all. There is not a town in Europe in which opulent men cannot be found that are backward in the payment of their debts. And the probability is, that Master Sadler acted like most people who, when they suppose a man to be going down in the world, feel their respect for him sen­sibly decaying, and think it wise to trample him under foot, provided only in that act of trampling they can squeeze out of him their own individual debt. Like that terrific chorus in Spohr's oratorio of St Paul, “ *stone him to death"* is the cry of the selfish and the illiberal amongst creditors, alike towards the just and the unjust amongst debtors.

It was the wise and beautiful prayer of Agar, “ Give me neither poverty nor riches ;” and, doubtless, for quiet, for peace, and the *latentis semita vitæ,* that is the happiest dis­pensation. But, perhaps, with a view to a school of disci­pline and of moral fortitude, it might be a more salutary prayer, “ Give me riches *and* poverty, and afterwards nei­ther.” For the transitional state between riches and po­verty will teach a lesson both as to the baseness and the goodness of human nature, and will impress that lesson with a searching force, such as no borrowed experience ever can approach. Most probable it is that Shakspeare drew some of his powerful scenes in the Timon of Athens, those which exhibit the vileness of ingratitude and the impas­sioned frenzy of misanthropy, from his personal recollec­tions connected with the case of his own father. Possibly, though a cloud of 270 years now veils it, this very Master Sadler, who was so urgent for his five pounds, and who so little apprehended that he should be called over the coals for it in the Encyclopædia Britannica, may have sate for the portrait of that Lucullus who says of Timon—

Alas, good lord ! a noble gentle­man 'tis, if he would not keep so good a house. Many a tune and often I have dined with him, and told him on’t ; and come again to supper to him, of purpose to have him spend less: and yet he would embrace no counsel, take no warning by my coming. Every man has his fault, and honesty is his ; I have told him on't, but I could never get him from it.

For certain years, perhaps, John Shakspeare moved on in darkness and sorrow :

His familiars from his buried fortunes Slunk all away ; left their false vows with him,

Like empty purses pick'd : and his poor self,

A dedicated beggar to the air,

With his disease of all-shunn’d poverty,

Walk'd, like contempt, alone.

We, however, at this day are chiefly interested in the case as it bears upon the education and youthful happiness of the poet. Now if we suppose that from 1568, the high noon of the family prosperity, to 1578, the first year of their mature embarrassments, one half the interval was passed in stationary sunshine, and the latter half in the gra­dual twilight of declension, it will follow that the young William had completed his tenth year before he heard the first signals of distress ; and for so long a period his edu­cation would probably be conducted on as liberal a scale as the resources of Stratford would allow. Through this earli­est section of his life he would undoubtedly rank as a gen­tleman’s son, possibly as the leader of his class, in Stratford. But what rank he held through the next ten years, or, more generally, what was the standing in society of Shakspeare until he had created a new station for himself by his own exertions in the metropolis, is a question yet unsettled, but which has been debated as keenly as if it had some great dependencies. Upon this we shall observe, that could we by possibility be called to settle beforehand what rank were best for favouring the development of intellectual powers, the question might wear a face of deep practical import­ance ; but when the question is simply as to a matter of fact, what *was* the rank held by a man whose intellectual development bas long ago been completed, this becomes a

mere question of curiosity. The tree has fallen ; it is con­fessedly the noblest of all the forest; and we must there­fore conclude that the soil in which it flourished was either the best possible, or, if not so, that any thing bad in its pro­perties had been disarmed and neutralized by the vital forces of the plant, or by the benignity of nature. If any future Shakspeare were likely to arise, it might be a pro­blem of great interest to agitate, whether the condition of a poor man or of a gentleman were best fitted to nurse and stimulate his faculties. But for the actual Shakspeare, since what he was he was, and since nothing greater can be ima­gined, it is now become a matter of little moment whether his course lay for fifteen or twenty years through the hu­milities of absolute poverty, or through the chequered paths of gentry lying in the shade. Whatever *was,* must, in this case at least, have been the best, since it terminated in pro­ducing Shakspeare ; and thus far we must all be optimists.

Yet still, it will be urged, the curiosity is not illiberal which would seek to ascertain the precise career through which Shakspeare ran. This we readily concede ; and we are anxious ourselves to contribute any thing in our power to the settlement of a point so obscure. What we have wished to protest against is the spirit of partisanship in which this question has too generally been discussed. For, whilst some with a foolish affectation of plebeian sympathies overwhelm us with the insipid commonplaces about birth and ancient descent, as honours containing nothing merito­rious, and rush eagerly into an ostentatious exhibition of all the circumstances which favour the notion of a humble sta­tion and humble connections ; others, with equal forgetful­ness of true dignity, plead with the intemperance and par­tiality of a legal advocate for the pretensions of Shakspeare to the hereditary rank of gentleman. Both parties violate the majesty of the subject. When we are seeking for the sources of the Euphrates or the St Lawrence, we look for no proportions to the mighty volume of waters in that par­ticular summit amongst the chain of mountains which em­bosoms its earliest fountains, nor are we shocked at the obscurity of these fountains. Pursuing the career of Ma­hommed, or of any man who has memorably impressed his own mind or agency upon the revolutions of mankind, we feel solicitude about the circumstances which might sur­round his cradle to be altogether unseasonable and imperti­nent. Whether he were born in a hovel or a palace, whe­ther he passed his infancy in squalid poverty, or hedged around by the glittering spears of body-guards, as mere questions of fact may be interesting ; but, in the light of either accessories or counteragencies to the native majesty of the subject, are trivial and below all philosophic valuation. So with regard to the creator of Lear and Hamlet, of Othel­lo and Macbeth ; to him from whose golden urns the na­tions beyond the far Atlantic, the multitude of the isles, and the generations unborn in Australian climes, even to the realms of the rising sun (the ἀvατoλαι ἡελιoιo), must in every age draw perennial streams of intellectual life, we feel that the little accidents of birth and social condition are so unspeakably below the grandeur of the theme, are so irrele­vant and disproportioned to the real interest at issue, so in­commensurable with any of its relations, that a biographer of Shakspeare at once denounces himself as below his sub­ject if he can entertain such a question as seriously affecting the glory of the poet. In some legends of saints, we find that they were born with a lambent circle or golden aureola about their heads. This angelic coronet shed light alike upon the chambers of a cottage or a palace, upon the gloomy limits of a dungeon or the vast expansion of a cathedral ; but the cottage, the palace, the dungeon, the cathedral, were all equally incapable of adding one ray of colour or one pencil of light to the supernatural halo.

Having therefore thus pointedly guarded ourselves from misconstruction, and consenting to entertain the question