but, perhaps, if any thing can extenuate his guilt, we might aſcribe it to the opinions of the age, which, per­haps, as was formerly the caſe in Scotland, might not diſtinguiſh the killing of deer by any mark of diſgrace, or any charge of criminality. One thing at leaſt is certain, that Shakeſpeare himſelf thought that the proſecution which Sir Thomas raiſed againſt him was car­ried on with too great ſeverity ; an opinion which he could not have entertained had this action been at that time viewed in the ſame criminal light as it is at preſent. Shakespeare teſtified his reſentment againſt Sir Thomas, by writing a satirical ballad, which exaſperated him ſo much, that the proceſs was carried on with redoubled violence ; and the young poet, in order to avoid the punishment of the law, was obliged to make his escaρe. This ballad would be conſidered as a curi­ous relict, on account of its being the firſt production of Shakeſpeare ; it would also be intereſting to peruſe a poem which could irritate the baronet to ſo high a degree. Tradition has preferred the firſt ſtanza:

A parliamente member, a juſtice of peace,

At home a poor ſcare-crow, at London an aſſe.

If lowſie is Lucy, as ſome volke miſcalle it,

Then Lucy is lowſie whatever befall it :

He thinks himſelf greate,

Yet an aſſe in his ſtate,

We allowe by his ears, but with aſſes to mate.

If Lucy is lowſie, as ſome volke miſcalle it,

Sing lowſie Lucy whatever befall it.

If the reſt of the ballad was of a piece with this ſtanza, it might aſſiſt us to form ſome opinion of the irritability of the baronet, but will enable us to form no idea of the opening genius of Shakeſpeare.

Thus expelled from his native village, he repaired to London, where be was glad to accept a ſubordinate of­fice in the theatre. It has been ſaid that he was firſt engaged, while the play was acting, in holding the horſes of thoſe who rode to the theatre ; but this ſtory reſts on a ſlender foundation. As his name is found print­ed among thoſe of the other players before ſome old plays, it is probable that he was ſome time employed as an actor ; but we are not informed what characters he played ; we are only told, that the part which he acted best was that of the Ghoſt in Hamlet ; and that he appeared in the character of Adam in As *you like it.* If the names of the actors prefixed to Ben Jonſon’s play of *Every Man in his Humour* were ar­ranged in the ſame order as the perſons repreſented, which is very probable, Shakeſpeare played the part of Old Knowell. We have reaſon therefore to ſuppoſe, as far as we can argue from theſe few facts, that he ge­nerally repreſented old men. See Malone’s Chrono­logy, in his edition of Shakeſpeare.

But though he was not qualified to ſhine as an ac­tor, he was now in the ſituation which could most ef­fectually rouſe thoſe latent ſparks of genius which af­terwards burſt forth with ſo reſplendent a flame. Be­ing well acquainted with the mechanical buſineſs of the theatre and the taſte of the times ; poſſeſſed of a know­ledge of the characters of men reſembling intuition, an imagination that ranged at large through nature, ſelecting the grand, the ſublime, and the beautiful ; a ju­dicious caution, that diſpoſed him to prefer thoſe plots **which had already been found to please ; an uncommon** fluency and force of expreſſion ; he was qualified at once to eclipſe all who had gone before him.

Notwithſtanding the unrivalled genius of Shakeſpeare, moſt of his plots were the invention of others ; which, however, he certainly much improved, if he did not entirely new-model. We are aſſured, that prior to the theatrical compoſitions of Shakeſpeare, dramatic pieces were written on the following ſubjects, viz. King John, King Richard II. and III. King Henry IV. and V. King Henry VIII. King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, Meaſure for Measure, the Merchant of Venice, the Taming of a Shrew, and the Comedy of Errors.

Among his patrons, the earl of Southampton is particularly honoured by him, in the dedication of two poems, Venus and *A* donis, and Lucrece ; in the latter eſpecially, he expreſſed himſelf in ſuch terms aS gives countenance to what is related of that patron’s diſtinguiſhed generoſity to him. In the beginning of king James I.'s reign (if not ſooner) he was one of the principal managers of the playhouſe, and conti­nued in it ſeveral years afterwards; till, having ac­quired ſuch a fortune as ſatisfied his moderate wiſhes and views in life, he quitted the ſtage, and all other buſineſs, and paſſed the remainder of his time in an ho­nourable eaſe, at his native town of Stratford, where he lived in a handſome houſe of his own purchaſing, to which he gave the name of *New Place ;* and he had the good fortune to save it from the flames in the dread­ful fire that conſumed the greateſt part of the town in l614.

In the beginning of the year 1616, he made his will, wherein he teſtified his reſpect to his quondam partners in the theatre : he appointed his youngeſt daughter, jointly with her huſband, his executors, and bequeathed to them the best part of his eſtate, which they came into the posseſſion of not long after. He died on the 23d of April following, being the 53 d year of his age ; and was interred among his anceſtors on the north side of the chancel, in the great church of Stratford, where there is a handſome monument erected for him, inſcribed with the following elegiac diſtich in Latin :

*Judicio Pylium, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,*

*Terra tegit, Populus maeret, Olympus habet.*

In the year 1740, another very noble one was raiſed to his memory, at the public expence, in Weſtminſter-abbey ; an ample contribution for this purpoſe being made upon exhibiting his tragedy of Julius Cæsar, at the theatre-royal in Drury-Lane, April 28th 1738.

Nor muſt we omit mentioning another teſtimony of the veneration paid to his manes by the public in gene­ral, which is, that a mulberry-tree planted upon his eſtate by the hands of this reverend bard, was cut down not many years ago ; and the wood being converted to ſeveral domeſtic uſes, was all eagerly bought at a high price, and each single piece treaſured up by its purcha­ser as a precious memorial of the planter.

The character of Shakeſpeare as a dramatic writer has been often drawn, but perhaps never with more ac­curacy than by the pen of Dr Johnson : “ Shakeſpeare (ſays he) is above all writers, at leaſt above all modern writers, the poet of nature ; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.