as one in which we, the worshippers of Shakspeare, have an interest of curiosity, but in which he, the object of our wor­ship, has no interest of glory, we proceed to state what ap­pears to us the result of the scanty facts surviving when collated with each other.

By his mother’s side, Shakspeare was an authentic gen­tleman. By his father’s he would have stood in a more dubious position ; but the effect of municipal honours to raise and illustrate an equivocal rank has always been ac­knowledged under the popular tendencies of our English political system. From the sort of lead, therefore, which John Shakspeare took at one time amongst his fellow-towns­men, and from his rank of first magistrate, we may pre­sume that, about the year 1568, he had placed himself at the head of the Stratford community. Afterwards he con­tinued for some years to descend from this altitude ; and the question is, at what point this gradual degradation may be supposed to have settled. Now we shall avow it as our opinion, that the composition of society in Stratford was such that, even had the Shakspeare family maintained their superiority, the main body of their daily associates must still have been found amongst persons below the rank of gentry. The poet must inevitably have mixed chiefly with mechanics and humble tradesmen, for such people composed perhaps the total community. But had there even been a gentry in Stratford, since they would have marked the distinctions of their rank chiefly by greater re­serve of manners, it is probable that, after all, Shakspeare, with his enormity of delight in exhibitions of human na­ture, would have mostly cultivated that class of society in which the feelings are more elementary and simple, in which the thoughts speak a plainer language, and in which the restraints of factitious or conventional decorum are ex­changed for the restraints of mere sexual decency. It is a noticeable fact to all who have looked upon human life with an eye of strict attention, that the abstract image of wo­manhood, in its loveliness, its delicacy, and its modesty, nowhere makes itself more impressive or more advanta­geously felt than in the humblest cottages, because it is there brought into immediate juxtaposition with the grossness of manners and the careless license of language inci­dent to the fathers and brothers of the house. And this is more especially true in a nation of unaffected sexual gal­lantry,@@1 such as the English and the Gothic races in gene­ral ; since, under the immunity which their women enjoy from all servile labours of a coarse or out-of-doors order, by as much lower as they descend in the scale of rank, by so much more do they benefit under the force of contrast with the men of their own level. A young man of that class, however noble in appearance, is somewhat degraded in the eyes of women, by the necessity which his indigence im­poses of working under a master ; but a beautiful young

woman, in the very poorest family, unless she enters upon a life of domestic servitude (in which case her labours are light, suited to her sex, and withdrawn from the public eye), so long in fact as she stays under her father’s roof, is as per­fectly her own mistress and *sui juris* as the daughter of an earl. This personal dignity, brought into stronger relief by the mercenary employments of her male connections, and the feminine gentleness of her voice and manners, exhibit­ed under the same advantages of contrast, oftentimes com­bine to make a young cottage beauty as fascinating an ob­ject as any woman of any station.

Hence we may in part account for the great event of Shakspeare’s early manhood, his premature marriage. It has always been known, or at least traditionally received for a fact, that Shakspeare had married whilst yet a boy ; and that his wife was unaccountably older than himself. In the very earliest biographical sketch of the poet, compiled by Rowe, from materials collected by Betterton the actor, it was stated (and that statement is now ascertained to have been correct), that he had married Anne Hathaway, “ the daughter of a substantial yeoman.” Further than this no­thing was known. But in September 1836 was published a very remarkable document, which gives the assurance of law to the time and fact of this event, yet still, unless col­lated with another record, does nothing to lessen the mys­tery which had previously surrounded its circumstances. This document consists of two parts : the first, and princi­pal, according to the logic of the case, though second ac­cording to the arrangement, being a *license* for the marriage of William Shakspeare with Anne Hathaway, under the condition “ of *once* asking of the bannes of matrimony,” that is, in effect, dispensing with two out of the three cus­tomary askings ; the second or subordinate part of the do­cument being a *bond* entered into by two sureties, viz. Fulke Sandells and John Rychardson, both described as *agricoles* or yeomen, and both marksmen (that is, incapable of writing, and therefore subscribing by means of *marks),* for the pay­ment of forty pounds sterling, in the event of Shakspeare, yet a minor, and incapable of binding himself, failing to fulfil the conditions of the license. In the bond, drawn up in Latin, there is no mention of Shakspeare’s name ; but in the license, which is altogether English, *his* name, of course, stands foremost ; and as it may gratify the reader to see the very words and orthography of the original, we here extract the *operative* part of this document, prefacing only, that the license is attached by way of explanation to the bond. “ The condition of this obligation is suche, that if herafter there shall not appere any lawfull lett or impediment, by reason of any precontract, &c., but that Willm. Shag- spere, one thone ptie” [on the one party), “ and Anne Hathwey of Stratford, in the diocess of Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize matrimony together ; and in the

@@@\* Never was the *case quαm* *videri* in any point more strongly discriminated than in this very point of gallantry to the female sex, as between England and France. In France, the verbal homage to women is so excessive as to betray its real purpose, viz. that it is a mask for secret contempt. In England, little is *said*; but, in the mean time, we allow our sovereign ruler to be a woman ; which in France is impossible. Even that fact is of some importance, but less so than what follows. In every country whatso­ever, if any principle has a deep root in the moral feelings of the people, we may rely upon its showing itself, by a thousand evi­dences, amongst the very lowest ranks, and in their daily intercourse, and their *undress* manners. Now in England there is, and always has been, a manly feeling, most widely diffused, of unwillingness to see labours of a coarse order, or requiring muscular exertions, thrown upon women. Pauperism, amongst other evil effects, has sometimes locally disturbed this predominating sentiment of Englishmen ; but never at any time with such depth as to kill the root of the old hereditary manliness. Sometimes at this day a gentleman, either from carelessness, or from over-ruling force of convenience, or from real defect of gallantry, will allow a female servant to carry his portmanteau for him ; though, after all, that spectacle is a rare one. And everywhere women of all ages engage in the pleasant, nay elegant, labours of the hay field ; but in Great Britain women are never suffered to mow, which is a most ath­letic and exhausting labour, nor to load a cart, nor to drive a plough or hold it. In France, on the other hand, before the Revolution (at which period the pseudo-homage, the lip-honour, was far more ostentatiously professed towards the female sex than at present), a Frenchman of credit, and vouching for his statement by the whole weight of his name and personal responsibility (SI. Simond, now an American citizen), records the following abominable scene as one of no uncommon occurrence : A woman was in some pro­vinces yoked side by side with an ass to the plough or the harrow ; and M. Simond protests that it excited no horror to see the driver distributing his lashes impartially between the woman and her brute yoke-fellow. So much for the wordy pomps of French gallantry. In England, we trust, and we believe, that any man, caught in such a situation, and in such an abuse of his power (supposing the case Otherwise a possible one), would be killed on the spot.