

31 II Henry IV, V, ii, 102 ff.

Appear before us? We'll yet enlarge that man,
 Though Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey, in their dear care
 And tender preservation of our person,
 Would have him punished. 32

In the treason of Cambridge, Grey, and Scroop we see the workings of stern justice. Yet there is not a touch of personal vindictiveness--the death of these three miserable men is just, and they know that they deserve their sentences. There is forgiveness and pity for their faults and suffering, but the sentence stands:

God quit you in his mercy! Hear you sentence.
 You have conspired against our royal person,
 Joined with an enemy proclaimed, and from his coffers
 Received the golden earnest of our death;
 Wherein you would have sold your king to slaughter,
 His princes and his peers to servitude,
 His subjects to oppression and contempt,
 And his whole kingdom into desolation.
 Touching our person, seek we no revenge;
 But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
 Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
 We do deliver you. Get you, therefore, hence,
 Poor miserable wretches, to your death:
 The taste whereof, God of his mercy give
 You patience to endure, and true repentance
 Of all your dear offences. Bear them hence. 33

During the war Henry repeatedly commands his soldiers to refrain from looting the conquered towns or violating the citizens. For one guilty of such there is no mercy shown. Bardolph is executed for stealing from a church. When mercy is asked for him King Henry answers thus:

We would have all such offenders so cut off: and we give express orders that in our marches through the country, there by nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the

32 Henry V. II, ii, 52 ff.

33 Ibid. III, iii, 166 ff.

French upbraided or abus'd in disdainful
language; for when lenity and cruelty play
for a kingdom the gentler gamester is the
soonest winner. 34

Throughout the war Henry shows great mercy toward the enemy. At the beginning he offers to make fair terms with the French king. At the seige of Harfleur he promised mercy if the governor will surrender the town which is doomed to fall. He points out to them what will happen if seige is laid to the town and urges:

Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people,
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command;
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil, and villainy. 35

When surrender is made he commands:

Open your gates! Come, uncle Exeter,
Go you and enter Harfleur; there remain,
And fortify it strongly 'gainst the French:
Use mercy to all. 36

It is quite evident that Shakespeare would have his ideal king a great military leader. This is easily understood when we consider the historical background of the period--this period when England was expanding her colonial empire and fighting for supremacy on land and sea. The chief claim of Henry V lies in his military genius. Shakespeare depicts him as a shrewd director of affairs, a leader who shares the hardships of his followers and inspires them

³⁴ Ibid. III, vi, 104 ff.

³⁵ Ibid. III, iii, 27 ff.

³⁶ Ibid. III, iii, 51 ff.

to do great deeds, and yet one who is generous in victory. Henry knows how to grant mercy without sacrificing discipline or conceding vital points. It is he who succeeds in again bringing France under an English yoke.

The Plantagenets have long claimed the French throne through Isabella, daughter of Philip IV. But they were barred in their claim by the Salic Law which declared "no woman, nor therefore her son, could in accordance with custom succeed to the monarchy of France."³⁷ Henry is assured by his spiritual and state advisers that his claim to France is just and that the hearts of Englishmen are already pavilioned in the fields of France. He immediately makes provision for Scotland and declares war on France.

The French, unfortunately for them, still think of Henry as a reckless, goddy-headed boy. The French king, however, does not forget that this Henry is bred out of the "bloody strain" that humbled the French at the battle of Cressy. He says:

"This is the stem
Of that victorious stock; and let us fear
The native mightiness and fate of him. 38

The demands sent by Henry are studied carefully by the French king. Henry in a

...most memorable line,
In every branch truly demonstrative, 39

sets forth his claim to the throne, and says that war must

³⁷ Cambridge Medieval History, VII, p. 335.

³⁸ Henry V, II, iv, 62 ff.

³⁹ Ibid. II, iv, 88 ff.

follow unless the French king resigns the crown. For the Dauphin, there is

Scorn and defiance, slight regard, contempt,
And anything that may not misbecome
The mighty sender. 40

Since the French king has no intention of resigning the crown, war is inevitable.

The French really think that there is little to fear because their army far outnumbers the English army. But their failure to take into consideration seriously the type of leadership Henry is giving his smaller army is costly. Henry shows his willingness to share the hardships and the fate of his soldiers. It is he who despite handicaps and losses inspires his soldiers to fight until the victory is won. He cries out:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead!
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage:
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let it pry through the portage of the head
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'er hang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth, and stretch the nostril wide;
Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit
To his full height! On, on, you noblest English,
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!...
...The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry! England and Saint George! 41

40 Ibid. II, iv, 117 ff.

41 Ibid. III, ii, 1 ff.

Later in the face of want and disease he plans to continue the fight saying:

We are in God's hand, brother, not in theirs.
 March to the bridge; it now draws toward night:
 Beyond the river we'll encamp ourselves;
 And on tomorrow bid them march away. 42

Knowing that his army was small in comparison to the French army, he says:

If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
 To do our country less; and if to live;
 The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
 God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
 By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
 Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
 It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
 Such outward things dwell not in my desires:
 But if it be a sin to covet honour,
 I am the most offending soul alive.
 No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England:
 God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
 As one man more, methinks, would share from me,
 For the best hope I have. O! do not wish one more;
 Rather proclaim it, Westmorland, through my host,
 That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
 Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
 And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
 We would not die in that man's company
 That fears his fellowship to die with us. 43

Under such a leader the soldiers fight desperately and with few losses win the great victory of Agincourt.

A man might be born a king, trained for kingship, and possess the qualities of kingship, and yet fall short of an ideal if he does not have that breath of divinity that makes him great; namely, the acceptance of responsibility as a sacred duty. Shakespeare climaxes his characterization of a great leader with this trait. Henry realizes

42 Ibid. III, vii, 166 ff.

43 Ibid. IV, iii, 20 ff.

that the happiness of his people and the greatness of his country is dependent upon him. He knows that a king's load is heavy in contrast with that of a common man, and that the crown is really an enemy.

We get this touch of Henry's character as he walks among his soldiers. He knows that with ceremonies laid aside he is but a man, subject to the same fears that beset mankind, yet he must not show those fears. One soldier says that the king will have a heavy reckoning to make some day for the dead, who have died fighting for him. It causes him to cry out:

Upon the king! Let us our lives, our souls,
 Our debts, our careful wives,
 Our children, and our sins lay on the king!
 We must bear all. O hard reckoning
 Twin born with greatness, subject to the breath
 Of every fool whose sense no more can fool
 But his own wringing! What infinite heart's ease
 Must kings neglect that private men enjoy!
 And what have kings that privates have not too,
 Save ceremony, save general ceremony? 44

We feel a deep undercurrent of seriousness beneath the king's laughter when he woos Katharine; there is no lapse from dignity in his behavior. Katharine's hand is included in the terms of peace, and despite his love for her he lessens none of his demands. He is desirous of having an heir for his great kingdom and the marriage with Katharine will, of course, strengthen the claim to the French throne. He says:

Shall not you and I, between Saint Denis and Saint

44 Ibid. IV, i, 250 ff.

George, compound a boy, half French, half English,
that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk
by the beard? 45

Henry has the right attitude toward kingship in his
fashion of wooing when he says:

O Kate! nice customs curtsy to great kings. Dear
Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak
list of a country's fashion: We are the makers of
manners, Kate, and the liberty that follows our places
stops the mouths of all findfaults. 46

So with all joyous preparation for the celebration of vic-
tory and marriage the play ends.

There seem to be great days ahead for England under
the continued rule of such a king as Henry V. It is well
that we leave the story here for the early death of Henry,
who promises so much yet to his country, frustrates the
fulfillment of that promise, In the Epilogue we find these
closing lines:

Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen,
Our bending author hath pursu'd the story;
In little room confining mighty men,
Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.
Small time, but in that small most greatly liv'd
This star of England: Fortune made his sword,
By which the world's best garden he achiev'd,
And of it left his son imperial lord.
Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd king
Of France and England, did this king succeed;
Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France and made this England bleed:
Which oft our stage hath shown, and, for their sake,
In your fair minds let this acceptance take. 47

45 Ibid. V, ii, 218 ff.

46 Ibid. V, ii, 291 ff.

47 Ibid. V, Epilogue.

We come to the close of this analysis. From a careful study of the character of Henry V as Shakespeare portrays him in the trilogy of plays dealing with him we reach these conclusions: Henry V is royal in birth and trained by experience for his position. He possesses such admirable traits as a keen wit, a sense of humor, and modesty. He is a judge who tempers justice with mercy, a shrewd director of state affairs, a leader who shares the hardships of his followers and inspires them to do great deeds, and yet one who is generous in victory. Above all he is a king who has a high conception of his rights as king, and of his sacred duty in fulfilling his responsibility as king. It is in such a king, we are led to believe, that Shakespeare has revealed an ideal.

CHAPTER III
THE FAILURE OF HAMLET

In Hamlet we have Shakespeare's portrait of a man who is by right of birth a king and who should have ruled as king. But Hamlet lacks the qualities that make a strong ruler, and the lack of these qualities prevents his ever being crowned. In his emotional instability, inability to act, and unwillingness to assume responsibility we have a striking contrast with Henry V and the explanation of his failure.

The general instability of Hamlet's character is quite evident. His extraordinary moodiness is followed by violent outbursts of temper and acts of dangerous impetuosity. Although he is slow to act, when his emotions are aroused there is gunpowder in every nerve. At such times Hamlet's nature is a hurricane, a thing of wrath, fury, and tempestuous scorn. "He is unable to control his own passions and often they strike inward."¹ Too often he shoots his arrow over the house and hurts those who are innocent.

In contrast we have seen Henry V as one who surveyed the situation calmly, outlined a course of action, and proceeded deliberately toward a definite end. This was quite clearly shown in Henry's war with France.

Hamlet's impetuous nature is first seen in his determi-

¹ George Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 367.

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nation to follow the ghost. The more practical Horatio warns him not to go because something terrible might happen but Hamlet says:

My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
Still am I called. Unhand me, gentlemen.
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!
I say, away! Go on: I'll follow thee. 2

We can reconstruct the scene of Hamlet's visit to Ophelia to show these same characteristics. He is brooding over the many problems that are present in his mind. His going to Ophelia was a stupid senseless thing to do--and its explanation lies in the rash impulsive nature of Hamlet. His manner of appearing before her loses for him any possible help that she might have been able to give him. She describes his appearance thus:

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled,
Ungartered and down-gyved to his ancle
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors,--he comes before me. 3

The incident is much like an incident that occurred when the Earl of Essex burst unceremoniously into the bedroom of Queen Elizabeth, another example of one who lost much because of a wild, impetuous act. 4

² Hamlet, I, v, 82 ff.

³ Ibid. II, i, 74 ff.

⁴ Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 98.

Hamlet advises Ophelia to leave off her foolish and evil ways and enter a nunnery. His ruthlessness in speaking to Ophelia can be explained, in part, by the fact that he is speaking to those whom he knows to be listening, but primarily it is the result of the loss of emotional control. He says things to Ophelia that no gentleman would say to a lady, much less a lover to a beloved one unless he were worked up to a point where he did not know what he is saying or why he was saying it. It is the type of passion which, if not checked, causes people to kill those whom they really love most. Is this the rational Hamlet?

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague
for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure
as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee
to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs
marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough
what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go,
and quickly too....

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough;
God has given you one face, and you make yourselves
another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-
name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your
ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on 't; it hath made me
mad. 5

Again the the scene in which Hamlet talks to the queen, his mother, he loses control of his emotions and says things that no son has ever before said to his mother. If temporary insanity is the lack of control of the emotions for the brief time that we "see red," then Hamlet is near insanity in these two scenes. He say:

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at you age

⁵ Hamlet, III, i, 135 ff.

The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble
 And waits on the judgment; and what judgment
 Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,
 Else could you not have motion; but sure, that sense
 Is apoplexed; for madness would not err,
 Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
 But it reserved some quantity of choice
 To serve in such a difference. 6

Hamlet continues through many lines of bitter denunciation, accusation, and contempt. Most of it the queen does not deserve, but he is not thinking of that. His brooding and anger have brought him again to an emotional brain-storm.

Hamlet grows suspicious of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, justifies his suspicions, and turns against them. In anger he says:

Why, look you now how unworthy a thing you make
 of me! You would play upon me; you would seem
 to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart
 of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest
 note to the top of my compass; and there is much
 music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet
 cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think
 I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me
 what you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot
 play upon me. 7

When he finds out that the two are escorting him to his death in England, he makes no attempt to ascertain whether they know what they are doing or are simply carrying out the orders of the king. On the spur of the moment he writes out the order that sends them to their deaths, "no shriving time allowed." This from the man who could not bring himself to kill the man who had murdered his father, disgraced his mother, and taken the crown! And he says:

⁶ Ibid. III, iv, 66 ff.

⁷ Ibid. III, ii, 339 ff.

They are not near my conscience. 8

How can we explain this except to say it is another example of dangerous impetuosity on the part of Hamlet?

The death of Polonius is a glaring example of a rash deed that carries with it unhappy consequences. Hamlet has been convinced of the guilt of Claudius and he is worked up to a high point of frenzy. He says:

'T is now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. 9

In this mood he goes to his mother, letting the opportunity to kill the king pass by. Shortly after this he slays Polonius, thrusting through the curtain, not knowing who it is that he thus deprives of life so rashly. When he has time to calm down a little he begins to realize what must be the result of this wild act and says:

For this same lord,
I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
To punish me with this and this with me;
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him, and will answer well
The death I gave him. 10

No always, however, do the impulsive acts of Hamlet lead to trouble. His instant decision to board the pirate ship enroute to England was possibly the means of saving his life. Immediately upon his return to Denmark, however,

⁸ Ibid. V, ii, 58 ff.

⁹ Ibid. III, ii, 364 ff.

¹⁰ Ibid. III, iv, 166 ff.

we have another example of emotional instability. Ophelia is being carried to her grave. Laertes, stricken with grief, leaps into her grave imploring the other mourners to bury him with her. Hamlet not to be outdone leaps into the grave too. A struggle ensues between the two--a terrible thing to happen at such a time and in such a place. Hamlet cries out:

I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
 Could not, with all their quantity of love,
 Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?....
 'Swounds, show me what thou 'lt do;
 Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself?
 't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
 I'll do it. Dost thou come here to whine,--
 To outface me with leaping in her grave?
 Be buried quick with her, and so will I:
 And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
 Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
 Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
 Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
 I'll rant as well as thou. ll

And the truth is that under certain influences Hamlet would make good his word and do one or all of these things.

Throughout the play Hamlet has been trying to bring himself to the place in his thinking where he can kill the king. He has never succeeded. Even after there could be no possible doubt of the king's guilt, Hamlet puts off the deed with one excuse or another. And yet in a moment of aroused fury--a thrust with a poisoned sword--and the deed is done.

In the character of Henry V we have pictured what was evidently Shakespeare's conception of an ideal monarch in the strong and heroic man of action--a leader who could

ll Ibid. V, i, 267 ff.

reanimate his drooping soldiers by a "little touch of Harry in the night." In contrast we have Hamlet, the failure,-- a failure as king because he is a man of thought and not of action. There are many fine qualities in the character of Hamlet, but they are not the qualities that make a great king. Hamlet is a great scholar and a brilliant thinker. His philosophy is sound and beautiful, but it does not solve his problems. He is a dreamer who does not know how to make his dreams come true. Carlyle asserts, "The end of man is an action and not a thought, though it were the noblest." The only time that Hamlet can act is when he is driven by circumstances to commit some deed quickly without considering the end of his act. When he does not act quickly, the act is lost and the idea becomes more important to him than the deed.

There are a good many instances in the play that show the paralyzing grasp that ideas have upon the faculties of Hamlet causing them to "lose the name of action." The very first line that Hamlet speaks in the play shows that he is off in the realm of thought:

A little more than kin, and less than kind. 12

There follows his play upon the word sun, and his explanation of his grief. There are those he says who can simulate the symptoms of grief:

12 Ibid. I, ii, 64

For they are actions that a man might play:
 But I have that within which passeth show;
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe. 13

Later, in the same scene we have Hamlet alone, and we see that in his thoughts he is toying with the idea of suicide. Suicide would end all necessity for action:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
 His cannon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
 How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on 't! ah fie! 't is an unweeded garden,
 That grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely. 14

Hamlet concludes his resolve to cast aside every other thought save revenge by observing how strange it is--

That one might smile, and smile, and be a villain: 15

When Horatio observes how unnatural it is that a ghost should come and take his part in the affairs of man Hamlet answers:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. 16

Hamlet engages Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in conversation. He turns their thoughts to prisons, saying that Denmark is one. When they do not understand he explains thus:

...for there is nothing either good or bad, but
 thinking makes it so; to me it is a prison.

Ros. Why, then, your ambition makes it one; 't is too
 narrow for your mind.

13 Ibid. I, ii, 84 ff.

14 Ibid. I, ii, 129 ff.

15 Ibid. I, v, 106

16 Ibid. I, v, 164 ff.

Ham. O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

Guil. Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

Ham. A dream itself is but a shadow.

Ros. Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

Ham. Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes and the beggars' shadows. Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason. 17

Shortly after this conversation Hamlet discovers that the two have been sent for and are spying upon him. His accusation is followed by an explanation of his condition and ends with a treatise on man:

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world!
the paragon of animals! 18

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet about the new things that are coming to pass in the theater and he answers:

It is not very strange; for mine uncle is king of Denmark, and those that would make mows at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, and hundred ducats a-piece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out. 19

As the play progresses Hamlet doubts the story told by the ghost and is determined to make sure of the king's guilt by the use of the play. It seems that Hamlet would be so carried away by the thought of the play and the clearing away of all doubts in his own mind that there could be nothing but

17 Ibid., II, ii, 244 ff.

18 Ibid., II, ii, 297 ff.

19 Ibid., II, ii, 354 ff.

impatience in his mind. Yet in the interim between the conceiving of the plan and its execution Hamlet puts into words his philosophy of the famous "To be, or not to be" speech.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether't is nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep:
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution,
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action. 20

How well the last five lines of this quotation express the character of Hamlet and explain his shortcomings as king!

Then when the players come to rehearse for the play, Hamlet is very much concerned over how the play is to be

20 Ibid. III, i, 56 ff.

given. He gives lengthy instructions on how they are to act and speak, discussing fully the purpose of playing and how that purpose might be destroyed in poor acting. It is not that Hamlet is afraid the king will miss the point; he has a good many ideas concerning acting and he wishes to express them. Again he has lost sight of his objective!

The time for the play within the play arrives. Hamlet calls upon his friend, Horatio, to watch with him to detect the king's guilt, if it is evident. But Hamlet's thoughts are not all concerned with the king. He takes this time to put into words his feeling for Horatio, and to express his idea of a perfect friend:

Why should the poor be flattered?
 No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
 And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
 Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
 Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
 And could of men distinguish, her election
 Hath sealed thee for herself; for thou hast been
 As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
 A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
 Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are those
 Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
 That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
 To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
 That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
 In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
 As I do thee. 21

Even Hamlet finally realizes that this is scarcely the time and place to wax philosophical and breaks off with, "Something too much of this--".

There is no question in the mind of Hamlet after the

²¹ Ibid. III, ii, 56 ff.

play of the king's guilt. The opportunity offers itself for him to kill the king while the king is praying. But does he do so? No. A thought comes to him, which scanned, prevents the action.

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
 And now I'll do it. And so he goes to heaven;
 A villain kills my father; and for that,
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send
 To heaven.
 O, this is hire and salary, not revenge. 22

Despite the fact that Hamlet could not bring himself to kill Claudius, he has killed a man--Polonius. He rounds off the impetuous act with a true but none the less disagreeable discussion on how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar:

Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that's the end. A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm. 23

We see the same strain of melancholy thought in the graveyard scene as Hamlet contemplates the skulls thrown up by the sexton. He laments that the end is this--to be thrown about by rude hands no matter who you were or what skills you possessed. His own bones ache to think on it. In imagination he traces the base uses to which mankind might return. He concludes:

22 Ibid. III, iii, 73 ff.

23 Ibid. IV, iii, 22 ff.

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
 Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:
 O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
 Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw! 24

Hamlet tells Horatio how he has found out the plan for his death in England. He describes the restlessness that would not let him sleep, and of his arising and going to the room of his companions. He points out:

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
 Rough-hew them how we will. 25

He explains the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by a generalization:

'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
 Between the pass and fell incensed points
 Of mighty opposites. 26

Hamlet is troubled in mind concerning the approaching contest with Laertes. Horatio would have him obey the intuitive voice of warning, but Hamlet says:

Not a whit, we defy augury: there is a special
 providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,
 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be
 now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness
 is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves,
 what is't to leave betimes? 27

Hamlet is wounded and knows death is inevitable and near. Yet would he explain some idea of death if he had the opportunity:

Had I but time--as this fell sergeant, death,

24 Ibid. V, i, 211 ff.

25 Ibid. V, ii, 10 ff.

26 Ibid. V, ii, 60 ff.

27 Ibid. V, ii, 212 ff.

Is strict in his arrest--0, I could tell you--
But let it be. 28

He could tell them what? An explanation of this tragedy that has been enacted before their eyes? In words that would attempt to explain death itself? We do not know. It is unfortunate that strength fails him for Hamlet, the man of thought and not of action, might have added something of truth to our philosophy of death, but--

The rest is silence. 29

Hamlet knows that he does not possess the ability to act--that ability to set an objective, think out a line of action, and go straight to that goal. He upbraids himself time and again for his indecision of purpose and habit of procrastination. He cannot understand his own nature when things around him point out the way; he calls himself names and tries to spur himself on to revenge, all to no avail. When he sees the players wrought up in grief for the queen, Hecuba, he says:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? ...
Yet I
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain: breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,

28 Ibid. V, ii, 329 ff.

29 Ibid. V, ii, 351 ff.

As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?
 Ha!
 'Swounds I should take it; for it cannot be
 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter... 30

Again when he sees the army of Fortinbras passing through
 the kingdom, many men going to their deaths for a mere bauble,
 he continues:

How all occasions do inform against me,
 And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and to feed? a beast, no more.
 Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after, gave us not
 That capability and god-like reason
 To fast in us unused. Now, whether it be
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
 Of thinking too precisely on the event,
 A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
 And ever three parts coward, I do not know
 Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'
 Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
 To do 't. ...
 How stand I then,
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,
 And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
 That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
 Which is not tomb enough and continent
 To hide the slain? O! from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! 31

When the opportunity to kill the king arises, Hamlet
 lets the occasion pass by with some fantastical explanation
 to himself on the fitness of the king for death. Shall he
 kill the king while he is praying, and therefore prepared
 for death?

30 Ibid. II, ii, 548 ff.

31 Ibid. IV, iv, 32 ff.

No!
 Up, sword: and know thou a more horrid hent:
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
 At gaming, swearing, or about some act
 That has no relish of salvation in 't;
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
 And that his soul may be as damned and black
 As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays:
 This physic but prolongs thy sickly days. 32

Hamlet's inactivity and procrastination contrast vividly with Laertes' wild determination for revenge. Laertes loses no time but comes in impetuous haste at the head of a riotous mob, overbearing the king's officers and breaking into the presence of the king himself. Laertes demands:

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with:
 To hell, allegiance! vows to the blackest devil!
 Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
 I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
 That both the worlds I give to negligence,
 Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged
 Most thoroughly for my father. 33

We have pictured Hamlet as a failure in kingship because he is emotionally unstable, and because he is a man of thoughts and not of deeds. Unable to plan and execute an act himself it is not strange that he cannot lead others to great achievement as Henry V does. But more than this he is unwilling, as well as unable, to assume the responsibility of kingship. A great task is laid upon his shoulders and he sinks beneath a burden which he can neither bear nor throw off. Despite the fact that Hamlet is a brave man he cries out:

32 Ibid. III, iii, 87 ff.

33 Ibid. IV, v, 114 ff.

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right. 34

He thinks constantly of suicide as a way of escape from responsibility. Very different is the spirit in which Henry V meets his problems:

'Tis true we are in great danger;
The greater, therefor, should our courage be...
There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distil it out. 35

Hamlet is not greatly concerned because he has lost the crown. True, as he enumerates his grievances against Claudius he adds usurpation of the crown to the list, but we never feel that Hamlet cares greatly to be king.

There is a character in the drama, who plays a very minor part, one that is usually disregarded, that is very much the opposite of Hamlet and very much like Henry V. It is to him that Shakespeare gives the crown--Young Fortinbras. Let us look in closing at this character and see if in his similarity to Henry we can find some of those characteristics which we have pointed out as belonging to the ideal conception of kingship which is evidently Shakespeare's.

As the play opens young Fortinbras is smarting under the sense of defeat and loss. His father has lost his life and certain lands to the older Hamlet. The younger Fortinbras is not yet even in power because of his youth, but unknown to his uncle he has raised an army and is about ready

34 Ibid. I, v, 187 ff.

35 Henry V, IV, i, 1 ff.

to march against Denmark. The fact that the young prince has picked his army up from here and there among his followers and lawless resolute--testimony of his popularity and leadership--are suggestive of Prince Hal.

When the plan is discovered and the prince is rebuked by his uncle, he makes peace with his uncle and immediately receives re-inforcements and starts out to fight Poland. He promises never to go against Denmark, but we can in imagination see his attempting to recover Norway's loss as soon as he becomes king--a parallel to Henry V's regaining of France.

Fortinbras' army passes through Denmark, where Hamlet sees it. Hamlet expresses his idea of such a venture thus:

Witness this army of such mass and charge
 Led by a delicate and tender prince,
 Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
 Makes mouths at the invisible event,
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure
 To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
 Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
 Is not to stir without great argument,
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
 When honor's at the stake. 36

These are Hamlet's words, but it is Fortinbras that practices the principles.

Fortinbras returns from his conquest in time to look upon the tragedy that has befallen the royal house of Denmark. When Horatio says that he can explain what has happened, Fortinbras answers:

Let us haste to hear it,
 And call the noblest to the audience.

36 Hamlet, IV, iv, 47 ff.

For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune:
 I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
 Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me. 37

Fortinbras knows his claim to the throne, and although he says that he accepts his fortune sorrowfully, the fitting thing to say, yet he accepts his responsibility and calls it "my fortune". He immediately assumes command when he says:

Let four captains
 Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
 For he was likely, had he been put on,
 To have proved most royally; and, for his passage,
 The soldiers' music and the rites of war
 Speak loudly for him.
 Take up the bodies; such a sight as this
 Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
 Go, bid the soldiers shoot. 38

His generous compliment to Hamlet here is the generous spirit of Henry.

We have traced the story of Hamlet who should have been a king and would have been had he possessed the traits of character necessary to kingship. He does not possess these characteristics; consequently, he is never given the crown. The crown is placed upon the head of one who resembles strongly Shakespeare's apparent conception of an ideal king, Henry V.

³⁷ Ibid. V, ii, 379 ff.

³⁸ Ibid. V, ii, 388 ff.

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