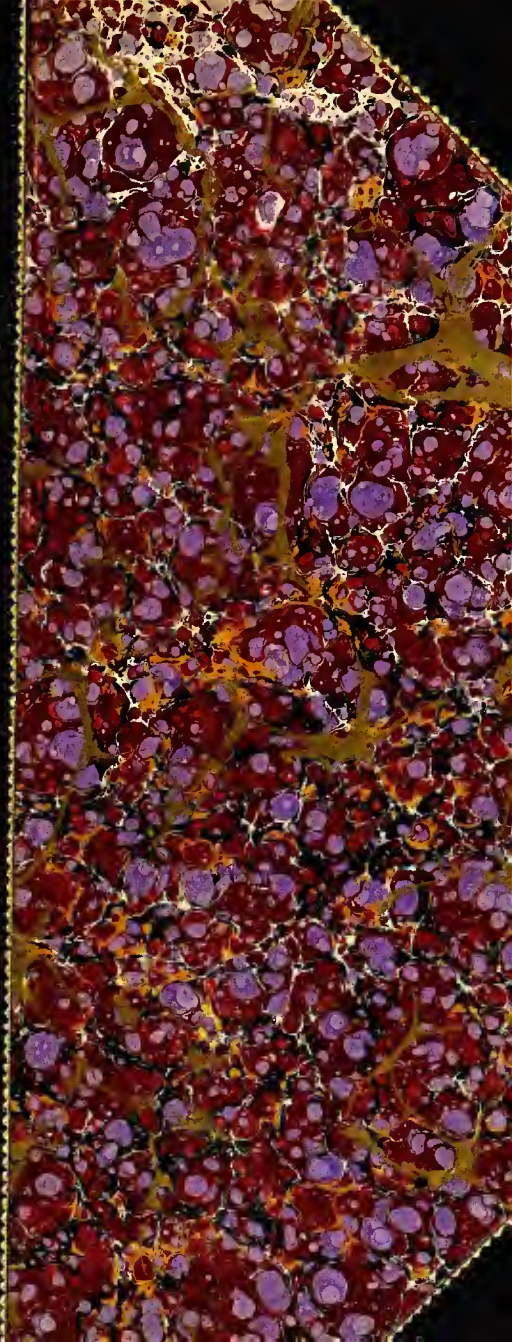
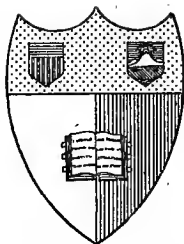


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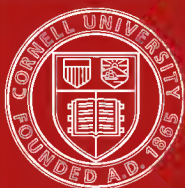
Shakspeare, a biography, by Thomas De Quin



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# SHAKSPEARE

## A BIOGRAPHY

BY

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

THE ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER.

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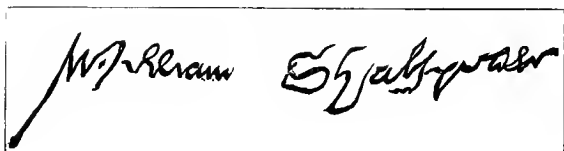


## N O T E.

IN issuing this Biography in a separate form and at the present time, it is perhaps only necessary to mention, in justice to the author, that it was written in the year 1838, and had not the benefit of any revision before his lamented death, which occurred in the year 1859.

EDINBURGH, *April* 1864.



A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "W. Shakespeare".

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE, the protagonist on the great arena of modern poetry, and the glory of the human intellect, was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, in the year 1564, and upon some day not precisely ascertained, in the month of April. It is certain that he was baptized on the 25th ; and from that fact, combined with some shadow of a tradition, Malone has inferred that he was born on the 23d. There is doubtless, on the one hand, no absolute necessity deducible from law or custom, as either operated in those times, which obliges us to adopt such a conclusion ; for children might be baptized, and were baptized, at various distances from their birth : yet, on the other hand, the 23d is as likely to have been the day as any other ; and more likely than any earlier day, upon two arguments. First, because there was probably a tradition floating in the seventeenth century, that Shakspeare died upon his birth-day : now it is beyond a doubt that he died upon the 23d of April. Secondly, because it is a reasonable presumption, that no parents, living in a simple community, tenderly alive to the pieties

of household duty, and in an age still clinging reverentially to the ceremonial ordinances of religion, would much delay the adoption of their child into the great family of Christ. Considering the extreme frailty of an infant's life during its two earliest years, to delay would often be to disinherit the child of its Christian privileges ; privileges not the less eloquent to the feelings from being profoundly mysterious, and, in the English church, forced not only upon the attention, but even upon the eye, of the most thoughtless. According to the discipline of the English church, the unbaptized are buried with "maimed rites," shorn of their obsequies, and sternly denied that "sweet and solemn farewell" by which otherwise the church expresses her final charity with all men ; and not only so, but they are even *locally* separated and sequestered. Ground the most hallowed, and populous with Christian burials of households,

That died in peace with one another,  
Father, sister, son, and brother,

opens to receive the vilest malefactor ; by which the church symbolically expresses her maternal willingness to gather back into her fold those even of her flock who have strayed from her by the most memorable aberrations ; and yet, with all this indulgence, she banishes to unhallowed ground the innocent bodies of the unbaptized. To them and to suicides she turns a face of wrath. With this gloomy fact offered to the very external senses, it is difficult to suppose that any parents would risk their own reproaches by putting the fulfilment of so grave a duty on the hazard of a convulsion fit. The case of royal

children is different; their baptisms, it is true, were often delayed for weeks; but the household chaplains of the palace were always at hand, night and day, to baptize them in the very agonies of death.\* We must presume, therefore, that William Shakspeare was born on some day very little anterior to that of his baptism; and the more so because the season of the year was lovely and genial, the 23d of April in 1564 corresponding in fact with what we now call the 3d of May, so that, whether the child was to be carried abroad, or the clergyman to be summoned, no hindrance would arise from the weather. One only argument has sometimes struck us for supposing that the 22d might be the day, and not the 23d; which is, that Shakspeare's sole grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, was married on the 22d of April 1626, ten years exactly from the poet's death; and the reason for choosing this day *might* have had a reference to her illustrious grandfather's birthday; which, there is good

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\* But, as a proof that, even in the case of royal christenings, it was not thought pious to "tempt God," as it were, by delay, Edward VI., the only son of Henry VIII., was born on the 12th day of October in the year 1537. And there was a delay on account of the sponsors, since the birth was not in London. Yet how little that delay was made, may be seen by this fact: The birth took place in the dead of the night, the day was Friday; and yet, in spite of all delay, the christening was most pompously celebrated on the succeeding Monday. And Prince Arthur, the elder brother of Henry VIII., was christened on the very next Sunday succeeding to his birth, notwithstanding an inevitable delay, occasioned by the distance of Lord Oxford, his godfather, and the excessive rains, which prevented the earl being reached by couriers, or himself reaching Winchester, without extraordinary exertions.

reason for thinking, would be celebrated as a festival in the family for generations. Still this choice *may* have been an accident, or governed merely by reason of convenience. And, on the whole, it is as well perhaps to acquiesce in the old belief, that Shakspeare was born and died on the 23d of April. We cannot do wrong if we drink to his memory on both 22d and 23d.

On a first review of the circumstances, we have reason to feel no little perplexity in finding the materials for a life of this transcendent writer so meagre and so few; and amongst them the larger part of doubtful authority. All the energy of curiosity directed upon this subject, through a period of one hundred and fifty years (for so long it is since Betterton the actor began to make researches) has availed us little or nothing. Neither the local traditions of his provincial birth-place, though sharing with London through half a century the honour of his familiar presence, nor the recollections of that brilliant literary circle with whom he lived in the metropolis, have yielded much more than such an outline of his history as is oftentimes to be gathered from the penurious records of a grave-stone. That he lived, and that he died, and that he was "a little lower than the angels;"—these make up pretty nearly the amount of our undisputed report. It may be doubted indeed whether at this day we are as accurately acquainted with the life of Shakspeare as with that of Chaucer, though divided from each other by an interval of two centuries, and (what should have been more effectual towards oblivion) by the wars of the two roses. And yet the traditional memory of a rural and a sylvan region, such as Warwickshire at

that time was, is usually exact as well as tenacious; and, with respect to Shakspeare in particular, we may presume it to have been full and circumstantial through the generation succeeding to his own, not only from the curiosity, and perhaps something of a scandalous interest, which would pursue the motions of one living so large a part of his life at a distance from his wife, but also from the final reverence and honour which would settle upon the memory of a poet so pre-eminently successful; of one who, in a space of five-and-twenty years, after running a bright career in the capital city of his native land, and challenging notice from the throne, had retired with an ample fortune, created by his personal efforts, and by labours purely intellectual.

How are we to account, then, for that deluge, as if from Lethe, which has swept away so entirely the traditional memorials of one so illustrious? Such is the fatality of error which overclouds every question connected with Shakspeare, that two of his principal critics, Steevens, and Malone, have endeavoured to solve the difficulty by cutting it with a falsehood. They deny in effect that he *was* illustrious in the century succeeding to his own, however much he has since become so. We shall first produce their statements in their own words, and we shall then briefly review them.

Steevens delivers *his* opinion in the following terms:—  
“ How little Shakspeare was once read, may be understood from Tate, who, in his dedication to the altered play of King Lear, speaks of the original as an obscure piece, recommended to his notice by a friend; and the author of the Tatler, having occasion to quote a few lines out of

Macbeth, was content to receive them from Davenant's alteration of that celebrated drama, in which almost every original beauty is either awkwardly disguised or arbitrarily omitted." Another critic, who cites this passage from Steevens, pursues the hypothesis as follows :—" In fifty years after his death, Dryden mentions that he was then become *a little obsolete*. In the beginning of the last century, Lord Shaftesbury complains of his *rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit*. It is certain that, for nearly a hundred years after his death, partly owing to the immediate revolution and rebellion, and partly to the licentious taste encouraged in Charles II.'s time, and perhaps partly to the incorrect state of his works, he was **ALMOST ENTIRELY NEGLECTED.**" This critic then goes on to quote with approbation the opinion of Malone,—“ that if he had been read, admired, studied, and imitated, in the same degree as he is now, the enthusiasm of some one or other of his admirers in the last age would have induced him to make some inquiries concerning the history of his theatrical career, and the anecdotes of his private life.” After which this enlightened writer re-affirms and clenches the judgment he has quoted by saying,—“ His admirers, however, *if he had admirers in that age*, possessed no portion of such enthusiasm.”

It may perhaps be an instructive lesson to young readers, if we now show them, by a short sifting of these confident dogmatists, how easy it is for a careless or a half-read man to circulate the most absolute falsehoods under the semblance of truth; falsehoods which impose upon himself as much as they do upon others. We believe that not one word or illustration is uttered in the sentences cited from



these three critics which is not *virtually* in the very teeth of the truth.

To begin with Mr Nahum Tate:—This poor grub of literature, if he did really speak of Lear as “an *obscure* piece, recommended to his notice by a friend,” of which we must be allowed to doubt, was then uttering a conscious falsehood. It happens that Lear was one of the few Shakspearian dramas which had kept the stage unaltered. But it is easy to see a mercenary motive in such an artifice as this. Mr Nahum Tate is not of a class of whom it can be safe to say that they are “well known:” they and their desperate tricks are essentially obscure, and good reason he has to exult in the felicity of such obscurity; for else this same vilest of travesties, Mr Nahum’s Lear, would consecrate his name to everlasting scorn. For himself, he belonged to the age of Dryden rather than of Pope; he “flourished,” if we can use such a phrase of one who was always withering, about the era of the Revolution; and his Lear, we believe, was arranged in the year 1682. But the family to which he belongs is abundantly recorded in the *Dunciad*; and his own name will be found amongst its catalogues of heroes.

With respect to *the author of the “Tatler,”* a very different explanation is requisite. Steevens means the reader to understand Addison; but it does not follow that the particular paper in question was from his pen. Nothing, however, could be more natural than to quote from the common form of the play as then in possession of the stage. It was *there*, beyond a doubt, that a fine gentleman living upon town, and not professing any deep scholastic knowledge of literature (a light in which we are

always to regard the writers of the Spectator, Guardian, &c.), would be likely to have learned anything he quoted from Macbeth. This we say generally of the writers in those periodical papers; but, with reference to Addison in particular, it is time to correct the popular notion of his literary character, or at least to mark it by severer lines of distinction. It is already pretty well known, that Addison had no very intimate acquaintance with the literature of his own country. It is known also, that he did not think such an acquaintance any ways essential to the character of an elegant scholar and *littérateur*. Quite enough he found it, and more than enough for the time he had to spare, if he could maintain a tolerable familiarity with the foremost Latin poets, and a very slender one indeed with the Grecian. *How* slender, we can see in his "Travels." Of modern authors, none as yet had been published with notes, commentaries, or critical collations of the text; and, accordingly, Addison looked upon all of them, except those few who professed themselves followers in the retinue and equipage of the ancients, as creatures of a lower race. Boileau, as a mere imitator and propagator of Horace, he read, and probably little else, amongst the French classics. Hence it arose that he took upon himself to speak sneeringly of Tasso. To this, which was a bold act for his timid mind, he was emboldened by the countenance of Boileau.<sup>1</sup> Of the elder Italian authors, such as Ariosto, and, *a fortiori*, Dante, he knew absolutely nothing. Passing to our own literature, it is certain that Addison was profoundly ignorant of Chaucer and of Spenser. Milton only,—and why? simply because he was a brilliant scholar, and stands like a bridge

between the Christian literature and the Pagan,—Addison had read and esteemed. There was also in the very constitution of Milton's mind, in the majestic regularity and planetary solemnity of its *epic* movements, something which he could understand and appreciate: as to the meteoric and incalculable eccentricities of the *dramatic* mind, as it displayed itself in the heroic age of our drama, amongst the Titans of 1590—1630, they confounded and overwhelmed him.

In particular, with regard to Shakspeare, we shall now proclaim a discovery which we made some twenty years ago. We, like others, from seeing frequent references to Shakspeare in the "Spectator," had acquiesced in the common belief, that, although Addison was no doubt profoundly unlearned in Shakspeare's language, and thoroughly unable to do him justice (and this we might well assume, since his great rival Pope, who had expressly studied Shakspeare, was, after all, so memorably deficient in the appropriate knowledge),—yet, that of course he had a vague popular knowledge of the mighty poet's cardinal dramas. Accident only led us into a discovery of our mistake. Twice or thrice we had observed, that if Shakspeare were quoted, that paper turned out not to be Addison's; and at length, by express examination, we ascertained the curious fact, that Addison has never in one instance quoted or made any reference to Shakspeare. But was this, as Steevens most disingenuously pretends, to be taken as an exponent of the public feeling towards Shakspeare? Was Addison's neglect representative of a general neglect? If so, whence came Rowe's edition, Pope's, Theobald's, Sir Thomas Hanmer's, Bishop War-

burton's, all upon the heels of one another? With such facts staring him in the face, how shameless must be that critic who could, in support of such a thesis, refer to "*the author of the 'Tatler,'*" contemporary with all these editors. The truth is, Addison was well aware of Shakspeare's hold on the popular mind; too well aware of it. The feeble constitution of the poetic faculty, as existing in himself, forbade his sympathising with Shakspeare; the proportions were too colossal for his delicate vision; and yet, as one who sought popularity himself, he durst not shock what perhaps he viewed as a national prejudice. Those who have happened, like ourselves, to see the effect of passionate music and "deep-inwoven harmonics" upon the feeling of an idiot,\* may conceive what we mean. Such music does not utterly revolt the idiot; on the contrary, it has a strange but a horrid fascination for him: it alarms, irritates, disturbs, makes him profoundly unhappy; and chiefly by unlocking imperfect glimpses of thoughts and slumbering instincts, which it is for his peace to have entirely obscured, because for him they can be revealed only partially, and with the sad effect of throwing a baleful gleam upon his blighted condition. Do we mean, then, to compare Addison with an idiot? Not generally, by any means. Nobody can more sincerely admire him where he was a man of real genius,—viz., in his delineations of character and manners, or in the exquisite delicacies of his humour. But assuredly

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\* A great modern poet refers to this very case of music entering "the mouldy chambers of the dull idiot's brain;" but in support of what seems to us a baseless hypothesis.

Addison, as a poet, was amongst the sons of the feeble; and between the authors of Cato and of King Lear there was a gulf never to be bridged over.\*

But Dryden, we are told, pronounced Shakspeare already in *his* day "*a little obsolete.*" Here, now, we have wilful, deliberate falsehood. *Obsolete*, in Dryden's meaning, does not imply that he was so with regard to his popularity (the question then at issue), but with regard to his diction and choice of words. To cite Dryden as a witness for any purpose against Shakspeare, — Dryden, who of all men had the most ransacked wit and exhausted language in celebrating the supremacy of Shakspeare's genius, does indeed require as much shamelessness in feeling as mendacity in principle.

But then Lord Shaftesbury, who may be taken as half way between Dryden and Pope (Dryden died in 1700, Pope was then twelve years old, and Lord S. wrote chiefly, we believe, between 1700 and 1710), "complains," it seems, "of his rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit." What if he does? Let the whole truth be told, and then we shall see how much stress is to be laid upon such a judgment. The second Lord Shaftesbury, the author of the "Characteristics," was the grandson of that famous political agitator, the Chancellor Shaftesbury, who passed his whole life in

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\* Probably Addison's fear of the national feeling was a good deal strengthened by his awe of Milton and of Dryden, both of whom had expressed a homage towards Shakspeare which language cannot transcend. Amongst his political friends, also, were many intense admirers of Shakspeare.

storms of his own creation. The second Lord Shaftesbury was a man of crazy constitution, querulous from ill health, and had received an eccentric education from his eccentric grandfather. He was practised daily in *talking* Latin, to which afterwards he added a competent study of the Greek; and finally, he became unusually learned for his rank, but the most absolute and undistinguishing pedant that perhaps literature has to show. He sneers continually at the regular-built academic pedant; but he himself, though no academic, was essentially the very impersonation of pedantry. No thought however beautiful, no image however magnificent, could conciliate his praise as long as it was clothed in English; but present him with the most trivial common-places in Greek, and he unaffectedly fancied them divine; mistaking the pleasurable sense of his own power in a difficult and rare accomplishment for some peculiar force or beauty in the passage. Such was the outline of his literary taste. And was it upon Shakspeare only, or upon him chiefly, that he lavished his pedantry? Far from it. He attacked Milton with no less fervour; he attacked Dryden with a thousand times more. Jeremy Taylor he quoted only to ridicule; and even Locke, the confidential friend of his grandfather, he never alludes to without a sneer. As to Shakspeare, so far from Lord Shaftesbury's censures arguing his deficient reputation, the very fact of his noticing him at all proves his enormous popularity; for upon system he noticed those only who ruled the public taste. The insipidity of his objections to Shakspeare may be judged from this, that he comments in a spirit of absolute puerility upon the name *Desdemona*, as though

intentionally formed from the Greek word for *superstition*. In fact, he had evidently read little beyond the list of names in Shakspeare; yet there is proof enough that the irresistible beauty of what little he *had* read was too much for all his pedantry, and startled him exceedingly; for ever afterwards he speaks of Shakspeare as one who, with a little aid from Grecian sources, really had something great and promising about him. As to modern authors, neither this Lord Shaftesbury nor Addison read anything for the latter years of their life but Bayle's Dictionary. And most of the little scintillations of erudition which may be found in the notes to the "Characteristics," and in the Essays of Addison, are derived, almost without exception, and uniformly without acknowledgment, from Bayle.\*

Finally, with regard to the sweeping assertion, that "for nearly a hundred years after his death Shakspeare was almost entirely neglected," we shall meet this scandalous falsehood by a rapid view of his fortunes during the century in question. The tradition has always been, that Shakspeare was honoured by the especial notice of Queen Elizabeth, as well as by that of James I. At one time we were disposed to question the truth of this tra-

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\* He who is weak enough to kick and spurn his own native literature, even if it were done with more knowledge than is shown by Lord Shaftesbury, will usually be kicked and spurned in his turn; and accordingly it has been often remarked, that the "Characteristics" are unjustly neglected in our days. For Lord Shaftesbury, with all his pedantry, was a man of great talents. Leibnitz had the sagacity to see this through the mists of a translation.

dition; but that was for want of having read attentively the lines of Ben Jonson to the memory of Shakspeare,—those generous lines which have so absurdly been taxed with faint praise. Jonson could make no mistake on this point: he, as one of Shakspeare's familiar companions, must have witnessed at the very time, and accompanied with friendly sympathy every motion of royal favour towards Shakspeare. Now he, in words which leave no room for doubt, exclaims—

Sweet swan of Avon! what a sight it were  
To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames  
*That so did take Eliza and our James.*

These princes, then, *were* taken, were fascinated, with some of Shakspeare's dramas. In Elizabeth the approbation would probably be sincere. In James we can readily suppose it to have been assumed; for he was a pedant in a different sense from Lord Shaftesbury; not from undervaluing modern poetry, but from caring little or nothing for any poetry, although he wrote about its mechanic rules. Still the royal *imprimatur* would be influential and serviceable no less when offered hypocritically than in full sincerity. Next let us consider, at the very moment of Shakspeare's death, who were the leaders of the British youth, the *principes juventutis*, in the two fields, equally important to a great poet's fame, of rank and of genius? The Prince of Wales and John Milton; the first being then about sixteen years old, the other about eight. Now these two great powers, as we may call them, these presiding stars over all that was English in thought and action, were both impassioned admirers of



Shakspeare. Each of them counts for many thousands. The Prince of Wales\* had learned to appreciate Shakspeare, not originally from reading him, but from witnessing the court representations of his plays at Whitehall. Afterwards we know that he made Shakspeare his closet companion, for he was reproached with doing so by Milton. And we know also, from the just criticism pronounced upon the character and diction of Caliban by one of Charles's confidential counsellors, Lord Falkland, that the king's admiration of Shakspeare had impressed a determination upon the court reading. As to Milton, by double prejudices, puritanical and classical, his mind had been preoccupied against the full impressions of Shakspeare. And we know that there is such a thing as keeping the sympathies of love and admiration in a dormant state, or state of abeyance; an effort of self-conquest realized in more cases than one by the ancient

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\* Perhaps the most bitter political enemy of Charles I. will have the candour to allow that, for a prince of those times, he was truly and eminently accomplished. His knowledge of the arts was considerable; and, as a patron of art, he stands foremost amongst all British sovereigns to this hour. He said truly of himself, and wisely as to the principle, that he understood English law as well as a gentleman ought to understand it; meaning that an attorney's minute knowledge of forms and technical niceties was illiberal. Speaking of him as an author, we must remember that the *Eikon Basilike* is still unappropriated; that question is still open. But supposing the king's claim negatived, still, in his controversy with Henderson, in his negotiations at the Isle of Wight and elsewhere, he discovered a power of argument, a learning, and a strength of memory, which are truly admirable, whilst the whole of his accomplishments are recommended by a modesty and a humility as rare as they are unaffected.

fathers, both Greek and Latin, with regard to the profane classics. Intellectually they admired, and would not belie their admiration; but they did not give their hearts cordially, they did not abandon themselves to their natural impulses. They averted their eyes and weaned their attention from the dazzling object. Such, probably, was Milton's state of feeling towards Shakspeare after 1642, when the theatres were suppressed, and the fanatical fervour in its noontide heat. Yet even then he did not belie his reverence intellectually for Shakspeare; and in his younger days we know that he had spoken more enthusiastically of Shakspeare than he ever did again of any uninspired author. Not only did he address a sonnet to his memory, in which he declares that kings would wish to die, if by dying they could obtain such a monument in the hearts of men; but he also speaks of him in his *Il Penseroso* as the tutelary genius of the English stage. In this transmission of the torch (*λαμπαδοφορεια*) Dryden succeeds to Milton; he was born nearly thirty years later; about thirty years they were contemporaries; and by thirty years, or nearly, Dryden survived his great leader. Dryden, in fact, lived out the seventeenth century. And we have now arrived within nine years of the era when the critical editions started in hot succession to one another. The names we have mentioned were the great influential names of the century. But of inferior homage there was no end. How came Betterton the actor, how came Davenant, how came Rowe, or Pope, by their intense (if not always sound) admiration for Shakspeare, unless they had found it fuming upwards like incense to the Pagan deities in ancient times from

altars erected at every turning upon all the paths of men ?

But it is objected that inferior dramatists were sometimes preferred to Shakspeare ; and again, that vile travesties of Shakspeare were preferred to the authentic dramas. As to the first argument, let it be remembered, that if the saints of the chapel are always in the same honour, because *there* men are simply discharging a duty, which once due will be due for ever ; the saints of the theatre, on the other hand, must bend to the local genius, and to the very reasons for having a theatre at all. Men go thither for amusement : this is the paramount purpose ; and even acknowledged merit or absolute superiority must give way to it. Does a man at Paris expect to see Molière reproduced in proportion to his admitted precedency in the French drama ? On the contrary, that very precedency argues such a familiarization with his works, that those who are in quest of relaxation will reasonably prefer any recent drama to that which, having lost all its novelty, has lost much of its excitement. We speak of ordinary minds ; but in cases of *public* entertainments, deriving part of their power from scenery and stage pomp, novelty is for all minds an essential condition of attraction. Moreover, in some departments of the comic, Beaumont and Fletcher, when writing in combination, really had a freedom and breadth of manner which excels the comedy of Shakspeare. As to the altered Shakspeare as taking precedency of the genuine Shakspeare, no argument can be so frivolous. The public were never allowed a choice ; the great majority of an audience even now cannot be expected to carry the real Shakspeare in

their mind, so as to pursue a comparison between that and the alteration. Their comparisons must be exclusively amongst what they have opportunities of seeing; that is, between the various pieces presented to them by the managers of theatres. Further than this it is impossible for them to extend their office of judging and collating; and the degenerate taste which substituted the caprices of Davenant, the rants of Dryden, or the filth of Tate, for the jewellery of Shakspeare, cannot with any justice be charged upon the public, not one in a thousand of whom was furnished with any means of comparing, but exclusively upon those (*viz.*, theatrical managers) who had the very amplest. Yet even in excuse for *them* much may be said. The very length of some plays compelled them to make alterations. The best of Shakspeare's dramas, *King Lear*, is the least fitted for representation; and, even for the vilest alteration, it ought in candour to be considered that possession is nine points of the law. He who would not have introduced, was often obliged to retain.

Finally, it is urged, that the small number of editions through which Shakspeare passed in the seventeenth century, furnishes a separate argument, and a conclusive one, against his popularity. We answer, that, considering the bulk of his plays collectively, the editions were *not* few: compared with any known case, the copies sold of Shakspeare were quite as many as could be expected under the circumstances. Ten or fifteen times as much consideration went to the purchase of one great folio like Shakspeare, as would attend the purchase of a little volume like Waller or Donne. Without reviews, or newspapers.

or advertisements to diffuse the knowledge of books, the progress of literature was necessarily slow, and its expansion narrow. But this is a topic which has always been treated unfairly, not with regard to Shakspeare only, but to Milton, as well as many others. The truth is, we have not facts enough to guide us; for the number of editions often tells nothing accurately as to the number of copies. With respect to Shakspeare it is certain, that, had his masterpieces been gathered into small volumes, Shakspeare would have had a most extensive sale. As it was, there can be no doubt, that from his own generation, throughout the seventeenth century, and until the eighteenth began to accommodate, not any greater popularity in *him*, but a greater taste for reading in the public, his fame never ceased to be viewed as a national trophy of honour; and the most illustrious men of the seventeenth century were no whit less fervent in their admiration than those of the eighteenth and the nineteenth, either as respected its strength and sincerity, or as respected its open profession.\*

It is therefore a false notion, that the general sympathy with the merits of Shakspeare ever beat with a languid or intermitting pulse. Undoubtedly, in times when the functions of critical journals and of newspapers were not at hand to diffuse or to strengthen the impressions which emanated from the capital, all opinions must have travelled slowly into the provinces. But even then, whilst the perfect organs of communication were wanting, indirect substitutes were supplied by the necessities of the times, or by the instincts of political zeal. Two channels especially

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\* See note, p. 93

lay open between the great central organ of the national mind, and the remotest provinces. Parliaments were occasionally summoned (for the judges' circuits were too brief to produce much effect); and during their longest suspensions, the nobility, with large retinues, continually resorted to the court. But an intercourse more constant and more comprehensive was maintained through the agency of the two universities. Already, in the time of James I., the growing importance of the gentry, and the consequent birth of a new interest in political questions, had begun to express itself at Oxford, and still more so at Cambridge. Academic persons stationed themselves as sentinels at London, for the purpose of watching the court and the course of public affairs. These persons wrote letters, like those of the celebrated Joseph Mede, which we find in Ellis's Historical Collections, reporting to their fellow-collegians all the novelties of public life as they arose, or personally carried down such reports, and thus conducted the general feelings at the centre into lesser centres, from which again they were diffused into the ten thousand parishes of England; for (with a very few exceptions in favour of poor benefices, Welch or Cumbrian), every parish priest must unavoidably have spent his three years at one or other of the English universities. And by this mode of diffusion it is that we can explain the strength with which Shakspeare's thoughts and diction impressed themselves from a very early period upon the national literature, and even more generally upon the national thinking and conversation.\*

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\* One of the profoundest tests by which we can measure the congeniality of an author with the national genius and temper, is the

The question therefore revolves upon us in threefold difficulty. How, having stepped thus prematurely into this inheritance of fame, leaping, as it were, thus abruptly into the favour alike of princes and the enemies of princes, had it become possible that in his native place (honoured still more in the final testimonies of his preference when founding a family mansion), such a man's history, and the personal recollections which cling so affectionately to the great intellectual potentates who have recommended themselves by gracious manners, could so soon and so utterly have been obliterated?

Malone, with childish irreflection, ascribes the loss of such memorials to the want of enthusiasm in his admirers. Local researches into private history had not then commenced. Such a taste, often petty enough in its management, was the growth of after-ages. Else how came Spenser's life and fortunes to be so utterly overwhelmed in oblivion? No poet of a high order could be more popular.

The answer we believe to be this: Twenty-six years after Shakspeare's death commenced the great parliamen-

degree in which his thoughts or his phrases interweave themselves with our daily conversation, and pass into the currency of the language. *Few French authors, if any, have imparted one phrase to the colloquial idiom*; with respect to Shakspeare, a large dictionary might be made of such phrases as "win golden opinions," "in my mind's eye," "patience on a monument," "o'erstep the modesty of nature," "more honour'd in the breach than in the observance," "palmy state," "my poverty and not my will consents," and so forth, without end. This reinforcement of the general language, by aids from the mintage of Shakspeare, had already commenced in the seventeenth century.

tary war: this it was, and the local feuds arising to divide family from family, brother from brother, upon which we must charge the extinction of traditions and memorials, doubtless abundant up to that era. The parliamentary contest, it will be said, did not last above three years; the king's standard having been first raised at Nottingham in August 1642, and the battle of Naseby (which terminated the open warfare) having been fought in June 1645. Or even if we extend its duration to the surrender of the last garrison, that war terminated in the spring of 1646. And the brief explosions of insurrection or of Scottish invasion which occurred on subsequent occasions were all locally confined; and none came near to Warwickshire, except the battle of Worcester, more than five years after. This is true; but a short war will do much to efface recent and merely personal memorials. And the following circumstances of the war were even more important than the general fact.

First of all, the very mansion founded by Shakspeare became the military head-quarters for the queen in 1644, when marching from the eastern coast of England to join the king in Oxford; and one such special visitation would be likely to do more serious mischief in the way of extinction than many years of general warfare. Secondly, as a fact, perhaps, equally important, Birmingham, the chief town of Warwickshire, and the adjacent district, the seat of our hardware manufactures, was the very focus of disaffection towards the royal cause. Not only, therefore, would this whole region suffer more from internal and spontaneous agitation, but it would be the more frequently traversed vindictively from without, and harassed by fly-



ing parties from Oxford, or others of the king's garrisons. Thirdly, even apart from the political aspects of Warwickshire, this county happens to be the central one of England, as regards the roads between the north and south; and Birmingham has long been the great central axis,\* in which all the radii from the four angles of England proper meet and intersect. Mere accident, therefore, of local position, much more when united with that avowed inveteracy of malignant feeling, which was bitter enough to rouse a reaction of bitterness in the mind of Lord Clarendon, would go far to account for the wreck of many memorials relating to Shakspeare, as well as for the subversion of that quiet and security for humble life, in which the traditional memory finds its best *nidus*. Thus we obtain one solution, and perhaps the main one, of the otherwise mysterious oblivion which had swept away all traces of the mighty poet, by the time when those quiet days revolved upon England, in which again the solitary agent of learned research might roam in security from house to house, gleaning those personal remembrances which, even in the fury of civil strife, might long have lingered by the chimney corner. But the fierce furnace of war had probably, by its *local* ravages, scorched this field of natural tradition, and thinned the gleaner's inheritance by three parts

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\* In fact, by way of representing to himself the system or scheme of the English roads, the reader has only to imagine one great letter X, or a St Andrew's cross, laid down from north to south, and decussating at Birmingham. Even Coventry, which makes a slight variation for one or two roads, and so far disturbs this decussation, by shifting it eastwards, is still in Warwickshire.

out of four. This, we repeat, may be one part of the solution to this difficult problem.

And if another is still demanded, possibly it may be found in the fact, hostile to the perfect consecration of Shakspeare's memory, that after all he was a player. Many a coarse-minded country gentleman, or village pastor, who would have held his town glorified by the distinction of having sent forth a great judge or an eminent bishop, might disdain to cherish the personal recollections which surrounded one whom custom regarded as little above a mountebank, and the illiberal law as a vagabond. The same degrading appreciation attached both to the actor in plays and to their author. The contemptuous appellation of "play-book," served as readily to degrade the mighty volume which contained Lear and Hamlet, as that of "play-actor," or "player-man," has always served with the illiberal or the fanatical to dishonour the persons of Roscius or of Garrick, of Talma or of Siddons. Nobody, indeed, was better aware of this than the noble-minded Shakspeare; and feelingly he has breathed forth in his sonnets this conscious oppression under which he lay of public opinion, unfavourable by a double title to his own pretensions; for, being both dramatic author and dramatic performer, he found himself heir to a twofold opprobrium, and at an era of English society when the weight of that opprobrium was heaviest. In reality, there was at this period a collision of forces acting in opposite directions upon the estimation of the stage and scenical art, and therefore of all the ministers in its equipage. Puritanism frowned upon these pursuits, as ruinous to public morals; on the other hand, loyalty could not but tolerate what

was patronized by the sovereign ; and it happened that Elizabeth, James, and Charles I., were all alike lovers and promoters of theatrical amusements, which were indeed more indispensable to the relief of court ceremony, and the monotony of aulic pomp, than in any other region of life. This royal support, and the consciousness that any brilliant success in these arts implied an unusual share of natural endowments, did something in mitigation of a scorn which must else have been intolerable to all generous natures.

But whatever prejudice might thus operate against the perfect sanctity of Shakspeare's posthumous reputation, it is certain that the splendour of his worldly success must have done much to obliterate that effect ; his admirable colloquial talents a good deal, and his gracious affability still more. The wonder therefore will still remain, that Betterton, in less than a century from his death, should have been able to glean so little. And for the solution of this wonder we must throw ourselves chiefly upon the explanations we have made as to the parliamentary war, and the local ravages of its progress in the very district, of the very town, and the very house.

If further arguments are still wanted to explain this mysterious abolition, we may refer the reader to the following succession of disastrous events, by which it should seem that a perfect malice of misfortune pursued the vestiges of the mighty poet's steps. In 1613, the Globe Theatre, with which he had been so long connected, was burned to the ground. Soon afterwards a great fire occurred in Stratford ; and next (without counting upon the fire of London, just fifty years after his death, which,

however, would consume many an important record from periods far more remote), the house of Ben Jonson, in which probably, as Mr Campbell suggests, might be parts of his correspondence, was also burned. Finally, there was an old tradition that Lady Barnard, the sole granddaughter of Shakspeare, had carried off many of his papers from Stratford; and these papers have never since been traced.

In many of the elder Lives it has been asserted, that John Shakspeare, the father of the poet, was a butcher, and in others that he was a woolstapler. It is now settled beyond dispute that he was a glover. This was his professed occupation in Stratford, though it is certain that, with this leading trade, from which he took his denomination, he combined some collateral pursuits; and it is possible enough that, as openings offered, he may have meddled with many. In that age, and in a provincial town, nothing like the exquisite subdivision of labour was attempted which we now see realized in the great cities of Christendom. And one trade is often found to play into another with so much reciprocal advantage, that even in our own days we do not much wonder at an enterprising man, in country places, who combines several in his own person. Accordingly, John Shakspeare is known to have united with his town calling the rural and miscellaneous occupations of a farmer.

Meantime his avowed business stood upon a very different footing from the same trade as it is exercised in modern times. Gloves were in that age an article of dress more costly by much, and more elaborately decorated, than in our own. They were a customary present from some

cities to the judges of assize, and to other official persons—a custom of ancient standing, and in some places, we believe, still subsisting; and in such cases it is reasonable to suppose that the gloves must originally have been more valuable than the trivial modern article of the same name. So also, perhaps, in their origin, of the gloves given at funerals. In reality, whenever the simplicity of an age makes it difficult to renew the parts of a wardrobe except in capital towns of difficult access, prudence suggests that such wares should be manufactured of more durable materials; and, being so, they become obviously susceptible of more lavish ornament. But it will not follow, from this essential difference in the gloves of Shakspeare's age, that the glover's occupation was more lucrative. Doubtless he sold more costly gloves, and upon each pair had a larger profit; but for that very reason he sold fewer. Two or three gentlemen "of worship" in the neighbourhood might occasionally require a pair of gloves, but it is very doubtful whether any inhabitant of Stratford would ever call for so mere a luxury.

The practical result, at all events, of John Shakspeare's various pursuits does not appear permanently to have met the demands of his establishment; and in his maturer years there are indications still surviving that he was under a cloud of embarrassment. He certainly lost at one time his social position in the town of Stratford; but there is a strong presumption, in *our* construction of the case, that he finally retrieved it; and for this retrieval of a station which he had forfeited by personal misfortunes or neglect, he was altogether indebted to the filial piety of his immortal son.

Meantime the earlier years of the elder Shakspeare wore the aspect of rising prosperity, however unsound might be the basis on which it rested. There can be little doubt that William Shakspeare, from his birth up to his tenth or perhaps his eleventh year, lived in careless plenty, and saw nothing in his father's house but that style of liberal housekeeping which has ever distinguished the upper yeomanry and the rural gentry of England. Probable enough it is that the resources for meeting this liberality were not strictly commensurate with the family income, but were sometimes allowed to entrench, by means of loans or mortgages, upon capital funds. The stress upon the family finances was perhaps at times severe; and that it was borne at all, must be imputed to the large and even splendid portion which John Shakspeare received with his wife.

This lady, for such she really was in an eminent sense, by birth as well as by connections, bore the beautiful name of Mary Arden, a name derived from the ancient forest district\* of the county; and doubtless she merits a more elaborate notice than our slender materials will furnish. To have been *the mother of Shakspeare*,—how august a title to the reverence of infinite generations, and of centuries beyond the vision of prophecy. A plausible hypothesis has been started in modern times, that the facial structure, and that the intellectual conformation,

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\* And probably so called by some remote ancestor who had emigrated from the forest of Ardennes, in the Netherlands, and now for ever memorable to English ears from its proximity to Waterloo.

may be deduced more frequently from the corresponding characteristics in the mother than in the father. It is certain that no very great man has ever existed, but that his greatness has been rehearsed and predicted in one or other of his parents. And it cannot be denied, that in the most eminent men, where we have had the means of pursuing the investigation, the mother has more frequently been repeated and reproduced than the father. We have known cases where the mother has furnished all the intellect, and the father all the moral sensibility; upon which assumption, the wonder ceases that Cicero, Lord Chesterfield, and other brilliant men, who took the utmost pains with their sons, should have failed so conspicuously; for possibly the mothers had been women of excessive and even exemplary stupidity. In the case of Shakspeare, each parent, if we had any means of recovering their characteristics, could not fail to furnish a study of the most profound interest; and with regard to his mother in particular, if the modern hypothesis be true, and if we are indeed to deduce from *her* the stupendous intellect of her son, in that case she must have been a benefactress to her husband's family beyond the promises of fairyland or the dreams of romance; for it is certain that to her chiefly this family was also indebted for their worldly comfort.

Mary Arden was the youngest daughter and the heiress of Robert Arden of Wilmecote, Esq., in the county of Warwick. The family of Arden was even then of great antiquity. About one century and a quarter before the birth of William Shakspeare, a person bearing the same name as his maternal grandfather had been returned by

the commissioners in their list of the Warwickshire gentry ; he was there styled Robert Arden, Esq. of Bromich. This was in 1433, or the 12th year of Henry VI. In Henry VII's reign, the Ardens received a grant of lands from the crown ; and in 1568, four years after the birth of William Shakspeare, Edward Arden, of the same family, was sheriff of the county. Mary Arden was therefore a young lady of excellent descent and connections, and an heiress of considerable wealth. She brought to her husband, as a marriage portion, the landed estate of Asbies, which, upon any just valuation, must be considered as a handsome dowry for a woman of her station. As this point has been contested, and as it goes a great way towards determining the exact social position of the poet's parents, let us be excused for sifting it a little more narrowly than might else seem warranted by the proportions of our present life. Every question which it can be reasonable to raise at all, it must be reasonable to treat with at least so much of minute research as may justify the conclusions which it is made to support.

The estate of Asbies contained fifty acres of arable land, six of meadow, and a right of commonage. What may we assume to have been the value of its fee-simple ? Malone, who allows the total fortune of Mary Arden to have been L.110, 13s. 4d., is sure that the value of Asbies could not have been more than one hundred pounds. But why ? Because, says he, the "average" rent of land at that time was no more than three shillings per acre. This we deny ; but upon that assumption, the total yearly rent of fifty-six acres would be exactly eight



guineas.\* And therefore, in assigning the value of Asbies at one hundred pounds, it appears that Malone must have estimated the land at no more than twelve years' purchase, which would carry the value to L.100, 16s. "Even at this estimate," as the latest annotator† on this subject *justly* observes, "Mary Arden's portion was a larger one than was usually given to a landed gentleman's daughter." But this writer objects to Malone's principle of valuation. "We find," says he, "that John Shakspeare also farmed the meadow of Tugton, containing sixteen acres, at the rate of eleven shillings per acre. Now, what proof has Mr Malone adduced that the acres of Asbies were not as valuable as those of Tugton? And if they were so, the former estate must have been worth between three and

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\* Let not the reader impute to us the gross anachronism of making an estimate for Shakspeare's days in a coin which did not exist until a century, within a couple of years, after Shakspeare's birth, and did not settle to the value of twenty-one shillings until a century after his death. The nerve of such an anachronism would lie in putting the estimate into a mouth of that age. And this is precisely the blunder into which the foolish forger of Vortigern, &c., has fallen. He does not indeed directly mention guineas; but indirectly and virtually he does, by repeatedly giving us accounts imputed to Shakspearian contemporaries, in which the sum-total amounts to L.5, 5s.; or to L.26, 5s.; or, again, to L.17, 17s. 6d. A man is careful to subscribe L.14, 14s., and so forth. But how could such amounts have arisen unless under a secret reference to guineas, which were not in existence until Charles II.'s reign; and, moreover, to guineas at their final settlement by law into twenty-one shillings each, which did not take place until George I.'s reign.

† Thomas Campbell the poet, in his eloquent Remarks on the Life and Writings of William Shakspeare, prefixed to a popular edition of the poet's dramatic works. London, 1838.

four hundred pounds." In the main drift of his objections we concur with Mr Campbell. But as they are liable to some criticism, let us clear the ground of all plausible cavils, and then see what will be the result. Malone, had he been alive, would probably have answered, that Tugton was a farm specially privileged by nature; and that if any man contended for so unusual a rent as eleven shillings an acre for land not known to him, the *onus probandi* would lie upon *him*. Be it so; eleven shillings is certainly above the ordinary level of rent, but three shillings is below it. We contend, that for tolerably good land, situated advantageously, that is, with a ready access to good markets and good fairs, such as those of Coventry, Birmingham, Gloucester, Worcester, Shrewsbury, &c., one noble might be assumed as the annual rent; and that in such situations twenty years' purchase was not a valuation, even in Elizabeth's reign, very unusual. Let us, however, assume the rent at only five shillings, and land at sixteen years' purchase: upon this basis, the rent would be L.14, and the value of the fee-simple L.224. Now, if it were required to equate that sum with its present value, a very operose\* calculation might be requisite. But contenting ourselves with the gross method of making such equations between 1560 and the current century, that is, multiplying by five, we shall find the capital value of the estate to be eleven hundred and twenty pounds, whilst the annual rent would be exactly seventy. But if the estate had been sold, and the purchase-money lent upon mortgage (the only safe

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\* See Note, p 95.

mode of investing money at that time), the annual interest would have reached L.28, equal to L.140 of modern money ; for mortgages in Elizabeth's age readily produced ten per cent.

A woman who should bring at this day an annual income of L.140 to a provincial tradesman, living in a sort of *rus in urbe*, according to the simple fashions of rustic life, would assuredly be considered as an excellent match. And there can be little doubt that Mary Arden's dowry it was which, for some ten or a dozen years succeeding to his marriage, raised her husband to so much social consideration in Stratford. In 1550 John Shakspeare is supposed to have first settled in Stratford, having migrated from some other part of Warwickshire. In 1557 he married Mary Arden ; in 1565, the year subsequent to the birth of his son William, his third child, he was elected one of the aldermen ; and in the year 1568 he became first magistrate of the town, by the title of high bailiff. This year we may assume to have been that in which the prosperity of this family reached its zenith ; for in this year it was, over and above the presumptions furnished by his civic honours, that he obtained a grant of arms from Clarendieux of the Heralds' College. On this occasion he declared himself worth five hundred pounds derived from his ancestors. And we really cannot understand the right by which critics, living nearly three centuries from his time, undertake to know his affairs better than himself, and to tax him with either inaccuracy or falsehood. No man would be at leisure to court heraldic honours when he knew himself to be embarrassed, or apprehended that he soon might be so. A

man whose anxieties had been fixed at all upon his daily livelihood would, by this chase after the aerial honours of heraldry, have made himself a butt for ridicule such as no fortitude could enable him to sustain.

In 1568, therefore, when his son William would be moving through his fifth year, John Shakspeare (now honoured by the designation of *Master*) would be found at times in the society of the neighbouring gentry. Ten years in advance of this period he was already in difficulties. But there is no proof that these difficulties had then reached a point of degradation, or of memorable distress. The sole positive indications of his decaying condition are, that in 1578 he received an exemption from the small weekly assessment levied upon the aldermen of Stratford for the relief of the poor; and that in the following year, 1579, he is found enrolled amongst the defaulters in the payment of taxes. The latter fact undoubtedly goes to prove that, like every man who is falling back in the world, he was occasionally in arrears. Paying taxes is not like the honours awarded or the processions regulated by Clarendieux: no man is ambitious of precedency there; and if a laggard pace in that duty is to be received as evidence of pauperism, nine-tenths of the English people might occasionally be classed as paupers. With respect to his liberation from the weekly assessment, that may bear a construction different from the one which it has received. This payment, which could never have been regarded as a burthen, not amounting to five pounds annually of our present money, may have been held up as an exponent of wealth and consideration; and John Shakspeare may have been required

to resign it as an honourable distinction, not, suitable to the circumstances of an embarrassed man. Finally, the fact of his being indebted to Robert Sadler, a baker, in the sum of five pounds, and his being under the necessity of bringing a friend as security for the payment, proves nothing at all. There is not a town in Europe in which opulent men cannot be found that are backward in the payment of their debts. And the probability is, that Master Sadler acted like most people who, when they suppose a man to be going down in the world, feel their respect for him sensibly decaying, and think it wise to trample him under foot, provided only in that act of trampling they can squeeze out of him their own individual debt. Like that terrific chorus in Spohr's oratorio of St Paul, "*Stone him to death*" is the cry of the selfish and the illiberal amongst creditors, alike towards the just and the unjust amongst debtors.

It was the wise and beautiful prayer of Agar, "Give me neither poverty nor riches;" and, doubtless, for quiet, for peace, and the *latentis semita vitæ*, that is the happiest dispensation. But, perhaps, with a view to a school of discipline and of moral fortitude, it might be a more salutary prayer, "Give me riches *and* poverty, and afterwards neither." For the transitional state between riches and poverty will teach a lesson both as to the baseness and the goodness of human nature, and will impress that lesson with a searching force, such as no borrowed experience ever can approach. Most probable it is that Shakspeare drew some of his powerful scenes in the Timon of Athens, those which exhibit the vileness of ingratitude and the impassioned frenzy of misanthropy,

from his personal recollections connected with the case of his own father. Possibly, though a cloud of 270 years now veils it, this very Master Sadler, who was so urgent for his five pounds, and who so little apprehended that he should be called over the coals for it in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," may have sate for the portrait of that Lucullus who says of Timon—

Alas, good lord! a noble gentleman  
'tis, if he would not keep so good a house. Many a time and often I have dined with him, and told him on't; and come again to supper to him, of purpose to have him spend less: and yet he would embrace no counsel, take no warning by my coming. Every man has his fault, and honesty is his; I have told him on't, but I could never get him from it.

For certain years, perhaps, John Shakspeare moved on in darkness and sorrow—

His familiars from his buried fortunes  
Slunk all away; left their false vows with him,  
Like empty purses pick'd: and his poor self,  
A dedicated beggar to the air,  
With his disease of all-shunn'd poverty,  
Walk'd, like contempt, alone.

We, however, at this day are chiefly interested in the case as it bears upon the education and youthful happiness of the poet. Now if we suppose that from 1568, the high noon of the family prosperity, to 1578, the first year of their mature embarrassments, one half the interval was passed in stationary sunshine, and the latter half in the gradual twilight of declension, it will follow that the young William had completed his tenth year before he heard the first signals of distress; and for so long a period his education would probably be conducted on as liberal

a scale as the resources of Stratford would allow. Through this earliest section of his life he would undoubtedly rank as a gentleman's son, possibly as the leader of his class in Stratford. But what rank he held through the next ten years, or, more generally, what was the standing in society of Shakspeare until he had created a new station for himself by his own exertions in the metropolis, is a question yet unsettled, but which has been debated as keenly as if it had some great dependencies. Upon this we shall observe, that could we by possibility be called to settle beforehand what rank were best for favouring the development of intellectual powers, the question might wear a face of deep practical importance; but when the question is simply as to a matter of fact, what *was* the rank held by a man whose intellectual development has long ago been completed, this becomes a mere question of curiosity. The tree has fallen; it is confessedly the noblest of all the forest; and we must therefore conclude that the soil in which it flourished was either the best possible, or, if not so, that anything bad in its properties had been disarmed and neutralized by the vital forces of the plant, or by the benignity of nature. If any future Shakspeare were likely to arise, it might be a problem of great interest to agitate, whether the condition of a poor man or of a gentleman were best fitted to nurse and stimulate his faculties. But for the actual Shakspeare, since what he was he was, and since nothing greater can be imagined, it is now become a matter of little moment whether his course lay for fifteen or twenty years through the humilities of absolute poverty, or through the chequered paths of gentry lying in the shade. Whatever

*was*, must, in this case at least, have been the best, since it terminated in producing Shakspeare; and thus far we must all be optimists.

Yet still, it will be urged, the curiosity is not illiberal which would seek to ascertain the precise career through which Shakspeare ran. This we readily concede; and we are anxious ourselves to contribute anything in our power to the settlement of a point so obscure. What we have wished to protest against is the spirit of partisanship in which this question has too generally been discussed. For, whilst some, with a foolish affectation of plebeian sympathies, overwhelm us with the insipid commonplaces about birth and ancient descent, as honours containing nothing meritorious, and rush eagerly into an ostentatious exhibition of all the circumstances which favour the notion of a humble station and humble connections; others, with equal forgetfulness of true dignity, plead with the intemperance and partiality of a legal advocate for the pretensions of Shakspeare to the hereditary rank of gentleman. Both parties violate the majesty of the subject. When we are seeking for the sources of the Euphrates or the St Lawrence, we look for no proportions to the mighty volume of waters in that particular summit amongst the chain of mountains which embosoms its earliest fountains, nor are we shocked at the obscurity of these fountains. Pursuing the career of Mahommed, or of any man who has memorably impressed his own mind or agency upon the revolutions of mankind, we feel solicitude about the circumstances which might surround his cradle to be altogether unseasonable and impertinent. Whether he were born in a hovel or a palace, whether he



passed his infancy in squalid poverty, or hedged around by the glittering spears of body-guards, as mere questions of fact may be interesting, but, in the light of either accessories or counter-agencies to the native majesty of the subject, are trivial and below all philosophic valuation. So with regard to the creator of Lear and Hamlet, of Othello and Macbeth ; to him from whose golden urns the nations beyond the far Atlantic, the multitude of the isles, and the generations unborn in Australian climes, even to the realms of the rising sun (the *ἀνατολαι ἡελιοιο*), must in every age draw perennial streams of intellectual life, we feel that the little accidents of birth and social condition are so unspeakably below the grandeur of the theme, are so irrelevant and disproportioned to the real interest at issue, so incommensurable with any of its relations, that a biographer of Shakspeare at once denounces himself as below his subject if he can entertain such a question as seriously affecting the glory of the poet. In some legends of saints, we find that they were born with a lambent circle or golden areola about their heads. This angelic coronet shed light alike upon the chambers of a cottage or a palace, upon the gloomy limits of a dungeon or the vast expansion of a cathedral ; but the cottage, the palace, the dungeon, the cathedral, were all equally incapable of adding one ray of colour or one pencil of light to the supernatural halo.

Having therefore thus pointedly guarded ourselves from misconstruction, and consenting to entertain the question as one in which we, the worshippers of Shakspeare, have an interest of curiosity, but in which he, the object of our worship, has no interest of glory, we proceed to state

what appears to us the result of the scanty facts surviving when collated with each other.

By his mother's side, Shakspeare was an authentic gentleman. By his father's he would have stood in a more dubious position ; but the effect of municipal honours to raise and illustrate an equivocal rank has always been acknowledged under the popular tendencies of our English political system. From the sort of lead, therefore, which John Shakspeare took at one time amongst his fellow-townsmen, and from his rank of first magistrate, we may presume that, about the year 1568, he had placed himself at the head of the Stratford community. Afterwards he continued for some years to descend from this altitude ; and the question is, at what point this gradual degradation may be supposed to have settled. Now we shall avow it as our opinion, that the composition of society in Stratford was such that, even had the Shakspeare family maintained their superiority, the main body of their daily associates must still have been found amongst persons below the rank of gentry. The poet must inevitably have mixed chiefly with mechanics and humble tradesmen, for such people composed perhaps the total community. But had there even been a gentry in Stratford, since they would have marked the distinctions of their rank chiefly by greater reserve of manners, it is probable that, after all, Shakspeare, with his enormity of delight in exhibitions of human nature, would have mostly cultivated that class of society in which the feelings are more elementary and simple, in which the thoughts speak a plainer language, and in which the restraints of factitious or conventional decorum are exchanged

for the restraints of mere sexual decency. It is a noticeable fact to all who have looked upon human life with an eye of strict attention, that the abstract image of womanhood, in its loveliness, its delicacy, and its modesty, nowhere makes itself more impressive or more advantageously felt than in the humblest cottages, because it is there brought into immediate juxtaposition with the grossness of manners and the careless license of language incident to the fathers and brothers of the house. And this is more especially true in a nation of unaffected sexual gallantry,\* such as the English and the Gothic races in general; since, under the immunity which their women enjoy from all servile labours of a coarse or out-of-doors order, by as much lower as they descend in the scale of rank, by so much more do they benefit under the force of contrast with the men of their own level. A young man of that class, however noble in appearance, is somewhat degraded in the eyes of women, by the necessity which his indigence imposes of working under a master; but a beautiful young woman, in the very poorest family, unless she enters upon a life of domestic servitude (in which case her labours are light, suited to her sex, and withdrawn from the public eye), so long in fact as she stays under her father's roof, is as perfectly her own mistress and *sui juris* as the daughter of an earl. This personal dignity, brought into stronger relief by the mercenary employments of her male connections, and the feminine gentleness of her voice and manners, exhibited under the same advantages of contrast, oftentimes combine to make

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\* See Note, p. 96.

a young cottage beauty as fascinating an object as any woman of any station.

Hence we may in part account for the great event of Shakspeare's early manhood—his premature marriage. It has always been known, or at least traditionally received for a fact, that Shakspeare had married whilst yet a boy; and that his wife was unaccountably older than himself. In the very earliest biographical sketch of the poet, compiled by Rowe, from materials collected by Betterton the actor, it was stated (and that statement is now ascertained to have been correct), that he had married Anne Hathaway, "the daughter of a substantial yeoman." Further than this nothing was known. But in September 1836 was published a very remarkable document, which gives the assurance of law to the time and fact of this event, yet still, unless collated with another record, does nothing to lessen the mystery which had previously surrounded its circumstances. This document consists of two parts: the first, and principal, according to the logic of the case, though second according to the arrangement, being a *license* for the marriage of William Shakspeare with Anne Hathaway, under the condition "of *once* asking of the bannes of matrimony," that is, in effect, dispensing with two out of the three customary askings; the second or subordinate part of the document being a *bond* entered into by two sureties, viz., Fulke Sandells and John Rychardson, both described as *agricolæ* or yeomen, and both marksmen (that is, incapable of writing, and therefore subscribing by means of *marks*), for the payment of forty pounds sterling, in the event of Shakspeare, yet a minor, and incapable of binding himself, failing to fulfil the con-

ditions of the license. In the bond, drawn up in Latin, there is no mention of Shakspeare's name; but in the license, which is altogether English, *his* name, of course, stands foremost; and as it may gratify the reader to see the very words and orthography of the original, we here extract the *operative* part of this document, prefacing only, that the license is attached by way of explanation to the bond. "The condition of this obligation is suche, that if hereafter there shall not appere any lawfull lett or impediment, by reason of any precontract, &c., but that Willm. Shagspere, one thone ptie" [on the one party], "and Anne Hathwey of Stratford, in the diocess of Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize matrimony together; and in the same afterwards remaine and continew like man and wiffe. And, moreover, if the said Willm. Shagspere do not proceed to solemnization of mariadg with the said Anne Hathwey, without the consent of hir frinds;—then the said obligation" [viz., to pay forty pounds] "to be voyd and of none effect, or els to stand & abide in full force and vertue."

What are we to think of this document? Trepidation and anxiety are written upon its face. The parties are not to be married by a special license; not even by an ordinary license; in that case no proclamation of banns, no public asking at all, would have been requisite. Economical scruples are consulted; and yet the regular movement of the marriage "through the bell-ropes"\* is dis-

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\* Amongst people of humble rank in England, who only were ever asked in church, until the new-fangled systems of marriage came up within the last ten or fifteen years, during the currency of the three Sundays on which the banns were proclaimed by the

turbed. Economy, which retards the marriage, is here evidently in collision with some opposite principle which precipitates it. How is all this to be explained? Much light is afforded by the date when illustrated by another document. The bond bears date on the 28th day of November in the 25th year of our lady the queen; that is, in 1582. Now the baptism of Shakspeare's eldest child, Susanna, is registered on the 26th of May in the year following. Suppose, therefore, that his marriage was solemnized on the 1st day of December: it was barely possible that it could be earlier, considering that the sureties, drinking, perhaps, at Worcester throughout the 28th of November, would require the 29th, in so dreary a season, for their return to Stratford; after which some preparation might be requisite to the bride, since the marriage was *not* celebrated at Stratford. Next suppose the birth of Miss Susanna to have occurred, like her father's, two days before her baptism, viz., on the 24th of May. From December the 1st to May the 24th, both days inclusively, are 175 days; which, divided by seven, gives precisely twenty-five weeks, that is to say, six months short by one week. Oh, fie, Miss Susanna! you came rather before you were wanted.

Mr Campbell's comment upon the affair is, that "*if* this was the case," viz., if the baptism were really solemnized on the 26th of May, "the poet's first child would *appear* to have been born only six months and eleven days after the bond was entered into." And he then

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clergyman from the reading-desk, the young couple elect were said jocosely to be "hanging in the bell-ropes;" alluding perhaps to the joyous peal contingent on the final completion of the marriage.

concludes that, on this assumption, "Miss Susanna Shakspeare came into the world a little prematurely." But this is to doubt where there never was any ground for doubting; the baptism was *certainly* on the 26th of May; and, in the next place, the calculation of six months and eleven days is sustained by substituting lunar months for calendar, and then only by supposing the marriage to have been celebrated on the very day of subscribing the bond in Worcester, and the baptism to have been coincident with the birth; of which suppositions the latter is improbable, and the former, considering the situation of Worcester, impossible.

Strange it is, that, whilst all biographers have worked with so much zeal upon the most barren dates or most baseless traditions in the great poet's life, realising in a manner the chimeras of Laputa, and endeavouring "to extract sunbeams from cucumbers," such a story with regard to such an event, no fiction of village scandal, but involved in legal documents, a story so significant and so eloquent to the intelligent, should formerly have been dismissed without notice of any kind, and even now, after the discovery of 1836, with nothing beyond a slight conjectural insinuation. For our parts, we should have been the last amongst the biographers to unearth any forgotten scandal, or, after so vast a lapse of time, and when the grave had shut out all but charitable thoughts, to point any moral censures at a simple case of natural frailty, youthful precipitancy of passion, of all trespasses the most venial, where the final intentions are honourable. But in this case there seems to have been something more in motion than passion or the ardour of youth. "I like

not," says Parson Evans (alluding to Falstaff in masquerade), "I like not when a woman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler." Neither do we like the spectacle of a mature young woman, five years past her majority, wearing the semblance of having been led astray by a boy who had still two years and a half to run of his minority. Shakspeare himself, looking back on this part of his youthful history from his maturest years, breathes forth pathetic counsels against the errors into which his own inexperience had been ensnared. The disparity of years between himself and his wife he notices in a beautiful scene of the Twelfth Night. The Duke Orsino, observing the sensibility which the pretended Cesario had betrayed on hearing some touching old snatches of a love strain, swears that his beardless page must have felt the passion of love, which the other admits. Upon this the dialogue proceeds thus:—

*Duke.* What kind of woman is't?

*Viola.* Of your complexion.

*Duke.* She is not worth thee then:—What years?

*Viola.* I' faith,

About your years, my lord.

*Duke.* Too old, by heaven. *Let still the woman take*

*An elder than herself: so wears she to him,*

*So sways she level in her husband's heart.*

For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,

More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,

Than women's are.

*Viola.* I think it well, my lord.

*Duke.* Then *let thy love be younger than thyself,*

*Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;*

For women are as roses, whose fair flower,

Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour.



These counsels were uttered nearly twenty years after the event in his own life to which they probably look back; for this play is supposed to have been written in Shakspeare's thirty-eighth year. And we may read an earnestness in pressing the point as to the *inverted* disparity of years, which indicates pretty clearly an appeal to the lessons of his personal experience. But his other indiscretion, in having yielded so far to passion and opportunity as to crop by prelibation, and before they were hallowed, those flowers of paradise which belonged to his marriage-day; this he adverts to with even more solemnity of sorrow, and with more pointed energy of moral reproof, in the very last drama which is supposed to have proceeded from his pen, and therefore with the force and sanctity of testamentary counsel. The *Tempest* is all but ascertained to have been composed in 1611, that is, about five years before the poet's death; and indeed could not have been composed much earlier; for the very incident which suggested the basis of the plot, and of the local scene, viz., the shipwreck of Sir George Somers on the Bermudas (which were in consequence denominated the Somers' Islands), did not occur until the year 1609. In the opening of the fourth act, Prospero formally betrothes his daughter to Ferdinand; and in doing so he pays the prince a well-merited compliment of having "worthily purchas'd" this rich jewel, by the patience with which, for her sake, he had supported harsh usage, and other painful circumstances of his trial. But, he adds solemnly,

If thou dost break her virgin knot before  
All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
With full and holy rite be minister'd;

in that case what would follow ?

No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall,  
 To make this contract grow; *but barren hate,*  
*Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew*  
*The union of your bed with weeds so loathly*  
*That you shall hate it both.* Therefore take heed,  
 As Hymen's lamps shall light you.

The young prince assures him in reply, that no strength of opportunity, concurring with the uttermost temptation, not

the murkiest den  
 The most opportune place, the strong'st suggestion  
 Our worser genius can——

should ever prevail to lay asleep his jealousy of self-control, so as to take any advantage of Miranda's innocence. And he adds an argument for this abstinence, by way of reminding Prospero, that not honour only, but even prudential care of his own happiness, is interested in the observance of his promise. Any unhallowed anticipation would, as he insinuates,

Take away  
 The edge of that day's celebration,  
 When I shall think, or Phœbus' steeds are founder'd,  
 Or night kept chain'd below;

that is, when even the winged hours would seem to move too slowly. Even thus Prospero is not quite satisfied: during his subsequent dialogue with Ariel, we are to suppose that Ferdinand, in conversing apart with Miranda, betrays more impassioned ardour than the wise magician altogether approves. The prince's caresses

have not been unobserved; and thus Prospero renews his warning :

Look thou be true: do not give dalliance  
 Too much the rein : the strongest oaths are straw  
 To the fire i' the blood : be more abstemious,  
 Or else—good night your vow.

The royal lover re-assures him of his loyalty to his engagements; and again the wise father, so honourably jealous for his daughter, professes himself satisfied with the prince's pledges.

Now in all these emphatic warnings, uttering the language "of that sad wisdom folly leaves behind," who can avoid reading, as in subtile hieroglyphics, the secret record of Shakspeare's own nuptial disappointments? We, indeed, that is, universal posterity through every age, have reason to rejoice in these disappointments; for to them, past all doubt, we are indebted for Shakspeare's subsequent migration to London, and his public occupation, which, giving him a deep pecuniary interest in the productions of his pen, such as no other literary application of his powers could have approached in that day, were eventually the means of drawing forth those divine works which have survived their author for our everlasting benefit.

Our own reading and deciphering of the whole case is as follows. The Shakspeares were a handsome family, both father and sons. This we assume upon the following grounds:—First, on the presumption arising out of John. Shakspeare's having won the favour of a young heiress higher in rank than himself; secondly, on the presumption involved in the fact of three amongst his

four sons having gone upon the stage, to which the most obvious (and perhaps in those days a *sine qua non*) recommendation would be a good person and a pleasing countenance ; thirdly, on the direct evidence of Aubrey, who assures us that William Shakspeare was a handsome and a well-shaped man ; fourthly, on the implicit evidence of the Stratford monument, which exhibits a man of good figure and noble countenance ; fifthly, on the confirmation of this evidence by the Chandos portrait, which exhibits noble features, illustrated by the utmost sweetness of expression ; sixthly, on the selection of theatrical parts, which it is known that Shakspeare personated, most of them being such as required some dignity of form, viz., kings, the athletic (though aged) follower of an athletic young man, and supernatural beings. On these grounds, direct or circumstantial, we believe ourselves warranted in assuming that William Shakspeare was a handsome and even noble-looking boy. Miss Anne Hathaway had herself probably some personal attractions ; and, if an indigent girl, who looked for no pecuniary advantages, would probably have been early sought in marriage. But as the daughter of "a substantial yeoman," who would expect some fortune in his daughter's suitors, she had, to speak coarsely, a little outlived her market. Time she had none to lose. William Shakspeare pleased her eye ; and the gentleness of his nature made him an apt subject for female blandishments, possibly for female arts. Without imputing, however, to this Anne Hathaway anything so hateful as a settled plot for ensnaring him, it was easy enough for a mature woman, armed with such inevitable advantages of experience and of self-possession,

to draw onward a blushing novice ; and, without directly creating opportunities, to place him in the way of turning to account such as naturally offered. Young boys are generally flattered by the condescending notice of grown-up women ; and perhaps Shakspeare's own lines upon a similar situation, to a young boy adorned with the same natural gifts as himself, may give us the key to the result :—

Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won ;  
 Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd ;  
 And, when a woman woos, what woman's son  
 Will sourly leave her till he have prevail'd?

Once, indeed, entangled in such a pursuit, any person of manly feelings would be sensible that he had no retreat ; *that* would be—to insult a woman, grievously to wound her sexual pride, and to insure her lasting scorn and hatred. These were consequences which the gentle-minded Shakspeare could not face ; he pursued his good fortunes, half perhaps in heedlessness, half in desperation, until he was roused by the clamorous displeasure of her family upon first discovering the situation of their kinswoman. For such a situation there could be but one atonement, and that was hurried forward by both parties ; whilst, out of delicacy towards the bride, the wedding was not celebrated in Stratford (where the register contains no notice of such an event) ; nor, as Malone imagined, in Weston-upon-Avon, that being in the diocese of Gloucester ; but in some parish, as yet undiscovered, in the diocese of Worcester.

But now arose a serious question as to the future maintenance of the young people. John Shakspeare was de-

pressed in his circumstances, and he had other children besides William, viz., three sons and a daughter. The elder Lives have represented him as burdened with ten ; but this was an error, arising out of the confusion between John Shakspeare the glover and John Shakspeare a shoemaker. This error has been thus far of use, that, by exposing the fact of two John Shakspeares (not kinsmen) residing in Stratford-upon-Avon, it has satisfactorily proved the name to be amongst those which are locally indigenous to Warwickshire. Meantime it is now ascertained that John Shakspeare the glover had only eight children, viz., four daughters and four sons. The order of their succession was this :—Joan, Margaret, WILLIAM, Gilbert, a second Joan, Anne, Richard, and Edmund. Three of the daughters, viz., the two eldest of the family, Joan and Margaret, together with Anne, died in childhood : all the rest attained mature ages, and of these William was the eldest. This might give him some advantage in his father's regard ; but in a question of pecuniary provision precedency amongst the children of an insolvent is nearly nominal. For the present John Shakspeare could do little for his son ; and, under these circumstances, perhaps the father of Anne Hathaway would come forward to assist the new-married couple. This condition of dependency would furnish matter for painful feelings and irritating words : the youthful husband, whose mind would be expanding as rapidly as the leaves and blossoms of spring-time in polar latitudes, would soon come to appreciate the sort of wiles by which he had been caught. The female mind is quick, and almost gifted with the power of witchcraft, to decipher what is passing in the

thoughts of familiar companions. Silent and forbearing as William Shakspeare might be, Anne, his staid wife, would read his secret reproaches ; ill would she dissemble her wrath, and the less so from the consciousness of having deserved them. It is no uncommon case for women to feel anger in connection with one subject, and to express it in connection with another ; which other, perhaps (except as a serviceable mask), would have been a matter of indifference to their feelings. Anne would therefore reply to those inevitable reproaches which her own sense must presume to be lurking in her husband's heart, by others equally stinging, on his inability to support his family, and on his obligations to her father's purse. Shakspeare, we may be sure, would be ruminating every hour on the means of his deliverance from so painful a dependency ; and at length, after four years' conjugal discord, he would resolve upon that plan of solitary emigration to the metropolis, which, at the same time that it released him from the humiliation of domestic feuds, succeeded so splendidly for his worldly prosperity, and with a train of consequences so vast for all future ages.

Such, we are persuaded, was the real course of Shakspeare's transition from school-boy pursuits to his public career : and upon the known temperament of Shakspeare, his genial disposition to enjoy life without disturbing his enjoyment by fretting anxieties, we build the conclusion, that had his friends furnished him with ampler funds, and had his marriage been well assorted or happy, we—the world of posterity—should have lost the whole benefit and delight which we have since reaped from his matchless faculties. The motives which drove him *from*

Stratford are clear enough ; but what motives determined his course *to* London, and especially to the stage, still remains to be explained. Stratford-upon-Avon, lying in the high road from London through Oxford to Birmingham (or more generally to the north), had been continually visited by some of the best comedians during Shakspeare's childhood. One or two of the most respectable metropolitan actors were natives of Stratford. These would be well known to the elder Shakspeare. But, apart from that accident, it is notorious that mere legal necessity and usage would compel all companies of actors, upon coming into any town, to seek, in the first place, from the chief magistrate, a license for opening a theatre, and next, over and above this public sanction, to seek his personal favour and patronage. As an alderman, therefore, but still more whilst clothed with the official powers of chief magistrate, the poet's father would have opportunities of doing essential services to many persons connected with the London stage. The conversation of comedians acquainted with books, fresh from the keen and sparkling circles of the metropolis, and filled with racy anecdotes of the court, as well as of public life generally, could not but have been fascinating by comparison with the stagnant society of Stratford. Hospitalities on a liberal scale would be offered to these men : not impossibly this fact might be one principal key to those dilapidations which the family estate had suffered. These actors, on *their* part, would retain a grateful sense of the kindness they had received, and would seek to repay it to John Shakspeare, now that he was depressed in his fortunes, as opportunities might offer. His eldest son,



growing up a handsome young man, and beyond all doubt from his earliest days of most splendid colloquial powers (for assuredly of *him* it may be taken for granted,

Nec licuit populis parvum te, Nile, videre),

would be often reproached in a friendly way for burying himself in a country life. These overtures, prompted alike by gratitude to the father, and a real selfish interest in the talents of the son, would at length take a definite shape; and, upon some clear understanding as to the terms of such an arrangement, William Shakspeare would at length (about 1586, according to the received account, that is, in the fifth year of his married life, and the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of his age), unaccompanied by wife or children, translate himself to London. Later than 1586 it could not well be; for already in 1589 it has been recently ascertained that he held a share in the property of a leading theatre.

We must here stop to notice, and the reader will allow us to notice with summary indignation, the slanderous and idle tale which represents Shakspeare as having fled to London in the character of a criminal, from the persecutions of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecot. This tale has long been propagated under two separate impulses: chiefly, perhaps, under the vulgar love of pointed and glaring contrasts; the splendour of the man was in this instance brought into a sort of epigrammatic antithesis with the humility of his fortunes; secondly, under a baser impulse, the malicious pleasure of seeing a great man degraded. Accordingly, as in the case of Milton,\*

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\* See Note, p. 97.

it has been affirmed that Shakspeare had suffered corporal chastisement ; in fact (we abhor to utter such words), that he had been judicially whipped. Now, first of all, let us mark the inconsistency of this tale : the poet was whipped, that is, he was punished most disproportionately, and yet he fled to avoid punishment. Next, we are informed that his offence was deer-stealing, and from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy. And it has been well ascertained that Sir Thomas had no deer, and had no park. Moreover, deer-stealing was regarded by our ancestors exactly as poaching is regarded by us. Deer ran wild in all the great forests ; and no offence was looked upon as so venial, none so compatible with a noble Robin-Hood style of character, as this very trespass upon what were regarded as *feræ naturæ*, and not at all as domestic property. But had it been otherwise, a trespass was not punishable with whipping ; nor had Sir Thomas Lucy the power to irritate a whole community like Stratford-upon-Avon, by branding with permanent disgrace a young man so closely connected with three at least of the best families in the neighbourhood. Besides, had Shakspeare suffered any dishonour of that kind, the scandal would infallibly have pursued him at his very heels to London ; and in that case Greene, who has left on record, in a posthumous work of 1592, his malicious feelings towards Shakspeare, could not have failed to notice it. For, be it remembered, that a judicial flagellation contains a twofold ignominy : flagellation is ignominious in its own nature, even though unjustly inflicted, and by a ruffian ; secondly, any judicial punishment is ignominious, even though not wearing a shade of personal degradation. Now a judicial flagella-

tion includes both features of dishonour. And is it to be imagined that an enemy, searching with the diligence of malice for matter against Shakspeare, should have failed, six years after the event, to hear of that very memorable disgrace which had exiled him from Stratford, and was the very occasion of his first resorting to London; or that a leading company of players in the metropolis, *one of whom*, and a chief one, *was his own townsman*, should cheerfully adopt into their society, as an honoured partner, a young man yet flagrant from the lash of the executioner or the beadle?

This tale is fabulous, and rotten to its core; yet even this does less dishonour to Shakspeare's memory than the sequel attached to it. A sort of scurrilous rondeau, consisting of nine lines, so loathsome in its brutal stupidity and so vulgar in its expression that we shall not pollute our pages by transcribing it, has been imputed to Shakspeare ever since the days of the credulous Rowe. The total point of this idiot's drivel consists in calling Sir Thomas "an asse;" and well it justifies the poet's own remark,—“Let there be gall enough in thy ink, no matter though thou write with a goose pen.” Our own belief is, that these lines were a production of Charles II.'s reign, and applied to a Sir Thomas Lucy, not very far removed, if at all, from the age of him who first picked up the precious filth: the phrase “parliament *member*,” we believe to be quite unknown in the colloquial use of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

But, that we may rid ourselves once and for ever of this outrageous calumny upon Shakspeare's memory, we shall pursue the story to its final stage. Even Malone

has been thoughtless enough to accredit this closing chapter, which contains, in fact, such a superfetation of folly as the annals of human dulness do not exceed. Let us recapitulate the points of the story. A baronet, who has no deer and no park, is supposed to persecute a poet for stealing these aerial deer out of this aerial park, both lying in *nephelococcygia*. The poet sleeps upon this wrong for eighteen years; but at length, hearing that his persecutor is dead and buried, he conceives bloody thoughts of revenge. And this revenge he purposes to execute by picking a hole in his dead enemy's coat-of-arms. Is this coat-of-arms, then, Sir Thomas Lucy's? Why, no: Malone admits that it is not. For the poet, suddenly recollecting that this ridicule would settle upon the son of his enemy, selects another coat-of-arms, with which his dead enemy never had any connection, and he spends his thunder and lightning upon this irrelevant object; and, after all, the ridicule itself lies in a Welchman's mispronouncing one single heraldic term—a Welchman who mispronounces all words. The last act of the poet's malice recalls to us a sort of jest-book story of an Irishman, the vulgarity of which the reader will pardon in consideration of its relevancy. The Irishman having lost a pair of silk stockings, mentions to a friend that he has taken steps for recovering them by an advertisement, offering a reward to the finder. His friend objects that the costs of advertising, and the reward, would eat out the full value of the silk stockings. But to this the Irishman replies, with a knowing air, that he is not so green as to have overlooked *that*; and that, to keep down the reward, he had advertised the stockings as

worsted. Not at all less flagrant is the bull ascribed to Shakspeare, when he is made to punish a dead man by personalities meant for his exclusive ear, through his coat-of-arms, but at the same time, with the express purpose of blunting and defeating the edge of his own scurrility, is made to substitute for the real arms some others which had no more relation to the dead enemy than they had to the poet himself. This is the very sublime of folly, beyond which human dotage cannot advance.

It is painful, indeed, and dishonourable to human nature, that whenever men of vulgar habits and of poor education wish to impress us with a feeling of respect for a man's talents, they are sure to cite, by way of evidence, some gross instance of malignity. Power, in their minds, is best illustrated by malice or by the infliction of pain. To this unwelcome fact we have some evidence in the wretched tale which we have just dismissed; and there is another of the same description to be found in all Lives of Shakspeare, which we will expose to the contempt of the reader whilst we are in this field of discussion, that we may not afterwards have to resume so disgusting a subject.

This poet, who was a model of gracious benignity in his manners, and of whom, amidst our general ignorance, thus much is perfectly established, that the term *gentle* was almost as generally and by prescriptive right associated with his name as the affix of *venerable* with Bede, or *judicious* with Hooker, is alleged to have insulted a friend by an imaginary epitaph beginning "*Ten in the Hundred,*" and supposing him to be damned, yet without

wit enough (which surely the Stratford bellman could have furnished) for devising any, even fanciful, reason for such a supposition; upon which the comment of some foolish critic is,—“The *sharpness of the satire* is said to have stung the man so much that he never forgave it.” We have heard of the sting in the tail atoning for the brainless head; but in this doggerel the tail is surely as stingless as the head is brainless. For, *1st, Ten in the Hundred* could be no reproach in Shakspeare’s time, any more than to call a man *Three-and-a-half-per-cent.* in this present year 1838; except, indeed, amongst those foolish persons who built their morality upon the Jewish ceremonial law. Shakspeare himself took ten per cent. *2dly,* It happens that John Combe, so far from being the object of the poet’s scurrility, or viewing the poet as an object of implacable resentment, was a Stratford friend; that one of his family was affectionately remembered in Shakspeare’s will by the bequest of his sword; and that John Combe himself recorded his perfect charity with Shakspeare by leaving him a legacy of L.5 sterling. And in this lies the key to the whole story. For, *3dly,* the four lines were written and printed before Shakspeare was born. The name Combe is a common one; and some stupid fellow, who had seen the name in Shakspeare’s will, and happened also to have seen the lines in a collection of epigrams, chose to connect the cases by attributing an identity to the two John Combes, though at war with chronology.

Finally, there is another specimen of doggerel attributed to Shakspeare, which is not equally unworthy of him, because not equally malignant, but otherwise equally

below his intellect, no less than his scholarship; we mean the inscription on his grave-stone. This, as a sort of *siste viator* appeal to future sextons, is worthy of the grave-digger or the parish-clerk, who was probably its author. Or it may have been an antique formula, like the vulgar record of ownership in books—

Anthony Timothy Dolthead's book,  
God give him grace therein to look.

Thus far the matter is of little importance; and it might have been supposed that malignity itself could hardly have imputed such trash to Shakspeare. But when we find, even in this short compass, scarcely wider than the posy of a ring, room found for traducing the poet's memory, it becomes important to say, that the leading sentiment, the horror expressed at any disturbance offered to his bones, is not one to which Shakspeare could have attached the slightest weight; far less could have outraged the sanctities of place and subject, by affixing to any sentiment whatever (and, according to the fiction of the case, his farewell sentiment) the sanction of a curse.

Filial veneration and piety towards the memory of this great man have led us into a digression that might have been unseasonable in any cause less weighty than one having for its object to deliver his honoured name from a load of the most brutal malignity. Never more, we hope and venture to believe, will any thoughtless biographer impute to Shakspeare the asinine doggerel with which the uncritical blundering of his earliest biographer has caused his name to be dishonoured. We now resume the thread

of our biography. The stream of history is centuries in working itself clear of any calumny with which it has once been polluted.

Most readers will be aware of an old story, according to which Shakspeare gained his livelihood for some time after coming to London, by holding the horses of those who rode to the play. This legend is as idle as any one of those which we have just exposed. No custom ever existed of riding on horseback to the play. Gentlemen, who rode valuable horses, would assuredly not expose them systematically to the injury of standing exposed to cold for two or even four hours; and persons of inferior rank would not ride on horseback in the town. Besides, had such a custom ever existed, stables (or sheds at least) would soon have arisen to meet the public wants; and in some of the dramatic sketches of the day, which noticed every fashion as it arose, this would not have been overlooked. The story is traced originally to Sir William Davenant. Betterton the actor, who professed to have received it from him, passed it onwards to Rowe, he to Pope, Pope to Bishop Newton, the editor of Milton, and Newton to Dr Johnson. This pedigree of the fable, however, adds nothing to its credit, and multiplies the chances of some mistake. Another fable, not much less absurd, represents Shakspeare as having from the very first been borne upon the establishment of the theatre, and so far contradicts the other fable, but originally in the very humble character of *call-boy* or deputy prompter, whose business it was to summon each performer according to his order of coming upon the stage. This story, however, quite as much as the other, is irreconcilable



with the discovery recently made by Mr Collier, that in 1589 Shakspeare was a shareholder in the important property of a principal London theatre. It seems destined that all the undoubted facts of Shakspeare's life should come to us through the channel of legal documents, which are better evidence even than imperial medals; whilst, on the other hand, all the fabulous anecdotes, not having an attorney's seal to them, seem to have been the fictions of the wonder-maker. The plain presumption from the record of Shakspeare's situation in 1589, coupled with the fact that his first arrival in London was possibly not until 1587, but, according to the earliest account, not before 1586, a space of time which leaves but little room for any remarkable changes of situation, seems to be, that, either in requital of services done to the players by the poet's family, or in consideration of money advanced by his father-in-law, or on account of Shakspeare's personal accomplishments as an actor, and as an adapter of dramatic works to the stage; for one of these reasons, or for all of them united, William Shakspeare, about the twenty-third year of his age, was adopted into the partnership of a respectable histrionic company, possessing a first-rate theatre in the metropolis. If 1586 were the year in which he came up to London, it seems probable enough that his immediate motive to that step was the increasing distress of his father; for in that year John Shakspeare resigned the office of alderman. There is, however, a bare possibility that Shakspeare might have gone to London about the time when he completed his twenty-first year, that is, in the spring of 1585, but not earlier. Nearly two years after the birth of his eldest daughter Susanna,

his wife lay in for a second and a *last* time ; but she then brought her husband twins, a son and a daughter. These children were baptized in February of the year 1585 ; so that Shakspeare's whole family of three children were born and baptized two months before he completed his majority. The twins were baptized by the names of Hamnet and Judith, those being the names of two amongst their sponsors, viz., Mr Sadler and his wife. Hamnet, which is a remarkable name in itself, becomes still more so from its resemblance to the immortal name of Hamlet\* the Dane ; it was, however, the real baptismal name of Mr Sadler, a friend of Shakspeare's, about fourteen years older than himself. Shakspeare's son must then have been most interesting to his heart, both as a twin-child and as his only boy. He died in 1596, when he was about eleven years old. Both daughters survived their father ; both married ; both left issue, and thus gave a chance for continuing the succession from the great poet. But all the four grandchildren died without offspring.

Of Shakspeare personally, at least of Shakspeare the man, as distinguished from the author, there remains little more to record. Already in 1592, Greene, in his posthumous "Groat's-worth of Wit," had expressed the earliest vocation of Shakspeare in the following sentence :

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\* And singular enough it is, as well as interesting, that Shakspeare had so entirely superseded to his own ear and memory the name Hamnet by the dramatic name of Hamlet, that in writing his will, he actually mis-spells the name of his friend Sadler, and calls him Hamlet. His son, however, who should have familiarized the true name to his ear, had then been dead for twenty years.

—“There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers ; in his own conceit the only *Shakscene* in a country !” This alludes to Shakspeare’s office of re-casting, and even re-composing, dramatic works, so as to fit them for representation ; and Master Greene, it is probable, had suffered in his self-estimation, or in his purse, by the alterations in some piece of his own which the duty of Shakspeare to the general interests of the theatre had obliged him to make.

In 1591 it has been supposed that Shakspeare wrote his first drama, the “Two Gentlemen of Verona ;” the least characteristically marked of all his plays, and, with the exception of “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” the least interesting. From this year, 1591 to that of 1611, are just twenty years, within which space lie the whole dramatic creations of Shakspeare, averaging nearly one for every six months. In 1611 was written the “Tempest,” which is supposed to have been the last of all Shakspeare’s works. Even on that account, as Mr Campbell feelingly observes, it has “a sort of sacredness ;” and it is a most remarkable fact, and one calculated to make a man superstitious, that in this play the great enchanter Prospero, in whom, “*as if conscious,*” says Mr Campbell, “*that this would be his last work,* the poet has been *inspired to typify himself as a wise, potent, and benevolent magician,*” of whom, indeed, as of Shakspeare himself, it may be said, that “within that circle” (the circle of his own art) “none durst tread but he,” solemnly and for ever renounces his mysterious functions, symbolically breaks his enchanter’s wand, and declares that he will bury his books, his science, and his secrets

Deeper than did ever plummet sound.

Nay, it is even ominous, that in this play, and from the voice of Prospero, issues that magnificent prophecy of the total destruction which should one day swallow up

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea all which it inherit.

And this prophecy is followed immediately by a most profound ejaculation, gathering into one pathetic abstraction the total philosophy of life :

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of ; and our little life  
Is rounded by a sleep ;

that is, in effect, our life is a little tract of feverish vigils, surrounded and islanded by a shoreless ocean of sleep—sleep before birth, sleep after death.

These remarkable passages were probably not undesigned ; but if we suppose them to have been thrown off without conscious notice of their tendencies, then, according to the superstition of the ancient Grecians, they would have been regarded as prefiguring words, prompted by the secret genius that accompanies every man, such as insure along with them their own accomplishment. With or without intention, however, it is believed that Shakspeare wrote nothing more after this exquisite romantic drama. With respect to the remainder of his personal history, Dr Drake and others have supposed, that during the twenty years from 1591 to 1611, he visited Stratford often, and latterly once a-year.

In 1589 he had possessed some share in a theatre ; in 1596 he had a considerable share. Through Lord Southampton, as a surviving friend of Lord Essex, who was viewed

as the martyr to his Scottish politics, there can be no doubt that Shakspeare had acquired the favour of James I. ; and accordingly, on the 29th of May 1603, about two months after the king's accession to the throne of England, a patent was granted to the company of players who possessed the Globe Theatre ; in which patent Shakspeare's name stands second. This patent raised the company to the rank of his majesty's servants, whereas previously they are supposed to have been simply the servants of the Lord Chamberlain. Perhaps it was in grateful acknowledgment of this royal favour that Shakspeare afterwards, in 1606, paid that sublime compliment to the house of Stuart which is involved in the vision shown to Macbeth. This vision is managed with exquisite skill : it was impossible to display the whole series of princes from Macbeth to James I. ; but he beholds the posterity of Banquo, one "gold-bound brow" succeeding to another, until he comes to an eighth apparition of a Scottish king,

Who bears a glass  
Which shows him many more ; and some he sees  
Who *twofold* balls and *treble* sceptres carry ;

thus bringing down without tedium the long succession to the very person of James I. by the symbolic image of the two crowns united on one head.

About the beginning of the century Shakspeare had become rich enough to purchase the best house in Stratford, called *The Great House*, which name he altered to *New Place* ; and in 1602 he bought 107 acres adjacent to this house for a sum (£320) corresponding to about 1500 guineas of modern money. Malone thinks that he purchased the house as early as 1597 ; and it is certain that

about that time he was able to assist his father in obtaining a renewed grant of arms from the Heralds' College, and therefore, of course, to re-establish his father's fortunes. Ten years of well-directed industry, viz., from 1591 to 1601, and the prosperity of the theatre in which he was a proprietor, had raised him to affluence; and after another ten years, improved with the same success, he was able to retire with an income of L.300, or (according to the customary computations) in modern money of L.1500, per annum. Shakspeare was in fact the first man of letters, Pope the second, and Sir Walter Scott the third, who, in Great Britain, has ever realized a large fortune by literature; or in Christendom, if we except Voltaire, and two dubious cases in Italy. The four or five latter years of his life Shakspeare passed in dignified ease, in profound meditation, we may be sure, and in universal respect, at his native town of Stratford; and there he died, on the 23d of April 1616.\*

His daughter Susanna had been married on the 5th of June of the year 1607, to Dr John Hall,† a physician in

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\* "I have heard that Mr Shakspeare was a natural wit, without any art at all. He frequented the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year; and for itt had an allowance so large, that he spent at the rate of 1,000*l.* a-year, as I have heard. Shakspeare, Drayton, and Ben Jonson, had a merie meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted." (Diary of the Rev. John Ward, A.M., Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, extending from 1648 to 1679, p. 183. Lond. 1839, 8vo.)

† It is naturally to be supposed that Dr Hall would attend the sick-bed of his father-in-law; and the discovery of this gentleman's medical diary promised some gratification to our curiosity,

Stratford. The doctor died in November 1635, aged sixty ; his wife, at the age of sixty-six, on July 11, 1640. They had one child, a daughter, named Elizabeth, born in 1608, married April 22, 1626, to Thomas Nashe, Esq., left a widow in 1647, and subsequently re-married to Sir John Barnard ; but this Lady Barnard, the sole granddaughter of the poet, had no children by either marriage. The other daughter Judith, on February 10, 1616 (about ten weeks before her father's death) married Mr Thomas Quiney of Stratford, by whom she had three sons, Shakspeare, Richard, and Thomas. Judith was about thirty-one years old at the time of her marriage ; and living just forty-six years afterwards, she died in February 1662, at the age of seventy-seven. Her three sons died without issue ; and thus, in the direct lineal descent, it is certain that no representative has survived of this transcendent poet, the most august amongst created intellects.

After this review of Shakspeare's life, it becomes our duty to take a summary survey of his works, of his intellectual powers, and of his station in literature,—a station which is now irrevocably settled, not so much (which happens in other cases) by a vast overbalance of favourable suffrages, as by acclamation ; not so much by the *voices* of those who admire him up to the verge of idolatry, as by the *acts* of those who everywhere seek for his works among the primal necessities of life, demand them, and crave them as they do their daily bread ; not so much by eulogy openly proclaiming itself, as by the silent homage

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as to the cause of Shakspeare's death. Unfortunately, it does not commence until the year 1617.

recorded in the endless multiplication of what he has bequeathed us; not so much by his own compatriots, who, with regard to almost every other author,\* compose the total amount of his *effective* audience, as by the unanimous "All hail!" of intellectual Christendom; finally, not by the hasty partisanship of his own generation, nor by the biassed judgment of an age trained in the same modes of feeling and of thinking with himself, but by the solemn award of generation succeeding to generation, of one age correcting the obliquities or peculiarities of another; by the verdict of two hundred and thirty years, which have now elapsed since the very *latest* of his creations, or of two hundred and forty-seven years if we date from the earliest; a verdict which has been continually revived and re-opened, probed, searched, vexed, by criticism in every spirit, from the most genial and intelligent, down to the most malignant and scurrilously hostile which feeble heads and great ignorance could suggest when co-operating with impure hearts and narrow sensibilities; a verdict, in short, sustained and countersigned by a longer series of writers, many of them eminent for wit or learning, than were ever before congregated upon any inquest

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\* An exception ought perhaps to be made for Sir Walter Scott and for Cervantes; but with regard to all other writers, Dante, suppose, or Ariosto amongst Italians, Camoens amongst those of Portugal, Schiller amongst Germans, however ably they may have been naturalised in foreign languages, as all of those here mentioned (excepting only Ariosto) have in one part of their works been most powerfully naturalised in English, it still remains true (and the very sale of the books is proof sufficient) that an alien author never does take root in the general sympathies out of his own country; he takes his station in libraries, he is read by the



relating to any author, be he who he might, ancient\* or modern, Pagan or Christian. It was a most witty saying with respect to a piratical and knavish publisher, who made a trade of insulting the memories of deceased authors by forged writings, that he was "among the new terrors of death." But in the gravest sense it may be affirmed of Shakspeare, that he is among the modern luxuries of life; that life, in fact, is a new thing, and one more to be coveted, since Shakspeare has extended the domains of human consciousness, and pushed its dark frontiers into regions not so much as dimly descried or even suspected before his time, far less illuminated (as now they are) by beauty and tropical luxuriance of life. For instance,—a single instance, indeed one which in itself is a world of new revelation,—the possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakspeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, of Imogene, of Hermione, of Perdita, of Ophelia, of Miranda, and many others. The Una of Spenser, earlier by ten or fifteen years than most of these, was an idealised portrait of female innocence and virgin purity, but too shadowy and unreal for a dramatic reality. And as to the Grecian classics, let not the reader imagine for an instant that any prototype in this field of Shakspearian power can be looked for there. The *Antigone* and the *Electra* of the tragic poets are the two leading female

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man of learned leisure, he is known and valued by the refined and the elegant, but he is not (what Shakspeare is for Germany and America) in any proper sense a *popular* favourite.

\* It will occur to many readers, that perhaps Homer may furnish the sole exception to this sweeping assertion. See Note, p. 98

characters that classical antiquity offers to our respect, but assuredly not to our impassioned love, as disciplined and exalted in the school of Shakspeare. They challenge our admiration, severe, and even stern, as impersonations of filial duty, cleaving to the steps of a desolate and afflicted old man; or of sisterly affection, maintaining the rights of a brother under circumstances of peril, of desertion, and consequently of perfect self-reliance. Iphigenia, again, though not dramatically coming before us in her own person, but according to the beautiful report of a spectator, presents us with a fine statuesque model of heroic fortitude, and of one whose young heart, even in the very agonies of her cruel immolation, refused to forget, by a single indecorous gesture, or so much as a moment's neglect of her own princely descent, that she herself was "a lady in the land." These are fine marble groups, but they are not the warm breathing realities of Shakspeare; there is "no speculation" in their cold marble eyes; the breath of life is not in their nostrils; the fine pulses of womanly sensibilities are not throbbing in their bosoms. And besides this immeasurable difference between the cold moony reflexes of life, as exhibited by the power of Grecian art, and the true sunny life of Shakspeare, it must be observed that the Antigones, &c., of the antique put forward but one single trait of character, like the aloe with its single blossom: this solitary feature is presented to us as an abstraction, and as an insulated quality; whereas in Shakspeare all is presented in the *concrete*; that is to say, not brought forward in relief, as by some effort of an anatomical artist; but embodied and imbedded, so to speak, as by the force of a creative nature,

in the complex system of a human life; a life in which all the elements move and play simultaneously, and with something more than mere simultaneity or co-existence, acting and re-acting each upon the other—nay, even acting by each other and through each other. In Shakspeare's characters is felt for ever a real *organic* life, where each is for the whole and in the whole, and where the whole is for each and in each. They only are real incarnations.

The Greek poets could not exhibit any approximations to *female* character, without violating the truth of Grecian life, and shocking the feelings of the audience. The drama with the Greeks, as with us, though much less than with us, was a picture of human life; and that which could not occur in life could not wisely be exhibited on the stage. Now, in ancient Greece, women were secluded from the society of men. The conventual sequestration of the *γυναικωνίτις*, or female apartment\* of the house, and the Mahomedan consecration of its threshold against the ingress of males, had been transplanted from Asia into Greece thousands of years perhaps before either convents or Mahommed existed. Thus barred from all open social intercourse, women could not develop or express any character by word or action. Even to *have* a character, violated, to a Grecian mind, the ideal portrait of feminine excellence; whence, perhaps, partly the too

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\* Apartment is here used, as the reader will observe, in its true and continental acceptation, as a division or *compartment* of a house including many rooms; a suite of chambers, but a suite which is partitioned off (as in palaces), not a single chamber; a sense so commonly and so erroneously given to this word in England.

generic, too little individualized, style of Grecian beauty. But prominently to *express* a character was impossible under the common tenor of Grecian life, unless when high tragical catastrophes transcended the decorums of that tenor, or for a brief interval raised the curtain which veiled it. Hence the subordinate part which women play upon the Greek stage in all but some half dozen cases. In the paramount tragedy on that stage, the model tragedy, the *Cedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, there is virtually no woman at all; for Jocasta is a party to the story merely as the dead Laius or the self-murdered Sphinx was a party,—viz., by her contributions to the fatalities of the event, not by anything she does or says spontaneously. In fact, the Greek poet, if a wise poet, could not address himself genially to a task in which he must begin by shocking the sensibilities of his countrymen. And hence followed, not only the dearth of female characters in the Grecian drama, but also a second result still more favourable to the sense of a new power evolved by Shakspeare. Whenever the common law of Grecian life did give way, it was, as we have observed, to the suspending force of some great convulsion or tragical catastrophe. This for a moment (like an earthquake in a nunnery) would set at liberty even the timid, fluttering Grecian women, those doves of the dove-cot, and would call some of them into action. But which? Precisely those of energetic and masculine minds; the timid and feminine would but shrink the more from public gaze and from tumult. Thus it happened, that such female characters as *were* exhibited in Greece, could not but be the harsh and the severe. If a gentle Ismene appeared for a moment in

contest with some energetic sister Antigone (and chiefly, perhaps, by way of drawing out the fiercer character of that sister), she was soon dismissed as unfit for scenical effect. So that not only were female characters few, but, moreover, of these few the majority were but repetitions of masculine qualities in female persons. Female agency being seldom summoned on the stage except when it had received a sort of special dispensation from its sexual character, by some terrific convulsions of the house or the city, naturally it assumed the style of action suited to these circumstances. And hence it arose, that not woman as she differed from man, but woman as she resembled man—woman, in short, seen under circumstances so dreadful as to abolish the effect of sexual distinction, was the woman of the Greek tragedy.\* And hence generally arose for Shakspeare the wider field, and the more astonishing by its perfect novelty, when he first introduced female characters, not as mere varieties or echoes of masculine characters, a Medea or Clytemnestra, or a vindictive Hecuba, the mere tigress of the tragic tiger, but female characters that had the appropriate beauty of female nature; woman no longer grand, terrific, and repulsive, but woman “after her kind”—the other hemisphere of the dramatic world; woman running through the vast gamut of womanly loveliness; woman as emancipated,

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

exalted, ennobled, under a new law of Christian morality; woman the sister and co-equal of man, no longer his slave, his prisoner, and sometimes his rebel. "It is a far cry to Loch Awe;" and from the Athenian stage to the stage of Shakspeare, it may be said, is a prodigious interval. True; but prodigious as it is, there is really nothing between them. The Roman stage, at least the tragic stage, as is well known, was put out, as by an extinguisher, by the cruel amphitheatre, just as a candle is made pale and ridiculous by daylight. Those who were fresh from the real murders of the bloody amphitheatre regarded with contempt the mimic murders of the stage. Stimulation too coarse and too intense had its usual effect in making the sensibilities callous. Christian emperors arose at length, who abolished the amphitheatre in its bloodier features. But by that time the genius of the tragic muse had long slept the sleep of death. And that muse had no resurrection until the age of Shakspeare. So that, notwithstanding a gulf of nineteen centuries and upwards separates Shakspeare from Euripides, the last of the surviving Greek tragedians, the one is still the nearest successor of the other, just as Connaught and the islands in Clew Bay are next neighbours to America, although three thousand watery columns, each of a cubic mile in dimensions, divide them from each other.

A second reason, which lends an emphasis of novelty and effective power to Shakspeare's female world, is a peculiar fact of contrast which exists between that and his corresponding world of men. Let us explain. The purpose and the intention of the Grecian stage was not primarily to develop human *character*, whether in men

or in women ; human *fates* were its object ; great tragic situations under the mighty control of a vast cloudy destiny, dimly descried at intervals, and brooding over human life by mysterious agencies, and for mysterious ends. Man, no longer the representative of an august *will*,—man, the passion-puppet of fate, could not with any effect display what we call a character, which is a distinction between man and man, emanating originally from the will, and expressing its determinations, moving under the large variety of human impulses. The will is the central pivot of character ; and this was obliterated, thwarted, cancelled, by the dark fatalism which brooded over the Grecian stage. That explanation will sufficiently clear up the reason why marked or complex variety of character was slighted by the great principles of the Greek tragedy. And every scholar who has studied that grand drama of Greece with feeling,—that drama, so magnificent, so regal, so stately,—and who has thoughtfully investigated its principles, and its difference from the English drama, will acknowledge that powerful and elaborate character,—character, for instance, that could employ the fiftieth part of that profound analysis which has been applied to Hamlet, to Falstaff, to Lear, to Othello, and applied by Mrs Jamieson so admirably to the full development of the Shakspearian heroines, would have been as much wasted, nay, would have been defeated, and interrupted the blind agencies of fate, just in the same way as it would injure the shadowy grandeur of a ghost to individualize it too much. Milton's angels are slightly touched, superficially touched, with differences of character ; but they are such differences, so simple and general,

as are just sufficient to rescue them from the reproach applied to Virgil's "*fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthem;*" just sufficient to make them knowable apart. Pliny speaks of painters who painted in one or two colours; and, as respects the angelic characters, Milton does so; he is *monochromatic*. So, and for reasons resting upon the same ultimate philosophy, were the mighty architects of the Greek tragedy. They also were monochromatic; they also, as to the characters of their persons, painted in one colour. And so far there might have been the same novelty in Shakspeare's men as in his women. There *might* have been; but the reason why there is *not*, must be sought in the fact, that History, the muse of History, had there even been no such muse as Melpomene, would have forced us into an acquaintance with human character. History, as the representative of actual life, of real man, gives us powerful delineations of character in its chief agents, that is, in men; and therefore it is that Shakspeare, the absolute creator of female character, was but the mightiest of all painters with regard to male character. Take a single instance. The Antony of Shakspeare, immortal for its execution, is found, after all, as regards the primary conception, in history: Shakspeare's delineation is but the expansion of the germ already pre-existing, by way of scattered fragments, in Cicero's Philippics, in Cicero's Letters, in Appian, &c. But Cleopatra, equally fine, is a pure creation of art: the situation and the scenic circumstances belong to history, but the character belongs to Shakspeare.

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



that 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,\* 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, 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

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\* 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 Danes. 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 how solemn, how real, how heart-searching he is!

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 life, 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 fleshiest incubus" among the fiends, and yet so far ennobled into interest by his intellectual power, and by the grandeur of misanthropy !

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\* Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed. For all Shakspeare's great creations are like works of nature, subjects of unexhaustible study.—See Note, p. 99.

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 scenes 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 for 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 Eumenides, 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, subtlest, most pathetic, and yet most catholic and universally intelligible; the most characteristic, also, and appropriate to the particular person, the situation, and the case, 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 French and of the Italian drama, indeed we may say of the Greek, the dialogue proceeds always by independent speeches, replying indeed to each other, but never modified in its several openings by the momentary effect of its several terminal forms immediately preceding. Now, in Shakspeare, who first set an example of that most important innovation, in all his impassioned dialogues, each reply or rejoinder seems the mere rebound of the previous speech. Every form of natural interruption, breaking through the restraints of ceremony under the impulses of tempestuous passion; every form of hasty interrogative, ardent reiteration when a question has been evaded; every form of scornful repetition of the hostile words; every impatient continuation of the hostile statement; in short, all modes and formulæ by which anger, hurry, fretfulness, scorn, impatience, or excitement under any movement whatever, can disturb or modify or dislocate the formal bookish style of commencement,—these are as rife in Shakspeare's dialogue as in life itself; and how much vivacity, how profound a verisimilitude, they add to the scenic effect as an imitation of human passion and real life, we need not say. A volume might be written illustrating the vast varieties of Shakspeare's art and power in this one field of improvement; another volume might be dedicated to the exposure of the

lifeless and unnatural result from the opposite practice in the foreign stages of France and Italy. And we may truly say, that were Shakspeare distinguished from them by this single feature of nature and propriety, he would on that account alone have merited a great immortality.

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# ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE

IN MACBETH.

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FROM my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in Macbeth. It was this: the knocking at the gate, which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see *why* it should produce such an effect.

Here I pause for one moment, to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding, when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to nothing else, which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes. Of this out of ten thousand instances that I might produce, I will cite one. Ask of any person whatsoever, who is not previously prepared for the demand by a knowledge of the perspective, to draw in the rudest way the commonest appearance which depends

upon the laws of that science ; as, for instance, to represent the effect of two walls standing at right angles to each other, or the appearance of the houses on each side of a street, as seen by a person looking down the street from one extremity. Now in all cases, unless the person has happened to observe in pictures how it is that artists produce these effects, he will be utterly unable to make the smallest approximation to it. Yet why ? For he has actually seen the effect every day of his life. The reason is—that he allows his understanding to overrule his eyes. His understanding, which includes no intuitive knowledge of the laws of vision, can furnish him with no reason why a line which is known and can be proved to be a horizontal line, should not *appear* a horizontal line ; a line that made any angle with the perpendicular, less than a right angle, would seem to him to indicate that his houses were all tumbling down together. Accordingly, he makes the line of his houses a horizontal line, and fails, of course, to produce the effect demanded. Here, then, is one instance out of many, in which not only the understanding is allowed to overrule the eyes, but where the understanding is positively allowed to obliterate the eyes, as it were ; for not only does the man believe the evidence of his understanding in opposition to that of his eyes, but (what is monstrous !) the idiot is not aware that his eyes ever gave such evidence. He does not know that he has seen (and therefore *quoad* his consciousness has *not* seen) that which he *has* seen every day of his life.

But to return from this digression, my understanding could furnish no reason why the knocking at the gate in Macbeth should produce any effect, direct or reflected. In fact, my understanding said positively that it could *not* produce any effect. But I knew better ; I felt that it



did ; and I waited and clung to the problem until further knowledge should enable me to solve it. At length, in 1812, Mr. Williams made his *début* on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation. On which murders, by the way, I must observe, that in one respect they have had an ill effect, by making the connoisseur in murder very fastidious in his taste, and dissatisfied by anything that has been since done in that line. All other murders look pale by the deep crimson of his ; and, as an amateur once said to me in a querulous tone, “ There has been absolutely nothing *doing* since his time, or nothing that’s worth speaking of.” But this is wrong ; for it is unreasonable to expect all men to be great artists, and born with the genius of Mr. Williams. Now it will be remembered, that in the first of these murders (that of the Marrs), the same incident (of a knocking at the door, soon after the work of extermination was complete) did actually occur, which the genius of Shakspeare has invented ; and all good judges, and the most eminent dilettanti, acknowledged the felicity of Shakspeare’s suggestion, as soon as it was actually realized. Here, then, was a fresh proof that I was right in relying on my own feeling, in opposition to my understanding ; and I again set myself to study the problem ; at length I solved it to my own satisfaction, and my solution is this. Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror ; and for this reason, that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life ; an instinct which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind (though different in degree) amongst all

living creatures : this instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of "the poor beetle that we tread on," exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him* (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them,—not a sympathy of pity or approbation\*). In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic ; the fear of instant death smites him "with its petrific mace." But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred—which will create a hell within him ; and into this hell we are to look.

In Macbeth, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakspeare has introduced two murderers : and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated : but, though in Macbeth the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her,—yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of

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\* It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word, in a situation where it would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholarlike use of the word sympathy, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonyme of the word *pity* ; and hence, instead of saying "sympathy *with* another," many writers adopt the monstrous barbarism of "sympathy *for* another."

murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both. This was to be expressed ; and on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, “the gracious Duncan,” and adequately to expound “the deep damnation of his taking off,” this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature, *i.e.*, the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man—was gone, vanished, extinct ; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration ; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader’s attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister in a fainting fit, he may chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle is *that* in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis, on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man—if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting, as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action

in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now apply this to the case in Macbeth. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in ; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured : Lady Macbeth is “ unsexed ; ” Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman ; both are conformed to the image of devils ; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable ? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess ; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice ; time must be annihilated ; relation to things without abolished ; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds : the knocking at the gate is heard ; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced ; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish ; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again ; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O mighty poet ! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art ; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the

stars and the flowers ; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident !

## NOTES TO SHAKSPEARE.

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### THE NAME SHAKSPEARE.—Page 1.

MR CAMPBELL, the latest editor of Shakspeare's dramatic works, observes that the "poet's name has been variously written Shaxpeare, Shackspeare, Shakspeare, and Shakspere;" to which varieties might be added Shagspere, from the Worcester Marriage License, published in 1836. But the fact is, that by combining with all the differences in spelling the first syllable, all those in spelling the second, more than twenty-five distinct varieties of the name may be expanded (like an algebraic series), for the choice of the curious in mis-spelling. Above all things, those varieties which arise from the intercalation of the middle *e* (that is, the *e* immediately before the final syllable *spear*), can never be overlooked by those who remember, at the opening of the *Dunciad*, the note upon this very question about the orthography of Shakspeare's name, as also upon the other great question about the title of the immortal *Satire*. Whether it ought not to have been the *Dunceiade*, seeing that *Dunce*, its great author and progenitor, cannot possibly dispense with the letter *e*. Meantime we must remark, that the first

three of Mr Campbell's variations are mere caprices of the press ; as is Shagspere ; or, more probably, this last euphonious variety arose out of the gross clownish pronunciation of the two hiccuping " *marksmen*" who rode over to Worcester for the license: and one cannot forbear laughing at the bishop's secretary for having been so misled by two varlets, professedly incapable of signing their own names. The same drunken villains had cut down the bride's name *Hathaway* into *Hathwey*. Finally, to treat the matter with seriousness, Sir Frederick Madden has shown, in his recent letter to the Society of Antiquaries, that the poet himself in all probability wrote the name uniformly *Shakspere*. Orthography, both of proper names, of appellatives, and of words universally, was very unsettled up to a period long subsequent to that of Shakspeare. Still it must usually have happened, that names written variously and laxly by others would be written uniformly by the owners ; especially by those owners who had occasion to sign their names frequently, and by literary people, whose attention was often, as well as consciously, directed to the proprieties of spelling. *Shakspeare* is now too familiar to the eye for any alteration to be attempted ; but it is pretty certain that Sir Frederick Madden is right in stating the poet's own signature to have been uniformly *Shakspere*. It is so written twice in the course of his will, and it is so written on a blank leaf of Florio's English translation of Montaigne's *Essays* ; a book recently discovered, and sold, on account of its autograph, for a hundred guineas.

#### SHAKSPEARE'S REPUTATION.—Page 19.

The necessity of compression obliges us to omit many arguments and references by which we could demonstrate the fact, that Shakspeare's reputation was always in a progressive state ; allowing only for the interruption of about seventeen years, which this poet, in common with all others, sustained, not so much from the state of war (which did not fully occupy four of those years), as from the triumph of a gloomy fanaticism. Deduct the twenty-three years

of the seventeenth century which had elapsed before the first folio appeared, to this space add seventeen years of fanatical madness, during fourteen of which *all* dramatic entertainments were suppressed, the remainder is sixty years. And surely the sale of four editions of a vast folio in that space of time was an expression of an abiding interest. *No other poet, except Spenser, continued to sell throughout the century.* Besides, in arguing the case of a *dramatic* poet, we must bear in mind, that although readers of learned books might be diffused over the face of the land, the readers of poetry would be chiefly concentrated in the metropolis, and such persons would have no need to buy what they heard at the theatres. But then comes the question, whether Shakspeare kept possession of the theatres. And we are really humiliated by the gross want of sense which has been shown, by Malone chiefly, but also by many others, in discussing this question. From the restoration to 1682, says Malone, no more than four plays of Shakspeare's were performed by a principal company in London. "Such was the lamentable taste of those times, that the plays of Fletcher, Jonson, and Shirley, were much oftener exhibited than those of our author." What cant is this! If that taste were "lamentable," what are we to think of our own times, when plays a thousand times below those of Fletcher, or even of Shirley, continually displace Shakspeare? Shakspeare would himself have exulted in finding that he gave way only to dramatists so excellent. And, as we have before observed, both then and now, it is the very familiarity with Shakspeare which often banishes him from audiences honestly in quest of relaxation and amusement. Novelty is the very soul of such relaxation; but in our closets, when we are *not* unbending, when our minds are in a state of tension from intellectual cravings, then it is that we resort to Shakspeare; and oftentimes those who honour him most, like ourselves, are the most impatient of seeing his divine scenes disfigured by unequal representation (good, perhaps, in a single personation, bad in all the rest); or to hear his divine thoughts mangled in the recitation; or (which is worst of all) to hear them dishonoured and defeated by im-



perfect apprehension in the audience, or by defective sympathy. Meantime, if one theatre played only four of Shakspeare's dramas, another played at least seven. But the grossest folly of Malone is, in fancying the numerous alterations so many insults to Shakspeare, whereas they expressed as much homage to his memory as if the unaltered dramas had been retained. The substance *was* retained. The changes were merely concessions to the changing views of scenical propriety; sometimes, no doubt, made with a simple view to the revolution effected by Davenant at the restoration, in bringing *scenes* (in the painter's sense) upon the stage; sometimes also with a view to the altered fashions of the audience during the suspensions of the action, or perhaps to the introduction of *after-pieces*, by which, of course, the time was abridged for the main performance. A volume might be written upon this subject. Meantime let us never be told, that a poet was losing, or had lost his ground, who found in his lowest depression, amongst his almost idolatrous supporters, a great king distracted by civil wars, a mighty republican poet distracted by puritanical fanaticism, the greatest successor by far of that great poet, a papist and a bigoted royalist, and finally, the leading actor of the century, who gave and reflected the ruling impulses of his age.

#### VALUE OF ASBIES.—Page 32.

After all the assistance given to such equations between different times or different places by Sir George Shuckborough's tables, and other similar investigations, it is still a very difficult problem, complex, and, after all, merely tentative in the results, to assign the true value in such cases; not only for the obvious reason, that the powers of money have varied in different directions with regard to different objects, and in different degrees where the direction has on the whole continued the same, but because the very objects to be taken into computation are so indeterminate, and vary so much, not only as regards century and century, kingdom and kingdom, but also, even in the same century and the same kingdom, as

regards rank and rank. That which is a mere necessary to one, is a luxurious superfluity to another. And, in order to ascertain these differences, it is an indispensable qualification to have studied the habits and customs of the several classes concerned, together with the variations of those habits and customs.

REGARD FOR WOMANHOOD IN ENGLAND.—Page 41.

Never was the *esse quam videri* in any point more strongly discriminated than in this very point of gallantry to the female sex, as between England and France. In France, the verbal homage to woman is so excessive as to betray its real purpose,—viz. that it is a mask for secret contempt. In England, little is *said*; but, in the mean time, we allow our sovereign ruler to be a woman; which in France is impossible. Even that fact is of some importance, but less so than what follows. In every country whatsoever, if any principle has a deep root in the moral feelings of the people, we may rely upon its showing itself, by a thousand evidences, amongst the very lowest ranks, and in their daily intercourse, and their *undress* manners. Now in England there is, and always has been, a manly feeling, most widely diffused, of unwillingness to see labours of a coarse order, or requiring muscular exertions, thrown upon women. Pauperism, amongst other evil effects, has sometimes locally disturbed this predominating sentiment of Englishmen; but never at any time with such depth as to kill the root of the old hereditary manliness. Sometimes at this day a gentleman, either from carelessness, or from over-ruling force of convenience, or from real defect of gallantry, will allow a female servant to carry his portmanteau for him; though, after all, that spectacle is a rare one. And everywhere women of all ages engage in the pleasant, nay elegant, labours of the hay field; but in Great Britain women are never suffered to mow, which is a most athletic and exhausting labour, nor to load a cart, nor to drive a plough or hold it. In France, on the other hand, before the Revolution (at which period the pseudo-homage, the lip-honour, was far more ostentatiously

professed towards the female sex than at present), a Frenchman of credit, and vouching for his statement by the whole weight of his name and personal responsibility (M. Simond, now an American citizen), records the following abominable scene as one of no uncommon occurrence : A woman was in some provinces yoked side by side with an ass to the plough or the harrow ; and M. Simond protests that it excited no horror to see the driver distributing his lashes impartially between the woman and her brute yoke-fellow. So much for the wordy pomps of French gallantry. In England, we trust, and we believe, that any man, caught in such a situation, and in such an abuse of his power (supposing the case otherwise a possible one), would be killed on the spot.

SLANDER OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.—Page 55.

In a little memoir of Milton, which the author of this article drew up some years ago for a public society, and which is printed in an abridged shape,\* he took occasion to remark, that Dr Johnson, who was meanly anxious to revive the slander against Milton, as well as some others, had supposed Milton himself to have this flagellation in his mind, and indirectly to confess it, in one of his Latin poems, where, speaking of Cambridge, and declaring that he has no longer any pleasure in the thoughts of revisiting that university, he says,—

“Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri,  
Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.”

This last line the malicious critic would translate—“And other things insufferable to a man of my temper.” \* But as we then observed, *ingenium* is properly expressive of the *intellectual* constitution, whilst it is the *moral* constitution that suffers degradation from personal chastisement—the sense of honour, of personal dignity, of justice, &c. *Indoles* is the proper term for this latter idea, and in using the word *ingenium*, there cannot be a doubt that Milton alluded to the dry scholastic disputations, which were

\* Works, vol. x. p. 79.

shocking and odious to his fine poetical genius. If, therefore, the vile story is still to be kept up in order to dishonour a great man, at any rate let it not in future be pretended that any countenance to such a slander can be drawn from the confessions of the poet himself.

SHAKSPEARE'S STATION IN LITERATURE.—Page 71.

It will occur to many readers, that perhaps Homer may furnish the sole exception to this sweeping assertion: any *but* Homer is clearly and ludicrously below the level of the competition; but even Homer, “with his tail on (as the Scottish Highlanders say of their chieftains when belted by their ceremonial retinues), musters nothing like the force which *already* follows Shakspeare; and be it remembered, that Homer sleeps, and has long slept as a subject of criticism or commentary, while in Germany as well as England, and *now even in France*, the gathering of wits to the vast equipage of Shakspeare is advancing in an accelerated ratio. There is, in fact, a great delusion current upon this subject. Innumerable references to Homer, and brief critical remarks on this or that pretension of Homer, this or that scene, this or that passage, lie scattered over literature ancient and modern; but the express works dedicated to the separate service of Homer are, after all, not many. In Greek we have only the large Commentary of Eustathius, and the Scholia of Didymus, &c.; in French little or nothing before the prose translation of the seventeenth century, which Pope esteemed “elegant,” and the skirmishings of Madame Dacier, La Motte, &c.; in English, besides the various translations and their prefaces (which, by the way, began as early as 1555), nothing of much importance until the elaborate preface of Pope to the Iliad, and his elaborate postscript to the Odyssey—nothing certainly before that, and very little indeed since that, except Wood’s *Essay on the Life and Genius of Homer*. On the other hand, of the books written in illustration or investigation of Shakspeare, a very considerable library might be formed in England, and another in Germany.

## CALIBAN.-- Page 80

Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed. For ail 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 ; for when he finds himself in the presence of dissolute and unprincipled men, he rises at once into the dignity of intellectual power.















