At the same time it is quite possible, and on some grounds even likely, that the step may have been taken somewhat earlier. But for the five years between 1587 and 1592 we have no direct knowledge of Shakespeare’s movements at all, the period being a complete biographical blank, dimly illuminated at the outset by one or two doubtful traditions. We have indeed the assurance that after leav­ing Stratford he continued to visit his native town at least once every year; and if he had left in 1586 we may con­fidently assume that he returned the next year for the purpose, amongst others, of consulting with his father and mother about the Asbies mortgage and of taking part with them in their action against John Lambert. His uniting with them in this action deserves special notice, as showing that he continued to take the keenest personal interest in all home affairs, and, although living mainly in London, was still looked upon, not only as the eldest son, but as the adviser and friend of the family. The anec­dotes of Shakespeare’s occupations on going to London are, that at first he was employed in a comparatively humble capacity about the theatre, and that for a time he took charge of the horses of those who rode to see the plays, and was so successful in this work that he soon had a number of juvenile assistants who were known as Shakespeare’s boys. Even in their crude form these traditions embody a tribute to Shakespeare’s business promptitude and skill. If there is any truth in them they may be taken to indicate that while filling some subordinate post in the theatre Shakespeare perceived a defective point in the local arrangements, or heard the complaints of the mounted gallants as to the difficulty of putting up their horses. His provisions for meeting the difficulty seem to have been completely and even notori­ously successful. There were open sheds or temporary stables in connexion with the theatre in Shoreditch, and Shakespeare’s boys, if the tradition is true, probably each took charge of a horse in these stables while its owner was at the play. But in any case this would be simply a brief episode in Shakespeare’s multifarious employments when he first reached the scene of his active labours in London. He must soon have had more serious and absorbing professional occupations in the green room, on the stage, and in the laboratory of his own teeming brain, “ the quick forge and working house of thought.”

But his leisure hours during his first years in London would naturally be devoted to continuing his education and equipping himself as fully as possible for his future work. It was probably during this time, as Mr Halliwell- Phillipps suggests, that he acquired the working knowledge of French and Italian that his writings show he must have possessed. And it is perhaps now possible to point out the sources whence his knowledge of these languages was derived, or at least the master under whom he chiefly studied them. The most celebrated and accomplished teacher of French and Italian in Shakespeare’s day was the resolute John Florio, who, after leaving Magdalen College, Oxford, lived for years in London, engaged in tutorial and literary work and intimately associated with eminent men of letters and their noble patrons. After the accession of James I., Florio was made tutor to Prince Henry, received an appointment about the court, became the friend and personal favourite of Queen Anne (to whom he dedicated the second edition of his Italian dictionary, entitled the *World of Words),* and died full of years and honours in 1625, having survived Shakespeare nine years. Florio had married the sister of Daniel the poet, and Ben Jonson presented a copy of *The Fox* to him, with the inscription, “ To his loving father and worthy friend Master John Florio, Ben Jonson seals this testi­mony of his friendship and love.” Daniel writes a poem

of some length in praise of his translation of Montaigne, while other contemporary poets contribute commendatory verses which are prefixed to his other publications. There are substantial reasons for believing that Shakespeare was also one of Florio’s friends, and that during his early years in London he evinced his friendship by yielding for once to the fashion of writing this kind of eulogistic verse. Prefixed to Florio’s *Second Fruits,* Prof. Minto discovered a sonnet so superior and characteristic that he was impressed with the conviction that Shakespeare must have written it. The internal evidence is in favour of this conclusion, while Mr Minto’s critical analysis and com­parison of its thought and diction with Shakespeare’s early work tends strongly to support the reality and value of the discovery. In his next work, produced four years later, Florio claims the sonnet as the work of a friend “ who loved better to be a poet than to be called one,” and vindicates it from the indirect attack of a hostile critic, II. S., who had also disparaged the work in which it appeared. There are other points of connexion between Florio and Shakespeare. The only known volume that certainly belonged to Shakespeare and contains his auto­graph is Florio’s version of Montaigne’s *Essays* in the British Museum ; and critics have from time to time produced evidence to show that Shakespeare must have read it carefully and was well acquainted with its con­tents. Victor Hugo in a powerful critical passage strongly supports this view. The most striking single proof of the point is Gonzalo’s ideal republic in the *Tempest,* which is simply a passage from Florio’s version turned into blank verse. Florio and Shakespeare were both, moreover, intimate personal friends of the young earl of Southampton, who, in harmony with his generous character and strong literary tastes, was the munificent patron of each. Shakespeare, it will be remembered, dedi­cated his *Venus and Adonis* and his *Lucrece* to this young nobleman ; and three years later, in 1598, Florio dedicated the first edition of his Italian dictionary to the earl in terms that almost recall Shakespeare’s words. Shake­speare had said in addressing the earl, “ What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have devoted yours.” And Florio says, “ In truth I ac­knowledge an entire debt, not only of my best knowledge, but of all, yea of more than I know or can to your bounte­ous lordship, most noble, most virtuous, and most honour­able earl of Southampton, in whose pay and patronage I have lived some years, to whom I owe and vow the years I have to live.” Shakespeare was also familiar with Florio’s earlier works, his *First Fruits* and *Second Fruits,* which were simply carefully prepared manuals for the study of Italian, containing an outline of the grammar, a selection of dialogues in parallel columns of Italian and English, and longer extracts from classical Italian writers in prose and verse. We have collected various points of indirect evidence showing Shakespeare’s familiarity with these manuals, but these being numerous and minute cannot be given here. It must suffice to refer in illustra­tion of this point to a single instance—the lines in praise of Venice which Holofernes gives forth with so much unction in *Love’s Labour’s Lost.* The *First Fruits* was published in 1578, and was for some years the most popular manual for the study of Italian. It is the book that Shakespeare would naturally have used in attempting to acquire a knowledge of the language after his arrival in London ; and on finding that the author was the friend of some of his literary associates he would probably have sought his acquaintance and secured his personal help. As Florio was also a French scholar and habitually taught both languages, Shakespeare probably owed to him his knowledge of French as well as of Italian. If the sonnet