emphasis the well-founded statement of Mr Halliwell- Phillipps that “ there is not a particle of direct evidence ” for either of these suppositions. The marriage could hardly have been a hasty one, for, as we have seen, the two families had been intimate for fifteen years, and Shakespeare had known Anne Hathaway from his early boyhood. As to whether it was suitable or not Shake­speare himself was the best and only adequate judge, and there is not, in the whole literature of the subject, even the shadow of a successful appeal against his decision. And, so far from the marriage having been unhappy, all the evidence within our reach goes to show that it was not only a union of mutual affection but a most fortunate event for the poet himself, as well as for the wife and mother who remained at the head of his family, venerated and loved by her children, and a devoted helpmate to her husband to the very end. Looking at the matter in its wider aspects, and especially in relation to his future career, it may be said that Shakespeare’s early marriage gave him at the most emotional and unsettled period of life a fixed centre of affection and a supreme motive to prompt and fruitful exertion. This would have a salutary and steadying effect on a nature so richly en­dowed with plastic fancy and passionate impulse, com­bined with rare powers of reflective foresight and self- control. If Shakespeare’s range and depth of emotional and imaginative genius had not been combined with unusual force of character and strength of ethical and artistic purpose, and these elements had not been early stimulated to sustained activity, he could never have had so great and uninterrupted a career. And nothing perhaps is a more direct proof of Shakespeare’s manly character than the prompt and serious way in which, from the first, he assumed the full responsibility of his acts, and unflinch­ingly faced the wider range of duties they entailed. He himself has told us that

“ Love is too young to know what conscience is :

Yet who knows not conscience is born of love ? ”

and it remains true that conscience, courage, simplicity, and nobleness of conduct are all, in generous natures, evoked and strengthened by the vital touch of that regenerating power. Shakespeare’s whole course was changed by the new influence ; and with his growing responsibilities his character seems to have rapidly matured, and his powers to have found fresh and more effective development. His first child Susanna was born in May 1583, and, as she was baptized on the 26th, the day of her birth may have been the 23d, which would be exactly a month after her father completed his nineteenth year. In February 1585 the family was unexpectedly enlarged by the birth of twins, a boy and a girl, who were named re­spectively Hamnet and Judith, after Hamnet and Judith Sadler, inhabitants of Stratford, who were lifelong friends of Shakespeare. Before he had attained his majority the poet had thus a wife and three children dependent upon him, with little opportunity or means apparently of ad­vancing his fortunes in Stratford. The situation was in itself sufficiently serious. But it was complicated by his father’s increasing embarrassments and multiplied family claims. Four children still remained in Henley Street to be provided for,—the youngest, Edmund, born in May 1580, being scarcely five years old. John Shakespeare, too, was being sued by various creditors, and apparently in some danger of being arrested for debt. All this was enough to make a much older man than the poet look anxiously about him. But, with the unfailing sense and sagacity he displayed in practical affairs, he seems to have formed a sober and just estimate of his own powers, and made a careful survey of the various fields available for their remunerative exercise. As the result of his delibera­

tions he decided in favour of trying the metropolitan stage and theatre. He had already tested his faculty of acting by occasional essays on the provincial stage ; and, once in London amongst the players, where new pieces were constantly required, he would have full scope for the exercise of his higher powers as a dramatic poet. At the outset he could indeed only expect to discharge the lower function, but. with the growing popular demand for dramatic representations, the actor’s calling, though not without its social drawbacks, was in the closing decades of the 16th century a lucrative one. Greene, in his autobio­graphical sketch *Never Too Late,* one of the most interest­ing of his prose tracts, illustrates this point in the account he gives of his early dealings with the players and experiences as a writer for the stage. Speaking through his hero Francesco, he says that “ when his fortunes were at the lowest ebb he fell in amongst a company of players who persuaded him to try his wit in writing of comedies, tragedies, or pastorals, and if he could perform anything worth the stage, then they would largely reward him for his pains.” Succeeding in the work, he was so well paid that he soon became comparatively wealthy, and went about with a well-filled purse. Although writing from the author’s rather than the actor’s point of view, Greene intimates that the players grew rapidly rich and were entitled both to praise and profit so long as they were “neither covetous nor insolent.” In the *Return from Parnassus* (1601) the large sums, fortunes indeed, realized by good actors are referred to as matter of notoriety. One of the disappointed academic scholars, indeed, moralizing on the fact with some bitterness, exclaims,—

“England affords those glorious vagabonds,

That carried erst their fardles on their backs,

Coursers to ride on through the gazing streets,

Sweeping it in their glaring satin suits,

And pages to attend their masterships :

"With mouthing words that better wits have framed They purchase lands, and now esquires are made.”

And in a humorous sketch entitled *Ratseis Ghost,* and published in the first decade of the 17th century, au apparent reference to Shakespeare himself brings out the same point. The hero of the tract, Ratsey, a highwayman, having compelled a set of strolling players to act before him, advised their leader to leave the couutry and get to London, where, having a good presence for the stage and a turn for the work, he would soon fill his pockets, adding, “ When thou feelest thy purse well-lined, buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, growing weary of playing, thy money may bring thee dignity and reputa­tion.” The player, thanking him for his advice, replies, “I have heard indeed of some that have gone to London very meanly, who have in time become exceedingly wealthy.” The movement to the London stage was there­fore from a worldly point of view a prudent one, and for the higher purposes of Shakespeare’s life it was equally wise and necessary. For besides the economic and practi­cal considerations in favour of the step there must have pressed on the poet’s mind the importance of a wider sphere of life and action for the enlargement of his inward horizon, and the effective development of his poetical and dramatic gifts.

The exact date of this event—of Shakespeare’s leaving Stratford for London—cannot be fixed with any certainty. All the probabilities of the case, however, indicate that it must have taken place between the spring of 1585 and the autumn of 1587. In the latter year three of the leading companies visited Stratford, those belonging to the queen, Lord Leicester, and Lord Essex ; and, as Lord Leicester’s included three of Shakespeare’s fellow townsmen,—Bur­bage, Heminge, and Greene,—it is not improbable that he may then have decided on trying his fortune in London.