a century the honour of his familiar presence, nor the recol­lections of that brilliant literary circle with whom he lived in the metropolis, have yielded much more than such an outline of his history as is oftentimes to be gathered from the penurious records of a grave-stone. That he lived, and that he died, and that he was “ a little lower than the an­gels —these make up pretty nearly the amount of our un­disputed report. It may be doubted indeed whether at this day we are as accurately acquainted with the life of Shak­speare as with that of Chaucer, though divided from each other by an interval of two centuries, and (what should have been more effectual towards oblivion) by the wars of the two roses. And yet the traditional memory of a rural and a syl­van region, such as Warwickshire at that time was, is usually exact as well as tenacious ; and, with respect to Shakspeare in particular, we may presume it to have been full and cir­cumstantial through the generation succeeding to his own, not only from the curiosity, and perhaps something of a scandalous interest, which would pursue the motions of one living so large a part of his life at a distance from his wife, but also from the final reverence and honour which would settle upon the memory of a poet so pre-eminently success­ful ; of one who, in a space of five-and-twenty years, after running a bright career in the capital city of his native land, and challenging notice from the throne, had retired with an ample fortune, created by his personal efforts, and by la­bours purely intellectual.

How are we to account, then, for that deluge, as if from Lethe, which has swept away so entirely the traditional memorials of one so illustrious? Such is the fatality of er­ror which overclouds every question connected with Shak­speare, that two of his principal critics, Steevens and Ma­lone, have endeavoured to solve the difficulty by cutting it with a falsehood. They deny in effect that he *was* illus­trious in the century succeeding to his own, however much he has since become so. We shall first produce their state­ments in their own words, and we shall then briefly review them.

Steevens delivers *his* opinion in the following terms :— “ How little Shakspeare was once read, may be understood from Tate, who, in his dedication to the altered play of King Lear, speaks of the original as an obscure piece, re­commended to his notice by a friend ; and the author of the Tatler, having occasion to quote a few lines out of Macbeth, was content to receive them from Davenant’s alteration of that celebrated drama, in which almost every original beauty is either awkwardly disguised or arbitrarily omitted.” Another critic, who cites this passage from Stee­vens, pursues the hypothesis as follows :—“ In fifty years af­ter his death, Dryden mentions that he was then become *a little obsolete.* In the beginning of the last century, Lord Shaftesbury complains of his *rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit.* It is certain that, for nearly a hundred years after his death, partly owing to the imme­diate revolution and rebellion, and partly to the licentious taste encouraged in Charles IL’s time, and perhaps partly to the incorrect state of his works, he was almost **ENTIRE­LY** Neglected.” This critic then goes on to quote with approbation the opinion of Malone,—“ that if he had been read, admired, studied, and imitated, in the same degree as he is now, the enthusiasm of some one or other of his ad­mirers in the last age would have induced him to make some inquiries concerning the history of his theatrical career, and the anecdotes of his private life.” After which this enlight­ened writer re-affirms and clenches the judgment he has quoted by saying,—“ His admirers, however, *if he had ad­mirers in that age,* possessed no portion of such enthu­siasm.”

It may perhaps be an instructive lesson to young read­ers, if we now show them, by a short sifting of these con­fident dogmatists, how easy it is for a careless or a half-read

man to circulate the most absolute falsehoods under the semblance of truth ; falsehoods which impose upon himself as much as they do upon others. We believe that not one word or illustration is uttered in the sentences cited from these three critics, which is not *virtually* in the very teeth of the truth.

To begin with Mr Nahum Tate:—This poor grub of lite- ratme, if he did really speak of Lear as “ an *obscure* piece, recommended to his notice by a friend,” of which we must be allowed to doubt, was then uttering a conscious false­hood. It happens that Lear was one of the few Shakspearian dramas which had kept the stage unaltered. But it is easy to see a mercenary motive in such an artifice as this. Mr Nahum Tate is not of a class of whom it can be safe to say that they are “ well known they and their desperate tricks are essentially obscure, and good reason he has to exult in the felicity of such obscurity ; for else this same vilest of travesties, Mr Nahum’s Lear, would consecrate his name to everlasting scorn. For himself, he belonged to the age of Dryden rather than of Pope : he “ flourished,” if we can use such a phrase of one who was always wither­ing, about the era of the Revolution ; and his Lear, we be­lieve, was arranged in the year 1682. But the family to which he belongs is abundantly recorded in the Dunciad ; and his own name will be found amongst its catalogues of heroes.

With respect to *the author of the Tntler,* a very differ­ent explanation is requisite. Steevens means the render to understand Addison ; but it does not follow that the particular paper in question was from his pen. Nothing, however, could be more natural than to quote from the common form of the play as then in possession of the stage. It was *there,* beyond a doubt, that a fine gentleman living upon town, and not professing any deep scholastic know­ledge of literature (a light in which we are always to re­gard the writers of the Spectator, Guardian, &c.), would be likely to have learned anything he quoted from Mac­beth. This we say generally of the wτiters in those perio­dical papers ; but, with reference to Addison in particular, it is time to correct the popular notion of his literary cha­racter, or at least to mark it by severer lines of distinc­tion. It is already pretty well known, that Addison had no very intimate acquaintance with the literature of his own country. It is known also, that he did not think such an acquaintance any ways essential to the character of an ele­gant scholar and *litterateur.* Quite enough he found it, and more than enough for the time he had to spare, if he could maintain a tolerable familiarity with the foremost La­tin poets, and a very slender one indeed with the Grecian. *How* slender, we can see in his “ Travels.” Of modern authors, none as yet had been published with notes, com­mentaries, or critical collations of the text ; and, accord­ingly, Addison looked upon all of them, except those few who professed themselves followers in the retinue and equi­page of the ancients, as creatures of a lower race. Boileau, as a mere imitator and propagator of Horace, he read, and probably little else, amongst the French classics. Hence it arose that he took upon himself to speak sneeringly of Tasso. To this, which was a bold act for his timid mind, he was emboldened by the countenance of Boileau. Of the elder Italian authors, such as Ariosto, and, *a fortiori,* Dante, he knew absolutely nothing. Passing to our own literature, it is certain that Addison was profoundly ignorant of Chau­cer and of Spenser. Milton only,—and why? simply be­cause he was a brilliant scholar, and stands like a bridge between the Christian literature and the Pagan,—Addison had read and esteemed. There was also in the very constitu­tion of Milton’s mind, in the majestic regularity and plane­tary solemnity of its *epic* movements, something which he could understand and appreciate : as to the meteoric and incalculable eccentricities of the *dramatic* mind, as it dis-