

In fact I know no way by which the old theory of the character of Cromwell, as half fanatic, half hypocrite, might have better been justified in point of intellectual consistency than by a reference to the Æschylean regicide. Its advocates might have found in her a case of a dissembler rejoicing over the dead with a religious feeling, and declaring, not as a bravado, but as a matter of personal conviction, "The Lord hath delivered him into my hand." Her comparative mildness too as a ruler might have been paralleled with that striking feature in the last scene where she discourages the vulgar threats of Ægisthus, and begs him not to shed blood *unnecessarily*, intimating that in their crime they had been but poor vessels in the hand of Providence, chosen out for a work which it would have been bliss to have avoided. "I have sought the Lord night and day that he would rather slay me than put me upon this work." Even now that our own countryman has begun to be differently estimated, it is interesting to dwell upon the comparison.

It has been said that Shakspeare's superiority to Æschylus can be judged of by weighing the Agamemnon against Macbeth. And this is to a great extent true; only we must not decide too hastily on simply dramatic grounds. The display of character in the Agamemnon, though masterly so far as it goes, is not nearly so wide as in Shakspeare's play; as much wonder is excited, but the whole subject is felt to be transacted upon an elevated platform, and not to come down to the level of common life. As in the Prometheus, little sympathy is raised, except for the abstract principle involved in the story, so that the spectator approaches cautiously, and is made to see that awe is his most appropriate sentiment. Shakspeare places his chief marvel in the development of a strictly human nature, aiming indeed at an object beyond the reach of common men, but actuated by mere human passions, and doing in reality no more than any

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