same afterwards remaine and continew like man and wiffe. And, moreover, if the said Willm. Shagspere do not pro­ceed to solemnization of mariadg with the said Anne Hath- wey, without the consent of hir frinds ;—then the said obli­gation” [viz. to pay forty pounds] “ to be voyd and of none effect, or els to stand & abide in full force and vertue.”

What are we to think of this document? Trepidation and anxiety are written upon its face. The parties are not to be married by a special license ; not even by an ordi­nary license ; in that case no proclamation of banns, no public asking at all, would have been requisite. Economi­cal scruples are consulted ; and yet the regular movement of the marriage “ through the bell-ropes”@@1 is disturbed. Econo­my, which retards the marriage, is here evidently in colli­sion with some opposite principle which precipitates it. How is all this to be explained ? Much light is afforded by the date when illustrated by another document. The bond bears date on the 28th day of November in the 25th year of our lady the queen, that is, in 1582. Now the baptism of Shak- speare’s eldest child, Susanna, is registered on the 26th of May in the year following. Suppose, therefore, that his marriage was solemnized on the 1st day of December; it was barely possible that it could be earlier, considering that the sureties, drinking, perhaps, at Worcester throughout the 28th of November, would require the 29th, in so dreary a season, for their return to Stratford ; after which some pre­paration might be requisite to the bride, since the marriage was *not* celebrated at Stratford. Next suppose the birth of Miss Susanna to have occurred, like her father’s, two days before her baptism, viz. on the 24th of May. From December the 1st to May the 24th, both days inclusively, are 175 days ; which, divided by seven, gives precisely twenty-five weeks, that is to say, six months short by one week. Oh, fie, Miss Susanna, you came rather before you were wanted.

Mr Campbpll’s comment upon the affair is, that “ *if* this was the case,” viz. if the baptism were really solemnized on the 26th of May, “ the poet’s first child would *appear* to have been born only six months and eleven days after the bond was entered into.” And he then concludes that, on this assumption, “ Miss Susanna Shakspeare came into the world a little prematurely.” But this is to doubt where there never was any ground for doubting ; the baptism was *certainly* on the 26th of May ; and, in the next place, the calculation of six months and eleven days is sustained by substituting lunar months for calendar, and then only by supposing the marriage to have been celebrated on the very day of subscribing the bond in Worcester, and the baptism to have been coincident with the birth ; of which supposi­tions the latter is improbable, and the former, considering the situation of Worcester, impossible.

Strange it is, that, whilst all biographers have worked with so much zeal upon the most barren dates or most baseless traditions in the great poet’s life, realising in a man­ner the chimeras of Laputa, and endeavouring “ to extract sunbeams from cucumbers,” such a story with regard to such an event, no fiction of village scandal, hut involved in legal documents, a story so significant and so eloquent to the in­telligent, should formerly have been dismissed without no­tice of any kind, and even now, after the discovery of 1836, with nothing beyond a slight conjectural insinuation. For our parts, we should have been the last amongst the biogra­phers to unearth any forgotten scandal, or, after so vast a lapse of time, and when the grave had shut out all but charitable thoughts, to point any moral censures at a simple case of

natural frailty, youthful precipitancy of passion, of all tres­passes the most venial, where the final intentions are honour­able. But in this case there seems to have been something more in motion than passion or the ardour of youth. “I like not,” says Parson Evans (alluding to Falstaff in mas­querade), “ I like not when a woman has a great peard ; I spy a great peard under her muffler.” Neither do we like the spectacle of a mature young woman, five years past her majority, wearing the semblance of having been led astray by a boy who had still two years and a half to run of his minority. Shakspeare himself, looking back on this part of his youthful history from his maturest years, breathes forth pathetic counsels against the errors into which his own in­experience had been ensnared. The disparity of years be­tween himself and his wife he notices in a beautiful scene of the Twelfth Night. The Duke Orsino, observing the sensi­bility which the pretended Cesario had betrayed on hearing some touching old snatches of a love strain, swears that his beardless page must have felt the passion of love, which the other admits. Upon this the dialogue proceeds thus ;

*Duke.* What kind of woman is’t ?

*Viola.* Of your complexion.

*Duke.* She is not worth thee then :—What years ?

*Viola* I’ faith,

About your years, my lord.

*Duke.* Too old, by heaven. *Let still the woman take*

*An* *elder than herself : so wears she to* Aim,

*So sways she level in her husband's. heart.*

For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,

More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,

Than women’s are.

*Viola.* I think it well, my lord.

*Duke* Then *let thy love be younger than thyself,*

*Or thy affection cannot hold the bent ;*

For women are as roses, whose fair flower,

Being once display’d, doth fall that very hour.

These counsels were uttered nearly twenty years after the event in his own life to which they probably look back ; for this play is supposed to have been written in Shak- speare’s thirty-eighth year. And we may read an earnest­ness in pressing the point as to the *inverted* disparity of years, which indicates pretty clearly an appeal to the les­sons of his personal experience. But his other indiscretion, in having yielded so far to passion and opportunity as to crop by prelibation, and befbre they were hallowed, those flowers of paradise which belonged to hie marriage-day ; this he adverts to with even more solemnity of sorrow, and with more pointed energy of moral reproof, in the very last drama which is supposed to have proceeded from his pen, and therefore with the force and sanctity of testamentary counsel. The Tempest is all but ascertained to have been composed in 1611, that is, about five years before the poet’s death; and indeed could not have been composed much earlier ; for the very incident which suggested the basis of the plot, and of the local scene, viz. the shipwreck of Sir George Somers on the Bermudas (which were in consequence denominated the Somers’ Islands), did not occur until the year 1609. In the opening of the fourth act, Prospero for­mally betrothes his daughter to Ferdinand ; and in doing so he pays the prince a well-merited compliment of having “ worthily purchas’d” this rich jewel, by the patience with which, for her sake, he had supported harsh usage, and other painful circumstances of his trial. But, he adds solemnly,

If thou dost break her virgin knot before All sanctimonious ceremonies may With full and holy rite be minister’d ;

@@@, Amongst people of humble rank in England, who only were ever asked in church, until the new-fangled systems of marriage came up within the lost ten or fifteen years, during the currency of the three Sundays on which the banns were proclaimed by tne clergyman from the reading desk, the young couple elect were said jocosely to be “hanging in the bell-ropes alluding perhaps to the joyous peal contingent on the final completion of the marriage.