SHAKSPEARE@@1

William Shakespeare, 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 un- baptized are buried with “ maimed rites,” shorn of their obsequies, and sternly denied that “ sweet and solcmn fare­well” by which otherwise the church expresses her final charity with all men ; and not only so, but they are even *locally* separated and sequestrated. 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.@@2 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 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

@@@' Mr. Campbell, the latest editor of Shakspeare’s dramatic works, observes that “ the poet's name has been variously written Shax- peare, 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 Duncriad, 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 *c*. 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, woud 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.

@@@’ But, as a proof that, even in the case of royal christenings, it was not thought pious to “ tempt God," as it were, by delav, Edward V I. the only son of Henry VIII. was bom 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.