horror expressed at any disturbance offered to his bones, is not one to which Shakspeare could have attached the slightest weight ; far less could have outraged the sanctities of place and subject, by affixing to any sentiment whatever (and, according to the fiction of the case, his farewell sen­timent) the sanction of a curse.

Filial veneration and piety towards the memory of this great man have led us into a digression that might have been unseasonable in any cause less weighty than one hav­ing for its object to deliver his honoured name from a load of the most brutal malignity. Never more, we hope and venture to believe, will any thoughtless biographer impute to Shakspeare the asinine doggerel with which the uncri­tical blundering of his earliest biographer has caused his name to be dishonoured. We now resume the thread of our biography. The stream of history is centuries in work­ing itself clear of any calumny with which it has once been polluted.

Most readers will be aware of an old story, according to which Shakspeare gained his livelihood for some time after coming to London by holding the horses of those who rode to the play. This legend is as idle as any one of those which we have just exposed. No custom ever existed of riding on horseback to the play. Gentlemen, who rode valuable horses, would assuredly not expose them syste­matically to the injury of standing exposed to cold for two or even four hours ; and persons of inferior rank would not ride on horseback in the town. Besides, had such a cus­tom ever existed, stables (or sheds at least) would soon have arisen to meet the public wants ; and in some of the dramatic sketches of the day, which noticed every fashion as it arose, this would not have been overlooked. The story is traced originally to Sir William Davenant. Betterton the actor, who professed to have received it from him, passed it onwards to Rowe, he to Pope, Pope to Bi­shop Newton the editor **of** Milton, and Newton to Dr Johnson. This pedigree of the fable, however, adds no­thing to its credit, and multiplies the chances of some mis­take. Another fable, not much less absurd, represents Shakspeare as having from the very first been borne upon the establishment of the theatre, and so far contradicts the other fable, but originally in the very humble character of *call-boy* or deputy prompter, whose business it was to sum­mon each performer according to his order of coming upon the stage. This story, however, quite as much as the other, is irreconcileable with the discovery recently made by Mr Collier, that in 1589 Shakspeare was a shareholder in the important property of a principal London theatre. It seems destined that all the undoubted facts of Shak- speare’s life should come to us through the channel of legal documents, which are better evidence even than imperial medals ; whilst, on the other hand, all the fabulous anec­dotes, not having an attorney’s seal to them, seem to have been the fictions of the wonder-maker. The plain pre­sumption from the record of Shakspeare’s situation in 1589, coupled with the fact that his first arrival in London was possibly not until 1587, but according to the earliest ac­count not before 1586, a space of time which leaves but little room for any remarkable changes of situation, seems to be, that, either in requital of services done to the players by the poet’s family, or in consideration of money advanced by his father-in-law, or on account of Shakspeare’s personal accomplishments as an actor, and as an adapter of dramatic works to the stage ; for one of these reasons, or for all of them united, William Shakspeare, about the 23d year of his age, was adopted into the partnership of a respectable his­

trionic company, possessing a first-rate theatre in the metro­polis. If 1586 were the year in which he came up to Lon­don, it seems probable enough that his immediate motive to that step was the increasing distress of his father ; for in that year John Shakspeare resigned the office of alder­man. There is, however, a bare possibility that Shak­speare might have gone to London about the time when he completed his twenty-first year, that is, in the spring of 1585, but not earlier. Nearly two years after the birth of his eldest daughter Susanna, his wife lay in for a second and a *last* time ; but she then brought her husband twins, a son and a daughter. These children were baptized in February of the year 1585; so that Shakspeare’s whole fa­mily of three children were born and baptized two months before he completed his majority. The twins were bap- tizcd by the names of Hamnet and Judith, those being the names of two amongst their sponsors, viz. Mr Sadler and his wife. Hamnet, which is a remarkable name in itself, becomes still more so from its resemblance to the immortal name of Hamlet@@1 the Dane ; it was, however, the real baptismal name of Mr Sadler, a friend of Shakspeare’s, about four­teen years older than himself. Shakspeare’s son must then have been most interesting to his heart, both as a twin child and as his only boy. He died in 1596, when he was about eleven years old. Both daughters survived their father; both married ; both left issue, and thus gave a chance for continuing the succession from the great poet. But all the four grandchildren died without offspring.

Of Shakspeare personally, at least of Shakspeare the man, as distinguished from the author, there remains little more to record. Already in 1592, Greene, in his posthu­mous Groat's-worth of Wit, had expressed the earliest vo­cation of Shakspeare in the following sentence:—“ There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers ; in his own conceit the only *Shakscene* in a country !” This alludes to Shakspeare’s office of re-casting, and even re-composing, dramatic works, so as to fit them for representation ; and Master Greene, it is probable, had suffered in his self-esti­mation, or in his purse, by the alterations in some piece of his own which the duty of Shakspeare to the general inte­rests of the theatre had obliged him to make. In 1591 it has been supposed that Shakspeare wrote his first drama, the Two Gentlemen of Verona; the least characteristi­cally marked of all his plays, and, with the exception of Love’s Labour’s Lost, the least interesting.

From this year, 1591 to that of 1611, are just twenty years, within which space lie the whole dramatic creations of Shakspeare, averaging nearly one for every six months. In 1611 was written the Tempest, which is supposed to have been the last of all Shakspeare’s works. Even on that account, as Mr Campbell feelingly observes, it has “ a sort of sacredness ;” and it is **a** most remarkable fact, and one calculated to make a man superstitious, that in this play the great enchanter Prospero, in whom, “ *as if conscious,”* says Mr Campbell, “ *that this would be his last work,* the poet has been *inspired to typify himself as a* wise, potent, and *benevolent magician,”* of whom, indeed, as of Shakspeare himself, it may be said, that “ within that circle” (the circle of his own art) “ none durst tread but he,” solemnly and for ever renounces his mysterious functions, symbolically breaks his enchanter’s wand, and declares that he will bury his books, his science, and his secrets

Deeper than did ever plummet sound.

Nay, it is even ominous, that in this play, and from the

@@@, And singular enough it is, as well as interesting, that Shakspeare had so entirely superseded to his own ear and memory the name Hamnet by the dramatic name of Hamlet, that in writing his will, he actually mis-spells the name of his friend Sadler, and calls him Hamlet. His son, however, who should have familiarized the true name to his ear, had then been dead for twenty years.