Stratford with one of the travelling companies of players which from time to time visited the town. Later biographers have fixed upon Leicester’s men, who were at Stratford in 1587, and have held that Shakespeare remained to the end in the same company, passing with it on Leicester’s death in 1588 under the patronage of Ferdinando, Lord Strange and afterwards earl of Derby, and on Derby’s death in 1594 under that of the lord chamberlain, Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon. This theory perhaps hardly takes sufficient account of the shifting combinations and recombinations of actors, especially during the disastrous plague years of 1592 to 1594. The continuity of Strange’s company with Leicester’s is very disputable, and while the names of many members of Strange’s company in and about 1593 are on record, Shakespeare’s is not amongst them. It is at least possible, as will be seen later, that he had about this time relations with the earl of Pembroke’s men, or with the earl of Sussex’s men, or with both of these organizations.

What is clear is that by the summer of 1592, when he was twenty-eight, he had begun to emerge as a playwright, and had evoked the jealousy of one at least of the group of scholar poets who in recent years had claimed a monopoly of the stage. This was Robert Greene, who, in an invective on behalf of the play-makers against the play-actors which forms part of his *Groats-worth of Wit,* speaks of “ an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide,* supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes fac totum,* is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie.” The play upon Shake- speare’s name and the parody of a line from *Henry VI.* make the reference unmistakable.@@1 The London theatres were closed, first through riots and then through plague, from June 1592 to April 1594, with the exception of about a month at each Christmas during that period ; and the companies were dissolved or driven to the provinces. Even if Shakespeare had been connected with Strange’s men during their London seasons of 1592 and 1593, it does not seem that he travelled with them. Other activities may have been sufficient to occupy the interval. The most important of these was probably an attempt to win a reputation in the world of non-dramatic poetry. *Venus and Adonis* was published about April 1593, and *Lucrece* about May 1594. The poems were printed by Richard Field, in whom Shakespeare would have found an old Stratford acquaintance; and each has a dedication to Henry Wriothesley, earl of South­ampton, a brilliant and accomplished favourite of the court, still in his nonage. A possibly super-subtle criticism discerns an increased warmth in the tone of the later dedication, which is supposed to argue a marked growth of intimacy. The fact of this intimacy is vouched for by the story handed down from Sir William Davenant to Rowe (who published in 1709 the first regular biography of Shakespeare) that Southampton gave Shakespeare a thousand pounds “ to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to.” The date of this generosity is not specified, and there is no known purchase by Shakespeare which can have cost anything like the sum named. The mention of Southampton leads naturally to the most difficult problem which a biographer has to handle, that of the *Sonnets.* But this will be more conveniently taken up at a later point, and it is only necessary here to put on record the probability that the earliest of the sonnets belong to the period now under discussion. There is a surmise, which is not in itself other than plausible, and which has certainly been supported with **a** good deal of ingenious argument, that Shakespeare’s enforced leisure enabled him to make of 1593 a *Wanderjahr,* and in particular that the traces of a visit to northern Italy may clearly be seen in the local colouring of *Lucrece* as compared with *Venus and Adonis,* and in that of the group of plays which may be dated in or about 1594 and 1595 as compared with those that preceded. It must, however, be borne in mind that, while Shakespeare may perfectly well, at this or at some earlier time, have voyaged

to Italy, and possibly Denmark and even Germany as well, there is no direct evidence to rely upon, and that inference from internal evidence is a dangerous guide when a writer of so assimila­tive a temperament as that of Shakespeare is concerned.

From the reopening of the theatres in the summer of 1594 onwards Shakespeare’s status is in many ways clearer. He had certainly become a leading member of the Chamberlain’s company by the following winter, when his name appears for the first and only time in the treasurer of the chamber’s accounts as one of the recipients of payment for their performances at court; and there is every reason to suppose that he continued to act with and write for the same associates to the close of his career. The history of the company may be briefly told. At the death of the lord chamberlain on the 22nd of July 1596, it passed under the protection of his successor, George, 2nd Lord Hunsdon, and once more became “ the Lord Chamberlain’s men ” when he was appointed to that office on the 17th of March 1597. James I. on his accession took this company under his patronage as grooms of the chamber, and during the remainder of Shakespeare’s connexion with the stage they were “ the King’s men.” The records of performances at court show that they were by far the most favoured of the companies, their nearest rivals being the company known during the reign of Elizabeth as “ the Admiral’s,” and afterwards as “ Prince Henry’s men.” From the summer of 1594 to March 1603 they appear to have played almost continuously in London, as the only provincial performances by them which are upon record were during the autumn of 1597, when the London theatres were for a short time closed owing to the interference of some of the players in politics. They travelled again during 1603 when the plague was in London, and during at any rate portions of the summers or autumns of most years thereafter. In 1594 they were playing at Newington Butts, and probably also at the Rose on Bankside, and at the Cross Keys in the city. It is natural to suppose that in later years they used the Theatre in Shoreditch, since this was the property of James Burbage, the father of their principal actor, Richard Burbage. The Theatre was pulled down in 1598, and, after a short interval during which the company may have played at the Curtain, also in Shoreditch, Richard Burbage and hiá brother Cuthbert rehoused them in the Globe on Bankside, built in part out of the materials of the Theatre. Here the profits of the enterprise were divided between the members of the company as such and the owners of the building as “ housekeepers,” and shares in the “ house ’’ were held in joint tenancy by Shake­speare and some of his leading “ fellows.” About 1608 another playhouse became available for the company in the “ private ” or winter house of the Black Friars. This was also the property of the Burbages, but had previously been leased to a compàny of boy players. A somewhat similar arrangement as to profits ■was made.

Shakespeare is reported by Aubrey to have been a good actor, but Adam in *As You Like It,* and the Ghost in *Hamlet* indicate the type of part which he played. \*As a dramatist, however, he was the mainstay of the company for at least some fifteen years, during which Ben Jonson, Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Tourneur also contributed to their repertory. On an average he must have written for them about two plays a year, although his rapidity of production seems to have been greatest during the opening years of the period. There was also no doubt a good deal of rewriting of his own earlier work, and also perhaps, at the beginning, of that of others. Occasionally he may have entered into collaboration, as, for example, at the end of his career, with Fletcher.

In a worldly sense he clearly flourished, and about 1596, if not earlier, he was able to resume relations as a moneyed man with Stratford-on-Avon. There is no evidence to show whether he had visited the town in the interval, or whether he had brought his wife and family to London. His son Hamnet died and was buried at Stratford in 1596. During the last ten years John Shakespeare’s affairs had remained unprosperous. He incurred fresh debt, partly through becoming surety for

@@@1 It is most improbable, however, that the apologetic reference in Chettle's *Kind-hart's Dream* (December 1592) refers to Shakespeare.