

A painting of a thatched-roof cottage at night. The scene is illuminated by a large, bright yellow moon in a dark blue sky. The cottage has several windows with warm, glowing light emanating from them. In the foreground, a woman in a long, dark dress stands with her back to the viewer, holding an open book. The overall style is expressive and atmospheric, with visible brushstrokes and a rich color palette of blues, yellows, and dark tones.

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**FOLK-LORE OF
SHAKESPEARE**

Thomas Firminger Thiselton-Dyer

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THOMAS FIRMINGER THISELTON-DYER



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Preface

It would be difficult to overestimate the value which must be attached to the plays of Shakespeare in connection with the social life of the Elizabethan age. Possessed of a rich treasury of knowledge of a most varied kind, much of which he may be said to have picked up almost intuitively, he embellished his writings with a choice store of illustrations descriptive of the period in which he lived. Apart, too, from his copious references to the manners and customs of the time, he seems to have had not only a wide knowledge of many technical subjects, but, also, an intimate acquaintance with the folk-lore of bygone days. How far this was the case may be gathered from the following pages, in which are collected, and grouped together, as far as arrangement would permit, the various subjects relating to this interesting and popular branch of our domestic history. It only remains for me to add that the Edition of the poet's plays made use of is the "Globe," published by Messrs Macmillan.

T. F. THISELTON DYER.

August, 1883.

1. Fairies

The wealth of Shakespeare's luxuriant imagination and glowing language seems to have been poured forth in the graphic accounts which he has given us of the fairy tribe. Indeed, the profusion of poetic imagery with which he has so richly clad his fairy characters is unrivalled, and the "Midsummer Night's Dream" holds a unique position in so far as it contains the finest modern artistic realisation of the fairy kingdom. Mr Dowden in his *Shakspeare Primer* (1877, pp. 71, 72) justly remarks: - "As the two extremes of exquisite delicacy, of dainty elegance, and, on the other hand, of thick-witted grossness and clumsiness, stand the fairy tribe, and the group of Athenian handicraftsmen. The world of the poet's dream includes the two—a Titania, and a Bottom the weaver—and can bring them into grotesque conjunction. No such fairy poetry existed anywhere in English literature before Shakspeare. The tiny elves, to whom a cowslip is tall, for whom the third part of a minute is an important division of time, have a miniature perfection which is charming. They delight in all beautiful and dainty things, and war with things that creep and things that fly, if they be un-comely; their lives are gay with fine frolic and delicate revelry." Puck, the jester of fairyland, stands apart from the rest, the recognisable "lob of spirits," a rough, "fawn-faced, shock-pated little fellow, dainty-limbed shapes around him." Judging, then, from the elaborate account which the poet has bequeathed us of the fairies, it is evident that the subject was one in which he took a special interest. Indeed, the graphic pictures he has handed down to us of—

"Elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves;
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot,
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demy-puppets that
By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make
Whereof the ewe not bites," &c.,

show how intimately he was acquainted with the history of these little people, and what a complete knowledge he possessed of the superstitious fancies which had clustered round them. In Shakespeare's day, too, it must be remembered, fairies were much in fashion; and, as Johnson remarks, common tradition had made them familiar. It has also been observed that well acquainted, from the rural habits of his early life, with the notions of the peasantry respecting these beings, he saw that they were capable of being applied to a production of a species of the wonderful. Hence, as Mr Halliwell Phillipps¹ has so aptly written, "he founded his elfin world on the prettiest of the people's traditions, and has clothed it in the ever-living flowers of his own exuberant fancy." Referring to the fairy mythology in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," it is described by Mr Keightley² as an attempt to blend "the elves of the village with the fays of romance. His fairies agree with the former in their diminutive stature—diminished, indeed, to dimensions inappreciable by village gossips—in their fondness for dancing, their love of cleanliness, and their child-abstracting propensities. Like the fays, they form a community, ruled over by the princely Oberon and the fair Titania. There is a court and chivalry; Oberon would have the queen's sweet changeling to be a "knight of his train to trace the forest wild." Like earthly monarchs, he has his jester, "the shrewd and knavish sprite called Robin Goodfellow."

¹ "Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" 1845, p. xiii.

² "Fairy Mythology," p. 325.

Of the fairy characters mentioned by Shakespeare may be mentioned Oberon, king of fairyland, and Titania his queen. They are represented as keeping rival courts in consequence of a quarrel, the cause of which is thus told by Puck ("Midsummer Night's Dream," ii. I):—

"The king doth keep his revels here to-night:
Take heed the queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy;
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen," &c.

Oberon first appears in the old French romance of "Huon de Bourdeaux," and is identical with Elberich, the dwarf king of the German story of Otnit in the Heldenbuch. The name Elberich, or, as it appears in the "Nibelungenlied," Albrich, was changed, in passing into French, first into Auberich, then into Auberon, and finally became our Oberon. He is introduced by Spenser in the "Fairy Queen" (Book ii., cant. i., st. 6), where he describes Sir Guyon:—

"Well could he tournay, and in lists debate,
And knighthood tooke of good Sir Huon's hand,
When with King Oberon he came to faery land."

And in the 10th canto of the same book (stanza 75) he is the allegorical representative of Henry VIII. The wise Elficles left two sons,

"of which faire Elferon,
The eldest brother, did untimely dy;
Whose emptie place the mightie Oberon
Doubly supplide, in spousall and dominion."

"Oboram, King of Fayeries," is one of the characters in Greene's "James the Fourth."³

The name Titania for the queen of the fairies appears to have been the invention of Shakespeare, for, as Mr Ritson⁴ remarks, she is not "so called by any other writer." Why, however, the poet designated her by this title, presents, according to Mr Keightley,⁵ no difficulty - "It was," he says, "the belief of those days that the fairies were the same as the classic nymphs, the attendants of Diana. The Fairy Queen was therefore the same as Diana whom Ovid (Met. iii. 173) styles Titania." In Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale," Pluto is the King of Faerie, and his queen, Proserpina, "who danced and sang about the well under the laurel in January's garden."⁶

³ Aldis Wright's "Midsummer Night's Dream," 1877, Preface, pp. xv., xvi.; Ritson's "Fairy Mythology," 1875, pp. 22, 23.

⁴ Essay on Fairies in "Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare," p. 23.

⁵ "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 325.

⁶ Notes to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by Aldis Wright, 1877. Preface, p. xvi.

In “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4) she is known by the more familiar appellation, Queen Mab. “I dream’d a dream tonight,” says Romeo, whereupon Mercutio replies, in that well-known famous passage—

“O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you”

—this being the earliest instance in which Mab is used to designate the fairy queen. Mr Thoms ⁷thinks that the origin of this name is to be found in the Celtic, and that it contains a distinct allusion to the diminutive form of the elfin sovereign. *Mab*, both in Welsh and in the kindred dialects of Brittany, signifies a child or infant, and hence it is a befitting epithet to one who

“Comes

In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman.”

Mr Keightley suggests that Mab may be a contraction of Habundia, who, Heywood says, ruled over the fairies; and another derivation is from Mabel, of which Mab is an abbreviation.

Amongst the references to Queen Mab, we may mention Drayton’s “Nymphidia”—

“Hence Oberon, him sport to make,
(Their rest when weary mortals take,

And none but only fairies wake),
Descendeth for his pleasure:
And Mab, his merry queen, by night
Bestrides young folks that lie upright,” etc.

Ben Jonson, in his “Entertainment of the Queen and Prince at Althrope,” in 1603, describes to come “tripping up the lawn a bevy of fairies, attending on Mab, their Queen, who falling into an artificial ring that there was cut in the path, began to dance around.” In the same masque the queen is thus characterised by a satyr—

“This is Mab, the mistress fairy,
That doth nightly rob the dairy,
And can help or hurt the churning
As she please, without discerning,” &c.

Like Puck, Shakespeare has invested Queen Mab with mischievous properties, which “identify her with the night of hag of popular superstition,” and she is represented as

“Platting the manes of horses in the night.”

The merry Puck, who is so prominent an actor in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” is the mischief-loving sprite, the jester of the fairy court, whose characteristics are roguery and sportiveness. In his description of him, Shakespeare, as Mr Thoms points out, “has embodied almost every attribute with which the imagination of the people has invested the fairy race; and has neither omitted one trait necessary to give brilliancy and distinctness to the likeness, nor sought to heighten its effect by the slightest exaggeration. For, carefully and elaborately as he has finished the picture, he has not in it invested the “Lob of Spirits” with one gift or quality which the popular voice of the age was not unanimous in bestowing upon him.” Thus (ii. 1) the fairy says—

⁷ “Three Notelets on Shakespeare,” pp. 100-107.

“Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call’d Robin Goodfellow: are you not he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern

And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you and Sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are you not he?”

The name “Puck” was formerly applied to the whole race of fairies, and not to any individual sprite—puck, or pouke, being an old word for devil, in which sense it is used in the Vision of Piers Ploughman—

“Out of the poukes pondfold
No maynprise may us feeche.”

The Icelandic *puki* is the same word, and in Friesland and Jutland the domestic spirit is called Puk by the peasantry. In Devonshire, Piskey is the name for a fairy, with which we may compare the Cornish Pixey. In Worcestershire, too, we read how the peasantry are occasionally “poake-ledden,” that is, misled by a mischievous spirit called *poake*. And, according to Grose’s “Provincial Glossary,” in Hampshire they give the name of Colt-pixey to a supposed spirit or fairy, which, in the shape of a horse, neighs, and misleads horses into bogs. The Irish, again, have their Pooka,⁸ and the Welsh their Pwcca—both words derived from Pouke or Puck. Mr Keightley⁹ thinks, also, that the Scottish *pawkey*, sly, knowing, may belong to the same list of words. It is evident, then, that the term Puck was in bygone years extensively applied to the fairy-race, an appellation still found in the west of England. Referring to its use in Wales, there is a Welsh tradition to the effect that Shakespeare received his knowledge of the Cambrian fairies from his friend Richard Price, son of Sir John Price, of the Priory of Brecon. It is even claimed that Cwm Pwcca, or Puck Valley, a part of the romantic glen of the Clydach, in Breconshire, is the original scene of the “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”¹⁰

Another of Puck’s names was Robin Goodfellow, and one of the most valuable illustrations we have of the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” is a black-letter tract published in London, 1628, under the title of “Robin Goodfellow: His Mad Pranks, and Merry Jests,” full of honest mirth, and is a fit medicine for melancholy.”¹¹ Mr Halliwell Phillipps,¹² speaking of Robin Goodfellow, says, “there can be no doubt that in the time of Shakespeare the fairies held a more prominent position in our popular literature than can be now concluded from the pieces on the subject that have descended to us.” The author of “Tarlton’s “News out of Purgatory,” printed in 1590, assures us that Robin Goodfellow was “famosed in every old wives chronicle for his mad merry pranks;” and we learn from Henslowe’s Diary that Chettle was the writer of a drama on the adventures of that “merry wanderer of the night.” These have disappeared;

⁸ See Croker’s “Fairy Legends of South of Ireland,” 1862, p. 135.

⁹ “Fairy Mythology,” 1878, p. 316.

¹⁰ Wirt Sikes’ “British Goblins,” 1880, p. 20.

¹¹ This is reprinted in Hazlitt’s “Fairy Tales, Legends, and Romances illustrating Shakespeare and other English Writers,” 1875, p. 193.

¹² “Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of the Midsummer Night’s Dream,” printed for the Shakespeare Society, p. viii.

and time has dealt so harshly with the memory of poor Robin, that we might almost imagine his spirit was still leading us astray over massive volumes of antiquity in a delusive search after documents for ever lost; or rather, perhaps, it is his punishment for the useless journeys he has given our ancestors, misleading night-wanderers, “and laughing at their harm.”¹³ He is mentioned by Drayton in his “Nymphidia”—

“He meeteth Puck, which most men call
Hob-goblin, and on him doth fall,” &c.

“hob being the familiar or diminutive form of Robert and Robin, so that Hobgoblin is equivalent to Robin the Goblin, *i.e.*, Robin Goodfellow.”¹⁴ Burton, in his “Anatomy of Melancholy,” alludes to him thus, “A bigger kinde there is of them, called with us hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows, that would, in superstitious times grinde come for a mess of milk, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery work.” Under his name of Robin Goodfellow, Puck is well characterized in Jonson’s “Masque of Love Restored.”¹⁵

Another epithet applied to Puck is “Lob,” as in the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1), where he is addressed by the fairy as—

“Thou Lob of spirits.”¹⁶

With this we may compare the “lubber-fiend” of Milton, and the following in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Knight of the Burning Pestle (iii. 4):” “There is a pretty tale of a witch that had the devil’s mark about her, that had a giant to be her son, that was called Lob-lye-by-the-Fire.” Grimm¹⁷ mentions a spirit, named the “Good Lubber,” to whom the bones of animals used to be offered at Mansfeld in Germany. Once more, the phrase of “being in,” or “getting into Lob’s pound,” is easy of explanation, presuming Lob to be a fairy epithet—the term being equivalent to Poake-ledden or Pixy-led.¹⁸ In “Hudibras,” this term is employed as a name for the stocks in which the knight puts Crowdero—

“Crowdero, whom in irons bound,
Thou basely threw’st into Lob’s pound.”

It occurs, also, in Massinger’s “Duke of Milan” (iii. 2), where it means behind the arras.”

“Who forc’d the gentleman, to save her credit,
To marry her, and say he was the party
Found in Lob’s pound.”

The allusion by Shakespeare to the “Will-o’-the-Wisp,” where he speaks of Puck as “sometime a fire,” is noticed elsewhere, this being one of the forms under which this fairy was supposed to play his midnight pranks.

Referring, in the next place, to the several names of Shakespeare’s fairies, we may quote from “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 3), where Mrs Page speaks of “urchins, ouphes, and fairies”—urchin having been an appellation for one class of fairies. In the “Maydes Metamorphosis” of Lylie (1600), we find fairies, elves, and urchins separately accommodated with dances for their use. The following is the *urchin’s* dance:—

¹³ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 3849, ii. pp. 508–512.

¹⁴ Thorns’ “Three Notelets on Shakespeare,” p. 88.

¹⁵ See Nares’ Glossary, ii. p. 695.

¹⁶ Mr Dyce considers that lob is descriptive of the contrast between Puck’s square figure and the airy shapes of the other fairies.

¹⁷ “Deutsche Mythologie,” p. 492.

¹⁸ See Keightley’s “Fairy Mythology,” pp. 318, 319.

“By the moone we sport and play,
 With the night begins our day;
 As we frisk the dew doth fall,
 Trip it, little urchins all, Lightly as the little bee,
 Two by two, and three by three,
 And about goe wee, goe wee.”

In the “Tempest” (i. 2), their actions are also limited to the night.

”Urchins
 Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
 All exercise on thee.”

The children employed to torment Falstaff in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 4), were to be dressed in these fairy shapes.

Mr Douce regards the word urchin, when used to designate a fairy, of Celtic origin, with which view Mr Thoms¹⁹ compares the *urisks* of Highland fairies.

The term “ouphe,” according to Grimm, is only another form of the cognate *elf*, which corresponds with the Middle High German *ulf*, in the plural *ulve*. He further proves the identity of this *ulp* with *alp*, and with our English *elf*, from a Swedish song published by Asdwardson, in his “Collection of Swedish Ballads,” in one version of which the elfin king is called Herr *Elfver*, and in the second Herr *Ulfver*.

The name *elf*, which is frequently used by Shakespeare, is the same as the Anglo-Saxon *alf*, the old High German and the middle High German *alp*. “Fairies and elvs,” says Tollet, “are frequently mentioned together in the poets without any distinction of character that I can recollect.”

The other fairies, Peas-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard-seed, probably owe their appellations to the poet himself.

How fully Shakespeare has described the characteristics of the fairy tribe, besides giving a detailed account of their habits and doings may be gathered from the following pages, in which we have briefly enumerated the various items of fairy lore as scattered through the poet’s writings.

Beauty, then, united with power, was one of the popular characteristics of the fairy tribe. Such was that of the “Fairy Queen” of Spenser, and of Titania in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” In “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 8), Antony, on seeing Cleopatra enter, says to Scarus—

“To this great fairy I’ll commend thy acts,
 Make her thanks bless thee.”

In “Cymbeline” (iii. 6), when the two brothers find Imogen in their cave, Belarius exclaims:—

“But that it eats our victuals, I should think
 Here was a fairy.”²⁰

And he then adds—

¹⁹ “Three Notelets on Shakespeare,” pp. 79–82.

²⁰ Showing, as Mr Ritson says, that they never ate.

“By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not,
An earthly paragon! behold diviness
No elder than a boy.”

The fairies, as represented in many of our old legends and folk-tales, are generally noticeable for their beauty, the same being the case with all their surroundings. As Sir Walter Scott²¹ too says, “Their pageants and court entertainments comprehended all that the imagination could conceive of what were accounted gallant and splendid. At their processions they paraded more beautiful steeds than those of mere earthly parentage. The hawks and hounds which they employed in their chase were of the first race. At their daily banquets, the board was set forth with a splendour which the proudest kings of the earth dared not aspire to, and the hall of their dancers echoed to the most exquisite music.”

Mr Douce²² quotes from the romance of “Lancelot of the Lake,” where the author, speaking of the days of King Arthur, says, “En celui temps estoient appellees faees toutes selles qui sentre-mettoient denchantemens et de charmes, et moult en estoit pour lors principalement en la Grande Bretagne, et savoient la force et la vertu des paroles, des pierres, et des herbes, parquoy elles estoient tenues en jeunesse et en beaulte, et en grandes richesses comme elles devoisoient.”

“This perpetual youth and beauty,” he adds, “cannot well be separated from a state of immortality;” another characteristic ascribed to the fairy race. It is probably alluded to by Titania in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1):—

“The human mortals want their winter here.”

And further on (ii. 1), when speaking of the changeling’s mother, she says:—

“But she, being mortal, of that boy did die.”

Again, a fairy addresses Bottom the weaver (iii. 1):—

“Hail, Mortal!”

—an indication that she was not so herself. The very fact, indeed, that fairies “call themselves *spirits*, ghosts, or shadows, seems to be a proof of their immortality.” Thus Puck styles Oberon “king of shadows,” and this monarch asserts of himself and his subjects—

“But we are spirits of another sort.”

Fletcher in the “Faithful Shepherdess” describes (i. 2)—

“A virtuous well, about whose flow’ry banks
The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds,
By the pale moon-shine, dipping oftentimes
Their stolen children, so to make them free
From dying flesh, and dull mortality.”

Ariosto in his “Orlando Furioso” (Book xliii. stanza 98) says—

“I am a fayrie, and to make you know,
To be a fayrie what it doth import,
We cannot dye, how old so ear we grow.

²¹ “Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft,” 1831, p. 121.

²² “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 115.

Of paines and harmes of ev'rie other sort
We taste, onelie no death we nature ow."

An important feature of the fairy race was their power of vanishing at will, and of assuming various forms. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Oberon says—

"I am invisible, and I will
Overhear their conference."

Puck relates how he was in the habit of taking all kinds of outlandish forms; and in the "Tempest," Shakespeare has bequeathed to us a graphic account of Ariel's eccentricities. "Besides," says Mr Spalding,²³ "appearing in his natural shape, and dividing into flames, and behaving in such a manner as to cause young Ferdinand to leap into the sea, crying, 'Hell is empty, and all the devils are here!' he assumes the forms of a water nymph (i. 2), a harpy (iii. 3), and also the Goddess Ceres (iv. 1), while the strange shapes, masquers, and even the hounds that hunt and worry the would-be king and viceroys of the island, are Ariel's 'meaner fellows.'" Poor Caliban complains of Prospero's spirits (ii. 2),—

"For every trifle are they set upon me;
Sometime like apes that mow and chatter at me
And after bite me, then like hedgehogs which
Lie tumbling in my bare-foot way and mount
Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I
All wound with adders who with cloven tongues
Do hiss me into madness."

That fairies are sometimes exceedingly diminutive is fully shewn by Shakespeare, who gives several instances of this peculiarity. Thus Queen Mab in "Romeo and Juliet" to which passage we have already had occasion to allude (i. 4) is said to come

"In shape no bigger than an agate stone²⁴
On the fore-finger of an alderman."

And Puck tells us, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1), that when Oberon and Titania meet,—

"They do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there."

Further on (ii. 2) the duties imposed by Titania upon her train point to their tiny character—

"Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence;
Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds,
Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings,
To make my small elves coats."

And when enamoured of Bottom, she directs her elves that they should—

"Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes;
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,

²³ "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 50.

²⁴ Agate was used metaphorically for a very diminutive person, in allusion to the small figures cut in agate for rings. In 2 Henry IV. (i. 2) Falstaff says:—"I was never manned with an agate till now; but I will inset you neither in gold nor silver, but in vile apparel, and send you back again to your master, for a jewel." In "Much Ado About Nothing" (iii. 1) Hero speaks of a man as being "low, an agate very vilely cut."

With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
 The honey bags steal from the humble bees,
 And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs
 And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
 To have my love to bed and to arise
 And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
 To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes."

We may compare, too, Ariel's well-known song in the "Tempest" (v. 1)—

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
 In a cowslip's bell I lie;
 There I couch when owls do cry,
 On the bat's back I do fly
 After summer merrily,
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

Again, from the following passage in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 4) where Mrs Page, after conferring with her husband, suggests that—

"Nan Page my daughter and my little son
 And three or four more of their growth we'll dress
 Like urchins, ouches and fairies, green, and white,
 With rounds of waxen tapers on their heads,
 And rattles in their hands."

it is evident that in Shakespeare's day fairies were supposed to be of the size of children. The notion of their diminutiveness, too, it appears was not confined to this country,²⁵ but existed in Denmark,²⁶ for in the ballad of Eline of Villenskov we read—

"Out then spake the smallest Troid;
 No bigger than an ant;—
 Oh! here is come a christian man,
 His schemes I'll sure prevent."

Again, various stories are current in Germany descriptive of the fairy dwarfs; one of the most noted being that relating to Elberich, who aided the emperor Otnit to gain the daughter of the Paynim Soldan of Syria.²⁷

The haunts of the fairies on earth are generally supposed to be the most romantic and rural that can be selected; such a spot being the place of Titania's repose described by Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1)—

"A bank where the wild thyme blows,
 Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
 With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
 Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;

²⁵ See Grimm's "Deutsche Mythologie."

²⁶ Thoms' "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," 1865, pp. 38, 39.

²⁷ See Keightley's "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 208.

And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.”

Titania also tells how the fairy race meet—

“On hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea.”

In the “*Tempest*” (v. 1), we have the following beautiful invocation by Prospero:—

“Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot,
Do chase the ebbing Neptune and do fly him
When he comes back - “

Their haunts, however, varied in different localities, but their favourite abode was in the interior of conical green hills, on the slopes of which they danced by moonlight.²⁸ Milton in the “*Paradise Lost*” (Book i.) speaks of—

“Fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels, by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course, they, on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.”

The Irish fairies occasionally inhabited the ancient burial-places known as tumuli or barrows, whilst some of the Scottish fairies took up their abode under the “door-stane” or threshold of some particular house, to the inmates of which they administered good offices.²⁹

The so-called fairy-rings in old pastures³⁰—little circles of a brighter green, within which it is supposed the fairies dance by night—are now known to result from the outspreading propagation of a particular mushroom, the fairy-ringed fungus, by which the ground is manured for a richer following vegetation. An immense deal of legendary lore, however, has clustered round this curious phenomenon, popular superstition attributing it to the merry roundelays of the moonlight fairies³¹. In the “*Tempest*” (v. 1) Prospero invokes the fairies as the “demi-puppets” that

“By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you, whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms.”

In “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (ii. 1), the fairy says—

“I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon’s sphere;

²⁸ See also Thorpe’s “*Northern Mythology*,” 1852, iii. p. 32, &c.

²⁹ Gunyon’s “*Illustrations of Scottish History, Life, and Superstitions*,” p. 299.

³⁰ Chambers’s “*Book of Days*,” i. p. 671.

³¹ Amongst the various conjectures as to the cause of these verdant circles, some have ascribed them to lightning; others maintained that they are occasioned by ants. See Miss Baker’s “*Northamptonshire Glossary*,” i. p. 218; Brand’s “*Pop. Antiq.*,” 1849, ii. pp. 480–483, and also the “*Phytologist*,” 1862, pp. 236–8.

And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.”

Again in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), Mistress Quickly says

“And nightly, meadow-fairies, look, you sing
Like to the Garter’s compass, in a ring;
The expressure that it bears, green let it be,
More fertile-fresh than all the field to see.”

And once in “Macbeth” (v. 1), Hecate says:—

“Like elves and fairies in a ring.”

Drayton in his “Nymphidia” (l. 69–72) mentions this superstition:—

“And in their courses make that round,
In meadows and in marshes found,
Of them so called the fayrie ground,
Of which they have the keeping.”

Cowley, too, in his “Complaint,” says:—

“Where once such fairies dance, no grass does ever grow.”

And again, in his ode upon Dr Harvey—

“And dance, like fairies, a fantastic round.”

Pluquet in his “Contes Populaires de Bayeux,” tells us that the fairy rings, called by the peasants of Normandy “Cercles des Fées,” are said to be the work of fairies.

Amongst the numerous superstitions which have clustered round the fairy rings, we are told that when damsels of old gathered the May dew on the grass, which they made use of to improve their complexions, they left undisturbed such of it as they perceived on the fairy-rings, apprehensive that the fairies should in revenge destroy their beauty. Nor was it considered safe to put the foot within the rings, lest they should be liable to the fairies’ power.³² The “Athenian Oracle” (i. 397) mentions a popular belief that “if a house be built upon the ground where fairy rings are, whoever shall inhabit therein does wonderfully prosper.”

Speaking of their dress, we are told that they constantly wore green vests, unless they had some reason for changing their attire.³³ In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 4) they are spoken of as:—

“Urchins, ouphes and fairies, green and white.”

And further on (v. 4):—

“Fairies, black, grey, green, and white.”

The fairies of the moors were often clad in heathbrown or lichen-dyed garments, whence the epithet of “Elfingrey.”

The legends of most countries are unanimous in ascribing to the fairies an inordinate love of music; such harmonious sounds as those which Caliban depicts in the “Tempest” (iii. 2) being generally ascribed to them:—

³² Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 112.

³³ Ritson’s “Fairy Mythology,” 1878, pp. 26, 27.

“The isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again.”

In the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 3), when Titania is desirous of taking a nap, she says to her attendants:—

“Come, now a roundel, and a fairy song.”

And further on (iii. 1) she tells Bottom:—

“I’ll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
 And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
 And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.”

The author of “Round About Our Coal Fire”³⁴tells us that “they had fine musick always among themselves, and danced in a moonshiny night, around, or in, a ring.”

They were equally fond of dancing, and we are told how they meet—

“To dance their ringlets to the whistling wind;”

and in the “Maydes’ Metamorphosis” of Lylie, the fairies, as they dance, sing—

“Round about, round about, in a fine ring a,
 Thus we dance, thus we dance, and thus we sing a
 Trip and go, to and fro, over this green a,
 All about, in and out, for our brave queen a,” &c.

As Mr Thorns says in his “Three Notelets on Shakespeare” (1865. pp. 40–1), “the writings of Shakespeare abound in graphic notices of these fairy revels, couched in the highest strains of poetry; and a comparison of these with some of the popular legends which the industry of Continental antiquaries has preserved, will show us clearly that these delightful sketches of elfin enjoyment, have been drawn by a hand as faithful as it is masterly.”

It would seem that the fairies disliked irreligious people, and so in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), the mock fairies are said to chastise unchaste persons, and those who do not say their prayers. This coincides with what Lilly in his “Life and Times” says: “Fairies love a strict diet and upright life; fervent prayers unto God conduce much to the assistance of those who are curious hereways,” *i.e.*, who wish to cultivate an acquaintance with them.

Again, fairies are generally represented as great lovers and patrons of cleanliness and propriety, for the observance of which they were frequently said to reward good servants, by dropping money into their shoes in the night; and on the other hand, they were reported to punish most severely the sluts and slovenly, by pinching them black and blue.³⁵Thus, in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. i.), Puck says:—

“I am sent with broom before,
 To sweep the dust behind the door.”

In “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), Pistol, speaking of the mock fairy queen, says:—

³⁴ Quoted by Brand, “Pop. Antiq.,” ii. p. 481.

³⁵ Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. p. 483.

“Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery.”

and the fairies who haunt the towers of Windsor are enjoined:—

”—About, about,
 Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out:
 Strew good luck, ouphes, on every sacred room:

The several chairs of order look you scour
 With juice of balm and every precious flower.”

In Ben Jonson’s ballad of “Robin Goodfellow,”³⁶ we have a further illustration of this notion

“When house or hearth doth sluttish lie,
 I pinch the maidens black and blue,
 The bed clothes from the bed pull I,
 And lay them naked all to view.
 ’Twixt sleep and wake
 I do them take,
 And on the key-cold floor them throw;
 If out they cry,
 Then forth I fly,
 And loudly laugh I, ho, ho, ho!”

In “Round about our Coal Fire,” we find the following passage bearing on the subject: -

“When the master and mistress were laid on the pillows, the men and maids, if they had a game at romps, and blundered up stairs, or jumbled a chair, the next morning every one would swear ‘twas the fairies, and that they heard them stamping up and down stairs all night, crying ‘Waters lock’d, waters lock’d!’ when there was no water in every pail in the kitchen.”
 Herrick, too, in his “Hesperides” speaks of this superstition:—

“If ye will with Mab find grace,
 Set each platter in his place;
 Rake the fire up and set
 Water in, ere sun be set,
 Wash your pales and cleanse your dairies,
 Sluts are loathesome to the fairies:
 Sweep your house; who doth not so,
 Mab will pinch her by the toe.”

While the belief in the power of fairies existed, they were supposed to perform much good service to mankind. Thus in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), Oberon says:—

“With this field-dew consecrate,
 Every fairy take his gait;
 And each several chamber bless,
 Through this palace, with secret peace;
 And the owner of it blest
 Ever shall in safety rest.”

³⁶ Halliwell-Phillipps’s “Illustrations of Fairy Mythology,” p. 167; see Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” pp. 122–123.

the object of their blessing being to bring peace upon the house of Theseus. Mr Douce³⁷ remarks, that the great influence which the belief in fairies had on the popular mind, “gave so much offence to the holy monks and friars, that they determined to exert all their power to expel these imaginary beings from the minds of the people, by taking the office of the fairies’ benedictions entirely into their own hands, a proof of which we have in Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath”:

“I speke of many hundred yeres ago;
But now can no man see non elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of limitoures and other holy freres

That serchen every land and every streme,
As thikke as motes in the sonne beme,
Blissing halles, chambres, kichenes, and boures,
Citees and burghes, castles highe and toures,
Thropes and bernes, shepenes and dairies,
This maketh that ther ben no faeries:
For ther as wont to walken was an elf
Ther walketh now the limitour himself.”

Macbeth, too, (v. 8) in his encounter with Macduff, says:—

“I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born.”

In the days of chivalry, the champion’s arms were ceremoniously blessed, each taking an oath that he used no charmed weapon. In Spenser’s “Faerie Queene” (Book i., canto 4) we read:—

“He bears a charmed shield,
And eke enchanted arms, that none can pierce.”

Fairies were amazingly expeditious in their journeys. Thus, Puck goes “swifter than arrow from the Tartar’s bow,” and he answers Oberon in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” who was about to send him on a secret expedition:—

“I’ll put a girdle round about the earth
In forty minutes.”

Again, the same fairy addresses him—

“Fairy king, attend, and mark:
I do hear the morning lark.”
Oberon. Then, my queen, in silence sad,
Trip we after the night’s shade:
We the globe can compass soon,
Swifter than the wandering moon.”

Once more, Puck says—

“My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
For night’s swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora’s harbinger,” &c.

³⁷ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” pp. 126–127.

It was fatal, if we may believe Falstaff in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), to speak to a fairy - “They are fairies; he that speaks to them shall die.”

Fairies are accustomed to enrich their favourites; and in “A Winter’s Tale” (iii. 3) the shepherd says: - “It was told me I should be rich by the fairies;”³⁸and in “Cymbeline” (v. 4), Posthumous, on waking and finding the mysterious paper, exclaims—

“What fairies haunt this ground? A book? O rare one!
Be not, as in our fangled world, a garment
Nobler than that it covers,” &c.

At the same time, however, it was unlucky to reveal their acts of generosity, as the shepherd further tells us - “This is fairy gold, boy; and ‘twill prove so; up with’t, keep it close, home, home, the next way. We are lucky, boy; and to be so still requires nothing but secrecy.”

The necessity of secrecy in fairy transactions of this kind is illustrated in Massinger and Field’s play of the “Fatal Dowry,” 1632 (iv. 1),³⁹where Romont says—

“But not a word o’ it; ‘tis fairies’ treasure,
Which, but reveal’d, brings on the blabber’s ruin.”

Amongst the many other good qualities belonging to the fairy tribe, we are told that they were humanely attentive to the youthful dead.⁴⁰Thus Guiderius in “Cymbeline,” thinking that Imogen is dead (iv. 2), says—

“With female fairies will his tomb be haunted,
And worms will not come to thee;”⁴¹

there having been a popular notion that where fairies resorted no noxious creature could be found.

In the pathetic dirge of Collins a similar allusion is made—

“No wither’d witch shall here be seen,
No goblin lead their nightly crew;
The female fays shall haunt the green
And dress thy grave with pearly dew.”

It seems, however, that they were also supposed to be malignant; but this, “it may be,” says Mr Ritson, “was merely calumny, as being utterly inconsistent with their general character, which was singularly innocent and amiable.” Thus when Imogen, in “Cymbeline” (ii. 2), prays on going to sleep—

“From fairies and the tempters of the night,
Guard me, beseech ye,”⁴²

it must have been, says Mr Ritson,⁴³the *incubus* she was so afraid of.

Hamlet too notices this imputed malignity of the fairies (i. 1)—

³⁸ See Croker’s “Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland,” p. 316.

³⁹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” ii. p. 493.

⁴⁰ Ritson’s “Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare,” 1875, p. 29.

⁴¹ Some copies read *them*.

⁴² We may compare Banquo’s words in “Macbeth” (ii. 1)—

“Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose.”

⁴³ “Fairy Mythology,” pp. 27–8.

“Then no planet strikes,
Nor fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm.”⁴⁴

That the fairies, however, were fond of indulging in mischievous sport at the expense of mortals is beyond all doubt, the merry pranks of Puck or Robin Goodfellow fully illustrating this item of our fairy-lore. Thus, in “A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream” (ii. 1), this playful fairy says—

“I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometime lurk I in a gossip’s bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her wither’d dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And ‘tailor’ cries, and falls into a cough.”

A fairy, in another passage, asks Robin

“Are you not he
That frights the maidens of the villagery,

Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm.”

We have already mentioned how Queen Mab had the same mischievous humour in her composition, which is described by Mercutio in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4)—

“This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes.”

Another reprehensible practice attributed to the fairies was that of carrying off and exchanging children, such being designated changelings.⁴⁵ The special agent in transactions of the sort was also Queen Mab, and hence Mercutio says—

“She is the fairies’ midwife.”

And “she is so called,” says Mr Halliwell-Phillips, “because it was her supposed custom to steal new-born babes in the night and leave others in their place.”

Mr Steevens gives a different interpretation to this line, and says, “It does not mean that she was the midwife to the fairies but that she was the person among the fairies whose department it was to deliver the fancies of sleeping men in their dreams, those children of an idle brain.”

⁴⁴ In “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 2) some critics read—

“A fiend, a fairy, pitiless and rough.”

⁴⁵ This superstition is fully described in chapter on Birth.

2. Witches

In years gone by witchcraft was one of the grossest forms of superstition, and it would be difficult to estimate the extent of its influence in this and other countries. It is not surprising that Shakespeare should have made frequent allusions to this popular belief, considering how extensively it prevailed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the religious and dramatic literature of the period being full of it. Indeed, as Mr Williams ⁴⁶points out, “what the vulgar superstition must have been may be easily conceived, when men of the greatest genius or learning credited the possibility, and not only a theoretical but possible occurrence, of these infernal phenomena.” Thus Francis Bacon was “not able to get rid of the principles upon which the creed was based. Sir Edward Coke, his contemporary, the most acute lawyer of the age, ventured even to define the devil’s agents in witchcraft. Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Matthew Hale, in 1664, proved their faith, the one by his solemn testimony in open court, the other by his still more solemn sentence.” Hence, it was only to be expected that Shakespeare should introduce into his writings descriptions of a creed which held such a prominent place in the history of his day, and which has made itself famous for all time by the thousands of victims it caused to be sent to the torture-chamber, to the stake, and to the scaffold. Thus he has given a graphic account of the celebrated Jeanne D’Arc, the Maid of Orleans, in 1 Henry VI., although Mr Dowden ⁴⁷is of opinion that this play was written by one or more authors, Greene having had perhaps a chief hand in it, assisted by Peele and Marlowe. He says, “It is a happiness not to have to ascribe to our greatest poet the crude and hateful handling of the character of Joan of Arc, excused though to some extent it may be by the occurrence of view in our old English chronicles.”

Mr Lecky, ⁴⁸too, regards the conception of Joan of Arc given in I Henry VI. as “the darkest blot upon the poet’s genius,” but it must be remembered that we only have expressed the current belief of his day—the English vulgar having regarded her as a sorceress, the French as an inspired heroine. Talbot is represented as accusing her of being a witch, serving the Evil One, and entering Rouen by means of her sorceries (iii. 2).

“France, thou shalt rue this treason with thy tears,
If Talbot but survive thy treachery.
Pucelle, that witch, that damned sorceress,
Hath wrought this hellish mischief unawares,
That hardly we escaped the pride of France.”

Further on (v. 3) she is made to summon fiends before her, but she wishes them in vain, for they speak not, hanging their heads in sign of approaching disaster.

“Now help, ye charming spells and periapts;
And ye choice spirits that admonish me
And give me signs of future accidents.
You speedy helpers, that are substitutes
Under the lordly monarch of the north,
Appear and aid me in this enterprise.”

⁴⁶ “Superstitions of Witchcraft,” 1865, p. 220.

⁴⁷ “Shakspeare Primer,” 1877, p. 63.

⁴⁸ “Rationalism in Europe,” 1870, i. p. 106.

But she adds—

“See, they forsake me! now the time is come
That France must veil her lofty-plumed crest
And let her head fall into England’s lap.
My ancient incantations are too weak,
And hell too strong for me to buckle with:
Now, France, thy glory droopeth to the dust.”

Finally, convicted of practising sorcery, and filling “the world with vicious qualities,” she was condemned to be burnt. Her death, however, Sir Walter Scott ⁴⁹says, “was not, we are sorry to say, a sacrifice to superstitious fear of witchcraft, but a cruel instance of wicked policy, mingled with national jealousy and hatred. The Duke of Bedford, when the ill-starred Jeanne fell into his hands, took away her life in order to stigmatise her memory with sorcery, and to destroy the reputation she had acquired among the French.”

The cases of the Duchess of Gloucester and of Jane Shore, also immortalised by Shakespeare, are both referred to in the succeeding pages.

The witch of Brentford, mentioned by Mrs Page in “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 2), was an actual personage, the fame, says Staunton, ⁵⁰“of whose vaticinations must have been traditionally well known to an audience of the time, although the records we possess of her are scant enough. The chief of them is a black letter tract, printed. by William Copland in the middle of the sixteenth century, entitled “Jyl of Braintford’s Testament,” from which it appears she was hostess of a tavern at Brentford.⁵¹One of the characters in Dekker and Webster’s “Westward Ho”⁵²says, “I doubt that old hag, Gillian of Brainford has bewitched me.”

The witches in “Macbeth” are probably Scottish hags. As Mr Gunnyon remarks, ⁵³“They are hellish monsters, brewing hell-broth, having cats and toads for familiars, loving midnight, riding on the passing storm, and devising evil against such as offend them. They crouch beneath the gibbet of the murderer, meet in gloomy caverns, amid earthquake convulsions, or in thunder, lightning, and rain.” Coleridge, speaking of them, observes that “the weird sisters are as true a creation of Shakespeare’s as his Ariel and Caliban—fates, fairies, and materialising witches being the elements. They are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers, and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice to act immediately on the audience. Their character consists in the imaginative disconnected from the good, they are the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, elemental avengers without sex or kin.”

It has been urged, however, by certain modern critics, that these three sisters, “who play such an important part in ‘Macbeth’ are not witches at all, but are, or are intimately allied to, the Norns or Fates of Scandinavian paganism.”⁵⁴Thus, a writer in the *Academy* (Feb. 8th, 1879) thinks that Shakespeare drew upon Scandinavian mythology for a portion of the material he used in constructing these characters, and that he derived the rest from the traditions of contemporary witchcraft; in fact, that the “sisters” are hybrids between Norns and witches. The supposed proof of this is that each sister exercises the special function of one of the

⁴⁹ “Demonology and Witchcraft,” 1881, pp. 292, 193.

⁵⁰ “Shakespeare,” 1864, ii. p. 161.

⁵¹ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 51.

⁵² Webster’s Works, edited by Dyce, 1857, p. 238.

⁵³ “Illustrations of Scottish History, Life, and Superstition,” 1879, p. 322.

⁵⁴ Spalding’s “Elizabethan Demonology,” 1880, p. 86.

Norns. "The third," it is said, "is the special prophetess, whilst the first takes cognizance of the past, and the second of the present, in affairs connected with humanity. These are the tasks of Urda, Verdandi, and Skulda. The first begins by asking, "When shall we three meet again?" The second decides the time: "When the battle's lost and won." The third, the future prophecies: "That will be ere the set of sun." The first again asks, "Where?" The second decides: "Upon the heath." The third, the future prophecies: "There to meet with Macbeth."

It is further added, that the description of the sisters given by Banquo (i. 3) applies to Norns rather than witches—

"What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her chappy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so."

But, as Mr Spalding truly adds, "a more accurate poetical counterpart to the prose descriptions given by contemporary writers, of the appearance of the poor creatures who were charged with the crime of witchcraft could hardly have been penned." Scot, for instance, in his "Discoverie of Witchcraft" (Book I. chap. iii. 7), says - "They are women which commonly be old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; they are leane and deformed, showing melancholie in their faces." Harsnet, too, in his "Declaration of Popish Impostures" (1603, 136), speaks of a witch as "an old weather-beaten crone, having her chin and knees meeting for age, walking like a bow, leaning on a staff, hollow-eyed, un-toothed, furrowed, having her limbs trembling with palsy, going mumbling in the streets; one that hath forgotten her paternoster, yet hath a shrewd tongue to call a drab a drab."

The beard, also, to which Shakespeare refers in the passage above, was the recognised characteristic of the witch. Thus, in the "Honest Man's Fortune" (ii. 1), it is said, "The women that come to us for disguises must wear beards, and that's to say a token of a witch." In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 2), Sir Hugh Evans says of the disguised Falstaff - "By yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed: I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under his muffler."

introduction of Hecate among the witches in "Macbeth" (iii. 5), Shakespeare has been censured for confounding ancient with modern superstitions. But the incongruity is found in all the poets of the Renaissance. Hecate, of course, is only another name for Diana.

"Witchcraft, in truth, is no modern invention. Witches were believed in by the vulgar in the time of Horace as implicitly as in the time of Shakespeare. And the belief that the Pagan gods were really existent as evil demons is one which has come down from the very earliest ages of Christianity."⁵⁵ As far back as the fourth century, the Council of Ancyra is said to have condemned the pretensions of witches; that in the night-time they rode abroad, or feasted with their mistress, who was one of the Pagan goddesses, Minerva, Sibylla, or Diana, or else Herodias.⁵⁶ In Middleton's "Witch," Hecate is the name of one of his witches, and she has a son a low buffoon. In Jonson's "Sad Shepherd" (ii. 1) Maudlin the witch calls Hecate the

⁵⁵ "Notes to Macbeth" (Clark & Wright), 1877, p. 137.

⁵⁶ Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, Book iii., chap. 16. See Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 235.

mistress of witches, “Our dame Hecate.” Whilst speaking of the witches in “Macbeth,” it may be pointed out that ⁵⁷“the full meaning of the 1st scene is the fag-end of a witch’s Sabbath, which, if fully represented, would bear a strong resemblance to the scene at the commencement of the 4th Act. But a long scene on such a subject would be tedious and uninteresting at the commencement of the play. The audience is therefore left to assume that the witches have met, performed their conjurations, obtained from the evil spirits the information concerning Macbeth’s career that they desired to obtain, and perhaps have been commanded by the fiends to perform the mission they subsequently carry through.” Brand ⁵⁸describes this “Sabbath of the witches as a meeting to which the sisterhood, after having been anointed with certain magical ointments, provided by their infernal leader, are supposed to be carried through the air on brooms,” &c. It was supposed to be held on a Saturday, and in past centuries this piece of superstition was most extensively credited, and was one of the leading doctrines associated with the system of witchcraft.

Referring, in the next place, to the numerous scattered notices of witches given by Shakespeare throughout his plays, it is evident that he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the superstitions connected with the subject, many of which he has described with the most minute accuracy. It appears, then, that although they were supposed to possess extraordinary powers, which they exerted in various ways, yet these were limited, as in the case of Christmas night, when we are told in “Hamlet” (i. 1), “they have no power to charm.” In spite, too, of their being able to assume the form of any animal at pleasure, the tail was always wanting. In “Macbeth” (i. 3), the first witch says—

“And, like a rat without a tail, I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do.”

One distinctive mark, also, of a werwolf, or human being changed into a wolf, was the absence of a tail. The cat was said to be the form most commonly assumed by the familiar spirits of witches; as, for instance, where the first witch says, “I come, Graymalkin!”⁵⁹(i. 1), and further on (iv. i), “Thrice the brinded cat hath mew’d.” In German legends and traditions, we find frequent notice of witches, assuming the form of a cat, and displaying their fiendish character in certain diabolical acts. It was, however, the absence of the tail that only too often was the cause of the witch being detected in her disguised form. There were various other modes of detecting witches; one being “the trial by the stool,” to which an allusion is made in “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 1), where Ajax says to Thersites—

“Thou stool for a witch!”

—a practice which is thus explained in Grey’s *Notes* (ii. 236), “In one way of trying a witch, they used to place her upon a chair or a stool, with her legs tied cross, that all the weight of her body might rest upon her seat, and by that means, after some time, the circulation of the blood would be much stopped, and her sitting would be as painful as the wooden horse; and she must continue in this pain twenty-four hours, without either sleep or meat; and it was no wonder that, when they were tired out with such an ungodly trial, they would confess themselves many times guilty to free themselves from such torture.”

Again, it was a part of the system of witchcraft that drawing blood from a witch rendered her enchantments ineffectual. Thus in 1 Henry VI. (i. 5) Talbot says to the Pucelle de Orleans—

⁵⁷ “Elizabethan Demonology,” pp. 102, 103. See Conway’s “Demonology and Devil-lore,” ii. p. 253.

⁵⁸ “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 8.

⁵⁹ Graymalkin—a grey cat.

”I’ll have a bout with thee;
 Devil or devil’s dam, I’ll conjure thee:
 Blood will I draw on thee, thou art a witch.”

An instance of this superstition occurred some years ago in a Cornish village, when a man was summoned before the bench of magistrates and fined for having assaulted the plaintiff and scratched her with a pin. Indeed, this notion has by no means died out. As recently as the year 1870, a man eighty years of age was fined at Barnstaple, in Devonshire, for scratching with a needle the arm of a young girl. He pleaded that he had “suffered affliction” through her for five years, had had four complaints on him at once, had lost fourteen canaries, and about fifty goldfinches, and that his neighbours told him this was the only way to break the spell and get out of her power.”⁶⁰

It was, also, a popular belief that a great share of faith was a protection from witchcraft. Hence, in the “Comedy of Errors” (iii. 2.), Dromio of Syracuse says of Nell—

“If my breast had not been made of faith and my heart of steel,
 She had transform’d me to a curtal-dog, and made me turn i’ the wheel.”

In order, moreover, to check the power of witches, it was supposed to be necessary to propitiate them, a ceremony which was often performed. It is alluded to further on in the same play (iv. 3), where Dromio of Syracuse says—

“Some devils ask but the parings of one’s nail,
 A rush, a hair, a drop of blood, a pin,
 A nut, a cherry-stone,”

and in “Macbeth” we read of their being propitiated by gifts of blood. Witches were supposed to have the power of creating storms and other atmospheric disturbances—a notion to which much prominence is given in “Macbeth.” Thus the witches elect to meet in thunder, lightning, or rain. They are represented as being able to loose and bind the winds (v. 3), to cause vessels to be tempest-tossed at sea. Hence Macbeth addresses them (iv. i)—

“Though you untie the winds and let them fight
 Against the churches; though the yesty waves
 Confound and swallow navigation up;
 Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
 Though castles topple on their warders’ heads;

 Though palaces and pyramids do slope
 Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
 Of nature’s germens tumble all together,
 Even till destruction sicken.”

Thus, by way of illustration we may quote a curious confession made in Scotland, about the year 1591, by Agnes Sampson, a reputed witch. She vowed that at the time his Majesty (James VI.) was in Denmark, she took a cat and christened it, and afterwards bound to each part of that cat the chiefest parts of a dead man, and several joints of his body; and that in the night following, the said cat was conveyed into the midst of the sea, by herself and other witches, sailing in their riddles, or crieves, and so left the said cat right before the town of Leith, in Scotland. This done, there arose such a tempest in the sea, as a greater hath not been seen, which tempest was the cause of the perishing of a boat or vessel coming from the town of Brunt Island to the town of Leith, wherein were sundry jewels and rich gifts, which should

⁶⁰ Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” p. 181.

have been presented to the new Queen of Scotland at his Majesty's coming to Leith. Again, it is confessed that the said christened cat was the cause of the king's majesty's ship, at his coming forth of Denmark, having a contrary wind to the rest of the ships then being in his company, which thing was most strange and true, as the king's majesty acknowledged." It is to this circumstance that Shakespeare probably alludes in "Macbeth" (i. 3), where he makes the witch say—

"Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost."

Witches were also believed to be able to sell or give winds, a notion thus described in Drayton's "Moon-Calf" (865)—

"She could sell winds to any one that would
Buy them for money, forcing them to hold
What time she listed, tie them in a thread,
Which ever as the seafarer undid
They rose or scantled, as his sails would drive
To the same port whereas he would arrive."

So in "Macbeth" (i. 3)—

"2 Witch. I'll give thee a wind.
1 Witch. Thou'rt kind.
3 Witch. And I another.

Singer quotes from Sumner's "Last Will and Testament"—

"In Ireland, and in Denmark both,
Witches for gold will sell a man a wind,
Which, in the corner of a napkin wrapp'd,
Shall blow him safe unto what coast he will."

At one time the Finlanders and Laplanders drove a profitable trade by the sale of winds. After being paid they knitted three magical knots, and told the buyer that when he untied the first he would have a good gale; when the second, a strong wind; and when the third, a severe tempest.⁶¹

The sieve, as a symbol of the clouds, has been regarded amongst all nations of the Aryan stock as the mythical vehicle used by witches, nightmares, and other elfish beings in their excursions over land and sea.⁶² Thus the first witch in "Macbeth" (i. 3), referring to the scoff which she had received from a sailor's wife, says—

"Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger:
But in a sieve I'll thither sail."⁶³

Stories of voyages performed in this way are common enough in Germany. A man, for instance, going through a corn-field, finds a sieve on the path, which he takes with him. He does not go far before a young lady hurries after him, and hunts up and down as if looking for something, ejaculating all the time, "How my children are crying in England!" Thereupon the man lays down the sieve, and has hardly done so ere sieve and lady vanish. In the case of another damsel of the same species, mentioned by Mr Kelly, the usual exclamation is thus

⁶¹ Olaus Magnus' "History of the Goths," 1638, p. 47. See note to the "Pirate."

⁶² See Hardwick's "Traditions and Folk-Lore," pp. 108, 109; Kelly's "Indo-European Folk-Lore," pp. 214, 215.

⁶³ In Greek, ἐπὶ ῥητους πλεῖν, "to go to sea in a sieve," was a proverbial expression for an enterprise of extreme hazard or impossible of achievement.—Clarke & Wright's notes to "Macbeth," 1877, p. 82.

varied - "My sieve rim! my sieve rim! how my mother is calling me in England!" At the sound of her mother's voice the daughter immediately thinks of her sieve. Steevens quotes from the Life of Doctor Fian, "a notable sorcerer," burnt at Edinburgh, January 1591, how that he and a number of witches went to sea, "each one in a *riddle* or *cive*." In the "Discovery of Witchcraft," Reginald Scot says it was believed that "witches could sail in an egg shell, a cockle or muscle shell, through and under the tempestuous seas." Thus, in "Pericles" (iv. 4), Gower says—

"Thus time we waste, and longest leagues make short;
Sail seas in cockles, have an wish but for't."

Their dance is thus noticed in "Macbeth" (iv. 1)—

"I'll charm the air to give a sound
While you perform your dutie round."

Witches also were supposed to have the power of vanishing at will, a notion referred to in "Macbeth" (i. 3), where, in reply to Banquo's inquiry as to whither the witches are vanished, Macbeth replies—

"Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted
As breath into the wind."

In his letter to his wife he likewise observes - "They made themselves air, into which they vanished." Hecate, in the third Act (scene 5), after giving instructions to the weird host, says—

"I am for the air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end."

To this purpose they prepared various ointments, concerning which Reginald Scot ⁶⁴says - "The devil teacheth them to make ointment of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the air and accomplish all their desires. After burial they steal them out of their graves and seethe them in a cauldron till the flesh be made potable, of which they make an ointment by which they ride in the air." Lord Bacon also informs us that the "ointment the witches use is reported to be made of the fat of children digged out of their graves, of the juices of smallage, wolfbane, and cinquefoil, mingled with the meal of fine wheat; but I suppose the soporiferous medicines are likest to do it, which are—henbane, hemlock, mandrake, moonshade—or, rather, nightshade—tobacco, opium, saffron,"⁶⁵&c. These witch recipes, which are very numerous, are well illustrated in Shakespeare's grim cauldron scene. In "Macbeth" (iv. 1), where the first witch speaks of—

"Grease that's sweaten
From the murderer's gibbet."

we may compare a similar notion given by Apuleius, who, in describing the process used by the witch, Milo's wife, for transforming herself into a bird, says - "That she cut the lumps of flesh of such as were hanged."⁶⁶

Another way by which witches exercise their power was by looking into futurity, as in "Macbeth" (i. 3), where Banquo says to them—

⁶⁴ "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, Book iii. chap. I, p. 40; see Spalding's "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 103.

⁶⁵ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," iii. pp. 8-10.

⁶⁶ Douce, "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 245, says—"See Adlington's Translation (1596, p. 49), a book certainly used by Shakespeare on other occasions."

“If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me.”

Charles Knight, in his biography of Shakespeare, quotes a witch-trial which aptly illustrates the passage above; the case being that of Johnnet Wischert, who was “indicted for passing to the green-growing corn in May, twenty-two years since, or thereby, sitting thereupon tymous in the morning before the sun-rising; and being there found and demanded what she was doing, thou answered, I shall tell thee; I have been piling the blades of the corn. I find it will be a dear year; the blade of the corn grows withersones [contrary to the course of the sun], and when it grows sonegatis about [with the course of the sun], it will he a good, cheap year.”

According to a common notion firmly believed in days gone by, witches were supposed to make waxen figures of those they intended to harm, which they stuck through with pins, or melted before a slow fire. Then, as the figure wasted, so the person it represented was said to waste away also. Thus in “Macbeth” (i. 3), the First Witch says—

“Weary se’nnights nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine.”

Referring to the histories of the Duchess of Gloucester and of Jane Shore, who were accused of practising this mode of witchcraft, Shakespeare, in “2 Henry VI.” (i. 2), makes the former address Hume thus—

“What say’st thou, man? hast thou as yet conferr’d
With Margery Jourdain, the cunning witch,
With Roger Bolingbroke, the conjurer?
And will they undertake to do me good?”

She was afterwards, however, accused of consulting witches concerning the mode of compassing the death of her husband’s nephew, Henry VI. It was asserted that “there was found in the possession of herself and accomplices a waxen image of the king, which they melted in a magical manner before a slow fire, with the intention of making Henry’s force and vigour waste away by like insensible degrees.”

A similar charge was brought against Jane Shore, the mistress of Edward IV., by Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Thus in “King Richard III.” (iii. 4), Gloucester asks Hastings—

“I pray you all, tell me what they deserve
That do conspire my death with devilish plots
Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevail’d
Upon my body with their hellish charms?”

And he then further adds—

“See how I am bewitch’d; behold mine arm
Is, like a blasted sapling, wither’d up:
And this is Edward’s wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.”

This superstition is further alluded to in “King John” (v. 4) by Melun, who, wounded, says—

“Have I not hideous death within my view,
Retaining but a quantity of life,
Which bleeds away, even as a form of wax
Resolveth from his figure ‘gainst the fire?”

And again, in “The Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 4), Proteus says—

“For now my love is thaw’d;
Which, like a waxen image ‘gainst a fire,
Bears no impression of the thing it was.”⁶⁷

Images were frequently formed of other materials, and maltreated in some form or other, to produce similar results— a piece of superstition which still prevails to a great extent in the East. Dubois, in his “People of India” (1825), speaks of magicians who make small images in mud or clay, and then write the names of their animosity on the breasts thereof these are otherwise pierced with thorns or mutilated, “so as to communicate a corresponding injury to the person represented.” They were also said to extract moisture from the body, as in “Macbeth” (i. 3)—

“I will drain him dry as hay.”

Referring to the other mischievous acts of witches, Steevens quotes the following from “A Detection of Damnable Driftes Practised by Three Witches,” &c., arraigned at Chelmsforde, in Essex, 1579: - “Item,—Also she came on a tyme to the house of one Robert Lathburie, who, dislyking her dealyng, sent her home emptie; but presently after her departure his hogges fell sicke and died, to the number of twentie.” Hence in “Macbeth” (i. 3) in reply to the inquiry of the First Witch—

“Where hast thou been, sister?”

the second replies—

“Killing swine.”

It appears to have been their practice to destroy the cattle of their neighbours, and the farmers have to this day many ceremonies to secure their cows and other cattle from witchcraft; but they seem to have been most suspected of malice against swine. Harsnet observes, how, formerly, “A sow could not be ill of the measles, nor a girl of the sullens, but some old woman was charged with witchcraft.”⁶⁸

Mr Henderson, in his “Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties” (1879, p. 182), relates how a few years ago a witch died in the village of Bovey Tracey, Devonshire. She was accused of “overlooking” her neighbours’ pigs, so that her son, if ever betrayed into a quarrel with her, used always to say before they parted - “Mother, mother, spare my pigs.”

Multiples of three and nine were specially employed by witches, ancient and modern. Thus in “Macbeth” (i. 3), the witches take hold of hands and dance round in a ring nine times—three rounds for each witch as a charm for the furtherance of her purposes.”⁶⁹

“Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm’s wound up.”

The love of witches for odd numbers is further illustrated (iv. 1) where one of them tells how—

“Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.”

this being the witches’ way of saying four times.

⁶⁷ See Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties,” 1879, p. 181.

⁶⁸ See *Pig*—Chapter on Animals.

⁶⁹ Notes to “Macbeth” by Clarke and Wright, 1877, p. 84.

In Fairfax's "Tasso" (book xiii, stanza 6) it is said that—

"Witchcraft loveth numbers odd."

This notion is very old, and we may compare the following quotations from Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (xiv. 58)—

"Ter novies Carmen magico demurmurat ore."

And again (vii. 189–191)—

"Ter se convertit; ter sumptis fluorine crinem
Irroravit aquis; ternis ululatibus ora
Solvit."

Virgil too in his "Eclogues" (viii. 75) says—

"Numero deus impare gaudet."

The belief in the luck of odd numbers is noticed by Falstaff in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (v. 1)—

"They say there is divinity in odd numbers, either in nativity, chance, or death!"

In "King Lear" (iv. 2) when the Duke of Albany tells Goneril—

"She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use"—

he alludes to the use that witches and enchanters were commonly supposed to make of withered branches in their charms.⁷⁰

Amongst other items of witch-lore mentioned by Shakespeare, may be noticed the common belief in the intercourse between demons and witches to which Prospero alludes in the "Tempest" (i. 2)—

"Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself
Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!"

This notion is seriously refuted by Scot in his "Discovery of Witchcraft" (book iv.), where he shows it to be "flat knavery."

The offspring of a witch was termed "Hag-Seed," and as such is spoken of by Prospero in the "Tempest" (i. 2).

Witches were also in the habit of saying their prayers backwards; a practice to which Hero refers in "Much ado about Nothing" (iii. 1) where speaking of Beatrice, she says—

"I never yet saw man,
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,
But she would spell him backward."

Familiar spirits⁷¹ attending on magicians and witches were always impatient of confinement.⁷² So in the "Tempest" (i. 2) we find an illustration of this notion in the following dialogue—

⁷⁰ See Jones' "Credulities Past and Present," 1880, pp. 256–289.

⁷¹ Allusions to this superstition occur in "Love's Labour's Lost" (i. 2) "love is a familiar"; in 1 Henry VI. (iii. 2), "I think her old familiar is asleep; and in 2 Henry VI. (iv. 7) "he has a familiar under his tongue."

⁷² See Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, p. 85.

Prospero. "What is't thou canst demand?"

Ariel. "My Liberty."

Prospero. "Before the time be out? No more."

Lastly, the term "Aroint thee" ("Macbeth" i. 3) used by the first witch, occurs again in "King Lear" (iii. 4), "Aroint thee, witch, aroint thee." That *aroint* is equivalent to "away," "begone," seems to be agreed, though its etymology is uncertain.⁷³ "Rynt thee" is used by Milkmaids in Cheshire to a cow, when she has been milked, to bid her get out of the way. Ray in his *Collection of North Country Words* (1768, p. 52) gives "Rynt ye, by your leave, stand handsomly, as rynt you witch, quoth Bessie Locket to her mother, Proverb, Chesh." Some connect it with the adverb "aroume," meaning "abroad," found in Chaucer's "House of Fame" (book ii. 32)—

"That I a-roume was in the field."

Other derivations are from the Latin *averrunco*: the Italian *rogna*, a cutaneous disease, &c.⁷⁴

How thoroughly Shakespeare was acquainted with the system of witchcraft is evident from the preceding pages, in which we have noticed his allusions to most of the prominent forms of this species of superstition. Many other items of witch lore, however, are referred to by him, mention of which is made in succeeding chapters.

⁷³ See Dyce's "Glossary," pp. 18, 19.

⁷⁴ "Notes to Macbeth" (Clarke and Wright), pp. 81, 82.

3. Ghosts

Few subjects have, from time immemorial, possessed a wider interest than ghosts, and the superstitions associated with them in this and other countries, form an extensive collection in folk-lore literature. In Shakespeare's day, it would seem that the belief in ghosts was specially prevalent, and ghost tales were told by the firelight in nearly every household. The young, as Mr Goadby in his "England of Shakespeare" (1881, p. 196), "were thus touched by the prevailing superstitions in their most impressionable years. They looked for the incorporeal creatures of whom they had heard, and they were quick to invest any trick of moonbeam shadow with the attributes of the supernatural." A description of one of these tale-tellings is given in the "Winter's Tale" (ii. 1):—

Her. What wisdom stirs amongst you?

Come, sir, now I am for you again: pray you, sit by us,
And tell's a tale.

Mam. Merry or sad shall 't be?

Her. As merry as you will.

Mam. A sad tale's best for winter:

I have one of sprites and goblins.

Her. Let's have that, good sir.

Come on, sit down: Come on, and do your best

To fright me with your sprites: you're powerful at it.

Mam. There was a man.

Her. Nay, come, sit down; then on.

Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard: I will tell it softly; Yond crickets shall not hear it.

Her. Come on, then,

And give't me in mine ear.

The important part which Shakespeare has assigned to the ghost in "Hamlet," has a special value, inasmuch as it illustrates many of the old beliefs current in his day respecting their history and habits. Thus, according to a popular notion, ghosts are generally supposed to assume the exact appearance by which they were usually known when in the material state; even to the smallest detail of their dress—so Horatio tells Hamlet, how when Marcellus and Bernado were on their watch (i. 2):—

"A figure like your father,
Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe,
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slowly and stately by them."

Further on, when the ghost appears again, Hamlet addresses it thus

"What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous."

In the graphic description of Banquo's ghost in "Macbeth" (iii. 4). we have a further allusion to the same belief; one, indeed, which is retained at the present day with as much faith as in days of old.

Shakespeare has several allusions to the notion which prevailed in days gone by, of certain persons being able to exorcise or raise spirits. Thus, in “Cymbeline” (iv. 2), Guiderius says over Fidele’s grave .—

“No exorciser harm thee.”

In “Julius Cæsar” (ii. 1) Ligarius says:—

“Soul of Rome!
”Brave son, derived from honourable loins!
Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjured up
My mortified spirit. Now bid me run,
And I will strive with things impossible;
Yea, get the better of them.”

In “All’s Well that Ends Well” (v. 3) the king says:—

“Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?
Is’t real that I see?”

This superstition, it may be added, has of late years gained additional notoriety since the so-called spiritualism has attracted the attention and support of the credulous. As learning was considered necessary for an exorcist, the schoolmaster was often employed. Thus in the “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 4) the schoolmaster Pinch is introduced in this capacity.

Within, indeed, the last fifty years the pedagogue was still a reputed conjuror. In “Hamlet” (i. 1), Marcellus, alluding to the ghost, says:—

“Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.”

And in “Much Ado about Nothing” (ii. 1) Benedick says:—

“I would to God some scholar would conjure her.”

For the same reason exorcisms were usually practised by the clergy in Latin; and so Toby, in the “Night Walker” of Beaumont and Fletcher (ii. 1), says:—

“Let’s call the butler up, for he speaks Latin,
And that will daunt the devil.”

It was also necessary that spirits, when evoked, should be questioned quickly, as they were supposed to be impatient of being interrogated. Hence in “Macbeth” (iv. 1) the apparition says

“Dismiss me. Enough.”

The spirit, likewise, in 2 Henry VI. (i. 4) utters these words:—

“Ask what thou wilt. That I had said and done!”

Spirits were supposed to maintain an obdurate silence till interrogated by the persons to whom they made their special appearance.⁷⁵ Thus Hamlet, alluding to the appearance of the ghost, asks Horatio (i. 2)—

“Did you not speak to it?”

⁷⁵ We may compare the words “unquestionable spirit” in “As You Like It” (iii. 2), which means “a spirit averse to conversation.”

Whereupon he replies—

”My lord, I did;
But answer made it none: yet once, methought
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak.”

The walking of spirits seems also to have been enjoined by way of penance. The ghost of Hamlet’s father (i. 5) says:—

“I am thy father’s spirit,
Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away.”

And further on (iii. 2) Hamlet exclaims—

“It is a damned ghost that we have seen.”

This superstition is referred to by Spenser in his “Faerie Queen” (Book i., canto ii.):—

“What voice of damned ghost from Limbo lake
Or guileful spright wand’ring in empty ayre,
Sends to my doubtful eares these speeches rare?”

According to a universal belief prevalent from the earliest times, it was supposed that ghosts had some particular reason for quitting the mansions of the dead, “such as a desire that their bodies, if unburied, should receive Christian rites of sepulture, that a murderer might be brought to due punishment,” &c.⁷⁶ On this account Horatio (“Hamlet” i. 1) invokes the ghost:—

“If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me.”

And in a later scene (i. 4) Hamlet says:—

“Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?”

The Greeks believed that such as had not received funeral rites would be excluded from Elysium; and thus the wandering shade of Patroclus appears to Achilles in his sleep, and demands the performance of his funeral. The younger Pliny tells a story of a haunted house at Athens, in which a ghost played all kinds of pranks owing to his funeral rites having been neglected. A further reference to the superstition occurs in “Titus Andronicus” (i. 1), where Lucius, speaking of the unburied sons of Titus, says:—

“Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
That we may hew his limbs, and, on a pile
Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh,
Before this earthy prison of their bones;
That so the shadows be not unappeased,
Nor we disturb’d with prodigies on earth.”

⁷⁶ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” pp. 450, 451.

In olden times, spirits were said to have different allotments of time suitable to the variety and nature of their agency. Prospero in the “Tempest” (i. 2), says to Caliban:—

“Be sure, to-night, thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast ⁷⁷of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee.”

According to a popular notion, the presence of unearthly beings was announced by an alteration in the tint of the lights which happened to be burning—a superstition alluded to in “Richard III.” (v. 3), where the tyrant exclaims, as he awakens:—

“The lights burn blue—It is now dead midnight,
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh—

* * * * *

Methought the souls of all that I had murder’d,
Came to my tent.”

So in “Julius Cæsar” (iv. 3), Brutus on seeing the ghost of Cæsar, exclaims!—

“How ill this taper burns! Ha! who comes here?

It has been a widespread belief from the most remote period that ghosts cannot bear the light and so disappear at the dawn of day; their signal being the cock-crow. The ghost of Hamlet’s father says (i. 5):—

“But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be”—

and—

“Fare thee well at once!
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And ‘gins to pale his uneffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.”

Again, in “King Lear” (iii. 4), Edgar says: - “This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock.”

The time of night as the season wherein spirits wander abroad, is further noticed by Gardiner in Henry VIII. (v. 1):—

“Affairs, that walk,
As they say spirits do, at midnight”—

It was a prevalent notion that a person who crossed the spot on which a spectre was seen became subject to its malignant influence. In Hamlet (i. 1), Horatio says in reference to the ghost:—

“But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!
I’ll cross it, though it blast me.”

Lodge, in his “Illustrations of British History” (iii. 48), tells us that among the reasons for supposing the death of Ferdinand, Earl of Derby (who died young, in 1594), to have been occasioned by witchcraft, was the following: - “On Friday there appeared a tall man, who

⁷⁷ Vast, *i.e.*, Space of Night. So in “Hamlet,” (i. 2.)
“In the dead waist and middle of the night.”

twice crossed him swiftly; and when the Earl came to the place where he saw this man, he fell sick.”

Reginald Scot in his “Discovery of Witchcraft” (1584), enumerates the different kinds of spirits, and particularly notices white, black, grey, and red spirits. So in “Macbeth” (iv. 1), “black spirits” are mentioned:—the charm song referred to (like the one in Act iv.), being found in Middleton’s “Witch” (v. 2):—

“Black spirits and white,
Red spirits and grey;
Mingle, mingle, mingle,
You that mingle many”—

A well-known superstition which still prevails in this and foreign countries, is that of the “spectre huntsman and his furious host.” As night time approaches, it is supposed that this invisible personage rides through the air with his yelping hounds; their weird sound being thought to forebode misfortune of some kind. This popular piece of folk-lore exists in the north of England under a variety of forms amongst our peasantry, who tenaciously cling to the traditions which have been handed down to them.⁷⁸ It has been suggested that Shakespeare had some of these superstitions in view when he placed in the mouth of Macbeth (i. 7), while contemplating the murder of Duncan, the following metaphors

“And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind!”

Again, in the “Tempest” (iv. 1), Prospero and Ariel are represented as setting on spirits, in the shape of hounds, to hunt Stephano and Trinculo. This species of diabolical or spectral chase, was formerly a popular article of belief. As Drake aptly remarks,⁷⁹ “the hell-hounds of Shakespeare appear to be sufficiently formidable, for, not merely commissioned to hunt their victims, they are ordered, likewise as goblins,” to—

”Grind their joints
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps; and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard or cat o’ mountain.
Hark (exclaims *Ariel*), they roar!
Prospero. Let them be hunted soundly.”

TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS.

Shakespeare has several references to the old superstitious belief in the transmigration of souls; traces of which may still be found in the reverence paid to the robin, the wren, and other birds. Thus, in the “Merchant of Venice” (iv. 1), Gratiano says to Shylock:—

“Thou almost makest me waver in my faith
To hold opinion with Pythagoras
That souls of animals infuse themselves
Into the trunks of men: thy currish spirit
Govern’d a wolf, who, hang’d for human slaughter,

⁷⁸ See Hardwick’s “Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-lore,” 1872, pp. 153–176.

⁷⁹ “Shakespeare and his Times,” i. p. 378.

Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
 And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,
 Infused itself in thee; for thy desires
 Are wolfish, bloody, starved, and ravenous."

Caliban, when remonstrating with the drunken Stephano and Trinculo, for delaying at the mouth of the cave of Prospero, instead of taking the magician's life ("Tempest," iv. 1), says:—

"I will have none on't: we shall lose our time,
 And all be turn'd to barnacles, or to apes."

In "Hamlet" (iv. 5), in the scene where Ophelia, in her mental aberration, quotes snatches of old ballads, she says: - "They say the owl was a baker's daughter! Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be."⁸⁰

Again, in "Twelfth Night" (iv. 2), there is another reference in the amusing passage where the clown, under the pretence of his being Sir Topas, the curate," questions Malvolio, when confined in a dark room, as a presumed lunatic:—

"*Mal.* I am no more mad than you are: make the trial of it in any constant question.

Clo. What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

Mal. That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

Clo. What thinkest thou of his opinion?

Mal. I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.

Clo. Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness: thou shalt hold the opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam."

Although this primitive superstition is almost effete amongst civilized nations, yet it still retains an important place in the religious beliefs of savage and uncivilized communities.

⁸⁰ See Owl, chap. vi.

4. Demonology And Devil Lore

The state of popular feeling in past centuries with regard to the active agency of devils has been well represented by Reginald Scot, who in his work on witchcraft has shown how the superstitious belief in demonology was part of the great system of witchcraft. Many of the popular delusions of this terrible form of superstition have been in a masterly manner exposed by Shakespeare, and the scattered allusions which he has given illustrative of it are indeed sufficient to prove, if it were necessary, what a highly elaborate creed it was. Happily Shakespeare, like the other dramatists of the period, has generally treated the subject with ridicule, showing that he had no sympathy with the grosser opinions shared by various classes in those times, whether held by king or clown. According to an old belief, still firmly credited in the poet's day, it was supposed that devils could at any moment assume whatever form they pleased that would most conduce to the success of any contemplated enterprise they might have in hand; and hence the charge of being a devil, so commonly brought against innocent and harmless persons in former years, can easily be understood. Amongst the incidental allusions to this notion given by Shakespeare, Prince Hal ("1 Henry IV.," ii. 4) tells Falstaff "there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man;" "an old white-bearded Satan." In the "Merchant of Venice" (iii. 1) Salanio, on the approach of Shylock, says - "Let me say 'amen' betimes, lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew."

Indeed "all shapes that man goes up and down in" seem to have been at the devil's control, a belief referred to in "Timon of Athens" (ii. 2)—

Var. Serv. What is a whoremaster, fool?

Fool. A fool in good clothes, and something like thee. 'Tis a spirit: sometime 't appears like a lord; sometime like a lawyer; sometime like a philosopher, with two stones more than's artificial one: he is very often like a knight; and, generally, in all shapes that man goes up and down in from fourscore to thirteen, this spirit walks in."

A popular form assumed by evil spirits was that of a negro or moor, to which Iago alludes when he incites Brabantio to search for his daughter in "Othello" (i. 1)—

"Zounds, sir, you're robb'd; for shame, put on your gown;
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise;
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you:
Arise, I say."

On the other hand, so diverse were the forms which devils were supposed to assume that they are said occasionally to appear in the fairest form, even in that of a girl (ii. 3)—

"When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows."

So in "The Comedy of Errors" (iv. 3) we have the following dialogue—

"*Ant. S.* Satan, avoid! I charge thee, tempt me not!
Dro. S. Master, is this mistress Satan?
Ant. S. It is the devil.

Dro. S. Nay, she is worse, she is the devil's dam; and here she comes in the habit of a light wench; and thereof comes that the wenches say, God damn me; that's as much to say, 'God make me a light wench.' It is written, they appear to men like angels of light."

(Cf. also "Love's Labour's Lost," iv. 3.) In "King John" (iii. 1) even the fair Blanche seemed to Constance none other than the devil tempting Lewis "in likeness of a new untrimmed bride."

Not only, too, were devils thought to assume any human shape they fancied, but, as Mr Spalding remarks,⁸¹"the forms of the whole of the animal kingdom appear to have been at their disposal; and, not content with these, they seem to have sought for unlikely shapes to appear in"—the same characteristic belonging also to the fairy tribe.

Thus when Edgar is trying to persuade the blind Gloucester that he has in reality cast himself over the cliff, he describes the being from whom he is supposed to have just departed—

"As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses.
Horns welk'd and waved like the endridged sea:
It was some fiend."

Again, Edgar says ("King Lear," iii. 6) - "The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale"—the allusion probably being to the following incident related by Friswood Williams: - "There was also another strange thing happened at Denham about a bird. Mistris Peckham had a nightingale which she kept in a cage, wherein Maister Dibdale took great delight, and would often be playing with it. The nightingale was one night conveyed out of the cage, and being next morning diligently sought for, could not be heard of, till Maister Mainie's devil, in one of his fits (as it was pretended), said that the wicked spirit which was in this exanimate's sister had taken the bird out of the cage and killed it in despite of Maister Dibdale."⁸²

Even the shape of a fly was a favourite one with evil spirits, so much so, that the term "fly" was a popular synonym for a familiar. In "Titus Andronicus" (iii. 2) there is an allusion to this belief where Marcius, being rebuked by Titus for having killed a fly, gives as his reason—

"It was a black ill-favour'd fly,
Like to the empress' Moor: therefore I kill'd him."

Mr Spalding gives the following illustrations of the superstition: "At the execution of Urban Grandier, the famous magician of London, in 1634, a large fly was seen buzzing about the stake; and a priest promptly seizing the opportunity of improving the occasion for the benefit of the onlookers, declared that Beelzebub had come in his own proper person to carry off Grandier's soul to hell. In 1664 occurred the celebrated witch trials which took place before Sir Matthew Hale. The accused were charged with bewitching two children, and part of the evidence against them was that flies and bees were seen to carry into their victims' mouths the nails and pins which they afterwards vomited."

Once more, another form devils assumed was that of a dead friend. Thus Hamlet (i. 4), when he confronts the apparition, exclaims—

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,

⁸¹ "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 49.

⁸² Harsnet's "Declaration of Egregious Impostures," p. 225.

Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
 Be thine intents wicked or charitable,
 Thou comest in such a questionable shape
 That I will speak to thee.”

for, as Mr Spalding remarks, “it cannot be imagined that Hamlet imagined that a ‘goblin damned’ could actually be the spirit of his dead father; and, therefore, the alternative in his mind must be that he saw a devil assuming his father’s likeness—a form which the Evil One knew would most incite Hamlet to intercourse.”

The same idea seems present in Horatio’s mind:—

“What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff,
 That beetles o’er his base into the sea,
 And there assume some horrible form,
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
 And draw you into madness?”

Once more, in the next act (ii. 2), Hamlet again expresses his doubts:—

“The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil: and the devil hath power
 To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me.”

In the Elizabethan times, too, no superstitious belief exerted a more pernicious and baneful influence on the credulous and ignorant than the notion that evil spirits from time to time entered into human beings, and so completely gained a despotic control over them as to render them perfectly helpless. Harsnet, in his “Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures” (1603), has exposed this gross superstition; and a comparison of the passages in “King Lear,” spoken by Edgar when feigning madness with those given by Harsnet, will show that Shakespeare has accurately given the contemporary belief on the subject. Mr Spalding also considers that nearly all the allusions in “King Lear” refer to a youth known as Richard Mainey, a minute account of whose supposed possession has been given by Harsnet.

Persons so possessed were often bound and shut up in a dark room, occasionally being forced to submit to flagellation—a treatment not unlike that described in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 2):—

“Not mad, but bound more than a madman is,
 Shut up in prison, kept without my food,
 Whipp’d and tormented.”

In the “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 4) we have an amusing scene, further illustrative probably of the kind of treatment adopted in Shakespeare’s day:—

“*Courtesan*. How say you now? Is not your husband mad?
Adriana. His incivility confirms no less.
 Good doctor Pinch, you are a conjurer;
 Establish him in his true sense again,
 And I will please you what you will demand.
Luciana. Alas, how fiery and how sharp he looks!
Courtesan. Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy!

Pinch. Give me your hand and let me feel your pulse.

Ant. F. There is my hand, and let it feel your ear.

Pinch. I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers,
And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight,
I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven.”

Pinch further says:—

“They must be bound and laid in some dark room.”

As Brand remarks,⁸³ there is no vulgar story of the devil’s having appeared anywhere without a cloven foot. In graphic representations he is seldom or never pictured without one. In the following passage, where Othello is questioning whether Iago is a devil or not, he (v. 2) says:—

“I look down towards his feet; but that’s a fable.
If that thou be’st a devil, I cannot kill thee.”

Dr Johnson gives this explanation, “I look towards his feet to see if, according to the common opinion, his feet be cloven.”

In Massinger’s “*Virgin Martyr*” (iii. 3), Harpax, an evil spirit, following Theophilus in the shape of a secretary, speaks thus of the superstitious Christian’s description of his infernal enemy—

“I’ll tell you what now of the devil,
He’s no such horrid creature; cloven-footed,
Black, saucer-ey’d, his nostrils breathing fire,
As these lying Christians make him.”

GOOD AND EVIL DEMONS.

It was formerly commonly believed that not only kingdoms had their tutelary guardians, but that every person had his particular genius or good angel, to protect and admonish him by dreams, visions, &c.⁸⁴ Hence in “*Antony and Cleopatra*” (ii. 3), the soothsayer speaking of Cæsar says:—

“O Antony, stay not by his side,
Thy demon, that’s thy spirit which keeps thee, is
Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
Where Cæsar’s is not, but, near him thy angel
Becomes a fear, as being o’erpower’d.”

Thus Macbeth (iii. 1), speaks in a similar manner in defence to Banquo:—

“There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and, under him,
My Genius is rebuked; as, it is said,
Mark Antony’s was by Cæsar.”

So too, in 2 Henry IV. (i. 2), the Chief-Justice says—

“You follow the young prince up and down, like his ill angel.”

⁸³ “*Pop. Ant.*,” 1849, ii. pp. 517–519.

⁸⁴ See Brand’s “*Pop. Antiq.*,” i. pp. 365–367.

We may quote a further reference in “Julius Cæsar” (iii. 2), where Antony says—

“For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar’s angel.”

In the Roman world, says Mr Tylor in his “Primitive Culture” (1873, ii. 202), “each man had his ‘genius natalis,’ associated with him from birth to death, influencing his action and his fate, standing represented by its proper image, as a lar among the household gods, and at weddings and joyous times, and especially on the anniversary of the birthday when genius and man began their united career, worship was paid with song and dance to the divine image, adorned with garlands, and propitiated with incense and libations of wine. The demon or genius was, as it were, the man’s companion soul, a second spiritual ego. The Egyptian astrologer warned Antonius to keep far from the young Octavius, ‘For thy demon,’ said he, ‘is in fear of his.’”

The allusion by Lady Macbeth (i. 5), in the following passage is to the “Spirits of Revenge”:—

”Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty.”

In Nash’s “Pierce Pennilesse” we find a description of these spirits and of their office. “The second kind of devils which he most employeth are those northern *Martii*, called the *Spirits of Revenge*, and the authors of massacres and seed-men of mischief, for they have commission to incense men to rapine, sacrilege, theft, murder, wrath, fury, and all manner of cruelties; and they command certain of the southern spirits to wait upon them, as also great Ariocho, that is termed the Spirit of Revenge.” In another passage we are further told how “the spirits of the aire will mixe themselves with thunder and lightning, and so infect the clime where they raise any tempest, that suddenly great mortalitie shall ensue of the inhabitants.” “Aerial spirits or devils,” according to Burton’s “Anatomy of Melancholy,” “are such as keep quarter most part in the aire, cause many tempests, thunder and lightnings, tear oakes, fire steeple, houses, strike men and beasts, etc.” Thus in “King John” (iii. 2), the bastard remarks:—

“Now, by my life, this day grows wondrous hot;
Some airy devil hovers in the sky
And pours down mischief.”

It was anciently supposed that all mines of gold, &c., were guarded by evil spirits. Thus Falstaff in 2 Henry IV. (iv. 3) speaks of “learning a mere hoard of gold kept by a devil.” This superstition still prevails, and has been made the subject of many a legend. Thus it is believed by the peasantry living near Largo-Law, Scotland, that a rich mine of gold is concealed in the mountain. “A spectre once appeared there, supposed to be the guardian of the mine, who being accosted by a neighbouring shepherd, promised to tell him at a certain time and on certain conditions, where ‘the gowd mine is in Largo-Law,’ especially enjoining that the horn sounded for the housing of the cows at the adjoining farm of Balmain should not blow. Every precaution having been taken, the ghost was true to his tryst; but, unhappily, when he was about to divulge the desired secret, Tammie Norrie, the cowherd of Balmain, blew a blast, whereupon the ghost vanished with the denunciation—

‘Woe to the man that blew the horn,
For out of the spot he shall ne’er be borne.’

The unlucky horn-blower was struck dead, and as it was found impossible to remove the body, a cairn of stones was raised over it.”⁸⁵

Steevens considers that when Macbeth (iii. 2) says—

“Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
Whiles night’s black agents to their preys do rouse,”

he refers to those demons who were supposed to remain in their several places of confinement all day, but at the close of it were released; such, indeed, as are mentioned in the “Tempest” (v. 1), as rejoicing “to hear the solemn curfew, because it announced the hour of their freedom.”

Amongst other superstitions we may quote one in the “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 1) where Salanio says - “Let me say ‘amen’ betimes, lest the devil cross my prayers.”

Of the devils mentioned by Shakespeare may be mentioned the following—

Amaimon is one of the chief, whose dominion is on the north side of the infernal gulf. He might be bound or restrained from doing hurt from the third hour till noon, and from the ninth hour till evening. In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 2) Ford mentions this devil, and in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) Falstaff says - “that same mad fellow of the north, Percy; and he of Wales, that gave Amamon the bastinado and made Lucifer cuckold.”⁸⁶

The north was always supposed to be the particular habitation of bad spirits. Milton, therefore, assembles the rebel angels in the north. In “1 Henry VI.” (v. 3), La Pucelle invokes the aid of the spirits—

“Under the lordly monarch of the north.”

Barbason. This demon would seem to be the same as “Marbas, alias Barbas,” who, as Scot ⁸⁷informs us, “is a great president, and appeareth in the forme of a mightie lion; but at the commandment of a conjurer cometh up in the likeness of man, and answereth fullie as touching anything which is hidden or secret.” In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 2) it is mentioned by Ford in connection with Lucifer, and again in “Henry V.” (ii. 1) Nym tells Pistol - “I am not Barbason, you cannot conjure me.”

The names of the several fiends in “King Lear,” Shakespeare is supposed to have derived from Harsnet’s “Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures” (1603).

Flibbertiggibet, one of the fiends that possessed poor Tom, is, we are told (iv. 1.), the “fiend of mopping and mowing, who possesses chambermaids and waiting-women.” And again (iii. 4), “he begins at curfew and walks till the first cock; he gives men the pin and the web.”

Frateretto is referred to by Edgar (iii. 6). “Frateretto calls me; and tells me Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness. Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.”

Hobbididance is noticed as “prince of darkness” (iv. 1), and perhaps is the same as Hopdance (iii. 6), “who cries,” says Edgar, “in Tom’s belly for two white herring.”

Mahu, like *Modo*, would seem to be another name for “the prince of darkness” (iii. 4), and further on (iv. i) he is spoken of as the fiend “of stealing;” whereas the latter is described as the fiend “of murder.” Harsnet thus speaks of them: - “Maho was general dictator of hell; and

⁸⁵ See Jones’ “Credulities Past and Present,” 1880, p. 133.

⁸⁶ See Scot’s “Discovery of Witchcraft” (1584, p. 393); Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 264.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

yet, for good manner's sake, he was contented of his good nature to make show, that himself was under the check of Modu, the graund devil in Ma(ister) Maynie.”

Obidicut, another name of the fiend known as Haberdicut (iv. 1).

Smulkin (iii. 4). This is spelt Smolkin by Harsnet.

Thus, in a masterly manner, Shakespeare has illustrated and embellished his plays with references to the demonology of the period; having been careful in every case—whilst enlivening his audience—to convince them of the utter absurdity of this degraded form of superstition.

5. Natural Phenomena

Many of the most beautiful and graphic passages in Shakespeare's writings have pictured the sun in highly glowing language, and often invested it with that sweet pathos for which the poet was so signally famous. Expressions, for instance, such as the following are ever frequent: - "The glorious sun" ("Twelfth Night," iv. 3); "heaven's glorious sun" ("Love's Labour's Lost," i. 1); "gorgeous as the sun at Midsummer" ("1 Henry IV.," iv. 1); "all the world is cheered by the sun" ("Richard III.," i. 2); "the sacred radiance of the sun" ("King Lear," i. 1); "sweet tidings of the sun's uprising" ("Titus Andronicus," iii. 1), &c. Then, again, how often we come across passages replete with pathos, such as "the sun sets weeping in the lowly west" ("Richard II.," ii. 4); "ere the weary sun set in the west" ("Comedy of Errors," i. 2); "the weary sun hath made a golden set" ("Richard III.," v. 3); "the sun for sorrow will not show his head" ("Romeo and Juliet," v. 3), &c. Although, however, Shakespeare has made such constant mention of the sun, yet his allusions to the folk-lore connected with it are somewhat scanty.

According to the old philosophy, the sun was accounted a planet,⁸⁸ and thought to be whirled round the earth by the motion of a solid sphere, in which it was fixed. In "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 15), Cleopatra exclaims—

"O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou movest in! darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world."

Supposing this sphere consumed, the sun must wander in endless space, and, as a natural consequence, the earth be involved in endless night.

In "1 Henry IV.," (i. 2), Falstaff, according to vulgar astronomy, calls the sun a "wandering knight,"—and by this expression evidently alludes to some knight of romance. Mr Douce⁸⁹ considered the allusion was to "The Voyage of the Wandering Knight," by Jean de Catheray, of which the translation, by W. Goodyear, appeared about the year 1600. The words may be a portion of some forgotten ballad.

A pretty fancy is referred to in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 5), where Capulet says—

"When the sun sets, the air doth drizzle dew;
But for the sunset of my brother's son
It rains downright."

And so, too, in the "Rape of Lucrece":—

"But as the earth doth weep, the sun being set."

"That Shakespeare thought it was the air," says Singer,⁹⁰ "and not the earth, that drizzled dew, is evident from many passages in his works. Thus, in King John" (ii. 1) he says: - "Before the dew of evening fall." Steevens, alluding to the following passage in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (iii. 1), "and when she (*i.e.* the moon) weeps, weeps every little flower," says that Shakespeare "means that every little flower is moistened with dew, as if with tears; and not that the flower itself drizzles dew."

⁸⁸ Singer's "Shakespeare," x. p. 292.

⁸⁹ "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, pp. 255, 256.

⁹⁰ Singer's Shakespeare, viii., p. 208.

By a popular fancy, the sun was formerly said to dance at its rising on Easter morning—to which there may be an allusion in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 5), where Romeo addressing Juliet, says

“Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;
Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.”

We may also compare the expression in “Coriolanus” (v. 4):—

“The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes,
Tabors and cymbals and the shouting Romans,
Make the sun dance.”

Mr Knight remarks, there was “Something exquisitely beautiful in the old custom of going forth into the fields before the sun had risen on Easter Day, to see him mounting over the hills with tremulous motion, as if it were an animate thing, bounding in sympathy with the redeemed of mankind.”⁹¹

A cloudy rising of the sun has generally been regarded as ominous—a superstition equally prevalent on the Continent as in this country. In “Richard III.” (v. 3), King Richard asks:—

“Who saw the sun to-day?
Ratcliff. Not I, my lord,
K. Richard. Then he disdains to shine; for, by the book
He should have braved the east an hour ago:
A black day will it be to somebody.”

“The learned Moresin in his ‘Papatus,’” says Brand,⁹²“reckons among omens, the cloudy rising of the sun.” Virgil, too, in his 1st Georgic (441–9) considers it a sign of stormy weather ⁹³:—

“Ille ubi nascentem maculis variaverit ortum
Conditus in nubem, medioque refugerit orbe;
Suspecti tibi sint imbres; namque urget ab alto
Arboribusque satisque notus pecorique sinister,
Aut ubi sub lucem densa inter nubila sese
Diversi rumpent radii, ut ubi pallida surget,
Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile:
Heu male tum mites defendet pampinus uvas:
Tam multa in tectis crepitans salit horrida grando.”

A red sunrise is also unpropitious, and according to a well-known rhyme:—

“If red the sun begins his race,
Be sure the rain will fall apace.”

This old piece of weather-wisdom is mentioned by our Lord in St Matthew xvi. 2, 3: - “When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowring.” Shakespeare in his “Venus and Adonis,” thus describes it:—

⁹¹ See Knight’s “Life of Shakespeare,” 1843, p. 63

⁹² “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii., p. 241.

⁹³ See Swainson’s “Weather-Lore,” 1873, p. 176, for popular adages on the Continent.

“—A red morn, that ever yet betoken’d
Wreck to the seaman, tempest to the field,
Sorrow to shepherds, woe unto the birds,
Gusts and foul flaws to herdmen and to herds.”

Mr Swainson ⁹⁴shows that this notion is common on the Continent. Thus, at Milan the proverb runs, “If the morn be red, rain is at hand.”

Shakespeare in “Richard II.” (ii. 4), alludes to another indication of rain:—

“The sun sets weeping in the lowly west,
Witnessing storms to come, woe and unrest.”

A “watery sunset” is still considered by many a forerunner of wet. A red sunset, on the other hand, beautifully described in “Richard III” (v. 3):—

“The weary sun hath made a golden set,”

is universally regarded as a prognostication of fine weather, and we find countless proverbs illustrative of this notion—one of the most popular being - “Sky red at night, is the sailor’s delight.”

From the earliest times an eclipse of the sun was looked upon as an omen of coming calamity; and was oftentimes the source of extraordinary alarm as well as the occasion of various superstitious ceremonies. In 1597, during an eclipse of the sun, it is stated that at Edinburgh, men and women thought the day of judgment was come.⁹⁵ Many women swooned, much crying was heard in the streets, and in fear some ran to the kirk to pray. Mr Napier says he remembers “an eclipse about 1818, when about three parts of the sun was covered. The alarm in the village was very great, indoor work was suspended for the time, and in several families prayers were offered for protection, believing that it portended some awful calamity; but when it passed off there was a general feeling of relief.” In “King Lear” (i. 2), Gloucester remarks: - “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects; love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked ‘twixt son and father.” Othello, too (v. 2), in his agony and despair, exclaims:—

”O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration.”

Francis Bernier ⁹⁶says that, in France in 1654, at an eclipse of the sun, “some bought drugs against the eclipse, others kept themselves close in the dark in their caves and their well closed chambers, others cast themselves in great multitudes into the churches; those apprehending some malign and dangerous influence, and these believing that they were come to the last day, and that the eclipse would shake the foundations of nature.”⁹⁷

In “3rd Henry VI.” (ii. 1), Shakespeare refers to a curious circumstance in which, on a certain occasion, the sun is reported to have appeared like three suns. Edward says, “do I see three suns?” to which Richard replies:—

⁹⁴ “Weather-Lore,” pp. 175, 176.

⁹⁵ Napier’s “Folk Lore of West of Scotland,” 2899, p. 241.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Southey’s “Common Place Book,” 1849. 2 series, p. 462.

⁹⁷ See Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” 1871, i. pp. 261, 296–7, 321.

“Three glorious suns, each one a perfect sun;
 Not separated with the racking clouds,
 But sever’d in a pale clear-shining sky.
 See, see! they join, embrace, and seem to kiss,
 As if they vow’d some league inviolable:
 Now are they but one lamp, one light, one sun,
 In this the heaven figures some event.”⁹⁸

This fact is mentioned both by Hall and Holinshed, the latter says: - “At which tyme the sun (as some write) appeared to the Earl of March like *three sunnes*, and sodainely joyned altogether in one, upon whiche sight hee tooke such courage, that he fiercely setting on his enemyes put them to flight.”—We may note here that on Trinity Sunday three suns are supposed to be seen. In the “Memoires de l’Academie Celtique” (iii. 447), it is stated that “Le jour de la fête de la Trinite, quelques personne vont de grand matin dans la campagne, pour y voir levre trois soleils à la fois.”

According to an old proverb to quit a better for a worse situation was spoken of as to go “out of God’s blessing into the warm sun,” a reference to which we find in “King Lear” (ii. 2), where Kent says:—

“Good King, that must approve the common saw,
 That out of heaven’s benediction comest
 To the warm sun.”

Dr Johnson thinks that Hamlet alludes to this saying (i. 2), for when the king says to him, “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?” he replies, “not so, my lord; I am too much i’ the sun,” *i.e.*, out of God’s blessing.

This expression, says Mr Dyce,⁹⁹ is found in various authors from Heywood down to Swift—the former has:—

“In your running from him to me, yee runne
 Out of God’s blessing into the warme sunne.”

And the latter—

“*Lord Sparkish*. They say, marriages are made in heaven; but I doubt, when she was married, she had no friend there.

Neverout. Well, she’s got out of God’s blessing into the warm sun.”¹⁰⁰

There seems to have been a prejudice from time immemorial against sunshine in March; and according to a German saying, it were “better to be bitten by a snake than to feel the sun in March.” Thus in “1 Henry IV.” (iv. 1), Hotspur says—

“Worse than the sun in March,
 This praise doth nourish agues.”

Shakespeare employs the words “sun-burned” in the sense of uncomely, ill-favoured. In “Much ado” (ii. 1), Beatrice says, “I am sunburnt;” and in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 3), Æneas remarks—

⁹⁸ In 3rd Henry VI. (ii. 1), Edward says:

“Henceforward will I bear
 Upon my target three fair-shining suns.”

⁹⁹ “Glossary to Shakespeare,” 283.

¹⁰⁰ Ray gives the Latin equivalent, “Ab equis ad asinos.”

“The Grecian dames are sunburnt and not worth
The splinter of a lance.”

Moon. Apart from his sundry allusions to the “pale-faced,” “silver moon,” Shakespeare has referred to many of the superstitions associated with it, several of which still linger on in country nooks. A widespread legend of great antiquity informs us that the moon is inhabited by a man ¹⁰¹with a bundle of sticks on his back, who has been exiled thither for many centuries, and who is so far off that he is beyond the reach of death. This tradition, which has given rise to many superstitions, is still preserved under various forms in most countries; but it has not been decided who the culprit originally was, and how he came to be imprisoned in his lonely abode. Dante calls him Cain; Chaucer assigns his exile as a punishment for theft, and gives him a thorn-bush to carry, while Shakespeare also loads him with the thorns, but by way of compensation gives him a dog for a companion. In the “*Tempest*” (ii. 2), Caliban asks Stephano whether he has “not dropp’d from heaven?” to which he answers, “Out o’ the moon, I do assure thee: I was the man i’ the moon when time was.” Whereupon Caliban says—

“I have seen thee in her and I do adore thee:
My mistress show’d me thee and thy dog and thy bush.”

We may also compare the expression in “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (v. 1), where, in the directions for the performance of the play of “*Pyramus and Thisbe*,” Moonshine is represented “with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn.” And further on in the same scene, describing himself, Moonshine says - “All that I have to say, is, to tell you that the lanthorn is the moon; I, the man in the moon;¹⁰²this thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog.”

Ordinarily,¹⁰³however, his offence is stated to have been Sabbath-breaking—an idea derived from the Old Testament. Like the man mentioned in the “*Book of Numbers*” (xv. 32), he is caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath; and, as an example to mankind, he is condemned to stand for ever in the moon, with his bundle on his back. Instead of a dog, one German version places him with a woman, whose crime was churning butter on Sunday. The Jews have a legend that Jacob is the moon, and they believe that his face is visible. Mr Baring Gould ¹⁰⁴says that the “idea of locating animals in the two great luminaries of heaven is very ancient, and is a relic of a primeval superstition of the Aryan race.” The natives of Ceylon, instead of a man, have placed a hare in the moon; and the Chinese represent the moon by “a rabbit pounding rice in a mortar.”¹⁰⁵

From the very earliest times the moon has not only been an object of popular superstition, but been honoured by various acts of adoration. In Europe,¹⁰⁶in the fifteenth century, “it was a matter of complaint that some still worshipped the new moon with bended knee, or hood or hat removed. And to this day we may still see a hat raised to her, half in conservatism and half in jest. It is with deference to silver as the lunar metal that money is turned when the act of adoration is performed, while practical peasant wit dwells on the ill luck of having no piece of silver when the new moon is first seen.” Shakespeare often incidentally alludes to

¹⁰¹ Baring Gould’s “*Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*,” 1877, p. 190.

¹⁰² Cf. “*Love’s Labour’s Lost*” (v. 2), “Yet still she is the moon, and I the man.”

¹⁰³ Fiske, “*Myths and Mythmakers*,” 1873, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ “*Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*,” 1877, p. 197.

¹⁰⁵ Douce’s “*Illustrations of Shakespeare*,” 1839, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ For further information on this subject, see Tylor’s “*Primitive Culture*,” 1873, i., pp. 288, 354–356; ii., pp. 70, 202, 203.

this form of superstition. To quote one or two out of many instances, Enobarbus, in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 9) says—

“Be witness to me, O thou blessed moon.”

In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), the king says—

“Vouchsafe, bright moon, and these thy stars, to shine,
Those clouds removed, upon our watery eyne.”

Indeed it was formerly a common practice for people to address invocations to the moon,¹⁰⁷ and even at the present day we find remnants of this practice both in this country and abroad. Thus in many places it is customary for young women to appeal to the moon to tell them of their future prospects in matrimony,¹⁰⁸ the following or similar lines being repeated on the occasion—

“New moon, new moon, I hail thee:
New moon, new moon, be kind to me;
If I marry man or man marry me,
Show me how many moons it will be.”

It was also the practice to swear by the moon, to which we find an allusion in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 2), where Juliet reproves her lover for testifying his affections by this means—

“O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.”

And again, in “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1), where Gratiano exclaims—

“By yonder moon I swear you do me wrong.”

We may note here that the inconstancy¹⁰⁹ of the moon is the subject of various myths, of which Mr Tylor has given the following examples:—Thus an Australian legend says that Mityan, the moon, was a native cat, who fell in love with some one else’s wife, and was driven away to wander ever since. A Slavonic legend tells us that the moon, king of night, and husband of the sun, faithlessly loved the morning star, wherefore he was cloven through in punishment, as we see him in the sky. The Khasias of the Himalaya say that the moon falls monthly in love with his mother-in-law, who throws ashes in his face, whence his spots.¹¹⁰

As in the case of the sun, an eclipse of the moon was formerly considered ominous. The Romans¹¹¹ supposed it was owing to the influence of magical charms, to counteract which they had recourse to the sound of brazen instruments of all kinds. Juvenal alludes to this practice in his Sixth Satire (44i), when he describes his talkative woman—

“Jam nemo tubas, nemo æra fatiget,
Una laboranti poterit succurrere lunæ.”

Indeed eclipses, which to us are well-known phenomena witnessing to the exactness of natural laws, were in the earlier stages of civilisation regarded as “the very embodiment of miraculous disaster.” Thus the Chinese believed that during eclipses of the sun and moon

¹⁰⁷ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” iii. pp. 142, 143.

¹⁰⁸ See “English Folk-lore,” pp. 43, 44.

¹⁰⁹ “Primitive Culture,” 1873, i., pp. 354, 355.

¹¹⁰ The words “moonish” (“As You Like It,” iii. 2) and “moonlike” (“Love’s Labour’s Lost,” iv. 3) are used in the sense of inconstant.

¹¹¹ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 18.

these celestial bodies were attacked by a great serpent, to drive away which they struck their gongs or brazen drums. The Peruvians entertaining a similar notion, raised a frightful din when the moon was eclipsed,¹¹² while some savages would shoot up arrows to defend their luminaries against the enemies they fancied were attacking them. It was also a popular belief that the moon was affected by the influence of witchcraft, a notion referred to by Prospero in “The Tempest” (v. 1), who says—

“His mother was a witch, and one so strong
That could control the moon.”

In a former scene (ii. 1), Gonzalo remarks: - “You are gentlemen of brave metal; you would lift the moon out of her sphere.” Douce¹¹³ quotes a marginal reference from Adlington’s translation of “Apuleius” (1596), a book well known to Shakespeare: - “Witches in old time were supposed to be of such power, that they could put downe the moone by their enchantment.”¹¹⁴ One of the earliest references to this superstition among classical authorities is, that in the “Clouds” of Aristophanes, where Strepsiades proposes the hiring of a Thessalian witch, to bring down the moon and shut her up in a box, that he might thus evade paying his debts by a month. Ovid, in his “Metamorphoses” (c. xii. 263), says:—

“Mater erat Mycale; quam deduxisse canendo
Sæpe reluctanti constabat cornua lunæ.”

Horace in his fifth Epode (l. 45) tells us:—

“Quæ sidera excantata voce Thessala,
Lunamque cœlo deripit.”¹¹⁵

Reverting again to the moon’s eclipse; such a season being considered most unlucky for lawful enterprises, was held suitable for evil designs. Thus, in “Macbeth” (iv. 1), one of the witches, speaking of the ingredients of the cauldron, says:—

“Gall of goat, and slips of yew,
Sliver’d in the moon’s eclipse.”

As a harbinger of misfortune it is referred to in “Antony, and Cleopatra” where (iii. 13), Antony says:—

“Alack, our terrene moon
Is now eclipsed; and it portends alone
The fall of Antony!”

Milton in his “Paradise Lost” (bk. i. S97), speaks much in the same strain:—

“As when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations.”

And in “Lycidas,” he says of the unlucky ship that was wrecked:—

¹¹² Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” i., p. 329.

¹¹³ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ See Scot’s “Discoverie of Witchcraft,” 1584, pp. 174, 226, 227, 250.

¹¹⁵ For further examples, see Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 27.

“It was that fatal and perfidious bark
Built in the eclipse.”

Its sanguine colour is also mentioned as an indication of coming disasters in “Richard II.” (ii. 4), where the Welsh captain remarks how

“The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth.”

And its paleness, too, in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 2), is spoken of as an unpropitious sign.

According to a long accepted theory, insane persons are said to be influenced by the moon; and many old writers have supported this notion. Indeed, Shakespeare himself in “Othello” (v. 2), tells how the moon when “She comes more nearer earth than she was wont, makes men mad.” Dr Forbes Winslow, in his “Light: its Influence on Life and Health,” says, that “it is impossible altogether to ignore the evidence of such men as Pinel, Daquin, Guislain, and others, yet the experience of modern psychological physicians, is to a great degree opposed to the deductions of these eminent men.” He suggests that the alleged changes observed among the insane at certain phases of the moon, may arise, not from the direct, but the indirect, influence of the planet. It is well known that certain important meteorological phenomena, result from the various phases of the moon, such as the rarity of the air, the electric conditions of the atmosphere, the degree of heat, dryness, moisture, and amount of wind prevailing. It is urged then, that those suffering from diseases of the brain, and nervous system affecting the mind, cannot be considered as exempt from the operation of agencies that are admitted to affect patients afflicted with other maladies. Dr Winslow further adds, that “an intelligent lady, who occupied for about five years the position of matron in my establishment for insane ladies, has remarked that she invariably observed among them, a greater agitation when the moon was at its full.” A correspondent of “Notes and Queries” (2nd S., xii. 492), explains the apparent aggravated symptoms of madness at the full moon by the fact that the insane are naturally more restless on light than on dark nights, and that in consequence loss of sleep makes them more excitable. We may note here, that in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 9), Enobarbus invokes the moon as the “sovereign mistress of true melancholy.”

The moisture of the moon is invariably noticed by Shakespeare. In “Hamlet” (i. 1) Horatio tells how “the moist star upon whose influence Neptune’s empire stands, was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.” In “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1) Titania says—

“Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.”

And in “The Winter’s Tale” (i. 2) Polixenes commences by saying how—

“Nine changes of the watery star hath been
The shepherd’s note since we have left our throne
Without a burthen.”

We may compare, too, the words of Enobarbus in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 9), who, after addressing the moon, says - “The poisonous damp of night disponge upon me.” And once more in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4) we read of the “moonshine’s watery beams.”

The same idea is frequently found in old writers. Thus for instance, in Newton’s “Direction for the Health of Magistrates and Studentes,” (1574), we are told that “the moone is ladye of moisture.” Bartholomæus in “De Proprietate Rerum” describes the moon as “mother of all

humours, minister and ladye of the sea.”¹¹⁶In Lydgate’s prologue to his “Story of Thebes” there are two lines not unlike those in “Midsummer Night’s Dream” already quoted—

“Of Lucina the moone, moist and pale,
That many shoure fro heaven made availe.”

Of course, the moon is thus spoken of as governing the tides, and from its supposed influence on the weather.¹¹⁷In 1 Henry IV. (i. 2) Falstaff alludes to the sea being governed “by our noble and chaste mistress the moon”; and in “Richard III.” (ii. 2) Queen Elizabeth says—

“That I, being govern’d by the watery moon,
May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world.”

We may compare, too, what Timon says, “Timon of Athens” (iv. 3)—

“The sea’s a thief, whose liquid surge resolves The moon into salt tears.”

The expression of Hecate in “Macbeth” (iii. 5)—

“Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound,”

seems to have been meant for the same as the *virus lunare* of the ancients, being a foam which the moon was supposed to shed on particular herbs, when strongly solicited by enchantment. Lucan introduces Erictho using it (Pharsalia, book vi. 669) - “Et virus large lunare ministrat.”

By a popular astrological doctrine the moon was supposed to exercise great influence over agricultural operations, and also over many “of the minor concerns of life, such as the gathering of herbs, the killing of animals for the table, and other matters of a like nature.” Thus the following passage in the “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1), it has been suggested, has reference to the practices of the old herbalists who attributed particular virtues to plants gathered during particular phases of the moon and hours of the night. After Lorenzo has spoken of the moon shining brightly, Jessica adds—

- “In such a night
Medea gather’d the enchanted herbs,
That did renew old Æson.”

And in “Hamlet” (iv. 7) the description which Laertes gives of the weapon-poison refers to the same notion—

“I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death.”

The sympathy of growing and declining nature with the waxing and waning moon is a superstition widely spread, and is as firmly believed in by many as when Tusser in his “Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry,” under “February” gave the following advice—

“Sow peason and beans, in the wane of the moon,
Who soweth them sooner, he soweth too soon,

¹¹⁶ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 116.

¹¹⁷ See Swainson’s “Weather Lore,” 1893, pp. 182–192.

That they with the planet may rest and arise,
And flourish, with bearing most plentiful wise.”

Warburton considers that this notion is alluded to by Shakespeare in “Troilus and Cressida” (iii. 2) where Troilus speaking of the sincerity of his love tells Cressida it is—

“As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate.”

There is a little doubt as to the exact meaning of plantage in this passage. Nares observes that it probably means anything that is planted; but Mr Ellacombe in his “Plant Lore of Shakespeare” (1878, p. 165) says “it is doubtless the same as plantain.”

It appears that, in days gone by, “neither sowing, planting, nor grafting was ever undertaken without a scrupulous attention to the increase or waning of the moon.”¹¹⁸ Scot, in his “Discoverie of Witchcraft,” notes how “the poore husbandman perceiveth that the increase of the moone maketh plants fruitful, so as in the full moone they are in best strength; decaieing in the wane, and in the conjunction do utterlie wither and vade.”

It was a prevailing notion that the moon had an attending star—Lilly calls it “Lunisequa;” and Sir Richard Hawkins, in his “Observations in a voyage to the South Seas in 1593,” published in 1622, remarks: “Some I have heard say, and others write, that there is a starre which never separateth itself from the moon, but a small distance.” Staunton considers that there is an allusion to this idea in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3), where the king says—

“My love, her mistress, is a gracious moon:
She an attending star, scarce seen a light.”

The sharp ends of the new moon are popularly termed horns—a term which occurs in “Coriolanus” (i. 1) - “They threw their caps as they would hang them on the horns o’ the moon.” It is made use of in Decker’s “Match me in London” (i.)—

“My lord, doe you see this change i’ the moone?
Sharp homes doe threaten windy weather.”

When the horns of the moon appear to point upwards, the moon is said to be like a boat, and various weather prognostications are drawn from this phenomena.¹¹⁹ According to sailors, it is an omen of fine weather, whereas others affirm it is a sign of rain—resembling a basin full of water about to fall.

Among other items of folk-lore connected with the moon, we may mention the moon-calf, a false conception, or fœtus imperfectly formed, in consequence, as was supposed, of the influence of the moon. The best account of this fabulous substance may be found in Drayton’s poem with that title. Trinculo in the “Tempest” (ii. 2), supposes Caliban to be a moon-calf—

“I hid me under the dead moon-calf’s gaberdine.”

It has been suggested that in calling Caliban a moon-calf, Shakespeare alluded to a superstitious belief formerly current, in the intercourse of demons and other non-human beings with mankind. In the days of witchcraft, it was supposed that a class of devils called Incubi and Succubi roamed the earth with the express purpose of tempting people to abandon

¹¹⁸ See Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” 1873, i. 130; “English Folk-lore,” 1878, pp. 41, 42.

¹¹⁹ See Swainson’s “Weather-lore,” pp. 182, 183.

their purity of life. Hence, all badly deformed children were suspected of having had such an undesirable parentage.¹²⁰

A curious expression, “a sop o’ the moonshine,” occurs in “King Lear” (ii. 2), which probably alludes to some dish so called. Kent says to the steward - “Draw, you rogue; for, though it be night, yet the moon shines; I’ll make a sop o’ the moonshine of you.”

There was a way of dressing eggs, called “eggs in moonshine,” of which Douce¹²¹ gives the following description: - “Eggs were broken and boiled in salad oil till the yolks became hard. They were eaten with slices of onion fried in oil, butter, verjuice, nutmeg, and salt.” “A sop in the moonshine” must have been a sippet in this dish.¹²²

Planets.—The irregular motion of the planets was supposed to portend some disaster to mankind. Ulysses in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 3), declares how—

“When the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents! what mutiny!
What raging of the sea! shaking of earth!

Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture.”

Indeed, the planets themselves were not thought in days gone by, to be confined in any fixed orbit of their own, but ceaselessly to wander about, as the etymology of their name demonstrates. A popular name for the planets was “wandering stars,” of which Cotgrave says, “they bee also called wandering starres, because they never keep one certain place or station in the firmament.” Thus Hamlet (v. 1), approaching the grave of Ophelia, addresses Laertes—

“What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers?”

In Tomkis’s “Albumazar” (i. 1), they are called “wanderers”—

“Your patron Mercury, in his mysterious character
Holds all the marks of the other wanderers.”

According to vulgar astrology, the planets like the stars, were supposed to affect, more or less, the affairs of this world, a notion frequently referred to by old writers. In “Winter’s Tale” (ii. 1), Hermione consoles herself in the thought—

”There’s some ill planet reigns:
I must be patient till the heavens look
With an aspect more favourable.”

In 1 Henry VI. (i. 1), the Duke of Exeter asks—

¹²⁰ See William’s “Superstitions of Witchcraft,” pp. 123–125; Scot’s “Discovery of Witchcraft,” bk. iv. p. 145.

¹²¹ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 405.

¹²² Nares’ “Glossary,” 1872, ii. p. 580.

“What! shall we curse the planets of mishap
That plotted thus our glory’s overthrow?”

Again, King Richard (Richard III., iv. 4)—

“Be opposite all planets of good luck
To my proceedings.”

And once more, in “Hamlet” (i. 1), Marcellus, speaking of the season of our Saviour’s birth, says, “then no planets strike.”

That diseases, too, are dependent upon planetary influence is referred to in “Timon of Athens” (iv. 3)—

“Be as a planetary plague, when Jove
Will o’er some high-iced city hang his poison
In the sick air: Let not thy sword skip one.”

“Fiery Trigon” was a term in the old judicial astrology, when the three upper planets met in a fiery sign,—a phenomenon which was supposed to indicate rage and contention. It is mentioned in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4)—

“*P. Hen.* Saturn and Venus this year in conjunction! What says the almanac to that?
Poins. And, look, whether the fiery Trigon, his man, be not lipping to his master’s old tables!”

Dr Nash, in his notes to Butler’s “Hudibras,” says, “the twelve signs in astrology are divided into four *trigons* or triplicities, each denominated from the connatural element; so they are three fiery [signs], three airy, three watery, and three earthy:”—

Fiery—Aries, Leo, Sagittarius.

Airy—Gemini, Libra, Aquarius.

Watery—Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces.

Earthly—Taurus, Virgo, Capricornus.

Thus, when the three superior planets met in Aries, Leo, or Sagittarius, they formed a *fiery trigon*; when in Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces, a watery one.

Charles’s Wain was the old name for the seven bright stars of the constellation Ursa Major. The constellation was so named in honour of Charlemagne; or, according to some, it is a corruption of chorles or churl’s, *i.e.*, rustic’s wain. Churl is frequently used for a countryman in old books, from the Saxon ceorl. In “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1), the Carrier says, “Charles’ wain is over the new chimney.”

Music of the spheres.—Pythagoras was the first who suggested this notion, so beautifully expressed by Shakespeare in the “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1).

“There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.”

Plato says that a syren sits on each planet, who carols a most sweet song, agreeing to the motion of her own particular planet, but harmonising with the other seven. Hence Milton in his “Arcades” speaks of the “celestial syrens’ harmony, that sits upon the nine enfolded spheres.”

Stars.—An astrological doctrine, which has kept its place in modern popular philosophy, asserts that mundane events are more or less influenced by the stars. That astronomers should have divided the sun's course into imaginary signs of the Zodiac, was enough, says Mr Tylor,¹²³ to originate astrological rules "that these celestial signs have an actual effect on real earthly rams, bulls, crabs, lions, virgins." Hence we are told that a child born under the sign of the Lion will be courageous; but one born under the Crab will not go forth well in life; one born under the Waterman is likely to be drowned, and so forth. Shakespeare frequently alludes to this piece of superstition, which, it must be remembered, was carried to a ridiculous height in his day. In "Julius Cæsar" (i. 2), Cassius says—

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

In the following passage in "Twelfth Night" (i. 3)—

"*Sir Tob.* Were we not born under Taurus?
Sir And. Taurus! that's sides and heart.
Sir Tob. No, sir; it is legs and thighs."

"Both the knights," says Mr Douce ("Illustrations of Shakspeare," p. 54), "are wrong in their astrology, according to the Almanacs of the time, which make Taurus govern the neck and throat."

Beatrice, in "Much Ado about Nothing" (ii. 1), says: "There was a star danced, and under that was I born;" Kent, in "King Lear" (iv. 3), remarks, "it is the stars, the stars above us, govern our conditions;" and once more, in "Pericles" (i. 1), King Antiochus, speaking of the charming qualities of his daughter, says:—

"Bring in our daughter, clothed like a bride,
For the embracements even of Jove himself:
At whose conception, till Lucina reign'd,
Nature this dowry gave, to glad her presence,
The senate-house of planets all did sit,
To knit in her their best perfections."¹²⁴

Throughout the East, says Mr Tylor,¹²⁵ astrology even now remains a science in full esteem. The condition of mediæval Europe may still be perfectly realised by the traveller in Persia, where the Shah waits for days outside the walls of his capital till the constellations allow him to enter; and where, on the days appointed by the stars for letting blood, it literally flows in streams from the barbers' shops in the streets. Professor Wuttke declares that there are many districts in Germany where the child's horoscope is still regularly kept with the baptismal certificate in the family chest." Astrology is ridiculed in a masterly manner in "King Lear" (i. 2); and Warburton suggests that if the date of the first performance of "King Lear" were well considered, "it would be found that something or other had happened at that time which gave a more than ordinary run to this deceit, as these words seem to indicate - "I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses."

Zouch,¹²⁶ speaking of Queen Mary's reign, tells us that "Judicial astrology was much in use long after this time. Its predictions were received with reverential awe; and even men of the

¹²³ "Primitive Culture," i. p. 131.

¹²⁴ Cf., "Richard III." (iv. 4); "1 Henry IV." (i. 1, iii. i); "Antony and Cleopatra" (iii. 13); "The Tempest" (i. 2); "Hamlet" (i. 4); "Cymbeline" (v. 4); "Winter's Tale" (iii. 2); "Richard II." (iv. 1).

¹²⁵ "Primitive Culture," i., p. 131; see Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1849, iii., pp. 341-348.

¹²⁶ "Walton's Lives," 1796, p. 113, note.

most enlightened understandings were inclined to believe that the conjunctions and oppositions of the planets had no little influence in the affairs of the world.”

The pretence, also, of predicting events—such as pestilence from the aspect of the heavenly bodies—one form of medical astrology—is noticed in “Venus and Adonis”—

“Long may they kiss each other, for this cure!
O, never let their crimson liveries wear!
And as they last, their verdure still endure,
To drive infection from the dangerous year!
That the star-gazers, having writ on death,
May say, the plague is banished by thy breath!”

Heroes were in ancient times immortalised by being placed among the stars, a custom to which Bedford refers in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1)—

“A far more glorious star thy soul will make
Than Julius Cæsar.”

And, again, “Pericles” (v. 3) exclaims—

“Heavens make a star of him.”

On a medal of Hadrian, the adopted son of Trajan and Plotina, the divinity of his parents is expressed by placing a star over their heads; and in like manner the medals of Faustina the Elder exhibit her on an eagle, her head surrounded with stars.¹²⁷

In “2 Henry IV.” (iv. 3) a ludicrous term for the stars is, “cinders of the elements;” and in “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1) they are designated “candles of the night.”

Meteors.—An elegant description of a meteor well-known to sailors is given by Ariel in “The Tempest” (i. 2)—

“Sometime I’d divide
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join.”

It is called by the French and Spaniards inhabiting the coasts of the Mediterranean—St Helme’s or St Telme’s fire; by the Italians—the fire of St Peter and St Nicholas. It is also known as the fire of St Helen, St Herm, and St Clare. Douce¹²⁸ tells us that whenever it appeared as a single flame it was supposed by the ancients to be Helena, the sister of Castor and Pollux, and in this state to bring ill luck, from the calamities which this lady is known to have caused in the Trojan war. When it came as a double flame it was called Castor and Pollux, and accounted a good omen. It has been described as a little blaze of fire, sometimes appearing by night on the tops of soldiers’ lances, or at sea on masts and sailyards, whirling and leaping in a moment from one place to another. According to some, it never appears but after a tempest, and is supposed to lead people to suicide by drowning. Shakespeare in all probability consulted Batman’s “Golden Books of the Leaden Goddess,” who, speaking of Castor and Pollux, says - “They were figured like two lampes or cresset lightes—one on the toppe of a maste, the other on the stemme or foeshippe.” He adds that if the first light appears in the stem or foeshippe and ascends upwards, it is a sign of good luck; if “either lights begin at the topmast, bowsprit,” or foeshippe, and descend towards the sea, it is a sign of a

¹²⁷ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, p. 397.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

tempest. In taking, therefore, the latter position, Ariel had fulfilled the commands of Prospero and raised a storm.¹²⁹ Mr Swainson, in his “Weather Lore” (1873, p. 193), quotes the following, which is to the same purport—

“Last night I saw Saint Elmo’s stars,
With their glittering lanterns all at play,
On the tops of the masts and the tips of the spars,
And I knew we should have foul weather that day.”

Capell, in his “School of Shakespeare” (1779, iii. 7), has pointed out a passage in Hakluyt’s “Voyages” (1598, iii. 450), which strikingly illustrates the speech of Ariel, quoted above: - “I do remember that in the great and boysterous storme of this foule weather, in the night, there came vpon the toppe of our maine yarde and maine maste, a certaine little light, much like unto the light of a little candle, which the Spaniards called the Cuerpo-Santo, and said it was St Elmo, whom they take to bee the aduocate of sailers. . . . This light continued aboard our ship about three houres, flying from maste to maste, and from top to top; and sometimes it would be in two or three places at once.” This meteor was by some supposed to be a spirit; and by others “an exhalation of moyst vapours, that are ingendered by foul and tempestuous weather.”¹³⁰ Mr Thoms in his “Notelets on Shakespeare” (1865, 59), says that, no doubt, Shakespeare had in mind the will-o’-the-wisp.¹³¹

Fire-Drake,—which is jocularly used in “Henry VIII.” (v. 4), for a man with a red face, was one of the popular terms for the will-o’ the wisp,¹³² and Burton in his “Anatomy of Melancholy” says: - “fiery spirits or devils are such as commonly work by fire-drakes, or ignes fatui, which lead men often in flumina et praecipitia.” In Bullokar’s “English Expositor” (1616), we have a quaint account of this phenomenon, “Fire-drake; a fire sometimes seen flying in the night like a dragon. Common people think it a spirit that keepeth some treasure hid, but philosophers affirme it to be a great unequal exhalation inflamed betweene two clouds, the one hot, the other cold, which is the reason that it also smoketh, the middle part whereof, according to the proportion of the hot cloud being greater than the rest, maketh it seem like a bellie, and both ends like unto a head and tail.”¹³³ White, however, in his “Peripateticall Institutions” (p. 156), calls the fiery-dragon or fire-drake, “a weaker kind of lightning. Its livid colours, and its falling without noise and slowly, demonstrate a great mixture of watery exhalation in it. . . . ‘Tis sufficient for its shape, that it has some resemblance of a dragon not the expresse figure.”

Among other allusions to the will-o’ the wisp by Shakespeare, Mr Hunter¹³⁴ notices one in “King Lear” (iii. 3), where Glo’ster’s torch being seen in the distance, the fool says, “Look, here comes a walking fire.” Whereupon Edgar replies, “This is the foul fiend, Flibbertigibbet; he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock.” “From which,” observes Mr Hunter, “Flibbertigibbet seems to be a name for the will-o’-the-wisp. Hence the propriety of ‘He *begins at curfew*, and walks till the crowing of the cock,’ that is, is seen in all the dark of

¹²⁹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii., p. 400.

¹³⁰ Purchas, “His Pilgrimes” (1625, pt. i. lib. iii., 333), quoted by Mr Aldis Wright in his notes to the “Tempest,” 1895, p. 86.

¹³¹ See Puck as Will-o’ the Wisp; chapter on “Fairy-Lore.”

¹³² See “Notes and Queries,” 5th S. X., p. 499; Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 410; Nares’ Glossary, i. p. 309.

¹³³ A “fire-drake” appears to have been also an artificial firework, perhaps what is now called a serpent. Thus in Middleton’s “Your Five Gallants” (1609)

“Bat, like fire-drakes,
Mounted a little, gave a crack and fell.”

¹³⁴ “New Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare,” Vol. ii. p. 272.

the night.” It appears that when Shakespeare wrote, “a walking fire” was a common name for the *ignis fatuus*, as we learn from the story “How Robin Goodfellow lead a company of fellows out of their way”:¹³⁵—A company of young men having been making merry with their sweethearts, were, at their coming home, to come over a heath—Robin Goodfellow, knowing of it, met them, and to make some pastime hee led them up and downe the heathe a whole night, so that they could not get out of it, for hee went before them in the shape of a *walking fire*, which they all saw and followed till the day did appeare, then Robin left them, and at his departure spake these words:—

Get you home, you merry lads,
Tell your mammies and your dads,
And all those that newes desire
How you saw a walking fire,
Wenches, that doe smile and lispe
Use to call me willy-wispe.”

Another allusion to this subject occurs in the “*Tempest*” (iv. 1), where Stephano, after Ariel has led him and his drunken companions through “tooth’d briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss and thorns,” and at last “left them i’ the filthy mantled pool,” reproaches Caliban in these words - “Monster, your fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy, has done little better than played the Jack with us”—that is, to quote Dr Johnson’s explanation of this passage “he has played Jack-with-a-lanthorn, has led us about like an *ignis fatuus*, by which travellers are decoyed into the mire.”¹³⁵ Once more, when Puck, in “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (iii. 1) speaks of the various forms he assumes in order to “mislead night wanderers, laughing at their harm,” he says—

“Sometime a horse I’ll be, sometime a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire.”

Shakespeare, no doubt, here alludes to the will-o’-the-wisp, an opinion shared by Mr Joseph Ritson,¹³⁶ who says - “This Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, seems likewise to be the illusory candle-holder, so fatal to travellers, and who is more usually called ‘Jack-a-lantern,’¹³⁷ or ‘Will-with-a-wisp,’ and ‘Kit-with-the-can-stick.’” Milton in “*Paradise Lost*” (b. ix.) alludes to this deceptive gleam in the following lines

“A wandering fire
Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night
Condenses, and the cold environs round,
Kindled through agitation to a flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends,
Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
Misleads th’ amaz’d night-wanderer from his way
To bogs and mires, and oft through pond and pool.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ See Thoms’s “Notelets on Shakespeare,” p. 59.

¹³⁶ “*Fairy Mythology*,” edited by Hazlitt, 1895, p. 40.

¹³⁷ Among the many other names given to this appearance may be mentioned the following: “Will-a-wisp,” “Joan-in-the-wad,” “Jacket-a-wad,” “Peg-a-lantern,” “Elf-fire,” &c. A correspondent of “*Notes and Queries*” (5th S., x. 499) says—“The wandering meteor of the moss or fell appears to have been personified as Jack, Gill, Joan, Will, or Robin, indifferently, according as the supposed spirit of the lamp seemed to the particular rustic mind to be a male or female apparition.” In Worcestershire it is called “Hob-and-his-lantern,” and “Hobany’s,” or “Hobnedy’s-lantern.”

¹³⁸ Mr Ritson says that Milton “is frequently content to pilfer a happy expression from Shakespeare—on this occasion, ‘night-wanderer.’” He elsewhere calls it “the friar’s lantern.”

This appearance has given rise to a most extensive folklore, and is embodied in many of the fairy legends and superstitions of this and other countries. Thus, in Germany, Jack o' Lanterns are said to be the souls of unbaptized children, that have no rest in the grave, and must hover between heaven and earth. In many places they are called land-measurers, and are seen like figures of fire, running to and fro with a red-hot measuring rod. These are said to be persons who have falsely sworn away land, or fraudulently measured it, or removed landmarks.¹³⁹ In the neighbourhood of Magdeburg, they are known as "Lüchtemännkens; and to cause them to appear, it is sufficient to call out "Ninove, Ninove." In the South Altmark they are termed "Dickepöten;" and if a person only prays as soon as he sees one, he draws it to him; if he curses, it retires. In some parts, too, a popular name is "Huckepöten," and "Tuckbolde." The Jack o' Lanterns of Denmark¹⁴⁰ are the spirits of unrighteous men, who by a false glimmer, seek to mislead the traveller, and to decoy him into bogs and moors. The best safeguard against them, when they appear, is to turn one's cap inside out. A similar notion occurs in Devonshire with regard to the Pixies, who delight in leading astray such persons as they find abroad after nightfall; the only remedy to escape them being to turn some part of the dress. In Normandy, these fires are called "Feux Follets," and they are believed to be cruel spirits, whom it is dangerous to encounter. Among the superstitions which prevail in connection with them, two, says Mr Thoms,¹⁴¹ are deserving of notice: - "One is, that the ignis fatuus is the spirit of some unhappy woman, who is destined to run *en furolle*, to expiate her intrigues with a minister of the church, and it is designated from that circumstance La Fourlore, or La Fourolle. Another opinion is, that Le Feu Follet is the soul of a priest, who has been condemned thus to expiate his broken vows of perpetual chastity; and it is very probable that it is to some similar belief existing in this country at the time when he wrote, that Milton alludes in "L' Allegro," when he says—

"She was pinched and pulled, she said,
And he by Friar's Lanthorn led."

In Brittany, the "Porte-brandon" appears in the form of a child bearing a torch, which he turns like a burning wheel; and with this, we are told, he sets fire to the villages, which are suddenly, sometimes in the middle of the night, wrapped in flames.

The appearance of meteors, Shakespeare ranks among omens, as in "1 Henry IV." (ii. 4), where Bardolph says: - "My lord, do you see these meteors? do you behold these exhalations? what think you they portend?" And in "King John" (iii. 4), Pandulph speaks of meteors as "prodigies and signs." The Welsh Captain in "Richard II." (ii. 4), says—

"'Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay,
The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd,
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven."

Comet.—From the earliest times comets have been superstitiously regarded, and ranked among omens. Thus Thucydides tells us, that the Peloponnesian war was heralded by an abundance of earthquakes and comets; and Virgil, in speaking of the death of Cæsar, declares that at no other time did comets and other supernatural prodigies appear in greater numbers. It is probably to this latter event that Shakespeare alludes in "Julius Cæsar" (ii. 2), where he represents Calpurnia as saying:—

¹³⁹ Thorpe, "Northern Mythology," 1852, iii. pp. 85, 258, 220.

¹⁴⁰ "Notelets on Shakespeare," pp. 64, 65.

¹⁴¹ "Notelets on Shakespeare," pp. 64, 65.

“When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.” Again, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1), the play opens with the following words uttered by the Duke of Bedford:—

“Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry’s death!”

In “Taming of the Shrew,” too (iii. 2), Petruchio, when he makes his appearance on his wedding-day, says:—

“Gentles, methinks you frown:
And wherefore gaze this goodly company,
As if they saw some wondrous monument,
Some comet, or unusual prodigy?”

In “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 2), the king, when telling his son how he had always avoided making himself “common-hackney’d in the eyes of men,” adds—

“By being seldom seen, I could not stir
But like a comet, I was wonder’d at.”

Arcite, in the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (v. 1), when addressing the altar of Mars, says:—

“Whose approach
Comets forewarn.”

Dew.—Amongst the many virtues ascribed to dew was its supposed power over the complexion, a source of superstition which still finds many believers, especially on May morning.¹⁴² All dew, however, does not appear to have possessed this quality—some being of a deadly or malignant quality. Thus Ariel, in the “Tempest” (i. 2), speaks of the “deep brook” in the harbour—

“Where once
Thou call’dst me up at midnight to fetch dew
From the still vex’d Bermoothes.”

And “Caliban” (i. 2), when venting his rage on Prospero and Miranda, can find no stronger curse than the following

“As wicked dew as e’er my mother brush’d,
With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both!”

It has been suggested that, in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 12), Shakespeare may refer to an old notion whereby the sea was considered the source of dews as well as rain, Euphronius is represented as saying:—

“Such as I am, I come from Antony:
I was of late as petty to his ends
As is the morn-dew on the myrtle leaf
To his grand sea.”

¹⁴² See Proctor’s “Myths of Astronomy;” Chambers’ “Domestic Annals of Scotland,” 1858, vol. ii. pp. 410–412. Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” pp. 364, 365.

According to an erroneous notion formerly current, it was supposed that the air, and not the earth, drizzled dew—a notion referred to in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 5):—

“When the sun sets, the air doth drizzle dew.”

And in “King John” (ii. 1)—

“Before the dew of evening fall.”

Then there is the celebrated honey-dew, a substance which has furnished the poet with a touching simile, which he has put into the mouth of “Titus Andronicus” (iii. 1):—

“When I did name her brothers, then fresh tears
Stood on her cheeks; as doth the honey-dew
Upon a gather’d lily almost wither’d.”

According to Pliny, “honey-dew” is the saliva of the stars, or a liquid produced by the purgation of the air. It is, however, a secretion deposited by a small insect, which is distinguished by the generic name of *Aphis*.¹⁴³

Rainbow.—Secondary rainbows, the watery appearance in the sky accompanying the rainbow, are in many places termed “water-galls”—a term we find in the “Rape of Lucrece” [1586–9]:—

“And round about her tear-distained eye
Blue circles stream’d, like rainbows in the sky:
These water-galls in her dim element
Foretell new storms to those already spent.”

Horace Walpole several times makes use of the word - “False good news are always produced by true good, like the water-gall by the rainbow”; and again, “Thank heaven it is complete, and did not remain imperfect like a water-gall.”¹⁴⁴In “The Dialect of Craven” we find “Water-gall, a secondary or broken rainbow. *Germ.* Wasser-galle.”

Thunder.—According to an erroneous fancy the destruction occasioned by lightning was effected by some solid body known as the thunder-stone or thunder-bolt. Thus in the beautiful dirge in “Cymbeline” (iv. 2)—

“*Guid.* Fear no more the lightning flash,
Arv. Or the all dreaded thunder-stone.”

Othello asks (v. 2)—

”Are there no stones in heaven
But what serve for the thunder?”

And in “Julius Cæsar” (i. 3) Cassius says

“And, thus unbraced, Casca, as you see,
Have bared my bosom to the thunder-stone.”

The thunder stone is the imaginary product of the thunder, which the ancients called *Brontia*, mentioned by Pliny (Nat. Hist. xxxvii. 10) as a species of gem, and as that which, falling with the lightning, does the mischief. It is the fossil commonly called the Belemnite, or Finger Stone, and now known to be a shell.

¹⁴³ See Patterson’s “Insects mentioned by Shakespeare,” 1841, p. 145.

¹⁴⁴ “Letters,” i., p. 310; vi., pp. 1, 187—Ed. Cunningham.

A superstitious notion prevailed among the ancients, that those who were stricken with lightning were honoured by Jupiter, and therefore to be accounted holy. It is probably to this idea that Shakespeare alludes in "Antony and Cleopatra" (ii. 5)—

"Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt."¹⁴⁵

The bodies of such were supposed not to putrify; and, after having been exhibited for a certain time to the people, were not buried in the usual manner, but interred on the spot where the lightning fell, and a monument erected over them. Some, however, held a contrary opinion. Thus Persius (Sat. ii. line 27), says—

"Triste jaces lucis evitandumque bidental."

The ground, too, that had been smitten by a thunderbolt was accounted sacred, and afterwards enclosed; nor did anyone even presume to walk on it. Such spots were, therefore, consecrated to the gods, and could not in future become the property of anyone.

Among the many other items of folk-lore associated with thunder is a curious one referred to in "Pericles" (iv. 2)—

"Thunder shall not so awake the beds of eels."

The notion formerly being that thunder had the effect of rousing eels from their mud, and so rendered them more easy to be taken in stormy weather. Marston alludes to this superstition in his satires ("Scourge of Villainie," sat. vii.)—

"They are nought but eeles, that never will appeare
Till that tempestuous winds or thunder teare
Their slimy beds."

The silence that often precedes a thunder storm is thus graphically described in "Hamlet" (ii. 2)—

"We often see, against some storm,
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold wind speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region."

Earthquakes, around which so many curious myths and superstitions have clustered,¹⁴⁶ are scarcely noticed by Shakespeare. They are mentioned among the ominous signs of that terrible night on which Duncan is so treacherously slain ("Macbeth," ii. 3)—

"The obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake."

And in "1 King Henry IV." (iii. 1) Hotspur assigns as a reason for the earthquakes the following theory:—

"Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth
Is with a kind of colic pinch'd and vex'd
By the imprisoning of unruly wind
Within her womb; which, for enlargement striving,

¹⁴⁵ Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 369.

¹⁴⁶ See Tylor's "Primitive Culture," i. pp. 364–367.

Shakes the old beldam earth, and topples down
Steeple, and moss-grown towers.”

Equinox—The storms that prevail in spring at the vernal equinox are aptly alluded to in
“Macbeth” (i. 2)—

“As whence the sun ‘gins his reflection,
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
So from that spring whence comfort seem’d to come
Discomfort swells.”

—the meaning being:—the beginning of the reflexion of the sun is the epoch of his passing
from the severe to the milder season, opening, however, with storms.

Wind—An immense deal of curious weather lore ¹⁴⁷has been associated with the wind from
the earliest period; and in our own and foreign countries innumerable proverbs are found
describing the future state of the weather from the position of the wind, for, according to an
old saying, “every wind has its weather.” Shakespeare has introduced some of these, showing
how keen an observer he was of those everyday sayings which have always been much in
use, especially among the lower classes. Thus the proverbial wet which accompanies the
wind when in the south is mentioned in “As you Like It” (iii. 5)—

“Like foggy south puffing with wind and rain.”

And again in “1 Henry IV.” (v. 1)—

“The southern wind
Doth play the trumpet to his (*i.e.* the sun’s) purposes,
And by his hollow whistling in the leaves
Foretells a tempest and a blustering day.”

A popular saying to the same effect, still in use, tells us that—

“When the wind is in the south,
It is in the rain’s mouth.”

Again, in days gone by, the southerly winds were generally supposed to be bearers of noxious
fogs and vapours, frequent allusions to which are given by Shakespeare. Thus in the
“Tempest” (i. 2), Caliban says

“A south-west blow on ye
And blister you all o’er.”

A book, ¹⁴⁸too, with which, as already noticed, Shakespeare appears to have been familiar,
tells us, “This southern wind is hot and moist. Southern winds corrupt and destroy; they heat,
and make men fall into the sickness.” Hence, in “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1), Thersites
speaks of “the rotten diseases of the south;” and in “Coriolanus” (i. 4), Marcius exclaims -
“All the contagion of the south light on you.” Once more, in “Cymbeline” (ii. 3), Cloten
speaks in the same strain - “The south fog rot him.”

Flaws—These are sudden gusts of wind. It was the opinion, says Warburton, “of some
philosophers that the vapours being congealed in the air by cold (which is the most intense in
the morning), and being afterwards rarefied and let loose by the warmth of the sun, occasion

¹⁴⁷ See Swainson’s “Weather Lore.”

¹⁴⁸ Batman upon Bartholomæus—“De Proprietatibus Rerum,” Lib. xi. c. 3.

those sudden and impetuous gusts of winds which were called ‘flaws.’” Thus he comments on the following passage in “2 Henry IV.” (iv. 4)—

“As humourous as winter and as sudden
As flaws congealed in the spring of day.”

In “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 1), these outbursts of wind are further alluded to—

“And this fell tempest shall not cease to rage
Until the golden circuit on my head,
Like to the glorious sun’s transparent beams,
Do calm the fury of this mad-bred flaw.”

Again, in “Venus and Adonis” (425), there is an additional reference—

“Like a red morn, that ever yet betoken’d
Wreck to the seaman, tempest to the field,
Sorrow to shepherds, woe unto the birds,
Gusts and foul flaws to herdmen and to herds.”

In the Cornish dialect a *flaw* signifies primitively a cut.¹⁴⁹ But it is also there used in a secondary sense for those sudden or cutting gusts of wind.¹⁵⁰

Squalls.—There is a common notion that “the sudden storm lasts not three hours,” an idea referred to by John of Gaunt in “Richard II.” (ii. 1)—

“Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short.”

Thus, in Norfolk, the peasantry say that “the faster the rain, the quicker the hold up,” which is only a difference in words from the popular adage, “after a storm comes a calm.”

Clouds.—In days gone by, clouds floating before the wind, like a reek or vapour, were termed racking clouds. Hence in “3 Henry VI.” (ii. 1), Richard speaks of—

“Three glorious suns, each one a perfect sun;
Not separated with the racking clouds.”

This verb though now obsolete, was formerly in common use; and in “King Edward III.,” 1596, we read:—

“Like inconstant clouds,
That, rack’d upon the carriage of the winds,
Increase,” &c.

At the present day one may often hear the phrase, the rack of the weather, in our agricultural districts; many, too, of the items of weather-lore noticed by Shakespeare being still firmly credited by our peasantry.

¹⁴⁹ Polwhele’s “Cornish Vocabulary.”

¹⁵⁰ Cf. “Macbeth,” iii. 4, “O, these flaws and starts.”

6. Birds

In the present chapter we have not only a striking proof of Shakespeare's minute acquaintance with natural history, but of his remarkable versatility as a writer. Whilst displaying a most extensive knowledge of ornithology, he has further illustrated his subject by alluding to those numerous legends, popular sayings, and superstitions which have, in this and other countries, clustered round the feathered race. Indeed, the following pages are alone sufficient to show, if it were necessary, how fully he appreciated every branch of antiquarian lore; and what a diligent student he must have been in the pursuit of that wide range of information, the possession of which has made him one of the most many-sided writers that the world has ever seen. The numerous incidental allusions, too, by Shakspeare, to the folk-lore of bygone days, whilst showing how deeply he must have read and gathered knowledge from every available source, serve as an additional proof of his retentive memory, and marvellous power of embellishing his ideas by the most apposite illustrations. Unfortunately, however, these have, hitherto, been frequently lost sight of through the reader's unacquaintance with that extensive field of folk-lore which was so well known to the poet. For the sake of easy reference, the birds with which the present chapter deals are arranged alphabetically.

Barnacle-Goose.—There was a curious notion, very prevalent in former times, that this bird (*Anser bernicla*) was generated from the barnacle (*Leilas anatifera*), a shell-fish, growing on a flexible stem, and adhering to loose timber, bottoms of ships, &c., a metamorphosis to which Shakspeare alludes in the "Tempest" (iv. i), where he makes Caliban say—

"We shall lose our time, And all be turn'd to barnacles."

This vulgar error, no doubt, originated in mistaking the fleshy peduncle of the shell-fish for the neck of a goose, the shell for its head, and the tentacula for a tuft of feathers. These shell-fish, therefore, bearing, as seen out of the water, a resemblance to the goose's neck, were ignorantly, and without investigation, confounded with geese themselves. In France, the barnacle-goose may be eaten on fast days, by virtue of this old belief in its fishy origin.¹⁵¹ Like other fictions this one had its variations,¹⁵² for sometimes the barnacles were supposed to grow on trees, and thence to drop into the sea, and become geese, as in Drayton's account of Furness, (*Polyolb.* 1622, Song 27, p. 1190). As early as the 12th century this idea¹⁵³ was promulgated by Giraldus Cambrensis in his "Topographia Hiberniæ." Gerarde, who in the year 1597 published his "Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantæ," narrates the following: - "There are found in the north parts of Scotland, and the isles adjacent called Orcades, certain trees, whereon do grow certain shell-fishes, of a white colour, tending to russet, wherein are contained little living creatures; which shells in time of maturity do open, and out of them grow those little living things, which, falling into the water, do become fowls, whom we call barnacles, in the north of England brant geese, and in Lancashire tree geese; but the others that do fall upon the land perish, and do come to nothing. Thus much of the writings of others, and also from the mouths of people of those parts, which may very well accord with truth. But what our eyes have seen and hands have touched, we shall declare. There is a small island in Lancashire called the Pile of Foulders, wherein are found

¹⁵¹ See Harland and Wilkinson's "Lancashire Folk-Lore," 1867, pp. 116-121; "Notes and Queries," I. S., viii. p. 224; "Penny Cyclopædia," vii. p. 206, article "Cirripeda."

¹⁵² Nares' "Glossary," 1872, i. p. 56.

¹⁵³ See Harting's "Ornithology of Shakspeare," 1871, pp. 246-257.

the broken pieces of old ships, some whereof have been cast thither by shipwreck, and also the trunks or bodies, with the branches, of old rotten trees, cast up there likewise, whereon is found a certain spume or froth, that in time breedeth into certain shells, in shape like those of the mussel, but sharper pointed, and of a whitish colour; wherein is contained a thing in form like a lace of silk, one end whereof is fastened unto the inside of the shell, even as the fish of oysters and mussels are. The other end is made fast unto the belly of a rude mass or lump, which in time cometh to the shape and form of a bird; when it is perfectly formed the shell gapeth open, and the first thing that appeareth is the foresaid lace or string; next come the legs of the bird hanging out, and as it groweth greater it openeth the shell by degrees, till at length it is all come forth and hangeth only by the bill. In short space after it cometh to full maturity, and falleth into the sea, where it gathereth feathers and groweth to a fowl, bigger than a mallard, and lesser than a goose; having black legs and bill, or beak, and feathers black and white, spotted in such a manner as is our magpie, which the people of Lancashire call by no other name than a tree goose." An interesting cut of these birds so growing is given by Mr Halliwell-Phillipps from a manuscript of the 14th century, who is of opinion that the barnacle mentioned by Caliban was the tree-goose. It is not to be supposed, however, that there were none who doubted this marvellous story, or who took steps to refute it. Belon, so long ago as 1551, says Mr Harting,¹⁵⁴ and others after him, treated it with ridicule, and a refutation may be found in Willughby's "Ornithology," which was edited by Ray in 1678.¹⁵⁵ This vulgar error is mentioned by many of the old writers. Thus Bishop Hall, in his "Virgidemiarum" (Lib. iv., sat. 2), says:—

"The Scottish barnacle, if I might choose,
That of a worme doth waxe a winged goose."

Butler, too, in his "Hudibras," (III., ii. 1. 655), speaks of it; and Marston, in his "Malecontent," (1604), has the following: - "Like your Scotch barnacle, now a block, instantly a worm, and presently a great goose."

Blackbird—This favourite is called in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" (iii. 1.) an ousel, (old French, oisel), a term still used in the neighbourhood of Leeds:—

"The ousel cock so black of hue,
With orange tawny bill."

In the 2d part of King Henry IV. (iii. 2) when Justice Shallow inquires of Justice Silence, "And how doth my cousin?" he is answered—

"Alas, a black ousel,¹⁵⁶ cousin Shallow," a phrase which, no doubt, corresponded to our modern one, a "black sheep." In Spenser's "Epithalamium" (1. 82), the word occurs—

"The ousel shrills, the ruddock warbles soft."

Buzzard.—Mr Staunton suggests that in the following passage of the "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1), a play is intended upon the words, and that in the second line, "buzzard" means a beetle from its peculiar buzzing noise—

¹⁵⁴ "Ornithology of Shakspeare," 1871, p. 252.

¹⁵⁵ See "Philosophical Transactions" for 1835; Darwin's "Monograph of the Cirrhipedia," published by the Ray Society; A paper by Sir J. Emerson Tennent in "Notes and Queries," I. S., viii. p. 223; Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1849, iii. pp. 361, 362; Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare," 1839, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ See "Yarrell's "Hist. of British Birds," 2d edition, i. p. 218. "Dialect of Leeds," 1862, p. 329. In Hamlet (iii. 2), some modern editions read ouzle; the old editions all have weasel, which is now adopted.

“O slow-wing’d turtle! shall a buzzard take thee?
Ay, for a turtle, as he takes a buzzard.”

The beetle was formerly called a buzzard; and in Staffordshire, a cock-chafer is termed a hum-buz. In Northamptonshire, we find a proverb, “I’m between a hawk and a buzzard,” which means, “I don’t know what to do, or how to act.”¹⁵⁷

Chaffinch.—Some think that this bird is alluded to in the song in the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 1), where the expression “Finch” is used; the chaffinch having always been a favourite cage bird with the lower-classes.¹⁵⁸In “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1), Thersites calls Patroclus a “finch-egg,” which was evidently meant as a term of reproach. Others again consider the phrase is equivalent to coxcomb.

Chough.—In using this word, Shakespeare probably in most cases meant the jackdaw;¹⁵⁹for in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 2), he says—

”Russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
Rising and cawing at the gun’s report.”

the term russet-pated being applicable to the jackdaw, but not to the real chough. In “1 Henry IV.” (v. 1), Prince Henry calls Falstaff *chewet* - “Peace, chewet, peace”—in allusion no doubt to the chough or jackdaw, for common birds have always had a variety of names.¹⁶⁰Such an appellation would be a proper reproach to Falstaff, for his meddling and impertinent talk. Steevens, and Malone, however, finding that *chewets* were little round pies made of minced meat, thought that the Prince compared Falstaff for his unseasonable chattering, to a minced pie. Cotgrave¹⁶¹describes the French “chouette;” as an owlet; also, a “chough,” which many consider to be the simple and satisfactory explanation of *chewet*. Belon in his “History of Birds” (Paris, 1855), speaks of the *chouette* as the smallest kind of chough or crow. Again, in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 2), in the amusing scene where Falstaff, with the Prince and Poins, meet to rob the travellers at Gadshill, Falstaff calls the victims “fat chuffs,” probably, says Mr Harting, who connects the word with chough, from their strutting about with much noise. Nares,¹⁶²too, in his explanation of *chuff*, says, that some suppose it to be from chough which is similarly pronounced, and means a kind of sea-bird generally esteemed a stupid one. Various other meanings are given. Thus, Mr Gifford¹⁶³affirms that chuff is always used in a bad sense, and means “a coarse unmannered clown, at once sordid and wealthy;” and Mr Halliwell-Phillipps explains it as spoken in contempt for a fat person.¹⁶⁴In Northamptonshire,¹⁶⁵we find the word chuff used to denote a person in good condition, as in Clare’s “Village Minstrel”—

“His chuff cheeks dimpling in a fondling smile.”

¹⁵⁷ Miss Baker’s “Northamptonshire Glossary,” 1854, i. 94. See Nares’ “Glossary,” 1872, i. p. 124; and “Richard the Third,” i. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 144; Halliwell-Phillipps “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” 1866, p. 187. The term finch, also, according to some may mean either the bullfinch or goldfinch.

¹⁵⁹ See Yarrell’s “History of British Birds,” 2d ed., ii. p. 58.

¹⁶⁰ Nares “Glossary,” i. p. 156; Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1875, v. p. 115; Dyce’s “Glossary,” 1876, p. 77.

¹⁶¹ Mr Dyce says that if Dr Latham had been acquainted with the article “Chouette,” in Cotgrave, he would not probably have suggested that Shakespeare meant here the lapwing or peewit. Some consider the magpie is meant. See Halliwell-Phillipps, “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” 1866, p. 83. Professor Newton would read “russet-patted,” or “red-legged,” thinking that Shakespeare meant the chough.

¹⁶² “Glossary,” i. p. 162. Singer’s Notes to Shakespeare, 1875, v p. 42.

¹⁶³ Massinger’s Works, 1813, i., p. 281.

¹⁶⁴ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” 1866, p. 86.

¹⁶⁵ Miss Baker’s “Northamptonshire Glossary,” 1854, i., p. 116.

Shakespeare alludes to the practice of teaching choughs to talk, although from the following passages he does not appear to have esteemed their talking powers of much value, for in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (iv. 1), he says—

“Choughs’ language, gabble enough, and good enough.”

And in *Tempest* (ii. 1), he represents Antonio as saying—

“There be that can rule Naples
As well as he that sleeps; lords that can prate
As amply and unnecessarily
As this Gonzalo; I myself could make
A chough of as deep chat.”

Shakespeare always refers to the jackdaw as the “daw.”¹⁶⁶The chough or jackdaw was one of the birds considered ominous by our forefathers, an allusion to which occurs in “*Macbeth*” (iii. 4.)—

“Augurs and understood relations have,
By magot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret’st man of blood.”

At the present day this bird is not without its folklore, and there is a Norwich rhyme to the following effect¹⁶⁷ —

“When three daws are seen on St Peter’s vane together,
Then we’re sure to have bad weather.”

In the north, too, of England ¹⁶⁸the flight of jackdaws down the chimney is held to presage death.

Cock.—The beautiful notion which represents the cock as crowing all night long on Christmas Eve, and by its vigilance dispelling every kind of malignant spirit ¹⁶⁹and evil influence, is graphically mentioned in “*Hamlet*” (i. 1), where Marcellus, speaking of the ghost, says—

“It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever ‘gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow’d and so gracious is the time.”

In short, there is a complete prostration of the powers of darkness; and thus, for the time being, mankind is said to be released from the influence of all those evil forces which otherwise exert such sway. The notion that spirits fly at cock-crow is very ancient, and is mentioned by the Christian poet Prudentius, who flourished in the beginning of the fourth century. There is also a hymn, said to have been composed by St Ambrose, and formerly used

¹⁶⁶ “*Coriolanus*,” iv. 5; “*Troilus and Cressida*,” i. 2; “*Much Ado about Nothing*,” ii. “*Twelfth Night*,” iii. 4; “*Love’s Labour’s Lost*,” v. 2, song; “*1 Henry VI.*” ii. 4.

¹⁶⁷ Swainson’s “*Weather Lore*,” 1873, p. 240.

¹⁶⁸ Henderson’s “*Folk-lore of Northern Counties*,” 1879, p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ See Douce’s “*Illustrations of Shakespeare*,” p. 438.

in the Salisbury Service, which so much resembles the following speech of Horatio (i. 1), that one might almost suppose Shakespeare had seen it ¹⁷⁰—

“The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine.”

This disappearance of spirits at cock-crow is further alluded to (i. 2) ¹⁷¹—

“The morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away,
And vanish’d from our sight.”

Blair, too, in his “Grave” has these graphic words—

”The tale
Of horrid apparition, tall and ghastly,
That walks at dead of night, or takes his stand
O’er some new-open’d grave, and strange to tell,
Evanishes at crowing of the cock.”

This superstition has not entirely died out in England, and a correspondent of “Notes and Queries”¹⁷² relates an amusing legend current in Devonshire: - “Mr N. was a squire who had been so unfortunate as to sell his soul to the Devil, with the condition that after his funeral the fiend should take possession of his skin. He had also persuaded a neighbour to be present on the occasion of the flaying. On the death of Mr N. this man went in a state of great alarm to the parson of the parish and asked his advice. By him he was told to fulfil his engagement, but he must be sure and carry a cock into the church with him. On the night after the funeral the man proceeded to the church armed with the cock, and, as an additional security, took up his position in the parson’s pew. At twelve o’clock the devil arrived, opened the grave, took the corpse from the coffin, and flayed it. When the operation was concluded he held the skin up before him and remarked, ‘Well, ‘twas not worth coming for after all, for it is all full of holes!’ As he said this, the cock crew, whereupon the fiend, turning round to the man, exclaimed, ‘If it had not been for the bird you have got there under your arm, I would have your skin too!’ But, thanks to the cock, the man got home safe again.” Various origins have been assigned to this superstition, which Hampson ¹⁷³ regards as a misunderstood tradition of some Sabæan fable. The cock, he adds, which seems by its early voice to call forth the sun, was esteemed a sacred solar bird, hence it was also sacred to Mercury, one of the personifications of the sun.

A very general amusement up to the end of the last century was cock-fighting, a diversion of which mention is occasionally made by Shakespeare, as in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 3)—

“His cocks do win the battle still of mine,
When it is all to nought.”

And again Hamlet says (v. 2)—

¹⁷⁰ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 438.

¹⁷¹ See Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, ii., pp. 51–57; Hampson’s “Medii Œvi Kalendarium,” i., p. 84.

¹⁷² I. S., iii. p. 404.

¹⁷³ “Medii Œvi Kalendarium,” i. p. 85.

”O, I die, Horatio;
The potent poison quite o’er-crows my spirit”

—meaning the poison triumphs over him, as a cock over his beaten antagonist. Formerly, cock-fighting entered into the occupations of the old and young.¹⁷⁴ Schools had their cockfights. Travellers agreed with coachmen that they were to wait a night if there was a cock-fight in any town through which they passed. When country gentlemen had sat long at table, and the conversation had turned upon the relative merits of their several birds, a cockfight often resulted, as the birds in question were brought for the purpose into the dining-room. Cock-fighting was practised on Shrove Tuesday to a great extent, and, in the time of Henry VII., seems to have been practised within the precincts of Court. The earliest mention of this pastime in England is by Fitzstephens, in 1191. Happily, now-a-days, cock-fighting is by law a misdemeanour, and punishable by penalty. One of the popular terms for a cock beaten in a fight was “a craven,” to which we find a reference in the “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1) - “No cock of mine; you crow too like a craven.” We may also compare the expression in Henry V. (iv. 7) - “He is a craven and a villain else.” In the old appeal or wager of battle,¹⁷⁵ in our common law, we are told, on the authority of Lord Coke, that the party who confessed himself wrong, or refused to fight, was to pronounce the word *cravent*, and judgment was at once given against him. Singer¹⁷⁶ says the term may be satisfactorily traced from *crant*, *créant*, the old French word for an act of submission. It is so written in the old metrical romance of “Ywaine and Gawaine” (Ritson i. 133)—

“Or yelde the til us als creant.”

and in “Richard Coeur de Lion” (Weber ii. 208)—

“On knees he fel down, and cryde, crêaunt.”

It then became *cravant*, *cravent*, and at length *craven*.

In the time of Shakespeare, the word *cock* was used as a vulgar corruption or purposed disguise of the name of God, an instance of which occurs in Hamlet (iv. 5) - “By cock, they are to blame.” This irreverent alteration of the sacred name is found at least a dozen times¹⁷⁷ in Heywood’s “Edward the Fourth,” where one passage is—

“*Herald*—Sweare on this booke, King Lewis, so help you God,
You mean no otherwise then you have said.
King Lewis—So helpe me Cock as I dissemble not.”

We find, too, other allusions to the sacred name, as in “cock’s-passion,” “cock’s-body;” as in “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. i) - “Cock’s passion, silence!” A not uncommon oath, too, in Shakespeare’s time was “Cock and pie”—*cock* referring to God, and *pie* being supposed to mean the service-book of the Romish Church; a meaning which, says Mr Dyce, seems much more probable than Douce’s¹⁷⁸ supposition that this oath was connected with the making of solemn vows by knights in the days of chivalry, during entertainments, at which a roasted peacock was served up. It is used by Justice Shallow (2 Henry IV., v. 1) - “By cock and pye, sir, you shall not away to-night.” We may also compare the expression in the old play of

¹⁷⁴ Roberts’ “Social History of Southern Counties of England,” 1856, p. 421. See “British Popular Customs,” 1876, p. 65.

¹⁷⁵ Nares’ “Glossary,” 1872, i. p. 203.

¹⁷⁶ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1875, ix. p. 256. Halliwell-Phillipp’s “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 112.

¹⁷⁷ Dyce’s “Glossary to Shakespeare,” p. 85.

¹⁷⁸ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 3839, p. 290.

“Soliman and Perseda” (1599) - “By cock and pye and mousefoot.” Mr Harting ¹⁷⁹says the “Cock and Pye” (*i.e.*, magpie) was an ordinary ale-house sign, and may have thus become a subject for the vulgar to swear by.

The phrase, “Cock-a-hoop,”¹⁸⁰which occurs in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 5)—

“You’ll make a mutiny among my guests!
You will set cock-a-hoop! you’ll be the man!”

—no doubt refers to a reckless person, who takes the cock or tap out of a cask, and lays it on the top or hoop of the barrel, thus letting all the contents of the cask run out. Formerly, a quart pot was called a hoop, being formed of staves bound together with hoops like barrels. There were generally three hoops to such a pot; hence, in “2 Henry VI.” (iv. 2), one of Jack Cade’s popular reformatations was to increase their number, “The three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it felony to drink small beer.” Some, however, consider the term Cock-a-hoop ¹⁸¹refers to the boastful crowing of the cock.

In “King Lear” (iii. 2) Shakespeare speaks of the “cataracts and hurricanoes” as having—
“Drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!”

Vanes on the tops of steeples were in days gone by made in the form of a cock—hence weathercocks—and put up, in papal times, to remind the clergy of watchfulness.¹⁸² Apart, too, from symbolism, the large tail of the cock was well adapted to turn with the wind.¹⁸³

Cormorant.—The proverbial voracity of this bird ¹⁸⁴gave rise to a man of large appetite being likened to it, a sense in which Shakespeare employs the word, as in “Coriolanus” (i. 1) - “The cormorant belly;” in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (i. 1) - “Cormorant devouring time;” and in “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 2) - “This cormorant war.” “Although,” says Mr Harting,¹⁸⁵“Shakespeare mentions the cormorant in several of his plays, he has nowhere alluded to the sport of using these birds, when trained, for fishing; a fact which is singular, since he often speaks of the then popular pastime of hawking, and he did not die until some years after James I. had made fishing with cormorants a fashionable amusement.”

Crow.—This has from the earliest times been reckoned a bird of bad omen; and in “Julius Cæsar,” (v. 1), Cassius, on the eve of battle, predicted a defeat, because, to use his own words:—

“Crows and kites
Fly o’er our heads and downward look on us,
As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem
A canopy most fatal, under which
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.”

¹⁷⁹ “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 171.

¹⁸⁰ It is also an ale-house sign.

¹⁸¹ See Dyce’s “Glossary to Shakespeare,” p. 85.

¹⁸² See “Book of Days,” 3863, i., p. 157.

¹⁸³ In “King Lear” (iv. 6), where Edgar says—

“Yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish’d to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight.”

the word “cock” is an abbreviation for cock-boat.

¹⁸⁴ For superstitions associated with this bird, see Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii., p. 218.

¹⁸⁵ “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 260.

Allusions to the same superstition occur in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 2); “King John” (v. 2), etc. Virgil (Bucolic i., 18), mentions the croaking of the crow as a bad omen:—

“Sæpe sinistra cava prædixit ab ilice cornix.”

And Butler in his “Hudibras” (part ii, canto 3), remarks:—

“Is it not ominous in all countries,
When crows and ravens croak upon trees.”

Even children now-a-days regard with no friendly feelings this bird of ill-omen;¹⁸⁶ and in the north of England there is a rhyme to the following effect:—

“Crow, crow, get out of my sight,
Or else I’ll eat thy liver and lights.”

Among other allusions, mentioned by Shakspeare, to the crow, may be noticed the crow-keeper—a person employed to drive away crows from the fields. At present,¹⁸⁷ in all the midland counties, a boy set to drive away the birds is said to keep birds; hence, a stuffed figure, now called a scare-crow, was also called a crow-keeper, as in “King Lear” (iv. 6):—

“That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper.”

One of Tusser’s directions for September is—

“No sooner a-sowing, but out by-and-by,
With mother or boy that alarum can cry:
And let them be armed with a sling or a bow,
To scare away pigeon, the rook, or the crow.”

In “Romeo and Juliet,” (i. 4), a scare-crow seems meant—

“Bearing a Tartar’s painted bow of lath,
Scaring the ladies like a crow-keeper.”

Among further references to this practice, is that in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 4), where Lord Talbot relates that, when a prisoner in France, he was publicly exhibited in the market-place:—

“Here, said they, is the terror of the French,
The scarecrow that affrights our children so.”¹⁸⁸

And once more, in “Measure for Measure,” (ii. 1):—

“We must not make a scare-crow of the law,
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch and not their terror.”

The phrase “to pluck a crow” is to complain good-naturedly but reproachfully, and to threaten retaliation.¹⁸⁹ It occurs in “Comedy of Errors,” (iii. 1): - “We’ll pluck a crow together.” Sometimes the word pull is substituted for pluck, as in Butler’s “Hudibras,” part ii. canto 2:—

¹⁸⁶ See “Folk-Lore Record,” 1879, i., p. 52; “Henderson’s Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” 3879, pp. 25, 126, 277.

¹⁸⁷ Nares’ “Glossary,” i., p. 208.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. “Henry IV.,” iv. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Miss Baker’s “Northamptonshire Glossary,” ii., p. 161; Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, iii., p. 393.

“If not, resolve before we go
That you and I must pull a crow.”

The crow has been regarded as the emblem of darkness, which has not escaped the notice of Shakespeare, who in “Pericles” (iv. *introd.*), speaking of the white dove, says:—

“With the dove of Paphos might the crow
Vie feathers white.”¹⁹⁰

Cuckoo.—Many superstitions have clustered round the cuckoo, and both in this country and abroad it is looked upon as a mysterious bird, being supposed to possess the gift of second sight, a notion referred to in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2):—

“Cuckoo, cuckoo:¹⁹¹O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear.”

And again, in “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” (iii. 1), Bottom sings:—

“The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay.”

It is still a common idea that the cuckoo, if asked, will tell anyone, by the repetition of its cries, how long he has to live. The country lasses in Sweden count the cuckoo’s call to ascertain how many years they have to remain unmarried, but they generally shut their ears and run away on hearing it a few times.¹⁹² Among the Germans the notes of the cuckoo, when heard in spring for the first time, are considered a good omen. Cæsarius (A.D. 1222), tells us of a convertite who was about to become a monk, but changed his mind on hearing the cuckoo’s call, and counting twenty-two repetitions of it. “Come,” said he, “I have certainly twenty-two years still to live, and why should I mortify myself during all that time. I will go back to the world, enjoy its delights for twenty years, and devote the remaining two to penitence.”¹⁹³ In England, the peasantry salute the cuckoo with the following invocation:—

“Cuckoo, cherry-tree,
Good bird tell me,
How many years have I to live.”

the allusion to the cherry-tree having probably originated in the popular fancy, that before the cuckoo ceases its song, it must eat three good meals of cherries. Pliny mentions the belief, that when the cuckoo came to maturity, it devoured the bird which had reared it; a superstition several times alluded to by Shakespeare. Thus, in “King Lear,” (i. 4) the Fool remarks—

“The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it’s had it head bit off by it young.”

Again, in “1 Henry IV.” (v. 1), Worcester says—

“And being fed by us you used us so
As that ungentle gull, the cuckoo’s bird,
Useth the sparrow; did oppress our nest;

¹⁹⁰ Cf. “Romeo and Juliet,” i. 5.

¹⁹¹ A cuckold being called from the cuckoo, the note of that bird was supposed to prognosticate that destiny.—Nares’ “Glossary,” i., p. 212.

¹⁹² Engel’s “Musical Myths and Facts,” 1876, i., p. 9.

¹⁹³ See Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk-Lore,” 1863, p. 99; “English Folk-Lore,” 1879, pp. 55–62.

Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk
That even our love durst not come near your sight
For fear of swallowing.”

Once more, the opinion that the cuckoo made no nest of its own, but laid its eggs in that of another bird, is mentioned in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 6):—

“Thou dost o’er-count me of my father’s house;
But, since the cuckoo builds not for himself,
Remain in’t as thou mayst.”

It has been remarked,¹⁹⁴ however, in reference to the common idea that the young cuckoo illtreats its foster mother, that if we watch the movements of the two birds, when the younger is being fed, we cannot much wonder at this piece of folk-lore. When the cuckoo opens its great mouth, the diminutive nurse places her own head so far within its precincts, that it has the exact appearance of a voluntary surrender to decapitation.

The notion¹⁹⁵ “which couples the name of the cuckoo with the character of the man whose wife is unfaithful to him, appears to have been derived from the Romans, and is first found in the middle ages in France, and in the countries of which the modern language is derived from the Latin. But the ancients more correctly gave the name of the bird, not to the husband of the faithless wife, but to her paramour, who might justly be supposed to be acting the part of the cuckoo. They applied the name of the bird in whose nest the cuckoo’s eggs were usually deposited—‘carruca’—to the husband. It is not quite clear how, in the passage from classic to mediæval, the application of the term was transferred to the husband.” In further allusion to this bird, we may quote the following from “All’s Well that Ends Well” (i. 3):—

“For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true will find,
Your marriage comes by destiny,
Your cuckoo sings by kind.”

The cuckoo has generally been regarded as the harbinger of spring, and according to a Gloucestershire rhyme—

“The cuckoo comes in April,
Sings a song in May;
Then in June another tune,
And then she flies away.”

Thus, in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 2), Henry IV., alluding to his predecessor, says—

“So when he had occasion to be seen,
He was but as the cuckoo is in June,
Heard, not regarded.”

In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), spring is maintained by the cuckoo, in those charming sonnets descriptive of the beauties of the country at this season.

The word cuckoo has, from the earliest times, been used as a term of reproach;¹⁹⁶ and Plautus¹⁹⁷ has introduced it on more than one occasion. In this sense we find it quoted by Shakespeare in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4): - “O’ horseback, ye cuckoo.” The term *cuckold*, too,

¹⁹⁴ See Mary Howitt’s “Pictorial Calendar of the Seasons,” p. 155 Knight’s “Pictorial Shakespeare,” i., p. 225, 6.

¹⁹⁵ Chambers’s “Book of Days,” i., p. 531.

¹⁹⁶ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii., p. 201.

¹⁹⁷ “Asinaria,” v. 1.

which so frequently occurs throughout Shakespeare's Plays, is generally derived from *cuculus*;¹⁹⁸ from the practice already alluded to of depositing its eggs in other birds' nests.

Domestic Fowl.—In the "Tempest" (v. 1), the word chick is used as a term of endearment, "Nay arise, chick, &c.;" and in "Macbeth" (iv. 3), Macduff speaks of his children as "all my pretty chickens." In "Coriolanus" (v. 3), hen is applied to a woman - "Poor hen, fond of no second brood;" and in "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1), Petruchio says, "So Kate will be my hen;" and, once more, "1 Henry IV." (iii. 3), Falstaff says, "How now, Dame Partlet, the hen?" In "Othello" (i. 3), Iago applies the term "guinea-hen" to Desdemona, a cant phrase in Shakespeare's day for a fast woman.

Dove.—Among the many beautiful allusions to this bird we may mention one in "Hamlet" (v. 1), where Shakespeare speaks of the dove only laying two eggs.¹⁹⁹

"As patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets are disclosed."

The young nestlings, when first disclosed, are only covered with a yellow down, and the mother rarely leaves the nest, in consequence of the tenderness of her young; hence the dove has been made an emblem of patience. In "2 Henry IV." (iv. 1), it is spoken of as the symbol of peace - "The dove, and very blessed spirit of peace;" and in the "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1), we find the expression "as modest as the dove." Its love, too, is several times referred to, as in "Romeo" (ii. 1), "Pronounce but—'love' and 'dove';" and in "1 Henry VI." (ii. 2), Burgundy says—

"Like to a pair of loving turtle-doves,
That could not live asunder day or night."

This bird has, also, been regarded as the emblem of fidelity, as in the following graphic passage in "Troilus and Cressida" (iii. 2):—

"As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
As iron to adamant, as earth to the centre."

and in "Winter's Tale" (iv. 4), we read - "Turtles pair, that never mean to part." Its modesty is alluded to in the "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1) - "Modest as the dove;" and its innocence in "2 Henry VI." (iii. 1), is mentioned, where King Henry says—

"Our kinsman Gloucester is as innocent
From meaning treason to our royal person
As is the sucking lamb or harmless dove:
The duke is virtuous, mild and too well given
To dream on evil or to work my downfall."

The custom of giving a pair of doves or pigeons as a present or peace-offering, is alluded to in "Titus Andronicus" (iv. 4), where the Clown says, "God and Saint Stephen give you good den: I have brought you a letter and a couple of pigeons here;" and when Gobbo tried to find favour with Bassanio in "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 2), he began by saying - "I have here a dish of doves, that I would bestow on your worship." Shakespeare alludes in several places to the "doves of Venus," as in "Venus and Adonis:"—

¹⁹⁸ Nares in his "Glossary" (i., p. 212) says—"Cuckold, perhaps, *quasi* cuckoo'd, *i.e.*, one served; *i.e.*, forced to bring up a brood that is not his own."

¹⁹⁹ Singer's "Shakespeare," 1875, ix., p. 294.

“Thus weary of the world, away she (Venus) hies,
 And yokes her silver doves; by whose swift aid
 Their mistress mounted through the empty skies
 In her light chariot quickly is conveyed;
 Holding their course to Paphos, where their queen
 Means to immure herself and not be seen.”

and in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (i. 1), where Hermia speaks of “the simplicity of Venus’ doves.” This will also explain, says Mr Harting,²⁰⁰ the reference to “the dove of Paphos” in “Pericles” (iv., *Introduction*). The towns of Old and New Paphos are situated on the south-west extremity of the coast of Cyprus. Old Paphos is the one generally referred to by the poets, being the peculiar seat of the worship of Venus, who was fabled to have been wafted thither, after her birth amid the waves. The “dove of Paphos” may therefore be considered as synonymous with the “dove of Venus.”

Mahomet, we are told, had a dove, which he used to feed with wheat out of his ear; when hungry, the dove lighted on his shoulder, and thrust its bill in to find its breakfast;—Mahomet persuading the rude and simple Arabians that it was the Holy Ghost that gave him advice.²⁰¹ Hence, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 2), the question is asked—

“Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?”

Duck.—A barbarous pastime in Shakespeare’s time was hunting a tame duck in the water with spaniels. For the performance of this amusement it was necessary²⁰² to have recourse to a pond of water sufficiently extensive to give the duck plenty of room for making its escape from the dogs when closely pursued: which it did by diving as often as any of them came near it, hence the following allusion in “Henry V.” (ii. 3)—

“And hold-fast is the only dog, my duck.”²⁰³

“To swim like a duck” is a common proverb, which occurs in the “Tempest” (ii. 2), where Trinculo, in reply to Stephano’s question how he escaped, says: “Swum ashore, man, like a duck; I can swim like a duck, I’ll be sworn.”

Eagle.—From the earliest time this bird has been associated with numerous popular fancies and superstitions, many of which have not escaped the notice of Shakspeare. A notion of very great antiquity attributes to it the power of gazing at the sun undazzled, to which Spenser in his “Hymn of Heavenly Beauty” refers:—

“And like the native brood of eagle’s kind,
 On that bright sun of glory fix thine eyes.”

In “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” (iv. 3), Biron says of Rosaline:—

“What peremptory eagle-sighted eye
 Dares look upon the heaven of her brow,
 That is not blinded by her majesty?”²⁰⁴

And in 3 Henry VI. (ii. 1), Richard says to Edward, Prince of Wales:—

²⁰⁰ “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” pp. 190, 191.

²⁰¹ Sir W. Raleigh’s “Hist. of the World,” B. i. Pt. i. Chap. 6.

²⁰² Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 329.

²⁰³ There is an allusion to the proverbial saying, “Brag is a good dog, but hold-fast is a better.”

²⁰⁴ In the same scene we are told:—“A lover’s eyes will gaze an eagle blind.” Cf. “Romeo and Juliet,” iii. 5; “Richard II.,” iii. 3.

“Nay, if thou be that princely eagle’s bird,
Show thy descent by gazing ‘gainst the sun.”

The French naturalist, Lacepede,²⁰⁵ has calculated that the clearness of vision in birds is nine times more extensive than that of the farthest-sighted man. The eagle, too, has always been proverbial for its great power of flight, and on this account has had assigned to it the sovereignty of the feathered race. Aristotle and Pliny both record the legend of the wren disputing for the crown, a tradition which is still found in Ireland:²⁰⁶—The birds all met together one day and settled among themselves that whichever of them could fly highest was to be the king of them all. Well, just as they were starting, the little rogue of a wren perched itself on the eagle’s tail. So they flew and flew ever so high, till the eagle was miles above all the rest, and could not fly another stroke, for he was so tired. “Then,” says he, “I’m the king of the birds,” says he; “hurroo!” “You lie,” says the wren, darting up a perch and a-half above the big fellow. The eagle was so angry to think how he was outwitted by the wren, that when the latter was coming down he gave him a stroke of his wing, and from that day the wren has never been able to fly higher than a hawthorn bush. The swiftness of the eagle’s flight is spoken of in “Timon of Athens,” (i. 1):—

“An eagle flight, bold, and forth on,
Leaving no track behind.”²⁰⁷

The great age, too, of the eagle is well known; and the words of the psalmist are familiar to most readers:—

“His youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s.”

Apemantus, however, asks of Timon (“Timon of Athens,” iv. 3):—

“Will these moss’d trees,
That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip where thou point’st out?”

Tuberville, in his “Book of Falconry,” 1575, says that the great age of this bird has been ascertained from the circumstance of its always building its eyrie or nest in the same place. The Romans considered the eagle a bird of good omen, and its presence in time of battle was supposed to foretell victory. Thus, in “Julius Cæsar,” (v. 1), we read:—

“Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
Two mighty eagles fell; and there they perch’d,
Gorging and feeding from our soldiers’ hands.”

It was selected for the Roman legionary standard,²⁰⁸ through being the king and most powerful of all birds. As a bird of good omen it is mentioned also in “Cymbeline,” (i. 1):—

“I chose an eagle, and did avoid a puttock.”

and in another scene (iv. 2), the Soothsayer relates how “Last night the very gods shew’d me a vision”: thus:—

“I saw Jove’s bird, the Roman eagle, wing’d
From the spongy south to this part of the west,
There vanish’d in the sunbeams: which portends

²⁰⁵ Quoted by Harting in “Ornithology of Shakspeare,” p. 24.

²⁰⁶ Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk-Lore,” pp. 75, 79.

²⁰⁷ Cf. “Antony and Cleopatra,” ii. 2.—’This was but as a fly by an eagle.’

²⁰⁸ Josephus, “De Bello Judico,” iii. 5.

(Unless my sins abuse my divination),
Success to th' Roman host."

The conscious superiority ²⁰⁹of the eagle is depicted by Tamora in "Titus Andronicus," (iv. 4):—

"The eagle suffers little birds to sing,
And is not careful what they mean thereby,
Knowing that with the shadow of his wing,
He can at pleasure stint their melody."

Goose.—This bird was the subject ²¹⁰of many quaint proverbial phrases often used in the old popular writers. Thus, a tailor's goose was a jocular name for his pressing iron, probably from its being often roasting before the fire, an allusion to which occurs in "Macbeth," (ii. 3):—

"Come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose."

The "wild-geese chase," which is mentioned in "Romeo and Juliet" (ii. 4)—

"*Mercutio*—Nay, if thy wits run the wild-geese chase, I have done."

—was a kind of horse-race, which resembled the flight of wild-geese. Two horses were started together, and whichever rider could get the lead, the other was obliged to follow him over whatever ground the foremost jockey chose to go. That horse which could distance the other won the race. This reckless sport is enumerated by Burton, in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," as a recreation much in vogue in his time among gentlemen. The term, "Winchester goose," was a cant phrase for a certain venereal disease, because the stews in Southwark were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester, to whom Gloucester tauntingly applies the term in the following passage ("1 Henry VI.," i. 3):—

"Winchester goose, I cry, a rope! a rope!"

In "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 10), there is a further allusion—

"Some galled goose of Winchester would hiss."

Ben Jonson ²¹¹calls it—

"The Winchestrian goose,
Bred on the banke in time of Popery,
When Venus there maintain'd the mystery."

"Plucking geese" was formerly a barbarous sport of boys ("Merry Wives of Windsor," v. 1), which consisted in stripping a living goose of its feathers.²¹²

In "Coriolanus" (i. 4), the goose is spoken of as the emblem of cowardice. Marcius says—

"You souls of geese,
That hear the shapes of men, how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat."

²⁰⁹ Harting's "Ornithology of Shakspeare," p. 33.

²¹⁰ Nares' "Glossary," i., p. 378.

²¹¹ "Execration against Vulcan," 1640, p. 37.

²¹² Singer's "Notes," 1875, i. p. 283.

Goldfinch.—The Warwickshire name ²¹³for this bird is “Proud Tailor,” to which, some commentators think, the words in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 1) refer

“*Lady P.*—I will not sing.

Hotsp.—’Tis the next way to turn tailor, or be red-breast teacher.”

It has, therefore, been suggested that the passage should be read thus - “’Tis the next way to turn tailor, or red-breast teacher,” *i.e.*, “to turn teacher of goldfinches or redbreasts.”²¹⁴Singer,²¹⁵however, explains the words thus - “Tailors, like weavers, have ever been remarkable for their vocal skill. Percy is jocular in his mode of persuading his wife to sing; and this is a humorous turn which he gives to his argument, ‘Come, sing.’ ‘I will not sing.’ ‘’Tis the next (*i.e.*, the readiest, nearest) way to turn tailor, or redbreast teacher’—the meaning being, to sing is to put yourself upon a level with tailors and teachers of birds.”

Gull.—Shakespeare often uses this word as synonymous with fool. Thus in Henry V. (iii. 6), he says—

“Why, ’tis a gull, a fool.”

The same play upon the word occurs in “Othello” (v. 2), and in “Timon of Athens” (ii. 1). In “Twelfth Night” (v. 1), Malvolio asks—

“Why have you suffer’d me to be imprison’d,
Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest,
And made the most notorious geck and gull
That e’er invention played on? tell me why.”

It is also used to express a trick or imposition, as in “Much Ado About Nothing” (ii. 3) - “I should think this a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it.”²¹⁶“Gull-catchers,” or “gull-gropers,” to which reference is made in “Twelfth Night”(ii. 5), where Fabian, on the entry of Maria, exclaims—

“Here comes my noble gull-catcher.”

were the names by which sharpers ²¹⁷were known in Shakespeare’s time.²¹⁸The “gull-catcher” was generally an old usurer, who lent money to a gallant at an ordinary, who had been unfortunate in play.²¹⁹Decker devotes a chapter to this character in his “Lanthorne and Candle-light,” 1612. According to him, “the gull-groper is commonly an old mony monger, who having travailed through all the follies of the world in his youth, knowes them well, and shunnes them in his age, his whole felicitie being to fill his bags with golde and silver.” The person so duped was termed a gull, and the trick also. In that disputed passage in the “Tempest” (ii. 2), where Caliban, addressing Trinculo, says—

“Sometimes I’ll get thee
Young scamels from the rock.”

²¹³ See “Archæologia,” iii., p. 33.

²¹⁴ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii., p. 693. Some think that the bull-finch is meant.

²¹⁵ Singer’s “Notes,” 3875, v. p. 82. See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 433.

²¹⁶ Some doubt exists as to the derivation of *gull*. Nares says it is from the old French *guiller*. Tooke holds that gull, guile, wile, and guilt are all from the Anglo-Saxon “wiglian, gewiglian,” that by which any one is deceived. Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 267.

²¹⁷ See D’Israeli’s “Curiosities of Literature,” iii., p. 84.

²¹⁸ See Thornbury’s “Shakespeare’s England,” i., pp. 311–322.

²¹⁹ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. pp. 394.

some think that the sea-mew, or sea-gull, is intended,²²⁰ sea-mall, or sea-mell, being still a provincial name for this bird. Mr Stevenson, in his “Birds of Norfolk” (ii. p. 260), tells us that “the female bar-tailed godwit is called a ‘scammell’ by the gunners of Blakeney. But as this bird is not a rock-breeder,²²¹ it cannot be the one intended in the present passage, if we regard it as an accurate description from a naturalist’s point of view.” Holt says that “scam” is a limpet, and scamell probably a diminutive. Mr Dyce²²² reads “Scamels,” *i.e.*, the kestrel, stannel, or windhover, which breeds in rocky situations, and high cliffs on our coasts. He also further observes that this accords well with the context “from the rock,” and adds that staniel or staunyel occurs in “Twelfth Night” (ii. 5), where all the old editions exhibit the gross misprint, “stallion.”

Hawk.—The diversion of catching game with hawks was very popular in Shakespeare’s time,²²³ and hence, as might be expected, we find many scattered allusions to it throughout his plays. The training of a hawk for the field was an essential part of the education of a young Saxon nobleman; and the present of a well-trained hawk was a gift to be welcomed by a king. Edward the Confessor spent much of his leisure time in either hunting or hawking; and in the reign of Edward III. we read how the Bishop of Ely attended the service of the church at Bermondsey, Southwark, leaving his hawk in the cloister, which in the meantime was stolen—the bishop solemnly excommunicating the thieves. On one occasion Henry VIII. met with a serious accident when pursuing his hawk at Hitchin in Hertfordshire. In jumping over a ditch, his pole broke, and he fell headlong into the muddy-water, where he was with some difficulty rescued by one of his followers. Sir Thomas Moore, writing in the reign of Henry VIII., describing the state of manhood, makes a young man say—

“Man-hod I am, therefore I me delyght
To hunt and hawke, to nourish up and fede
The greyhounde to the course, the hawke to th’ flight,
And to bestryde a good and lusty stede.”

In noticing then, Shakespeare’s allusions to this sport, we have a good insight into its various features, and also gain a knowledge of the several terms associated with it. Thus frequent mention is made of the word “haggard”—a wild untrained hawk—and in the following allegory (“Taming of the Shrew,” iv. 1), where it occurs, much of the knowledge of falconry is comprised:—

“My falcon now is sharp and passing empty;
And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged,²²⁴

For then she never looks upon her lure.
Another way I have to man my haggard,
To make her come and know her keeper’s call,
That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites,
That bate and beat and will not be obedient.

²²⁰ Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 269.

²²¹ “Aldis Wright’s “Notes to the ‘Tempest,’” 1875, pp. 120, 121.

²²² See Dyce’s “Shakespeare,” i., p. 245.

²²³ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, pp. 60–97, and “Book of Days,” 1863, ii. pp. 211–213. Smith’s “Festivals, Games, and Amusements,” 1831, p. 174.

²²⁴ “A hawk full fed was untractable, and refused the lure—the lure being a thing stuffed to look like the game the hawk was to pursue; its lure was to tempt him back after he had flown.”

She eat no meat to-day, nor none shall eat;
Last night she slept not, nor to-night she shall not.”²²⁵

Further allusions occur in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 1), where Viola says of the Clown:—

“This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit:
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time,
And, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye.”

In “Much Ado about Nothing,” Hero (iii. 1), speaking of Beatrice says that—

“her spirits are as coy and wild
As haggerds of the rock.”

And Othello (iii. 3), mistrusting Desdemona, and likening her to a hawk, exclaims—

“If I do prove her haggard,—
I’ld whistle her off.”²²⁶

The word “check” alluded to above was a term in falconry applied to a hawk when she forsook her proper game and followed some other of inferior kind that crossed her in her flight ²²⁷—being mentioned again in Hamlet (iv. 7), where the king says—

“If he be now return’d,
As checking at his voyage.”²²⁸

Another common expression used in falconry is “tower,” applied to certain hawks, etc., which tower aloft, soar spirally to a height in the air, and thence swoop upon their prey. In “Macbeth” (ii. 4), we read of “a falcon, towering in her pride of place;” in “2 Henry VI.” (ii. 1), Suffolk says, “My lord protector’s hawks do tower so well;” and in “King John” (v. 2), the Bastard says, “And, like an eagle o’er his aery ²²⁹towers.”

The word “quarry” which occurs several times in Shakespeare’s plays, in some instances, means the “game or prey sought.” The etymology has, says Nares, been variously attempted, but with little success. It may, perhaps, originally have meant the square, or inclosure (*carrée*) into which the game was driven (as is still practised in other countries), and hence the application of it to the game there caught, would be a natural extension of the term. Randle Holme, in his “Academy of Armory” (Book II., c. xi. p. 240), defines it as “the fowl which the hawk flyeth at, whether dead or alive.” It was also equivalent to a heap of slaughtered game, as in the following passages. In “Coriolanus” (i. 1), Caius Marcius says - “I’ld make a quarry with thousands of these quarter’d slaves.” In “Macbeth” (iv. 3) ²³⁰ we read “The quarry of these murder’d deer,” and in “Hamlet” (v. 2), “This quarry cries on havoc.”

²²⁵ In the same play (iv. 2) Hortensio describes Bianca as “this proud disdainful haggard.” See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 197. Cotgrave’s “French and English Dictionary,” sub. “Hagard;” and Latham’s “Falconry,” &c., 1658.

²²⁶ “To whistle off,” or dismiss by a whistle; a hawk seems to have been usually sent off in this way against the wind when sent in pursuit of prey.

²²⁷ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 77; see “Twelfth Night,” ii. 5.

²²⁸ The use of the word is not quite the same here, because the voyage was Hamlet’s “proper game,” which he abandons. “Notes to Hamlet,” Clark & Wright, 1876, p. 205.

²²⁹ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 456. Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 39. Tuberville’s “Booke of Falconrie,” 1611, p. 53.

²³⁰ Also in i. 2 we read—

Another term in falconry is “stoop,” or “swoop,” denoting the hawk’s violent descent from a height upon its prey. In “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. 1) the expression occurs, “Till she stoop, she must not be full-gorged.” In “Henry V.” (iv. 1), King Henry, speaking of the king, says, “Though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.” In “Macbeth,” too (iv. 3), Macduff, referring to the cruel murder of his children, exclaims, “What! at one fell swoop?”²³¹ Webster, in the “White Devil,”²³² says—

“If she [*i.e.*, Fortune] give aught, she deals it in small parcels,
That she may take away all at one swoop.”

Shakespeare gives many incidental allusions to the hawk’s trappings. Thus in “Lucrece” he says—

“Harmless Lucretia, marking what he tells
With trembling fear, as fowl hear falcon’s bells.”

And in “As You Like It” (iii. 3)²³³, Touchstone says, “As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires.” The object of these bells was to lead the falconer to the hawk when in a wood or out of sight. In Heywood’s play entitled, “A Woman Killed with Kindness,” 1617, is a hawking scene, containing a striking allusion to the hawk’s bells. The dress of the hawk²³⁴ consisted of a close-fitting hood of leather or velvet, enriched with needle-work, and surmounted with a tuft of coloured feathers, for use as well as ornament, inasmuch as they assisted the hand in removing the hood when the birds for the hawk’s attack came in sight. Thus in “Henry V.” (iii. 7), the Constable of France, referring to the valour of the Dauphin, says, “‘Tis a hooded valour, and when it appears it will bate.”²³⁵ And again, in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 2), Juliet says—

“Hood my unmann’d blood, bating²³⁶ in my cheeks.”

The “jesses” were two short straps of leather or silk, which were fastened to each leg of a hawk, to which was attached a swivel from which depended the leash or strap which the falconer²³⁷ twisted round his hand. Othello (iii. 3), says

“Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings.”

We find several allusions to the training of hawks.²³⁸ They were usually trained by being kept from sleep, it having been customary for the falconers to sit up by turns and “watch” the hawk, and keep it from sleeping, sometimes for three successive nights. Desdemona in “Othello” (iii. 3), says—

“And fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show’d like a rebel’s whore.”

Some read “quarry.” See “Notes to Macbeth,” Clark and Wright, p. 77. It denotes the square-headed bolt of a cross-bow. See Douce’s “Illustrations,” 1839, p. 227; Nares’ “Glossary,” ii., p. 206.

²³¹ See Spenser’s “Faerie Queen,” Book i., canto xi. 18—

“Low stooping with unwieldy sway.”

²³² “Ed. Dyce,” 1857, p. 5.

²³³ See “3 Henry VI.” i. 1.

²³⁴ A quibble is perhaps intended between *bate*, the term of falconry, and *abate*, *i.e.*, fall off, dwindle.

²³⁵ *Bate* is a term in falconry, to flutter the wings as preparing for flight, particularly at the sight of prey. In “1 Henry IV.” (iv. 1)—

“All plumed like estridges that with the wind,
Baited like eagles having lately bathed.”

Nares’ “Glossary,” i., p. 60.

²³⁶ “Unmann’d” was applied to a hawk not tamed.

²³⁷ See Singer’s “Notes to Shakespeare,” 1875, x. p. 86; Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 448.

²³⁸ See passage in “Taming of the Shrew,” iv. 1, already referred to, p. 115.

“My lord shall never rest;
I’ll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I’ll intermingle every thing he does
With Cassio’s suit.”

So in Cartwright’s “Lady Errant” (ii. 2),—

“We’ll keep you as they do hawks,
Watching until you leave your wildness.”

In “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), where Page says

“Nay, do not fly: I think we have watch’d you now”

the allusion is, says Staunton, to this method employed to tame or “reclaim” hawks.

Again, in “Othello” (iii. 3),²³⁹Iago exclaims—

“She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,
To seel her father’s eyes up close as oak;”

in allusion to the practice of seeling a hawk, or sewing up its eyelids, by running a fine thread through them, in order to make her tractable and endure the hood of which we have already spoken. Henry IV. (“2 Henry IV.” iii. 1), in his soliloquy on sleep, says—

“Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge.”²⁴⁰

In Spenser’s “Fairie Queen,” (I. vii. 23), we read:—

“Mine eyes no more on vanity shall feed,
But sealed up with death, shall have their deadly meed.”

It was a common notion, that if a dove was let loose with its eyes so closed, it would fly straight upwards, continuing to mount, till it fell down through mere exhaustion.²⁴¹

In “Cymbeline,” (iii. 4), Imogen, referring to Posthumus, says:—

”I grieve myself
To think, when thou shall be disedged by her
That now thou tirest on,”

this passage containing two metaphorical expressions from falconry. A bird was said to be *disedged* when the keenness of its appetite was taken away by *tiring*, or feeding upon some tough or hard substance given to it for that purpose. In “3 Henry VI.” (i. 1), the king says:—

“That hateful duke,
Whose haughty spirit, winged with desire,
Will cost my crown, and like an empty eagle
Tire on the flesh of me and of my son.”

²³⁹ Also in same play, i. 3.

²⁴⁰ Tuberville, in his “Book of Falconrie,” 1575, gives some curious directions, as “how to seele a hawke”; we may compare similar expressions in “Antony and Cleopatra,” iii. 13; v. 2.

²⁴¹ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii., pp. 777, 778; cf. Beaumont and Fletcher, “Philaster,” v. 1.

In “Timon of Athens,” (iii. 6), one of the lords says:—

“Upon that were my thoughts tiring, when we encountered.”

In “Venus and Adonis,” too, we find a further allusion:—

“Even as an empty eagle, sharp by fast,
Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh, and bone,” &c.

Among other allusions to the hawk, may be mentioned one in “Measure for Measure,” (iii. i):—

“This outward-sainted deputy,
Whose settled visage and deliberate word
Nips youth i’ th’ head and follies doth emmew,
As falcon doth the fowl.”

—the word “emmew” signifying the place where hawks were shut up during the time they moulted. In “Romeo and Juliet,” (iii. 4), Lady Capulet says of Juliet: - “To-night she is mew’d up to her heaviness;” and in “Taming of Shrew,” (i. 1), Gremio speaking of Bianca to Signor Baptista, says: - “Why will you mew her?”

When the wing or tail feathers of a hawk were dropped, forced out, or broken, by any accident, it was usual to supply or repair as many as were deficient or damaged, an operation called “to imp ²⁴²a hawk.” Thus in Richard II. (ii. 1), Northumberland says:—

“If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
Imp out our drooping country’s broken wing.”

So Massinger in his “Renegado” (v. 8), makes Asambeg say—

“Strive to imp
New feathers to the broken wings of time.”

Hawking was sometimes called birding.²⁴³In the “Merry Wives of Windsor,” (iii. 3), Master Page says: - “I do invite you to-morrow morning to my house to breakfast; after, we’ll a-birding together, I have a fine hawk for the bush.” In the same play (iii. 5), Dame Quickly, speaking of Mistress Ford, says: - “Her husband goes this morning a-birding;” and Mistress Ford says (iv. 2): - “He’s a-birding, sweet St John.” The word hawk, says Mr Harting, is invariably used by Shakspeare in its generic sense; and in only two instances does he allude to a particular species. These are the kestrel and sparrowhawk. In “Twelfth Night,” (ii. 5), Sir Toby Belch, speaking of Malvolio, as he finds the letter which Maria has purposely dropped in his path, says

“And with what wing the staniel ²⁴⁴checks at it.”

—staniel being a corruption of stangdall, a name for the kestrel hawk.²⁴⁵“Gouts” is the technical term for the spots on some parts of the plumage of a hawk, and perhaps Shakspeare uses the word in allusion to a phrase in heraldry. Macbeth (ii. 1), speaking of the dagger, says: - “I see thee still, and on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood.”

²⁴² Imp, from A.-S. *impan*, to graft. Tuberville has a whole chapter on “The way and manner how to ympe a hawke’s feather, howsoever it be broken or bruised.”

²⁴³ Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakspeare,” p. 72.

²⁴⁴ The reading of the folios here is *stallion*; but the word *wing*, and the falconer’s term *checks*, prove that the bird must be meant. See Nares’s “Glossary,” ii., p. 832.

²⁴⁵ See kestrel and sparrowhawk.

Heron.—This bird was frequently flown at by falconers. Shakespeare, in “Hamlet” (ii. 2), makes Hamlet say, “I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw;” handsaw being a corruption of “heronshaw,” or “hernsew,” which is still used, in the provincial dialects, for a heron. In Suffolk and Norfolk it is pronounced “harnsa,” from which to “handsaw,” is but a single step.²⁴⁶ Shakespeare here alludes to a proverbial saying, “He knows not a hawk from a handsaw.”²⁴⁷ Mr J. C. Heath²⁴⁸ explains the passage thus: “The expression obviously refers to the sport of hawking. Most birds, especially one of heavy flight like the heron, when roused by the falconer or his dog, would fly down or with the wind, in order to escape. When the wind is from the north, the heron flies towards the south, and the spectator may be dazzled by the sun, and be unable to distinguish the hawk from the heron. On the other hand, when the wind is southerly, the heron flies towards the north, and it and the pursuing hawk are clearly seen by the sportsman, who then has his back to the sun, and without difficulty knows the hawk from the hernsew.”

Jay.—From its gay and gaudy plumage, this bird has been used for a loose woman, as “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 3):—

“We’ll teach him to know turtles from jays,”

i.e., to distinguish honest women from loose ones. Again, in “Cymbeline” (iii. 4), Imogen says—

“Some jay of Italy

Whose mother was her painting,²⁴⁹ hath betray’d him.”

Kestrel.—A hawk²⁵⁰ of a base unserviceable breed, and therefore used by Spenser in his “Faerie Queen” (II. iii. 4), to signify base

“Ne thought of honour ever did assay
His baser breast, but in his kestrell kynd
A pleasant veine of glory he did fynd.”

By some²⁵¹ it is derived from “coystril,” a knave or peasant, from being the hawk formerly used by persons of inferior rank. Thus, in “Twelfth Night” (i. 3), we find “coystrill,” and in “Pericles” (iv. 6), “coystrel.” The name kestrel, says Singer,²⁵² for an inferior kind of hawk, was evidently a corruption of the French quercelle or quercerelle, and originally had no connection with coystril, though in later times they may have been confounded.

Holinshed²⁵³ classes coisterels with lacqueys and women, the unwarlike attendants on an army. The term was also given as a nick-name to the emissaries employed by the kings of England in their French wars. Dyce²⁵⁴ also considers kestrel distinct from coistrel.

Kingfisher.—It was a common belief in days gone by, that during the days the halcyon or kingfisher was engaged in hatching her eggs, the sea remained so calm that the sailor might venture upon it without incurring risk of storm or tempest; hence this period was called by Pliny and Aristotle “the halcyon days,” to which allusion is made in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 2)—

²⁴⁶ “Notes to Hamlet,” Clark & Wright, 1876, p. 159.

²⁴⁷ Ray’s “Proverbs,” 1768, p. 196.

²⁴⁸ Quoted in “Notes to Hamlet,” by Clark & Wright, p. 159. See Nares’ “Glossary,” i., p. 416.

²⁴⁹ *i.e.*, made by art; the creature not of nature but of painting; cf. “Taming of Shrew” (iv. 3); “Tempest” (ii. 2).

²⁵⁰ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii., p. 482.

²⁵¹ Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 74.

²⁵² See Singer’s “Notes,” iii., pp. 357, 358.

²⁵³ “Description of England,” i., p. 362.

²⁵⁴ “Glossary to Shakespeare,” p. 88.

“Expect St Martin’s summer, halcyon days.”

Dryden also refers to this notion—

“Amidst our arms as quiet you shall be,
As halcyons brooding on a winter’s sea.”

Another superstition connected with this bird occurs in “King Lear” (ii. 1), where the Earl of Kent says—

”Turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters.”

the prevalent idea being, that a dead kingfisher, suspended, from a cord, would always turn its beak in that direction from whence the wind blew. Marlow, in his “Jew of Malta,” (i. 1), says—

“But now how stands the wind?
Into what corner peers my halcyon’s bill?”

Occasionally one may still see this bird hung up in cottages, a remnant, no doubt, of this old superstition.²⁵⁵

Kite.—This bird was considered by the ancients to be unlucky. In “Julius Cæsar” (v. 1), Cassius says—

“Ravens, crows, and kites,
Fly o’er our heads and downward look on us.”

In “Cymbeline,” too (i. 2), Imogen says—

“I chose an eagle, and did avoid a puttock,”

puttock, ²⁵⁶here, being a synonym sometimes applied to the kite. Formerly the kite became a term of reproach from its ignoble habits. Thus in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 13), Antony exclaims, “You kite,” and King Lear (i. 4), says to Goneril, “detested kite, thou liest.” Its intractable disposition is alluded to in “Taming of the Shrew” by Petruchio (iv. 1). A curious peculiarity of this bird is noticed in “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 3), where Autolycus says: - “My traffic is sheets; when the kite builds, look to lesser linen”—meaning that his practice was to steal sheets; leaving the smaller linen to be carried away by the kites, who will occasionally carry it off to line their nests.²⁵⁷Mr Dyce ²⁵⁸quotes the following remarks of Mr Peck on this passage - “Autolycus here gives us to understand that he is a thief of the first class. This he explains by an allusion to an odd vulgar notion. The common people many of them, think that, if anyone can find a kite’s nest, when she hath young, before they are fledged, and sew up their back doors, so as they cannot mute, the mother kite in compassion to their distress, will steal lesser linen, as caps, cravats, ruffles, or any other such small matters as she can best fly with, from off the hedges where they are hanged to dry after washing, and carry them to her nest, and there leave them, if possible to move the pity of the first corner, to cut the thread, and ease them of their misery.”

²⁵⁵ Sir Thomas Browne’s “Vulgar Errors,” B. iii. chap. 10.

²⁵⁶ Also to the buzzard, which see p. 95.

²⁵⁷ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” iv., p. 67.

²⁵⁸ “Glossary,” p. 243.

Lapwing.—Several interesting allusions are made by Shakespeare to this eccentric bird. It was a common notion that the young lapwings ran out of the shell with part of it sticking on their heads, in such haste were they to be hatched. Horatio (“Hamlet,” v. 2) says of Osric—
 “This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.”

It was, therefore, regarded as the symbol of a forward fellow. Webster ²⁵⁹in the “White Devil” (1859, p. 13)—

“Forward lapwing!
 He flies with the shell on’s head.”

The lapwing, like the partridge, is also said to draw pursuers from her nest by fluttering along the ground in an opposite direction or by crying in other places. Thus in the “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 2), Shakespeare says—

“Far from her nest the lapwing cries away.”

Again in “Measure for Measure” (i. 4), Lucio exclaims—

“Though ‘tis my familiar sin,
 With maids to seem the lapwing, and to jest
 Tongue far from heart.”

Once more in “Much Ado about Nothing” (iii. 1) we read—

“For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing, runs,
 Close by the ground, to hear our conference.”

Several, too, of our older poets refer to this peculiarity. In Ben Jonson’s “Underwoods” (lviii.) we are told—

“Where he that knows will like a lapwing fly,
 Farre from the nest, and so himself belie.”

Through thus alluring intruders from its nest, the lapwing became a symbol of insincerity; and hence originated the proverb, “The lapwing cries tongue from heart;” or, “The lapwing cries most, farthest from her nest.”²⁶⁰

Lark.—Shakespeare has bequeathed to us many exquisite passages referring to the lark, full of the most sublime pathos and lofty conceptions. Most readers are doubtless acquainted with that superb song in “Cymbeline” (ii. 3), where this sweet songster is represented as singing “at heaven’s gate;” and again, as the “bird of dawn,” it is described in “Venus and Adonis,” thus—

“Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
 From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
 And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
 The sun ariseth in his majesty.”²⁶¹

In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2 song), we have a graphic touch of pastoral life—

“When shepherds pipe on oaten straws
 And merry larks are ploughmen’s clocks.”

²⁵⁹ “Glossary,” ii., p. 495; see Yarrell’s “History of British Birds,” 2d edition, ii., p. 482.

²⁶⁰ Ray’s “Proverbs,” 1768, p. 199.

²⁶¹ Cf. “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” iv. 1, “the morning lark;” “Romeo and Juliet,” iii. 5, “the lark, the herald of the morn.”

The words of Portia, too, in “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1), to sing “as sweetly as the lark,” have long ago passed into a proverb.

It was formerly a current saying that the lark and toad changed eyes, to which Juliet refers in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 5)—

“Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes.”

Warburton says this popular fancy originated in the toad having very fine eyes, and the lark very ugly ones. This tradition was formerly expressed in a rustic rhyme—

”To heav’n I’d fly,
But that the toad beguil’d me of mine eye.”

In “Henry VIII.” (iii. 2), the Earl of Surrey, in denouncing Wolsey, alludes to a curious method of capturing larks, which was effected by small mirrors and red cloth. These scaring the birds made them crouch, while the fowler drew his nets over them—

“Let his grace go forward,
And dare us with his cap like larks.”

In this case the cap was the scarlet hat of the cardinal, which it was intended to use as a piece of red cloth. The same idea occurs in Skelton’s “Why Come Ye not to Court?” a satire on Wolsey—

“The red hat with his lure
Bringeth all things under cure.”

The words “tirra-lyra” (“Winter’s Tale,” iv. 3), are a fanciful combination of sounds,²⁶² meant to imitate the lark’s note, borrowed, says Nares, from the French tire-lire. Browne, “British Pastorals” (bk. i. song 4), makes it teery-leery. In one of the Coventry pageants there is the following old song sung by the shepherds at the birth of Christ, which contains the expression—

“As I out rode this endenes night,
Of three joli shepherds I sawe a syght,
And all aboute there fold a stare shone bright,
They sang terli terlow,
So mereli the sheppardes their pipes can blow.”

In Scotland²⁶³ and the north of England, the peasantry say that if one is desirous of knowing what the lark says, he must lie down on his back in the field and listen, and he will then hear it say:—

“Up in the lift go we,
Tehee, tehee, tehee, tehee!
There’s not a shoemaker on the earth
Can make a shoe to me, to me!
Why so, why so, why so?
Because my heel is as long as my toe.”

Magpie.—It was formerly known as magot-pie, probably from the French magot, a monkey, because the bird chatters and plays droll tricks like a monkey. It has generally been regarded

²⁶² Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. 886; Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 217.

²⁶³ Chambers’ “Popular Rhymes of Scotland,” 1870, p. 192.

as a mysterious bird, and regarded with superstitious awe,²⁶⁴ and is thus alluded to in “Macbeth,” (iii. 4):—

“Augurs and understood relations, have
By magot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret’st man of blood.”

And again, in 3 “Henry VI.,” (v. 6), it is said:—

“Chattering pies in dismal discords sung.”

There are numerous rhymes relating to the magpie, of which we subjoin as a specimen one prevalent in the north of England:—

“One is sorrow, two mirth,
Three a wedding, four a birth.
Five heaven, six hell,
Seven the de’il’s ain sell.”

In Devonshire, in order to avert the ill-luck from seeing a magpie, the peasant spits over his right shoulder three times, and in Yorkshire various charms are in use. One is to raise the hat as a salutation, and then to sign the cross on the breast; and another consists in making the same sign by crossing the thumbs. It is a common notion in Scotland that magpies flying near the windows of a house portend a speedy death to one of its inmates. The superstitions associated with the magpie are not confined to this country, for in Sweden²⁶⁵ it is considered the witch’s bird, belonging to the evil one and the other powers of night. In Denmark, when a magpie perches on a house, it is regarded as a sign that strangers are coming.

Martin.—The martin, or martlet, which is called in “Macbeth,” (i. 6), the “guest of summer,” as being a migratory bird, has been from the earliest times treated with superstitious respect,—it being considered unlucky to molest or in any way injure its nest. Thus, in the “Merchant of Venice,” (ii. 9), the Prince of Arragon says:—

”The martlet
Builds in the weather on the outward wall,
Even in the force and road of casualty.”

Forster²⁶⁶ says that the circumstance of this bird’s nest being built so close to the habitations of man indicates that it has long enjoyed freedom from molestation. There is a popular rhyme still current in the north of England:—

“The martin and the swallow
Are God Almighty’s bow and arrow.”

The Nightingale.—The popular error that the nightingale sings with its breast impaled upon a thorn is noticed by Shakespeare, who makes Lucrece say:—

“And whiles against a thorn thou bear’st thy part,
To keep thy sharp woes waking.”

In the “Passionate Pilgrim,” (xxi.), there is an allusion:—

²⁶⁴ See “English Folk-Lore,” p. 81; Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” p. 127.

²⁶⁵ Thorpe’s “Northern Mythology,” ii. p. 34; Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, pp. 215, 216; see also Harland & Wilkinson’s “Lancashire Folk-Lore,” 1867, pp. 143, 145.

²⁶⁶ “Atmospherical Researches,” 1823, p. 262.

“Everything did banish moan,
Save the nightingale alone.

She, poor bird, as all forlorn,
Lean’d her breast up-till a thorn,
And there sung the dolefull’st ditty,
That to hear it was great pity.”

Beaumont and Fletcher, in “The Faithful Shepherdess” (v. 3), speak of—

“The nightingale among the thick-leaved spring,
That sits alone in sorrow, and doth sing
Whole nights away in mourning.”

Sir Thomas Browne ²⁶⁷asks “Whether the nightingale’s sitting with her breast against a thorn, be any more than that she placeth some prickles on the outside of her nest, or roosteth in thorny prickly places, where serpents may least approach her.”²⁶⁸In the “Zoologist” for 1862 the Rev. A. C. Smith mentions “the discovery, on two occasions, of a strong thorn projecting upwards in the centre of the nightingale’s nest.” Another notion is that the nightingale never sings by day; and thus Portia in “Merchant of Venice,” (v. 1), says:—

“I think,
The nightingale, if she could sing by day,
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren.”

Such, however, is not the case, for this bird often sings as sweetly in the day as at night-time. There is an old superstition ²⁶⁹that the nightingale sings all night, to keep itself awake, lest the glow-worm should devour her. The classical fable ²⁷⁰of the unhappy Philomela turned into a nightingale, when her sister Progne was changed to a swallow, has doubtless given rise to this bird being spoken of as she; thus Juliet tells Romeo (iii. 5),—

“It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree;
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.”

Sometimes the nightingale is termed Philomel, as in “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 2, song) ²⁷¹—

“Philomel, with melody,
Sing your sweet lullaby.”

Osprey.—This bird,²⁷²also called the sea-eagle, besides having a destructive power of devouring fish, was supposed formerly to have a fascinating influence, both which qualities are alluded to in the following passage in “Coriolanus” (iv. 7)—

²⁶⁷ Sir Thomas Browne’s Works, 1852, i. p. 378.

²⁶⁸ See “Book of Days,” i. p. 515.

²⁶⁹ Southey’s “Common-Place Book,” 5th S., 1851, p. 305.

²⁷⁰ “Ovid Metamorph.,” vi. 455–676; “Titus Andronicus,” iv. 1.

²⁷¹ Cf. “Lucrece,” 1079 and 1127.

²⁷² See Yarrell’s “Hist. of British Birds,” 1856, i. p. 30. Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 620; also Pennant’s “British Zoology.” See Peele’s Play of the “Battle of Alcazar,” (ii. 3), 1861, p. 28.

"I think he'll be to Rome,
As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it
By sovereignty of nature."

Drayton, in his "Polyolbion" (Song xxv.), mentions the same fascinating power of the osprey—

"The osprey, oft here seen, though seldom here it breeds,
Which over them the fish no sooner do espy,
But, betwixt him and them by an antipathy,
Turning their bellies up, as though their death they saw,
They at his pleasure lie, to stuff his gluttonous maw."

Ostrich.—The extraordinary digestion of this bird ²⁷³is said to be shown by its swallowing iron and other hard substances. ²⁷⁴In 2 Henry VI. (iv. 10), the rebel Cade says to Alexander Iden - "Ah villain, thou wilt betray me, and get a thousand crowns of the .king by carrying my head to him; but I'll make thee eat iron like an ostrich, and swallow my sword like a great pin, ere thou and I part." Cuvier,²⁷⁵ speaking of this bird, says, "It is yet so voracious, and its senses of taste and smell are so obtuse, that it devours animal and mineral substances indiscriminately, until its enormous stomach is completely full. It swallows without any choice, and merely as it were to serve for ballast, wood, stones, grass, iron, copper, gold, lime, or, in fact, any other substance equally hard, indigestible, and deleterious." Sir Thomas Browne,²⁷⁶ writing on this subject, says, "The ground of this conceit in its swallowing down fragments of iron, which men observing, by a forward illation, have therefore conceived it digesteth them, which is an inference, not to be admitted, as being a fallacy of the consequent." In Loudon's "Magazine of Natural History" (No. 6, p. 32), we are told of an ostrich having been killed by swallowing glass.

Owl.—The dread attached to this unfortunate bird is frequently spoken of by Shakespeare, who has alluded to several of the superstitions associated with it. At the outset, many of the epithets ascribed to it show the prejudice with which it was regarded—being in various places stigmatised as "the vile owl," in "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. 1); and the "obscure bird," in "Macbeth" (ii. 3), etc. From the earliest period it has been considered a bird of ill-omen, and Pliny tells us how, on one occasion, even Rome itself underwent a lustration, because one of them strayed into the Capitol. He represents it also as a funereal bird, a monster of the night, the very abomination of human kind. Virgil ²⁷⁷describes its death-howl from the top of the temple by night, a circumstance introduced as a precursor of Dido's death. Ovid,²⁷⁸ too, constantly speaks of this bird's presence as an evil omen; and indeed the same notions respecting it may be found among the writings of most of the ancient poets. This superstitious awe in which the owl is held may be owing to its peculiar look, its occasional and uncertain appearance, its loud and dismal cry,²⁷⁹ as well as to its being the bird of night.²⁸⁰ It has generally been associated with calamities and deeds of darkness.²⁸¹ Thus its weird shriek pierces the ear of Lady Macbeth (ii. 2), while the murder is being committed—

²⁷³ Called *estridge*, "1 Henry IV.," iv. 1.

²⁷⁴ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq." 1849, iii. p. 365.

²⁷⁵ "Animal Kingdom," 1829, viii. p. 427.

²⁷⁶ See Sir Thomas Browne's "Works," 1852, i. pp. 334-337.

²⁷⁷ "Æneid," iv. 462.

²⁷⁸ "Metam.," v. 550; vi. 432; x. 453; xv. 791.

²⁷⁹ "2 Henry VI.," iii. 2; iv. 1.

²⁸⁰ "Titus Andronicus," ii. 3.

²⁸¹ Cf. "Lucrece," 1. 165; see Yarrell's "History of British Birds," i. p. 122.

”Hark!—Peace!

It was the owl that shriek’d, the fatal bellman,
Which gives the stern’st good night.”

And when the murderer rushes in exclaiming—

“I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?”

She answers—

“I heard the owl scream.”

Its appearance at a birth has been said to foretell ill-luck to the infant, a superstition to which King Henry, in “3 Henry VI.” (v. 6), addressing Gloucester, refers—

“The owl shriek’d at thy birth, an evil sign.”

Its cries ²⁸²have been supposed to presage death, and, to quote the words of the “Spectator,” “a screech-owl at mid: night has alarmed a family more than a band of robbers.” Thus, in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), we are told how—

“The screech-owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe
In remembrance of a shroud”;

and, in “1 Henry VI.” (iv. 2), it is called the “ominous and fearful hour of death.” Again, when Richard III. (iv. 4) is exasperated by the bad news, he interrupts the third messenger by saying—

“Out on you, owls! nothing but songs of death?”

The owl by day is considered by some equally ominous, as in “3 Henry VI.” (v. 4) —

“The owl by day,
If he arise, is mock’d and wonder’d at.”

And in “Julius Cæsar” (i. 3), Casca says,—

“And yesterday the bird of night did sit
Even at noon-day, upon the market-place,
Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies
Do so conjointly meet, let not men say,
These are their reasons,—they are natural’;
For, I believe they are portentous things
Unto the climate that they point upon.”

Considering, however, the abhorrence with which the owl is generally regarded, it is not surprising that the “owlet’s wing”²⁸³ should form an ingredient of the cauldron in which the witches in “Macbeth” (iv. 1), prepared their “charm of powerful trouble.” The owl is, too, in all probability, represented by Shakespeare as a witch,²⁸⁴ a companion of the fairies in their moonlight gambols. In “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 2), Dromio of Syracuse says—

“This is the fairy land: O, spite of spites!
We talk with goblins, owls, and elvish sprites.

²⁸² See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 209.

²⁸³ The spelling of the folios is howlets. In Holland’s Translation of Pliny (chap. xvii. book x.), we read “of owl’s or howlets.” Cotgrave gives “Hulotte.”

²⁸⁴ Halliwell-Phillipps, “Handbook Index,” 1866, p. 354.

If we obey them not, this will ensue,
They'll suck our breath, and pinch us black and blue!"

Singer in his Notes on this passage (ii. p. 28) says - "It has been asked, how should Shakespeare know that screech-owls were considered by the Romans as witches?" Do these cavillers think that Shakespeare never looked into a book? Take an extract from the Cambridge Latin Dictionary (1594, 8vo), probably the very book he used: "Strix, a *scritche owle*; an unluckie kind of bird (as they of olde time said) which sucked out the blood of infants lying in their cradles; a witch, that changeth the favour of children; an hagge or fairie." So in the "London Prodigal," a comedy, 1605: - "Soul, I think I am sure crossed or witch'd with an owl."²⁸⁵In the "Tempest" (v. 1), Shakespeare introduces Ariel as saying—

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I,
In a cowslip's bell I lie,
There I couch when owls do cry."

Ariel,²⁸⁶who sucks honey for luxury in the cowslip's bell, retreats thither for quiet when owls are abroad and screeching. According to an old legend, the owl was originally a baker's daughter, to which allusion is made in "Hamlet" (iv. 5), where Ophelia exclaims - "They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be." Douce ²⁸⁷says the following story was current among the Gloucestershire peasantry: - "Our Saviour went into a baker's shop where they were baking, and asked for some bread to eat; the mistress of the shop immediately put a piece of dough into the oven to bake for him; but was reprimanded by her daughter, who, insisting that the piece of dough was too large, reduced it to a very small size; the dough, however, immediately began to swell, and presently became a most enormous size, whereupon the baker's daughter cried out, 'Heugh, heugh, heugh!' which owl-like noise probably induced our Saviour to transform her into that bird for her wickedness." Another version of the same story, as formerly known in Herefordshire, substitutes a fairy in the place of our Saviour. Similar legends are found on the Continent.²⁸⁸

Parrot.—The "popinjay," in "1 Henry IV." (i. 3), is another name for the parrot—from the Spanish, papagayo—a term which occurs in Browne's "Pastorals" (ii. 65)—

"Or like the mixture nature dothe display
Upon the quaint wings of the popinjay."

Its supposed restlessness before rain is referred to in "As you like it," (iv. 1): - "More clamorous than a parrot against rain." It was formerly customary to teach the parrot unlucky words, with which when anyone was offended, it was the standing joke of the wise owner to say, "Take heed, sir, my parrot prophesies,"—an allusion to which custom we find in "Comedy of Errors," (iv. 4), where Dromio of Ephesus says: - "Prophesy like the parrot, *beware the rope's end*." To this Butler hints, where speaking of Ralpho's skill in augury, he says ²⁸⁹:—

"Could tell what subtlest parrots mean,
That speak and think contrary clean;

²⁸⁵ See Dyce's "Glossary," p. 302.

²⁸⁶ See Singer's "Notes to Tempest," 1875, i. p. 82.

²⁸⁷ See "Gentleman's Magazine," November 1804, pp. 1083, 1084. Grimm's "Deutsche Mythologie."

²⁸⁸ See Dasent's "Tales of the Norse," 1859; p. 230.

²⁸⁹ "Hudibras," P. i. c. i.

What member 'tis of whom they talk,
When they cry *rope*, and *walk*, *knave walk*."

The rewards given to parrots to encourage them to speak are mentioned in "Troilus and Cressida," (v. 2) ²⁹⁰ - "The parrot will not do more for an almond." Hence, a proverb for the greatest temptation that could be put before a man seems to have been "An almond for a parrot." To "talk like a parrot," is a common proverb, a sense in which it occurs in "Othello," (ii. 3).

Peacock.—This bird was as proverbially used for a proud, vain fool as the lapwing for a silly one. In this sense some would understand it in the much disputed passage in "Hamlet," (iii. 2):—

"For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very—peacock."²⁹¹

The third and fourth folios reads *pajock*,²⁹² the other editions have "paiock," "paiocke," or "pajocke," and in the later quartos the word was changed to "paicock" and "pecock," whence Pope printed peacock.

Dyce says that in Scotland the peacock is called the pea-jock. Some have proposed to read paddock, and in the last scene Hamlet bestows this opprobrious name upon the king. It has been also suggested to read puttock, a kite.²⁹³ The peacock has also been regarded as the emblem of pride and arrogance, as in 1 "Henry VI." (iii. 3) ²⁹⁴:—

"Let frantic Talbot triumph for a while,
And, like a peacock, sweep along his tail;
We'll pull his plumes and take away his train."

Pelican.—There are several allusions by Shakespeare to the pelican's piercing her own breast to feed her young. Thus, in Hamlet (iv. 5), Laertes says:—

"To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms;
And like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood."

And in "King Lear," where the young pelicans are represented as piercing their mother's breast to drink her blood, an illustration of filial impiety (iii. 4), the king says:—

"Is it the fashion, that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'Twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters."²⁹⁵

It is a common notion that the fable here alluded to is a classical one, but this is an error. Shakespeare, says Mr Harting, "was content to accept the story as he found it, and to apply it metaphorically as the occasion required." Mr Houghton, in an interesting letter to "Land and

²⁹⁰ In "Much Ado about Nothing" (i. 1), Benedick likens Beatrice to a "parrot-teacher," from her talkative powers.

²⁹¹ This is the reading adopted by Singer.

²⁹² Notes to "Hamlet,"—Clark and Wright, 1876, pp. 179, 180.

²⁹³ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 645; Singer's "Notes," ix. p. 228.

²⁹⁴ Cf. "Troilus and Cressida," iii. 3.

²⁹⁵ Cf. "Richard II.," i. 1.

Water ²⁹⁶on this subject, remarks that the Egyptians believed in a bird feeding its young with its blood, and this bird is none other than the vulture. He goes on to say that the fable of the pelican doubtless originated in the Patristic annotations on the scriptures. The ecclesiastical Fathers transferred the Egyptian story from the vulture to the pelican, but magnified the story a hundredfold, for the blood of the parent was not only supposed to serve as food for the young, but was also able to reanimate the dead offspring. Augustine, commenting on Psalm cii. 6, - "I am like a pelican of the wilderness,"—remarks: - "These birds [male pelicans] are said to kill their offspring by blows of their beaks, and then to bewail their death for the space of three days. At length, however, it is said that the mother inflicts a severe wound on herself, pouring the flowing blood over the dead young ones, which instantly brings them to life." To the same effect write Eustathius, Isidorus, Epiphanius, and a host of other writers.²⁹⁷

According to another idea ²⁹⁸pelicans are hatched dead, but the cock pelican then wounds his breast, and lets one drop of blood fall upon each, and this quickens them.

Pheasant.—This bird is only once alluded to in "Winter's Tale" (iv. 4), where the Clown jokingly says to the Shepherd - "Advocate's the Court word for a pheasant; say you have none."

Phœnix.—Many allusions are given to this fabulous bird which is said to rise again from its own ashes. Thus in "Henry VIII." (v. 4), Cranmer tells how—

"When
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phœnix,
Her ashes new create another heir,
As great in admiration as herself."

Again, in "3 Henry VI." (i. 4), the Duke of York exclaims—

"My ashes, as the phœnix, may bring forth
A bird that will revenge upon you all."

Once more, in "Henry VI." (iv. 7), Sir William Lucy speaking of Talbot and those slain with him, predicts that "from their ashes shall be rear'd a phœnix that shall make all France afeard."²⁹⁹

Sir Thomas Browne ³⁰⁰tells us that there is but one phœnix in the world, "which after many hundred years burns herself, and from the ashes thereof ariseth up another." From the very earliest times there have been countless traditions respecting this wonderful bird. Thus its longevity has been estimated from three hundred to fifteen hundred years; and among the various localities assigned as its home are Ethiopia, Arabia, Egypt, and India. In the "Phœnix and the Turtle," it is said—

"Let the bird of loudest lay
On the sole Arabian tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be."

Pliny says of this bird, "Howbeit, I cannot tell what to make of him; and first of all, whether it be a tale or no, that there is never but one of them in the whole world, and the same not

²⁹⁶ Mr Harting, in his "Ornithology of Shakespeare," quotes an interesting correspondence from "Land and Water" (1869), on the subject.

²⁹⁷ See Sir Thomas Browne's Works, 1852, ii. pp. 1-4.

²⁹⁸ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 366, 367.

²⁹⁹ Cf. "Tempest," iii. 3; "All's Well that Ends Well," i. 1; "Antony and Cleopatra" iii. 2; "Cymbeline," i. 6.

³⁰⁰ Works, 1852, i. pp. 277-284.

commonly seen." Malone ³⁰¹quotes from Lyly's "Euphues and his England" (p. 312, ed. Arber). "For as there is but one phœnix in the world, so is there but one tree in Arabia wherein she buyldeth;" and Florio's "New Worlde of Wordes" (1598), "Rasin, a tree in Arabia, whereof there is but one found, and upon it the phœnix sits."

Pigeon.—As carriers these birds have been used from a very early date, and the castle of the birds at Bagdad takes its name from the pigeon-post which the old monks of the convent established. The building has crumbled into ruins long ago by the lapse of time, but the bird messengers of Bagdad became celebrated as far westward as Greece, and were a regular commercial institution between the distant parts of Asia Minor, Arabia, and the east.³⁰²In ancient Egypt also the carrier breed was brought to great perfection, and, between the cities of the Nile and the Red Sea, the old traders used to send word of their caravans to each other by letters written on silk, and tied under the wings of trained doves. In "Titus Andronicus" (iv. 3), Titus, on seeing a clown enter with two pigeons, says - "News, news from heaven! Marcus, the post is come. Sirrah, What tidings? have you any letters?" From the same play we also learn that it was also customary to give a pair of pigeons as a present. The Clown says to Saturninus (iv. 4), "I have brought you a letter and a couple of pigeons here."³⁰³

In "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 3), the dove is used synonymously for pigeon; where the nurse is represented as "sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall."³⁰⁴Mr Darwin in his "Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication" (i. pp. 204, 205), has shown that from the very earliest times pigeons have been kept in a domesticated state. He says - "The earliest record of pigeons in a domesticated condition occurs in the 5th Egyptian dynasty, about 3000 B.C., but Mr Birch of the British Museum informs me that the pigeon appears in a bill of fare in the previous dynasty. Domestic pigeons are mentioned in "Genesis," "Leviticus," and "Isaiah." Pliny informs us that the Romans gave immense prices for pigeons; 'nay, they are come to this pass, that they can reckon up their pedigree and race.' In India, about the year 1600 pigeons were much valued by Akber Khan; 20,000 birds were carried about with the Court." In most countries, too, the breeding and taming of pigeons have been a favourite recreation. The constancy of the pigeon has been proverbial from time immemorial; allusions to which occur in "Winter's Tale" (iv. 3); and in "As You Like it" (iii. 3).

Quail.—The quail was thought to be an amorous bird; and hence was metaphorically used to denote people of a loose character.³⁰⁵In this sense it is generally understood in "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 1), "Here's Agamemnon, an honest fellow enough, and one that loves quails." Mr Harting,³⁰⁶however, thinks that the passage just quoted refers to the practice formerly prevalent of keeping quails, and making them fight like game-cocks. The context of the passage would seem to sanction the former meaning. Quail fighting ³⁰⁷is spoken of in "Antony and Cleopatra" (ii. 3), where Antony, speaking of the superiority of Cæsar's fortunes to his own, says—

"If we draw lots, he speeds;
His cocks do win the battle still of mine,

³⁰¹ See Aldis Wright's Notes to "The Tempest," 1875, p. 129.

³⁰² "Daily Telegraph," January 31, 1880; see Southey's "Common Place Book," 1849, 2d series, p. 447.

³⁰³ See the Dove, pp. 107-108.

³⁰⁴ Sir Thomas Browne's Works, 1852, i. pp. 235-240.

³⁰⁵ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 704; Halliwell-Phillipps' "Handbook Index to Shakespeare," 1866, p. 398; Dyce's "Glossary," p. 345 Singer's "Shakespeare," vii. p. 264.

³⁰⁶ "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 218.

³⁰⁷ Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes," 1876, pp. 19, 97, 677; Brand's Popular Antiquities," 1849, ii. pp. 59, 60.

When it is all to nought; and his quails ever
Beat mine, inhoop'd, at odds."

It appears that cocks as well as quails were sometimes made to fight within a broad hoop—hence the term inhoop'd—to keep them from quitting each other. Quail-fights were well known among the ancients, and especially at Athens.³⁰⁸ Julius Pollux relates that a circle was made, in which the birds were placed, and he whose quail was driven out of this circle lost the stake, which was sometimes money, and occasionally the quails themselves. Another practice was to produce one of these birds, which being first smitten with the middle finger, a feather was then plucked from its head. If the quail bore this operation without flinching, his master gained the stake, but lost it if he ran away. Some doubt exists as to whether quail-fighting prevailed in the time of Shakespeare. At the present day³⁰⁹ the Sumatrans practise these quail combats, and this pastime is common in some parts of Italy, and also in China. Mr Douce has given a curious print, from an elegant Chinese miniature painting, which represents some ladies engaged at this amusement, where the quails are actually inhooped.

Raven.—Perhaps no bird is so universally unpopular as the raven, its hoarse croak in most countries being regarded as ominous. Hence, as might be expected, Shakespeare often refers to it, in order to make the scene he depicts all the more vivid and graphic. In "Titus Andronicus" (ii. 3), Tamora, describing "a barren detested vale," says—

"The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe:
Here never shines the sun; here nothing breeds,
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven."

And in "Julius Cæsar" (v. 1), Cassius tells us how ravens

"Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,
As we were sickly prey."³¹⁰

It seems that the superstitious dread³¹¹ attaching to this bird has chiefly arisen from its supposed longevity,³¹² and its frequent mention and agency in Holy Writ. By the Romans it was consecrated to Apollo, and was believed to have a prophetic knowledge—a notion still very prevalent. Thus its supposed faculty³¹³ of "smelling death" still renders its presence, or even its voice, ominous. Othello (iv. i) exclaims—

"O, it comes o'er my memory,
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all."

There is no doubt a reference here to the fanciful notion that it was a constant attendant on a house infected with the plague. Most readers, too, are familiar with that famous passage in "Macbeth" (i. 5), where Lady Macbeth, having heard of the king's intention to stay at the castle, exclaims—

"The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits

³⁰⁸ Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 367.

³⁰⁹ Marsden's "History of Sumatra," 1811, p. 276.

³¹⁰ Cf. "2 Henry VI." iii. 2; "Troilus and Cressida," v. 2.

³¹¹ See Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1849, iii. pp. 211, 212.

³¹² "English Folk-lore," 1878, p. 78.

³¹³ See Hunt's "Popular Romances of West of England," 1881, p. 380.

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty!"

We may compare Spenser's language in the "Faerie Queene" (bk. ii., c. vii. 23)

"After him owles and night ravens flew,
The hateful messengers of heavy things,
Of death and dolor telling sad tidings."

And once more the following passage from Drayton's "Barons' Wars" (book v. st. 42), illustrates the same idea—

"The ominous raven often he doth hear,
Whose croaking him of following horror tells."

In "Much Ado About Nothing" (ii. 3), the "night-raven" is mentioned. Benedick observes to himself - "I had as lief have heard the night-raven, come what plague could have come after it."³¹⁴This inauspicious bird, according to Steevens, is the owl; but this conjecture is evidently wrong, "being ³¹⁵at variance with sundry passages in our early writers, who make a distinction between it and the night-raven."

Thus Johnson, in his "Seven Champions of Christendom" (part i), speaks of "the dismal cry of night-ravens, . . . and the fearefull sound of schriek owles." Cotgrave regarded the "night-crow" and the "night-raven" as synonymous; and Mr Yarrell considered them only different names for the night-heron.³¹⁶In "3 Henry VI." (v. 6), King Henry says—

"The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time."

Goldsmith, in his "Animated Nature," calls the bittern the night-raven, and says - "I remember, in the place where I was a boy, with what terror the bird's note affected the whole village; they consider it as the presage of some sad event, and generally found, or made one to succeed it. If any person in the neighbourhood died, they supposed it could not be otherwise, for the night-raven had foretold it; but if nobody happened to die, the death of a cow or a sheep gave completion to the prophecy."

According to an old belief, the raven deserts its own young, to which Shakespeare alludes in "Titus Andronicus" (ii. 3)—

"Some say that ravens foster forlorn children,
The whilst their own birds famish in their nests."

"It was supposed that when the raven," says Mr Harting,³¹⁷"saw its young ones newly hatched, and covered with down, it conceived such an aversion that it forsook them, and did not return to the nest until a darker plumage had shown itself." To this belief the commentators consider the Psalmist refers, when he says - "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry" (Psalm cxlvii. 9). We are told, too, in Job, "Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat" (Job xxxviii. 41). Shakespeare, in "As You Like It" (ii. 3), probably had the words of the Psalmist in his mind—

³¹⁴ See Sir Thomas Browne's Works, 1852, ii. p. 29.

³¹⁵ Dyce's "Glossary," 1876, p. 288.

³¹⁶ See Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," pp. 101, 102; and Yarrell's "History of British Birds," ii. p. 581.

³¹⁷ "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 107.

“He that doth the ravens feed
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow.”

The raven has from earliest times been symbolical of blackness, both in connection with colour and character. In “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 2), Juliet exclaims—

“O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face,
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather’d raven!”³¹⁸

Once more, ravens’ feathers were formerly used by witches, from an old superstition that the wings of this bird carried with them contagion wherever they went. Hence in the “Tempest” (i. 2), Caliban says

“As wicked dew as e’er my mother brush’d
With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both.”

Robin Redbreast.—According to a pretty notion,³¹⁹ this little bird is said to cover with leaves any dead body it may chance to find unburied; a belief which probably in a great measure originated in the well-known ballad of the “Children in the Wood,” although it seems to have been known previously. Thus Singer quotes as follows from “Cornucopia, or Divers Secrets,” &c. (by Thomas Johnson, 1596) - “The robin redbreast, if he finds a man or woman dead, will cover all his face with moss; and some think that if the body should remain unburied that he would cover the whole body also.” In Dekker’s “Villaines Discovered by Lanthorn and Candlelight” (1616), quoted by Douce, it is said - “They that cheere up a prisoner but with their sight, are robin redbreasts that bring strawes in their bills to cover a dead man in extremitie.” Shakespeare, in a beautiful passage in “Cymbeline” (iv. 2), thus touchingly alludes to it, making Arviragus, when addressing the supposed dead body of Imogen, say—

“With fairest flowers
While summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I’ll sweeten thy sad grave: thou shalt not lack
The flower that like’s thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azured harebell, like thy veins; no, nor
The leaf of Eglantine, whom not to slander
Out-sweeten’d not thy breath: the ruddock would,
With charitable bill,—o bill, sore shaming
Those rich-left heirs that let their fathers lie
Without a monument! bring thee all this;
Yea, and furr’d moss besides, when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse.”

the “ruddock”³²⁰ being one of the old names for the redbreast, which is now-a-days found in some localities. John Webster, also, refers to the same idea in “The White Devil” (1857. Edit. Dyce, p. 45),—

³¹⁸ Cf. “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” ii. 2; “Twelfth Night,” v. 1.

³¹⁹ “English Folk-lore,” pp. 62–64; Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, 111. p. 191; Singer’s “Shakespeare,” x. p. 424; Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 380.

³²⁰ Cf. Spenser’s “Epithalamium,” v. 8:—

“The thrush replies, the mavis descant plays,
The ouzell shrills, the ruddock warbles soft.”

“Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,
 Since o’er shady groves they hover,
 And with leaves and flowers do cover
 The friendless bodies of unburied men.”

Drayton, too, in the “Owl,” has the following lines:

“Cov’ring with moss the dead’s unclosed eye,
 The little redbreast teaching charitie.”

Rook.—As an ominous bird this is mentioned in “Macbeth,” (iii. 4). Formerly the nobles of England prided themselves in having a rookery ³²¹in the neighbourhood of their castles, because rooks were regarded as “fowls of good omen.” On this account no one was permitted to kill them, under severe penalties. When rooks desert a rookery ³²²it is said to foretell the downfall of the family on whose property it is. A Northumbrian saying informs us that the rooks left the rookery of Chipchase before the family of Reed left that place. There is also a notion that when rooks haunt a town or village “mortality is supposed to await its inhabitants, and if they feed in the street it shows that a storm is at hand.”³²³

The expression “bully-rook,” in “Merry Wives of Windsor,” (I. 3), in Shakespeare’s time, says Mr Harting, ³²⁴had the same meaning as “jolly-dog” now-a-days; but subsequently it became a term of reproach, meaning a cheating sharper. It has been suggested that the term derives its origin from the rook in the game of chess; but Douce ³²⁵considers it very improbable that this noble game, “never the amusement of gamblers, should have been ransacked on this occasion.”

Snipe.—This bird was in Shakespeare’s time proverbial for a foolish man.³²⁶In “Othello,” (1. 3), Iago, speaking of Roderigo, says:—

“For I mine own gain’d knowledge should profane,
 If I would time expend with such a snipe,
 But for my sport and profit.”

Sparrow.—A popular name for the common sparrow was, and still is, philip, perhaps from its note, “Phip, phip.” Hence the allusion to a person named Philip in “King John,” (i. 1):—

Gurney, Good leave, good Philip.
Bastard, Philip!—sparrow.

Staunton says perhaps Catullus alludes to this expression in the following lines:—

“Sed circumsiliens, modo huc, modo illuc,
 Ad solam dominam usque pipilabat.”

Skelton, in an elegy upon a sparrow, calls it “Phyllyp Sparowe”; and Gascoigne also writes “The praise of Philip Sparrow.”

³²¹ “Standard,” January 26, 1897.

³²² “English Folk-Lore,” p. 76.

³²³ Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” 1879, p. 122.

³²⁴ “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 121.

³²⁵ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 36; the term “bully-rook” occurs several times in Shadwell’s “Sullen Lovers,”—See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 58.

³²⁶ In Northamptonshire the word denotes a pendant icicle, from its resemblance to the long bill of the bird, so-called. Baker’s “Northamptonshire Glossary,” 1854, ii. p. 260.

In “Measure for Measure,” (iii. 2), Lucio, speaking of Angelo, the Deputy-Duke of Vienna, says: - “Sparrows must not build in his house-eaves, because they are lecherous.”³²⁷

Sparrow-hawk.—A name formerly given to a young sparrow hawk was *eyas-musket*,³²⁸ a term we find in “Merry Wives of Windsor,” (iii. 3):—

“How now, my-eyas-musket!
What news with you?”

It was thus metaphorically used as a jocular phrase for a small child. As the invention, too, of fire-arms took place ³²⁹at a time when hawking was in high fashion, some of the new weapons were named after those birds, probably from the idea of their fetching their prey from on high. Musket has thus become the established name for one sort of gun. Some, however, assert that the musket was invented in the fifteenth century, and owes its name to its inventors.

Starling.—This was one of the birds that was in days gone by trained to speak. In “1 Henry IV.” (i. 3), Hotspur says—

“I’ll have a starling shall be taught to speak
Nothing but ‘Mortimer,’ and give it him,
To keep his anger still in motion.”

Pliny tells us how starlings were taught to utter both Latin and Greek words for the amusement of the young Cæsars; and there are numerous instances on record of the clever sentences uttered by this amusing bird.

Swallow.—This bird has generally been honoured as the harbinger of spring, and Athenæus relates that the Rhodians had a solemn song to welcome it. Anacreon has a well known ode. Shakespeare in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 3), alludes to the time of the swallow’s appearance in the following passage—

“Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.”

And its departure is mentioned in “Timon of Athens” (iii. 6), “The swallow follows not summer more willing than we your lordship.”

We may compare Tennyson’s notice of the bird’s approach and migration in the “May Queen”—

“And the swallow ‘ll come back again with summer o’er the wave.”

It has been long considered lucky for the swallow to build its nest on the roof of a house, but just as unlucky for it to forsake a place which it has once tenanted. Shakespeare probably had this superstition in his mind when he represents Scarus as saying, in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 12)—

”Swallows have built
In Cleopatra’s sails their nests: the augurers

³²⁷ See Nares’s “Glossary,” ii. p. 653; Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 320.

³²⁸ Derived from the French *mouschet*, of the same meaning.

³²⁹ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 593; Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 46. Tuberville tells us “the first name and terme that they bestowe on a falcon is an eyesse, and this name doth laste as long as she is an eyrie and for that she is taken from the eyrie.”

Say they know not,—they cannot tell;—look grimly,
And dare not speak their knowledge.”

Swan.—According to a romantic notion, dating from antiquity, the swan is said to sing sweetly just before its death, many pretty allusions to which we find scattered here and there throughout Shakespeare’s plays. In “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 2), Portia says—

“He makes a swan-like end,
Fading in music.”

Emilia, too, in “Othello” (v. 2), just before she dies, exclaims—

“I will play the swan,
And die in music.”

In “King John” (v. 7), Prince Henry, at his father’s deathbed, thus pathetically speaks—

“‘Tis strange that death should sing.
I am the cygnet to this pale faint swan,
Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death,
And from the organ-pipe of frailty sings
His soul and body to their lasting rest.”

Again, in “Lucrece” (1611), we have these touching lines—

“And now this pale swan in her watery nest,
Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending.”

And once more in “Phœnix and the Turtle”—

“Let the priest in surplice white,
That defunctive music can,
Be the death-divining swan,
Lest the requiem lack his right.”

This superstition, says Douce,³³⁰ “was credited by Plato, Chrysippus, Aristotle, Euripides, Philostratus, Cicero, Seneca, and Martial. Pliny, Ælian, and Athenæus, among the ancients, and Sir Thomas More, among the moderns, treat this opinion as a vulgar error. Luther believed in it.” This notion probably originated in the swan being identified with Orpheus. Sir Thomas Browne³³¹ says we read that, “after his death Orpheus the musician became a swan. Thus was it the bird of Apollo, the bird of music by the Greeks.” Alluding to this piece of folk-lore, Carl Engel³³² remarks: - “Although our common swan does not produce sounds which might account for this tradition, it is a well-known fact that the wild swan (*Cygnus ferus*), also called the ‘whistling swan,’ when on the wing emits a shrill tone, which, however harsh it may sound if heard near, produces a pleasant effect when, emanating from a large flock high in the air, it is heard in a variety of pitches of sound, increasing or diminishing in loudness according to the movement of the birds and to the current of the air.” Colonel Hawker³³³ says, “The only note which I ever heard the wild swan make, in winter, is his well-known ‘whoop.’”³³⁴

³³⁰ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 161.

³³¹ See Sir Thomas Browne’s Works, 1852, i. p. 357.

³³² “Musical Myths and Facts,” 1876, i. p. 89.

³³³ “Instructions to Young Sportsmen,” 11th edition, p. 269.

³³⁴ See Baring-Gould’s “Curious Myths of the Middle Ages,” 1877, p. 561; Thorpe’s “Northern Mythology,” 1852, iii. pp. 302–328.

*Tassel-Gentle.*³³⁵—The male of the Goshawk was so called on account of its tractable disposition, and the facility with which it was tamed. It occurs in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 2)—

“O, for a falconer’s voice
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!”

Spenser, in his “Faerie Queene” (Bk. iii., iv. 49), says—

“Having far off espied a tassel-gent
Which after her his nimble wings doth straine.”

This species of hawk was also commonly called a “falcon-gentle;” on account of “her familiar, courteous, disposition.”³³⁶

Turkey.—This bird, so popular with us at Christmas-tide, is mentioned in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1), where the First Carrier says: - “God’s body! the turkeys in my pannier are quite starved.” This however, is an anachronism on the part of Shakespeare, as the turkey was unknown in this country until the reign of Henry VIII. According to a rhyme written in 1525, commemorating the introduction of this bird, we are told how—

“Turkies, carps, hoppes, piccarell, and beere,
Came into England all in one yeare.”

The turkey is again mentioned by Shakespeare in ‘Twelfth Night’ (ii. 5), where Fabian says of Malvolio: - “Contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock of him: how he jets under his advanced plumes.”

Vulture.—In several passages Shakespeare has introduced most forcibly this bird to deepen the beauty of some of his exquisite passages. Thus King Lear (ii. 4), when complaining of the unkindness of a daughter, bitterly exclaims—

“O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth’d unkindness, like a vulture, here.”

What, too, can be more graphic than the expression of Tamora in “Titus Andronicus” (v. 2)—

“I am Revenge, sent from the infernal kingdom,
To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind.”

Equally forcible too are Pistol’s words in “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 3)—

“Let vultures gripe thy guts.”

Johnson considers that “the vulture of sedition” in “2 Henry VI.” (iv. 3), is in allusion to the tale of Prometheus, but of this there is a decided uncertainty.

Wagtail.—In “King Lear” (ii. 2), Kent says—

“Spare my grey beard, you wagtail,”

the word being used, in an opprobrious sense, to signify an officious person.

Woodcock.—In several passages this bird is used to denote a fool or silly person; as in “Taming of the Shrew” (i. 2)—

“O this woodcock! what an ass it is!”

³³⁵ Properly “tiercel gentle,” French tiercelet. Cf. “Troilus and Cressida,” iii. 2, “the falcon as the tercel.”

³³⁶ “Gentleman’s Recreation,” p. 19, quoted in Nares’s “Glossary,” ii. p.867

And again in “Much ado about Nothing” (v. 1) where Claudio, alluding to the plot against Benedick, says—

“Shall I not find a woodcock too.”

In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3) Biron says—

“O heavens, I have my wish;
Duncan’s transformed: four woodcocks in a dish.”

The woodcock has generally been proverbial as a foolish bird,—perhaps because it is easily caught in springes or nets.³³⁷ Thus the popular phrase “Springes to catch woodcocks” “meant arts to entrap simplicity,³³⁸ as in “Hamlet” (i. 3)—

“Aye, springes to catch woodcocks.”

A similar expression occurs in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Loyal Subject” (iv. 4)—

“Go like a woodcock,
And thrust your neck i’ th’ noose.”

“It seems,” says Nares, “that woodcocks are now grown wiser by time, for we do not now hear of their being so easily caught. If they were sometimes said to be without brains, it was only founded on their character, certainly not on any examination of the fact.”³³⁹ Formerly, one of the terms for twilight³⁴⁰ was “cock-shut time,” because the net in which cocks, *i.e.* woodcocks, were shut in during the twilight, was called a “cock-shut.” It appears that a large net was stretched across a glade, and so suspended upon poles as to be easily drawn together. Thus in “Richard III.” (v. 3) Ratcliff says—

“Thomas the Earl of Surrey, and himself,
Much about cock-shut time, from troop to troop,
Went through the army, cheering up the soldiers.”

In Ben Jonson’s “Masque of Gypsies” we read—

“Mistress, this is only spite;
For you would not yesternight
Kiss him in the cock-shut light.”

Sometimes it was erroneously written “cock-shoot.” “Come, come away then, a fine cock-shoot evening.” In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (iv. i) we find the term “cock-light.”

Wren.—The diminutive character of this bird is noticed in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 1, song)—

“The wren with little quill.”

Lady Macbeth (iv. 2) says—

“The poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.”

³³⁷ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 508.

³³⁸ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 971.

³³⁹ See Willoughby’s “Ornithology,” iii. section 1.

³⁴⁰ Minsheu’s “Guide into Tongues,” Ed. 1617.

Considering, too, that as many as sixteen young ones have been found in this little bird's nest, we can say with Grahame in his poem on the birds of Scotland—

“But now behold the greatest of this train
Of miracles, stupendously minute;
The numerous progeny, claimant for food
Supplied by two small bills, and feeble wings
Of narrow range, supplied—ay, duly fed—
Fed in the dark, and yet not one forgot.”

The epithet “poor” applied to the wren by Lady Macbeth was certainly appropriate in days gone by, when we recollect how it was cruelly hunted in Ireland on St Stephen's day—a practice which prevailed also in the Isle of Man.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ See Yarrell's "History of British Birds," ii. p. 178.

7. Animals

As in the case of the birds, considered in the previous chapter, Shakespeare has also interwoven throughout his plays an immense deal of curious folk-lore connected with animals. Not only does he allude with the accuracy of a naturalist to the peculiarities and habits of certain animals, but so true to nature is he in his graphic descriptions of them that it is evident his knowledge was in a great measure acquired from his own observation. It is interesting, also, to note how carefully he has, here and there, worked into his narrative some old proverb, or superstition, thereby adding a freshness to the picture which has, if possible, imbued it with an additional lustre. In speaking of the dog, he has introduced many an old hunting custom; and his references to the tears of the deer are full of sweet pathos, as, for instance, where Hamlet says (iii. 2), "Let the stricken deer go weep." It is not necessary, however, to add further illustrations, as these will be found in the following pages.

Ape.—In addition to Shakespeare's mention of this animal as a common term of contempt, there are several other allusions to it. There is the well known phrase, "to lead apes in hell," applied to old maids mentioned in the "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1)—the meaning of this term not having been yet satisfactorily explained. (It is further discussed in the chapter on Marriage.)

In "2 Henry IV." (ii. 4), it is used as a term of endearment - "Alas, poor ape, how thou sweat'st."

Ass.—Beyond the proverbial use of this much ill-treated animal to denote a silly, foolish person, Shakespeare has said little about it. In "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. 1), Thersites uses the word "assinego," a Portuguese expression for a young ass - "Thou hast no more brain than I have in my elbows; an assinego may tutor thee." It is used by Beaumont and Fletcher in the "Scornful Lady" (v. 4) - "All this would be forsworn, and I again an assinego, as your sister left me."³⁴² Dyce³⁴³ would spell the word "Asinico," because it is so spelt in the old editions of Shakespeare, and is more in accordance with the Spanish word.³⁴⁴ In "King Lear" (i. 4), the Fool alludes to Æsop's celebrated fable of the old man and his ass—

"Thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt."

Bat.—The bat, immortalised by Shakespeare ("Tempest," v. I) as the "delicate Ariel's" steed—

"On the bat's back I do fly."

has generally been an object of superstitious dread, and proved to the poet and painter a fertile source of images of gloom and terror.³⁴⁵ In Scotland³⁴⁶ it is still connected with witchcraft, and if, while flying, it rise and then descend again earthwards, it is a sign that the witches' hour is come—the hour in which they are supposed to have power over every human being who is not specially shielded from their influence. Thus in "Macbeth" (iv. 1) the "wool of bat" forms an ingredient in the witches' cauldron. One of its popular names is "rere-mouse," which occurs in a "Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 2), where Titania says—

³⁴² Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 38.

³⁴³ "Glossary to Shakespeare," 1876, p. 20.

³⁴⁴ "Asinico, a little ass," Connelly's "Spanish and English Dict.," Madrid, 4to.

³⁴⁵ "English Folk-lore," p. 115; cf. "Macbeth," iii. 2.

³⁴⁶ Henderson's "Folk-lore of Northern Counties," 1879, pp. 125, 126.

“Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings,
To make my small elves coats.”

This term is equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon, *hrére-mús*, from *hreran*, to stir, agitate, and so the same as the old name “flitter-mouse.”³⁴⁷The early copies spell the word *reremise*.³⁴⁸It occurs in the Wicliffite versions of Lev. xi. 19, and the plural in the form “reremees” or “rere-myis” is found in Isaiah ii. 20. At Polperro, Cornwall,³⁴⁹the village boys call it “airy-mouse,” and address it in the following rhyme:—

“Airy mouse, airy mouse! fly over my head,
And you shall have a crust of bread;
And when I brew, and when I bake,
You shall have a piece of my wedding cake.”

In Scotland³⁵⁰it is known as the Backe or Bakie bird. An immense deal of curious folk-lore has clustered round this curious little animal.³⁵¹

Bear.—According to an old idea, the bear brings forth unformed lumps of animated flesh, and then licks them into shape—a vulgar error, referred to in “3 Henry VI.” (iii. 2), where Gloucester, bemoaning his deformity, says of his mother—

“She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,

.....

To disproportion me in every part,
Like to a chaos, or an unlick’d bear-whelp,
That carries no impression like the dam.”

This erroneous notion, however, was long ago confuted by Sir Thomas Browne.³⁵²Alexander Ross, in his “Arcana Microcosmi,” nevertheless affirms that bears bring forth their young deformed and mis-shapen, by reason of the thick membrane in which they are wrapped, that is covered over with a mucous matter. This, he says, the dam contracts in the winter-time, by lying in hollow caves without motion, so that to the eye the cub appears like an unformed lump. The above mucilage is afterwards licked away by the dam, and the membrane broken, whereby that which before seemed to be unformed appears now in its right shape. This he contends is all that the ancients meant.³⁵³Ovid (Metam. xv. 379) thus describes this once popular fancy—

“Nec Catulus partu quem reddidit ursa recenti,
Sed male viva caro est. Lambendo mater in artus
Fingit, et in formam quantam capit ipsa, reducit.”

Bears, in days gone by, are reported to have been surprised by means of a mirror, which they could gaze on, affording their pursuers an opportunity of taking the surer aim.³⁵⁴In “Julius Cæsar” (ii. 1), this practice is mentioned by Decius—

³⁴⁷ It has been speciously derived from the English word to rear, in the sense of being able to raise itself in the air, but this is erroneous. Nares’s “Glossary,” ii. 726.

³⁴⁸ Aldis Wright’s “Notes to a ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’” 1877, p. 101.

³⁴⁹ “Folk-lore Record,” 1879, p. 201.

³⁵⁰ Jamieson’s “Scottish Dictionary,” 1879, i. p. 106.

³⁵¹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 189; Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” 1871, pp. 13, 14.

³⁵² “Vulgar Errors,” 1852, i. p. 247.

³⁵³ See Bartholomæus “De Proprietate Rerum,” lib. xviii. c. 112; Aristotle, “History of Animals,” lib. vi. c. 31; Pliny’s “Natural History,” viii. c. 54.

³⁵⁴ Steevens on this passage.

"Unicorns may be betray'd with trees,
And bears with glasses."

Batman, "Upon Bartholome" (1582), speaking of the bear, says, "And when he is taken he is made blinde with a bright basin, and bound with chaynes, and compelled to playe." This, however, says Mr Aldis Wright,³⁵⁵ probably refers to the actual blinding of the bear.

A favourite amusement with our ancestors was bear-baiting. As early as the reign of Henry II. the baiting of bears by dogs was a popular game in London,³⁵⁶ whilst at a later period "a royal bear-ward" was an officer regularly attached to the royal household. In "2 Henry VI." (v. 1), this personage is alluded to by Clifford, who says—

"Are these thy bears? We'll bait thy bears to death,
And manacle the bear-ward in their chains,
If thou darest bring them to the baiting place."

And again, in "Much Ado about Nothing" (ii. 1), Beatrice says, "I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bear-ward, and lead his apes into hell." The synonymous term, "bear-herd," occurs in "Taming of the Shrew" (Introduction, scene 2), where Sly speaks of himself as "by transmutation a bear-herd;" and in "2 Henry IV." (i. 2), Sir John Falstaff remarks how "true valour is turned bear-herd." Among the Harleian MSS.³⁵⁷ is preserved the original warrant of Richard III. appointing John Brown to this office, and which recites "the diligent service he had done the king" as the ground for granting him the privilege of wandering about the country with his bears and apes, and receiving the "loving benevolence and favours of the people."³⁵⁸ In the time of Queen Elizabeth, bear-baiting was still a favourite pastime, being considered a fashionable entertainment for the ladies of the highest rank.³⁵⁹ James I. encouraged this sport. Nichols³⁶⁰ informs us that on one occasion the king, accompanied by his court, took the Queen, the Princess Elizabeth, and the two young Princes to the Tower to witness a fight between a lion and a bear, and by the king's command, the bear (which had killed a child that had been negligently left in the bear-house), was afterwards "baited to death upon a stage in the presence of many spectators." Popular, says Mr Kelly, as bear-baiting was in the metropolis and at court, it was equally so among all classes of the people.³⁶¹ It is on record that at Congleton, in Cheshire, "the town-bear having died, the corporation in 1601 gave orders to sell their Bible, in order to purchase another, which was done, and the town no longer without a bear." This event is kept up in a popular rhyme—

"Congleton rare, Congleton rare,
Sold the Bible to pay for a bear."

The same legend attaches to Clifton, a village near Rugby:—

"Clifton-upon-Dunsmore, in Warwickshire,
Sold the Church Bible to buy a bear."

³⁵⁵ Notes on "Julius Cæsar," 1878, p. 134.

³⁵⁶ "Notices Illustrative of the Drama and other Popular Amusements," incidentally illustrating Shakespeare and his contemporaries, extracted from the MSS. of Leicester, by W. Kelly, 1865, p. 152.

³⁵⁷ No. 433. The document is given at length in Collier's "Annals of the Stage," i. 35, Note.

³⁵⁸ Kelly's "Notices of Leicester," p. 152.

³⁵⁹ Wright's "Domestic Manners," p. 304.

³⁶⁰ "Progresses and Processions," ii. p. 259.

³⁶¹ About 1760 it was customary to have a bear baited at the election of the mayor.—Corry, "History of Liverpool," 1810, p. 93.

In Pulleyn's "Etymological Compendium,"³⁶² we are told that "this cruel amusement is of African origin, and was introduced into Europe by the Romans. It is further alluded to by Shakespeare in "Twelfth Night" (i. 3), "dancing and bear-baiting;" and further on in the same play (ii. 5) Fabian says, "he brought me out o' favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here;" and Macbeth (v. 7) relates:—

"They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course."³⁶³

and in "Julius Cæsar" (iv. 1), Octavius says:—

"—We are at the stake
And bay'd about with many enemies."

Boar.—It appears that in former times boar-hunting was a favourite recreation; many allusions to which we find in old writers. Indeed, in the middle ages, the destruction of a wild boar ranked among the deeds of chivalry,³⁶⁴ and "won for a warrior almost as much renown as the slaying an enemy in the open field." So dangerous too, was boar-hunting considered, that Shakespeare represents Venus as dissuading Adonis from the perilous practice:—

"O, be advised! thou know'st not what it is,
With javelin's point a churlish swine to gore,
Whose tushes never sheathed he whetteth still,
Like to a mortal butcher, bent to kill.

His brawny sides, with hairy bristles arm'd,
Are better proof than thy spear's point can enter;
His short thick neck cannot be easily harm'd;
Being ireful, on the lion he will venture."

Such hunting expeditions were generally fatal to some of the dogs, and occasionally to one or more of the hunters. An old tradition of Grimsby, in Lincolnshire,³⁶⁵ asserts that every burgess at his admission to the freedom of the borough, anciently presented to the mayor a boar's head, or an equivalent in money, when the animal could not be procured. The old seal of the mayor of Grimsby represents a boar hunt. The lord, too, of the adjacent manor of Bradley, was obliged by his tenure to keep a supply of these animals in his wood, for the entertainment of the mayor and burgesses.³⁶⁶ A curious triennial custom called the "Rhyne Toll," is observed at Chetwode, a small village about five miles from Buckingham.³⁶⁷ According to tradition, it originated in the destruction of an enormous wild boar—the terror of the surrounding county—by one of the lords of Chetwode; who, after fighting with it for four hours on a hot summer's day, eventually killed it.

"Then Sir Ryalas he drewed his broad sword with might,
Wind well thy horn, good hunter;
And he fairly cut the boar's head off quite,
For he was a jovial hunter."

³⁶² Edited by M. A. Thoms, 1853, p. 170.

³⁶³ For further information on this subject consult "Strutt's Sports and Pastimes," 1876: Kelly's "Notices of Leicester," pp. 152–159.

³⁶⁴ Chambers' "Book of Days," 1864, vol. ii., pp. 518, 519.

³⁶⁵ Hampson's "Ævi Medii Kalendarium," i. p. 96.

³⁶⁶ See "Gent. Mag.," xcvi. pp. 401, 402.

³⁶⁷ See "Book of Days," ii. pp. 517–519.

As a reward, it is said, the king “granted to him and to his heirs for ever, among other immunities and privileges, the full right to levy every year the Rhyne Toll.” This is still kept up, and consists of a yearly tax, on all cattle found within the manor of Chetwode between the 30th October and the 7th November, inclusive. In “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 13) Cleopatra alludes to the famous boar killed by Meleager - “The boar of Thessaly was never so emboss’d.”³⁶⁸

Bull.—Once upon a time there was scarcely a town or village of any magnitude which had not its bull-ring.³⁶⁹ Indeed, it was not until the year 1835 that baiting was finally put down by an act of Parliament, “forbidding the keeping of any house, pit, or other place for baiting or fighting any bull, bear, dog, or other animal;” and after an existence of at least seven centuries, this ceased to rank among the amusements of the English people.³⁷⁰ This sport is alluded to in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), “Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa.” We may too compare the expressions in “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 7) - “Now, bull, now, dog!—the bull has the game.”³⁷¹

Cat.—Few animals, in times past, have been more esteemed than the cat, or been honoured with a wider folk-lore. Indeed, among the Egyptians this favoured animal was held sacred to Isis or the moon, and worshipped with great ceremony. In the mythology of all the Indo European nations, the cat holds a prominent place; and its connection with witches is well known. “The picture of a witch,” says Mr Henderson,³⁷² “is incomplete without her cat, by rights a black one.” In “Macbeth” (iv. i) the First Witch says - “Thrice the brinded cat hath mew’d,”—it being a common superstition that the form most generally assumed by the familiar spirits of witches was the cat. Thus in another passage of the same play (i. 1), the First Witch says: - “I come, Graymalkin,”—the word otherwise spelt Grimalkin,³⁷³ meaning a grey cat. Numerous stories are on record of witches having disguised themselves as cats, in order to carry out their fiendish designs. A woodman out working in the forest has his dinner every day stolen by a cat. Exasperated at the continued repetition of the theft, he lies in wait for the aggressor, and succeeds in cutting off her paw, when lo! on his return home he finds his wife minus a hand.³⁷⁴ An honest Yorkshireman,³⁷⁵ who bred pigs, often lost the young ones. On applying to a certain wise man of Stokesley, he was informed that they were bewitched by an old woman who lived near. The owner of the pigs calling to mind that he had often seen a cat prowling about his yard, decided that this was the old woman in disguise. He watched for her, and, as soon as she made her appearance, flung at her a poker with all his might. The cat disappeared, and curiously enough the poor old woman in question, that night fell and broke her leg. This was considered as conclusive, that she was the witch that had simulated the form of a cat. This notion is very prevalent on the Continent. It is said that witch-cats³⁷⁶ have a great hankering after beer. Witches are adepts in the art of brewing, and therefore fond of tasting what their neighbours brew. On these occasions they always masquerade as cats, and what they steal they consume on the spot. There was a countryman

³⁶⁸ “Emboss’d” is a hunting term, properly applied to a deer when foaming at the mouth from fatigue, see p. 169; also Dyce’s “Glossary to Shakespeare,” p. 142. See Nares’s “Glossary,” i. p. 275.

³⁶⁹ Wright’s “Domestic Manners,” p. 304. See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes;” Smith’s “Festivals, Games, and Amusements,” 1831, pp. 192–229.

³⁷⁰ “Book of Days,” ii. p. 59.

³⁷¹ Cf. “2 Henry IV.,” ii. 2, “the town-bull.”

³⁷² “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” p. 267. Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 7.

³⁷³ Malkin is a diminutive of “Mary,” “Maukin,” the same word is still used in Scotland for a hare. Notes to “Macbeth” by Clarke and Wright, 1877. p. 75.

³⁷⁴ Sternberg’s “Dialect and Folk Lore of Northamptonshire,” 1851, p. 148.

³⁷⁵ Henderson’s “Folk Lore of Northern Counties,” 1879, p. 206.

³⁷⁶ Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk Lore,” 1863, p. 238.

whose beer was all drunk up by night whenever he brewed, so that at last he resolved for once to sit up all night and watch. As he was standing by his brewing pan, a number of cats made their appearance, and calling to them, he said; "Come, puss, puss, come, warm you a bit." So in a ring they all sat round the fire as if to warm themselves. After a time, he asked them "if the water was hot." "Just on the boil," said they, and, as he spoke he dipped his long-handled pail in the wort, and soused the whole company with it. They all vanished at once, but on the following day his wife had a terribly scalded face, and then he knew who it was that had always drunk his beer. This story is widely prevalent, and is current among the Flemish-speaking natives of Belgium. Again, a North German tradition ³⁷⁷tells us of a peasant who had three beautiful large cats. A neighbour begged to have one of them, and obtained it. To accustom it to the place, he shut it up in the loft. At night, the cat, popping its head through the window, said, "What shall I bring to-night?" "Thou shalt bring mice," answered the man. The cat then set to work, and cast all it caught on the floor. Next morning the place was so full of dead mice that it was hardly possible to open the door, and the man was employed the whole day in throwing them away by bushels. At night the cat again asked, 'what shall I bring to night?' 'Thou shalt bring rye,' answered the peasant. The cat was now busily employed in shooting down rye, so that in the morning the door could not be opened. The man then discovered that the cat was a witch, and carried it back to his neighbour." A similar tradition occurs in Scandinavian mythology.³⁷⁸ Spranger ³⁷⁹relates that a labourer, on one occasion, was attacked by three young ladies in the form of cats, and that they were wounded by him. On the following day they were found bleeding in their beds. In Vernon, ³⁸⁰about the year 1566, "the witches and warlocks gathered in great multitudes under the shape of cats. Four or five men were attacked in a lone place by a number of these beasts. The men stood their ground, and succeeded in slaying one cat, and wounding many others. Next day a number of wounded women were found in the town, and they gave the judge an accurate account of all the circumstances connected with their wounding." It is only natural, then, that Shakespeare in his description of the witches in "Macbeth," should have associated them with the popular superstition which represents the cat as their agent—a notion that no doubt originated in the classic story of Galanthis being turned into a cat, and becoming, through the compassion of Hecate, her priestess. From their supposed connection with witchcraft, cats were formerly often tormented by the ignorant vulgar. Thus it appears ³⁸¹that, in days gone by, they (occasionally fictitious ones) were hung up in baskets and shot at with arrows. In some counties, too, they were enclosed, with a quantity of soot, in wooden bottles suspended on a line, and he who could beat out the bottom of the bottle as he ran under it, and yet escape its contents, was the hero of the sport.³⁸² Shakespeare alludes to this practice in "Much Ado about Nothing" (i. 1), where Benedick says—

"Hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot at me."

Percy, in his "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry" (1794, i. p. 155), says - "It is still a diversion in Scotland to hang up a cat in a small cask or firkin, half filled with soot; and then a parcel of clowns on horseback try to beat out the ends of it, in order to show their dexterity in escaping before the contents fall upon them."

³⁷⁷ Thorpe's "Northern Mythology," 1851, iii. p. 32.

³⁷⁸ See Thorpe's "Northern Mythology," 1851, ii. p. 32; iii. pp. 26–236.

³⁷⁹ See Baring Gould's "Book of Werewolves," 1869, p. 65.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁸¹ Dyce's "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 70.

³⁸² See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. p. 39, also "Wright's Essays on the Superstitions of the Middle Ages," 1846.

This practice was once kept up at Kelso in Scotland, according to Ebenezer Lazarus, who, in his "Description of Kelso" (1789, p. 144), has given a graphic description of the whole ceremony. He says - "This is a sport which was common in the last century at Kelso on the Tweed. A large concourse of men, women, and children assembled in a field about half a mile from the town, and a cat having been put into a barrel stuffed full of soot, was suspended on a crossbeam between two high poles. A certain number of the whipmen, or husbandmen, who took part in this savage and unmanly amusement, then kept striking, as they rode to and fro on horseback, the barrel in which the unfortunate animal was confined, until at last, under the heavy blows of their clubs and mallets, it broke, and allowed the cat to drop. The victim was then seized and tortured to death." He justly stigmatizes it, saying

"The cat in the barrel exhibits such a farce,
That he who can relish it is worse than an ass."

Cats, from their great powers of resistance, are said to have nine lives;³⁸³ hence Mercutio, in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 1), says - "Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives." Ben Jonson, in "Every Man in His Humour" (iii. 2), makes Edward Knowell say to Bobadill - "'Twas pity you had not ten; a cat's and your own." And in Gay's fable of the "Old Woman and her Cats," one of these animals is introduced, upbraiding the witch

"'Tis infamy to serve a hag,
Cats are thought imps, her broom a nag;
And boys against our lives combine,
Because 'tis said, your cats have nine."

In Marston's "Dutch Courtezan," we read—

"Why, then, thou hast nine lives like a cat."

And in Dekker's "Strange Horse-Race" (1613) - "When the grand Helcat had gotten these two furies with nine lives." This notion, it may be noted, is quite the reverse of the well-known saying - "Care will kill a cat," mentioned in "Much Ado About Nothing" (v. 1), where Claudio says "What though care killed a cat."

For some undiscovered reason a cat was formerly called Tybert or Tybalt;³⁸⁴ hence some of the insulting remarks of Mercutio, in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 1), who calls Tybalt "rat catcher" and "king of cats." In the old romance of "Hystorye of Reynard the Foxe" (chap. vi.), we are told how "the king called for Sir Tibert, the cat, and said to him, Sir Tibert, you shall go to Reynard, and summon him the second time."³⁸⁵ A popular term for a wild cat was "cat-o'-mountain," an expression ³⁸⁶borrowed from the Spaniards, who call the wild cat "gato-montes." In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (ii. 2), Falstaff says of Pistol - "Your cat-a-mountain looks."

The word cat was used as a term of contempt, as in "Tempest" (ii. 1), and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (iii. 2), where Lysander says, "Hang off, thou cat." Once more, too, in "Coriolanus" (iv, 2), we find it in the same sense

"'Twas you incensed the rabble;
Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth,

³⁸³ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," iii. p. 42.

³⁸⁴ Dyce, "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 466.

³⁸⁵ From Tibert, Tib was also a common name for a cat.

³⁸⁶ Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 41.

As I can of those mysteries which heaven
Will not have earth to know.”

A gib, or a gib cat, is an old male cat ³⁸⁷—gib being the contraction of Gilbert, ³⁸⁸and is, says Nares, an expression exactly analogous to that of a jack-ass. ³⁸⁹Tom-cat is now the usual term. The word was certainly not bestowed upon a cat early in life, as is evident from the melancholy character ascribed to it in Shakespeare’s allusion in “1 Henry IV.” (i. 2) “I am as melancholy as a gib cat.” Ray gives “as melancholy as a gib’d [a corruption of gib] cat.” The term occurs again in “Hamlet” (iii. 4). It is improperly applied to a female by Beaumont and Fletcher in the “Scornful Lady” (v. 1) - “Bring out the cat-hounds! I’ll make you take a tree, whore; then with my tiller bring down your gib-ship, and then have you cased and hung up in the warren.”

Chameleon.—This animal was popularly believed to feed on air, a notion which Sir Thomas Browne ³⁹⁰has carefully discussed. He has assigned, among other grounds for this vulgar opinion, its power of abstinence and its faculty of self-inflation. It lives on insects, which it catches by its long gluey tongue, and crushes between its jaws. It has been ascertained by careful experiment that the chameleon can live without eating for four months. It can inflate not only its lungs but its whole body, including even the feet and tail. In allusion to this supposed characteristic, Shakespeare makes Hamlet say (iii. 2) - “Of the chameleon’s dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed; you cannot feed capons so;” and in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 1) Speed says “Though the chameleon, Love, can feed on the air, I am one that am nourished by my victuals, and would fain have meat.” There is, too, a popular notion that this animal undergoes frequent changes of colour, according to that of the bodies near it. This, however, depends on the volition of the animal, or the state of its feelings, on its good or bad health, and is subordinate to climate, age, and sex. ³⁹¹In “3 Henry VI.” (iii. 2), Gloucester boasts—

“I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages.”

Cockatrice.—This imaginary creature, also called a basilisk, has been the subject of extraordinary prejudice. It was absurdly said to proceed from the eggs of old cocks. It has been represented as having eight feet, a crown on the head, and a hooked and recurved beak. ³⁹²Pliny asserts that the basilisk had a voice so terrible that it struck terror into all other species. Sir Thomas Browne, ³⁹³however, distinguishes the cockatrice from the ancient basilisk. He says - “This of ours is generally described with legs, wings, a serpentine and winding tail, and a crest or comb somewhat like a cock. But the basilisk of elder times was a proper kind of serpent, not above three palms long, as some account; and different from other serpents by advancing his head and some white marks, or coronary spots upon the crown, as all authentic writers have delivered.” No other animal, perhaps, has given rise to so many fabulous notions. Thus, it was supposed to have so deadly an eye as to kill by its very look, to which Shakespeare very often alludes. In “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 2), the latter says—

³⁸⁷ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 183.

³⁸⁸ A gibbe (an old male cat), Macou, Cotgrave’s “French and English Dict.”

³⁸⁹ “Glossary,” i. p. 360.

³⁹⁰ “Vulgar Errors,” Bk. iii. 21, 1852, i. p. 321—Note.

³⁹¹ Ovid (“Metam.” xv. 1. 411), speaks of its changes of colour.

³⁹² Cuvier’s “Animal Kingdom,” 1831, ix. p. 226.

³⁹³ “Vulgar Errors,” iii. p. 7.

“Say thou but ‘I,’
And that bare vowel ‘I’ shall poison more
Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice.”

In “Richard III.” (iv. 1) the Duchess exclaims”—

“O my accursed womb, the bed of death!
A cockatrice has thou hatch’d to the world,
Whose unavoyded eye is murderous.”

In “Lucrece” (l. 540), we read:—

“Here with a cockatrice’s dead-killing-eye
He rouseth up himself and makes a pause.”

Once more,³⁹⁴in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), Sir Toby Belch affirms - “This will so fright them both that they will kill one another by the look, like cockatrices.” It has also been affirmed that this animal could not exercise this faculty, unless it first perceived the object of its vengeance before it was itself seen by it—if first seen, it died. Dryden has alluded to this superstition—

“Mischiefs are like the cockatrice’s eye,
If they see first they kill, if seen they die.”

Cockatrice was a popular phrase for a loose woman, probably from the fascination of the eye.³⁹⁵It appears, too, that Basilisk³⁹⁶was the name of a huge piece of ordnance carrying a ball of very great weight. In the following passage in “Henry V.” (v. 2), there is no doubt a double allusion—to pieces of ordnance, and to the fabulous creature already described: - “the fatal balls of murdering basilisks.”

Colt.—From its wild tricks, the colt was formerly used to designate, according to Johnson, “a witless, heady, gay youngster.” Portia mentions it with a quibble in “The Merchant of Venice” (i. 2), referring to the Neapolitan prince: - “Ay, that’s a colt indeed.” The term “to colt,” meant to trick, or befool; as in the phrase in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 2): - “What a plague mean ye to colt me thus?” Mr Halliwell-Phillipps³⁹⁷explains the expression, in “Henry VIII.” (i. 2), “Your colt’s tooth is not cast yet,” to denote a love of youthful pleasure. In “Cymbeline” (ii. 4), it is used in a coarser sense: - “She hath been colted by him.”

Crocodile.—According to fabulous accounts, the crocodile was the most deceitful of animals; its tears being proverbially fallacious. Thus, Othello (iv. 1) says:—

“O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem with woman’s tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile:
Out of my sight!”

We may also compare the words of the queen in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 1):—

“Henry my lord is cold in great affairs
Too full of foolish pity, and Gloucester’s show
Beguiles him as the mournful crocodile
With sorrow snares relenting passengers.”

³⁹⁴ See “Cymbeline,” ii. 4.; “Winter’s Tale,” i. 2.

³⁹⁵ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 173.

³⁹⁶ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 29; see “1 Henry IV.,” ii. 3, “of basilisks, of cannon, culvern.”

³⁹⁷ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare.”

It is said that this treacherous animal weeps over a man's head when it hath devoured the body, and will then eat up the head too. In "Bullokar's Expositor," i616, we read:—

"Crocodile lachrymæ, crocodiles teares, do signify such teares as are feigned, and spent only with intent to deceive or do harm." In Quarles's "Emblems," there is the following allusion:—

"O what a crocodilian world is this,
Compos'd of treachries and ensnaring wiles!
She cloaths destruction in a formal kiss,
And lodges death in her deceitful smiles."

In the above passage from "Othello," Singer says, there is, no doubt, a reference to the doctrine of equivocal generation by which new animals were supposed to be producible by new combinations of matter.³⁹⁸

Deer.—In "King Lear" (iii. 4), Edgar uses deer for wild animals in general:—

"But mice and rats, and such small deer,
Have been Tom's food for seven long year."

Shakespeare frequently refers to the popular sport of hunting the deer;³⁹⁹ and by his apt allusions shows how thoroughly familiar he was with the various amusements of his day.⁴⁰⁰ In "Winter's Tale" (i. 2), Leontes speaks of "the mort o' the deer;" certain notes played on the horn at the death of the deer, and requiring a deep drawn breath.⁴⁰¹ It was anciently, too, one of the customs of the chase, for all to stain their hands in the blood of the deer as a trophy. Thus, in "King John" (ii. 1), the English herald declares to the men of Angiers how—

"Like a jolly troop of huntsmen, come
Our lusty English, all with purpled hands,
Dyed in the dying slaughter of their foes."

The practice is again alluded to in "Julius Cæsar" (iii. 1)—

"Here thy hunters stand,
Sign'd in thy spoil, and crimson'd in thy lethe."

Old Tuberville gives us the details of this custom - "Our order is, that the prince, or chief, if so please them, do alight, and take assay of the deer, with a sharp knife, the which is done in this manner—the deer being laid upon his back, the prince, chief, or such as they do appoint, comes to it, and the chief huntsman, kneeling if it be a prince, doth hold the deer by the forefoot, whilst the prince, or chief, do cut a slit drawn along the brisket of the deer."

In "Antony and Cleopatra" (v. 2), where Cæsar, speaking of Cleopatra's death, says—

"Bravest at the last,
She levell'd at our purposes, and, being royal,
Took her own way,"

there is possibly an allusion to the *hart royal* which had the privilege of roaming unmolested, and of taking its own way to its lair.

³⁹⁸ Singer's "Shakespeare," 1875, x. p. 118.

³⁹⁹ See Strutt's "Sport and Pastimes," 1876, pp. 66, 75, 79, 80, 113, 117.

⁴⁰⁰ See "As You Like It," iv. 2; "All's Well," v. 2; "Macbeth," iv. 3; "1 Henry IV.," v. 4; "1 Henry VI.," iv. 2; "2 Henry VI.," v. 2; "Titus Andronicus," iii. 1., &c.

⁴⁰¹ Singer's "Shakespeare," viii. p. 421.

Shooting with the cross-bow at deer was an amusement of great ladies. Buildings with flat roofs, called stands, partly concealed by bushes, were erected in the parks for the purpose. Hence the following dialogue in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 1)—

Princess. Then forester, my friend, where is the bush
That we must stand and play the murderer in?
Forester. Hereby, upon the edge of yonder coppice;
A stand where you may make the fairest shoot.”

Amongst the hunting terms to which Shakespeare refers may be mentioned the following:—

“To draw,” meant to trace the steps of the game, as in “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 2)—

“A hound that runs counter and yet draws dry-foot well.”

The term “to run counter” was to mistake the course of the game, or to turn and pursue the backward trail.”

The “recheat” denoted certain notes sounded on the horn, properly and more usually employed to recall the dogs from a wrong scent. It is used in “Much ado about Nothing” (i. 1)—

“I will have a recheat winded on my forehead.”

We may compare Drayton’s “Polyolbion” (xiii.):—

“Recheating with his horn, which then the hunter cheers.”

“The phrase ‘to recover the wind of me’ used by Hamlet (iii. 2) is borrowed from hunting, and means to get the animal pursued to run with the wind that it may not scent the toil or its pursuers.” Again, when Falstaff in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) speaks of “fat rascals,” he alludes to the phrase of the forest - “rascall,” says Puttenham, “being properly the hunting term given to a young deer leane and out of season.”

The phrase “a hunt’s up” implied any song intended to arouse in the morning,—even a love song—the name having been derived from a tune or song employed by early hunters.⁴⁰² The term occurs in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 5) where Juliet says to Romeo, speaking of the lark—

“Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,
Hunting thee hence with hunt’s up to the day.”

In Drayton’s “Polyolbion” (xiii.) it is used—

“No sooner doth the earth her flowery bosom brave,
At such time as the year brings on the pleasant spring,
But hunt’s-up to the morn the feather’d sylvans sing.”

In Shakespeare’s day it was customary to hunt as well after dinner as before, hence in “Timon of Athens” (ii. 2) Timon says—

“So soon as dinner’s done, we’ll forth again.”

The word “embossed” was applied to a deer when foaming at the mouth from fatigue. In “Taming of the Shrew” (i. ind.) we read - “the poor club is embossed,” and in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 13) - “the boar of Thessaly was never so emboss’d.”

⁴⁰² Chappell’s “Pop. Music of the Olden Time,” 2nd Ed., i. p. 61. See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 432. See, too, Nares’ Glossary,” i, p. 440.

It was usual to call a pack of hounds “a cry,” from the French *meute* de chiens. The term is humorously applied to any troop or company of players by Hamlet (iii. 2), who speaks of “a fellowship in a cry of players.” In “Coriolanus,” Menenius says (iv. 6) - “You have made good work, you and your cry.”

Antony in “Julius Cæsar” (iii. i) alludes to the technical phrase to “let slip a dog,” employed in hunting the hart. This consisted in releasing the hounds from the leash or slip of leather by which they were held in hand until it was judged proper to let them pursue the animal chased.⁴⁰³In 1 Henry IV.” (i. 3) Northumberland tells Hotspur—

“Before the game is afoot, thou still let’s slip.”

In “Taming of the Shrew” (v. 2) Tranio says—

“O, sir, Lucentio slipp’d me like his greyhound,
Which runs himself and catches for his master.”

A sportsman’s saying, applied to hounds, occurs in “2 Henry IV.” (v. 3); “a’ will not out; he is true bred,” serving to expound Gadshill’s expression, “such as can hold in,” “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1).

The severity of the game laws under our early monarchs was very stringent; and a clause in the “Forest Charter”⁴⁰⁴grants “to an archbishop, bishop, earl, or baron, when travelling through the royal forests, at the king’s command, the privilege to kill one deer or two in the sight of the forester, if he was at hand; if not, they were commanded to cause a horn to be sounded, that it might not appear as if they had intended to steal the game.” In “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), Falstaff, using the terms of the forest, alludes to the perquisites of the keeper. Thus he speaks of the “shoulders for the fellow of this walk,” *i.e.*, the keeper.

Shakespeare has several pretty allusions to the tears of the deer, this animal being said to possess a very large secretion of tears. Thus Hamlet (iii. 2) says - “Let the stricken deer go weep;” and in “As You Like It” (ii. 1), we read of the “sobbing deer,” and in the same scene, the First Lord narrates how, at a certain spot,

”A poor sequester’d stag
That from the hunter’s aim hath ta’en a hurt
Did come to languish. . . .
. . . . And the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase.”

Bartholomæus ⁴⁰⁵says, that “when the hart is arered, he fleethe to a ryver or ponde, and roreth cryeth and wepeth when he is take.”⁴⁰⁶It appears that there were various superstitions connected with the tears of the deer. Batman ⁴⁰⁷tells us that “when the hart is sick, and hath eaten many serpents for his recoverie, he is brought unto so great a heate, that he hasteth to the water, and there covereth his body unto the very eares and eyes, at which time distilleth

⁴⁰³ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 401.

⁴⁰⁴ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 65.

⁴⁰⁵ “De Proprietate Rerum,” l. xviii. c. 30.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Virgil’s description of the wounded stag in “Æneid,” Bk. vii.

⁴⁰⁷ Commentary on Bartholomæus’s “De Proprietate Rerum.”

many tears from which the [Bezoar] stone is gendered.”⁴⁰⁸Douce ⁴⁰⁹quotes the following passage from the “Noble Art of Venerie,” in which the hart thus addresses the hunter:—

“O cruel!, be content, to take in worth my tears,
Which growe to gumme, and fall from me: content thee with my heares,
Content thee with my homes, which every year I new,
Since all these three make medicines, some sickness to eschew.
My tears congeal’d to gumme, by peeces from me fall,
And thee preserve from pestilence, in pomander or ball.
Such wholesome tears shedde I, when thou pursewest me so.”

Dog.—As the favourite of our domestic animals, the dog not unnaturally possesses an extensive history, besides entering largely into those superstitions which, more or less, are associated with every stage of human life. It is not surprising, therefore, that Shakespeare frequently speaks of the dog, making it the subject of many of his illustrations. Thus he has not omitted to mention the fatal significance of its howl; which is supposed either to foretell death or misfortune. In “2 Henry VI.” (i. 4), he makes Bolingbroke say—

“The time when screech-owls cry and ban dogs howl⁴¹⁰
And spirits walk and ghosts break up their graves.”

And again, in “3 Henry VI.” (v. 6), King Henry, speaking of Gloucester, says—

“The owl shriek’d at thy birth,—an evil sign;
The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;
Dogs howl’d, and hideous tempests shook down trees.”

The same superstition prevails in France and Germany,⁴¹¹and various charms are resorted to for averting the ill-consequences supposed to attach to this sign of ill-omen. Several of these, too, are practised in our own country. Thus, in Staffordshire, when a dog howls, the following advice is given - “Take off your shoe from the left foot, and spit upon the sole, place it on the ground bottom upwards, and your foot upon the place you sat upon, which will not only preserve you from harm, but stop the howling of the dog.”⁴¹²A similar remedy is recommended in Norfolk ⁴¹³ - “Pull off your left shoe, and turn it, and it will quiet him. A dog won’t howl three times after.” We are indebted to antiquity for this superstition; some of the earliest writers referring to it. Thus, Pausanias relates how, previous to the destruction of the Messenians, the dogs pierced the air by raising a louder barking than usual; and it is on record how, before the sedition in Rome, about the dictatorship of Pompey, there was an extraordinary howling of dogs. Virgil,⁴¹⁴(*Georgic* i. 470), speaking of the Roman misfortunes, says—

“Obscœnique canes, importunæque volucres
Signa dabant.”

Capitolinus narrates, too, how the dogs by their howling presaged the death of Maximinus. The idea which associates the dog’s howl with the approach of death is probably derived

⁴⁰⁸ The drops which fall from their eyes are not tears from the lachrymal glands, but an oily secretion from the inner angle of the eye close to the nose. Brewer’s “Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,” p. 217.

⁴⁰⁹ “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 183.

⁴¹⁰ These dogs were kept for baiting bears, when that amusement was in vogue, and “from their terrific howling they are occasionally introduced to heighten the horror of the picture.” Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 50.

⁴¹¹ See Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk-Lore,” p. 109.

⁴¹² See Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties,” p. 48.

⁴¹³ “English Folk-Lore,” p. 101.

⁴¹⁴ See Hardwick’s “Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-Lore,” p. 171.

from a conception in Aryan mythology, which represents a dog as summoning the departing soul. Indeed, as Mr Fiske ⁴¹⁵remarks, "Throughout all Aryan mythology, the souls of the dead are supposed to ride on the night-wind, with their howling dogs, gathering into their throng the souls of those just dying as they pass by their houses."

Another popular superstition—in all probability derived from the Egyptians—refers to the setting and rising of Sirius or the dog-star, as infusing madness into the canine race. Hence the name of the "Dog-days" was given by the Romans to the period between the 3rd July and the 11th August, to which Shakespeare alludes in "Henry VIII." (v. 3) - "The dog-days now reign." We may, too, compare the words of Benvolio in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 1) - "For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring." It is obvious, however, that this superstition is utterly groundless, for not only does the star vary in its rising, but is later and later every year. The term "dog-day" is still a common phrase, and it is difficult to say whether it is from superstitious adherence to old custom, or from a belief in the injurious effect of heat upon dogs, that the magistrates, often unwisely, at this season of the year order them to be muzzled or tied up. It was the practice to put them to death; and Ben Jonson, in his "Bartholomew Fair," speaks of "the dog-killer" in this month of August. Lord Bacon, too, in his "Sylva Sylvarum," tells us that "it is a common experience that dogs know the dog-killer, when, as in times of infection, some petty fellow is sent out to kill them. Although they have never seen him before, yet they will all come forth and bark and fly at him."

A "curtal dog," to which allusion is made in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (ii. 1), by Pistol—
"Hope is a curtal dog in some affairs,"

denoted "originally the dog of an unqualified person, which, by the forest laws, must have its tail cut short, partly as a mark, and partly from a notion that the tail of a dog is necessary to him in running." In later usage, curtail dog means either a common dog, not meant for sport, or a dog that missed the game, which latter sense it has in the passage above.⁴¹⁶

Dragon.—As the type and embodiment of the spirit of evil, the dragon has been made the subject of an extensive legendary lore. The well-known myth of "St George and the Dragon," which may be regarded as a grand allegory representing the hideous and powerful monster against whom the Christian soldier is called to fight, has exercised a remarkable influence for good in times past, over half-instructed people. It has been truly remarked that "the dullest mind and hardest heart could not fail to learn from it something of the hatefulness of evil, the beauty of self-sacrifice, and the all-conquering might of truth." This graceful conception is alluded to by Shakespeare in his "King John" (ii. 1), where, according to a long established custom, it is made a subject for sign-painting⁴¹⁷—

"St George that swinged the dragon, and e'er since,
Sits on his horseback at mine hostess' door,
Teach us some fence."

In ancient mythology the task of drawing the chariot of night was assigned to dragons, on account of their supposed watchfulness. In "Cymbeline" (ii. 2), Iachimo addressing them says—

⁴¹⁵ Myths and Mythmakers," 1873, p. 36.

⁴¹⁶ Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 218.

⁴¹⁷ For the various versions of this myth consult Baring Gould's "Curious Myths of the Middle Ages," 1877, pp. 266–316.

“Swift, swift, you dragons of the night! that dawning
May bare the raven’s eye.”⁴¹⁸

Milton, in his “Il Penseroso,” mentions the dragon yoke of night, and in his “Comus” (l. 130)

“The dragon womb
Of Stygian darkness.”

It may be noticed that the whole tribe of serpents sleep with their eyes open, and so appear to exert a constant watchfulness.⁴¹⁹

In devising loathsome ingredients for the witches’ mess, Shakespeare “Macbeth” (iv. 1), speaks of “the scale of dragon,” alluding to the horror in which this mythical being was held. Referring, also, to the numerous legends associated with its dread form, he mentions “the spleen of fiery dragons” (“Richard III.” v. 3); “dragon’s wings,” “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1), and in “Pericles” (i. 1), “death-like dragons.” Mr Conway⁴²⁰ has admirably summed up the general views respecting this imaginary source of terror: - “Nearly all the dragon forms, whatever their original types and their region, are represented in the conventional monster of the European stage, which meets the popular conception. The dragon is a masterpiece of the popular imagination, and it required many generations to give it artistic shape. Every Christmas he appears in some London pantomime, with aspect similar to that which he has worn for many ages. His body is partly green, with the memories of the sea and of slime, and partly brown or dark, with lingering shadow of storm clouds. The lightning flames still in his red eyes, and flashes from his fire-breathing mouth. The thunderbolt of Jove, the spear of Wodan, are in the barbed point of his tail. His huge wings—bat-like, spiked, sum up all the mythical life of extinct harpies and vampires. Spine of crocodile is on his neck, tail of the serpent, and all the jagged ridges of rocks and sharp thorns of jungles bristle around him, while the ice of glaciers and brassy glitter of sunstrokes are in his scales. He is ideal of all that is hard, obstructive, perilous, loathe-some, horrible in nature; every detail of him has been seen through and vanquished by man, here or there, but in selection and combination they rise again as principles, and conspire to form one great generalisation of the forms of Pain—the sum of every creature’s worst.”⁴²¹

Elephant.—According to a vulgar error current in bygone times, the elephant was supposed to have no joints—a notion which is said to have been first recorded from tradition by Ctesias the Cnidian.⁴²² Sir Thomas Browne has entered largely into this superstition, arguing from reason, anatomy, and general analogy with other animals, the absurdity of the error. In “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 3), Ulysses says: - “the elephant hath joints, but none for courtesy: his legs are legs for necessity, not for flexure.” Steevens quotes from “the Dialogues of Creatures Moralized”—a curious specimen of our early natural history—the following: - “the olefawnte that bowyth not the kneys.” In the play of “All Fools,” 1605, we read: - “I hope you are no elephant—you have joints.” In a note to “Sir Thomas Browne’s Works,”⁴²³ we are told, “it has long been the custom for the exhibitors of itinerant collections of wild animals, when showing the elephant, to mention the story of its having no joints, and its consequent inability to kneel; and they never fail to think it necessary to demonstrate its untruth by causing the animal to bend one of its fore-legs, and to kneel also.”

⁴¹⁸ Cf. “Troilus and Cressida,” v. 8; “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” iii. 2.

⁴¹⁹ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” x. p. 363.

⁴²⁰ “Demonology and Devil Lore,” 1880, i. p. 383.

⁴²¹ The dragon formerly constituted a part of the Morris dance.

⁴²² See Sir Thomas Browne’s Works, 1852, i. pp. 220–232.

⁴²³ Edited by Simon Wilkin, 3852, i. p. 226.

In “Julius Cæsar” (ii. 1), the custom of seducing elephants into pitfalls, lightly covered with hurdles and turf, on which a proper bait to tempt them was exposed, is alluded to.⁴²⁴ Decius speaks of elephants being betrayed “with holes.”

Fox.—It appears that the term fox was a common expression for the old English weapon, the broad sword of Jonson’s days, as distinguished from the small (foreign) sword. The name was given from the circumstance that Andrea Ferrara adopted a fox as the blade mark of his weapons—a practice, since his time, adopted by other foreign sword-cutlers. Swords with a running fox rudely engraved on the blades, are still occasionally to be met with in the old curiosity shops of London.⁴²⁵ Thus, in “Henry V.” (iv. 4), Pistol says:—

“O Signieur Dew, thou diest on point of fox,
Except, O Signieur, thou do give to me
Egregious ransom.”

In Ben Jonson’s “Bartholomew Fair” (ii. 6), the expression occurs: - “What would you have, sister, of a fellow that knows nothing but a basket-hilt, and an old fox in it?”

The tricks and artifices of a hunted fox were supposed to be very extraordinary, hence Falstaff makes use of this expression in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3):—

“No more truth in thee than in a drawn fox.”

Goat.—It is curious that the harmless goat should have had an evil name, and been associated with devil-lore. Thus, there is a common superstition in England and Scotland that it is never seen for twenty-four hours together; and that once in this space, it pays a visit to the devil in order to have its beard combed. It was, formerly, too, a popular notion that the devil appeared frequently in the shape of a goat, which accounted for his horns and tail. Sir Thomas Browne observes that the goat was the emblem of the sin offering, and is the emblem of sinful men at the day of judgment. This may, perhaps, account for Shakespeare’s enumerating the “gall of goat” (“Macbeth” iv. 1), among the ingredients of the witches’ cauldron. His object seems to have been to include the most distasteful and ill-omened things imaginable—a practice shared, indeed, by other poets, contemporary with him.

Hare.—This was formerly esteemed a melancholy animal, and its flesh was supposed to engender melancholy in those who ate it. This idea was not confined to our own country, but is mentioned by La Fontaine in one of his “Fables” (Liv. ii. Fab. 14)—

“Dans un profond ennui ce lievre se plongeoit,
Cet animal est triste, et la crainte le rounge.”

and later on ‘he says - “Le melancolique animal.” Hence, in “1 Henry IV.” (i. 2), Falstaff is told by Prince Henry, that he is as melancholy as a hare. This notion was not quite forgotten in Swift’s time; for in his “Polite Conversation,” Lady Answerall, being asked to eat hare, replies: “no madam; they say ‘tis melancholy meat.” Mr Staunton quotes the following extract from Tuberville’s book on “Hunting and Falconry:” - “The hare first taught us the use of the hearbe called wyld succory, which is very excellent for those which are disposed to be melancolicke. She herself is one of the most melancolicke beasts that is, and to heale her own infirmitie, she goeth commonly to sit under that hearbe.”

The old Greek epigram relating to the hare—

⁴²⁴ See Pliny’s “Nat. His.,” Bk. viii.

⁴²⁵ Staunton’s “Shakespeare,” 3864, ii. p. 367; Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 331.

“Strike ye my body, now that life is fled:
So hares insult the lion when he’s dead”

is alluded to by the Bastard in “King John” (ii. 1)—

“You are the hare of whom the proverb goes,
Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard.”

A familiar expression amongst sportsmen for a hare is “wat,” so called perhaps from its long ears or wattles. In “Venus and Adonis” the term occurs—

“By this, poor wat, far off upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs, with listening ear.”

In Drayton’s “Polyolbion” (xxiii.), we read—

“The man whose vacant mind prepares him to the sport,
The finder sendeth out, to seek out nimble Wat,
Which crosseth in the field, each furlong, every flat,
Till he this pretty beast upon the form hath found.”

Hedgehog.—The urchin or hedgehog, like the toad, for its solitariness, the ugliness of its appearance, and from a popular belief that it sucked or poisoned the udders of cows, was adopted into the demonologic system; and its shape was sometimes supposed to be assumed by mischievous elves.⁴²⁶Hence in the “Tempest” (i. 2), Prospero says—

“Urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee.”

and later on in the same play (ii. 2), Caliban speaks of being frightened with “urchin shows.” In the witch scene in “Macbeth” (iv. 1), the hedgepig is represented as one of the witches’ familiars; and in the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 2), in the incantation of the fairies, “thorny hedgehogs are exorcised. For the use of urchins in similar associations we may quote “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 4), “like urchins, ouphes, and fairies;” and “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 3), “ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins.”⁴²⁷In the phrase still current of “little urchins” for a child, the idea of the fairy also remains. In various legends we find this animal holding a prominent place. Thus, for example, it was in the form of a hedgehog,⁴²⁸that the devil is said to have made his attempt to let the sea in through the Brighton Downs, which was prevented by a light being brought, though the seriousness of the scheme is still attested in the Devil’s Dyke. There is an ancient tradition that when the devil had smuggled himself into Noah’s Ark, he tried to sink it by boring a hole; but this scheme was defeated, and the human race saved, by the hedgehog stuffing himself into a hole. In the Brighton story, as Mr Conway points out, the devil would appear to have remembered his former failure in drowning people, and to have appropriated the form which defeated him. In “Richard III.” (i. 2), the hedgehog is used as a term of reproach by Lady Anne, when addressing Gloucester.

Horse.—Although Shakespeare’s allusions to the horse are most extensive, yet he has said little of the many widespread superstitions, legends, and traditional tales that have been associated from the earliest times with this brave and intellectual animal. Indeed, even now-a-days, both in our own country and abroad, many a fairy tale is told and credited by the

⁴²⁶ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ix. p. 75.

⁴²⁷ See Wright’s Notes to the “Tempest,” 1875, p. 94.

⁴²⁸ Conway’s “Demonology and Devil Lore,” 1880, i. p. 122.

peasantry, in which the horse occupies a prominent place. It seems to have been a common notion that, at night time, fairies in their nocturnal revels played various pranks with horses, often entangling in a thousand knots their hair—a superstition to which we referred in our chapter on Fairies, where Mercutio, in “Romeo and Juliet,” says, (i. 4):—

“This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once entangled much misfortune bodes.”

In “King Lear” (ii. 3), Edgar says: - “I’ll elf all my hair in knots.” Mr Hunt, in his “Popular Romances of the West of England” (1871, p. 87), tells us that when a boy, he was on a visit at a farmhouse near Fowey River, and well remembers the farmer with much sorrow, telling the party one morning at breakfast how “the piskie people had been riding Tom again.” The mane was said to be knotted into fairy stirrups, and the farmer said he had no doubt that at least twenty small people had sat upon the horse’s neck. Warburton ⁴²⁹ considers that this superstition may have originated from the disease called “Plica Polonica.” Witches, too, have generally been supposed to harass the horse, using it in various ways for their fiendish purposes. Thus, there are numerous local traditions in which the horse at night-time has been ridden by the witches, and found in the morning in an almost prostrate condition, bathed in sweat.

It was a current notion that a horse hair dropped into corrupted water would soon become an animal. The fact, however, is that the hair moves like a living thing, because a number of animalculæ cling to it.⁴³⁰ This ancient vulgar error is mentioned in (“Antony and Cleopatra,” i. 2):—

“Much is breeding,
Which, like the courser’s hair hath yet but life,
And not a serpent’s poison.”

Steevens quotes from Churchyard’s “Discourse of Rebellion,” 1570,—

“Hit is of kinde much worse than horses heare,
That lyes in donge, where on vyle serpents brede.”

Dr Lister, in the “Philosophical Transactions,” says, that these animated horse-hairs are real thread worms. It was asserted that these worms moved like serpents, and were poisonous to swallow. Coleridge tells us it was a common experiment with boys in Cumberland and Westmoreland, to lay a horse-hair in water, which, when removed after a time, would twirl round the finger and sensibly compress it—having become the supporter of an immense number of small slimy water lice.

A horse is said to have a “cloud in his face,” when he has a dark coloured spot in his forehead between his eyes. This gives him a sour look, and, being supposed to indicate an ill-temper, is generally considered a great blemish. This notion is alluded to in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 2), where Agrippa speaking of Cæsar says:—

“He has a cloud in’s face,”

whereupon Enobarbus adds:—

⁴²⁹ Warburton on “Romeo and Juliet,” i. 4.

⁴³⁰ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 104.

“He were the worse for that, were he a horse;
So is he, being a man.”

Burton in his “Anatomy of Melancholy,” uses the phrase for the look of a woman: - “Every lover admires his mistress, though she be very deformed of herself—thin, leane, chitty face, have clouds in her face,” etc.

“To mose in the chine,” a phrase we find in “Taming of the Shrew” (iii. 2):—

“Passened with the glanders, like to mose in the chine”

refers to a disorder in horses, also known as “mourning in the chine.”

Alluding to the custom associated with horses, we may note that a stalking-horse, or stale, was either a real or artificial one, under cover of which the fowler approached towards and shot at his game. It is alluded to in “As You Like It” (v. 4), by the Duke, who says of Touchstone: - “He uses his folly like a stalking-horse and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit.” In “Much Ado About Nothing” (ii. 3), Claudio says: - “Stalk on, stalk on; the fowl sits.”⁴³¹ In “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 1), Adriana says: - “I am but his stale,” upon which Malone remarks: - “Adriana undoubtedly means to compare herself to a stalking-horse, behind whom Antipholus shoots at such game as he selects.” In “Taming of the Shrew,” Katharine says to her father (i. 1): - “Is it your will to make a stale of me amongst these mates?” which, says Singer, means “make an object of mockery.” So in “3 Henry VI.” (iii. 3), Warwick says: - “Had he none else to make a stale but me?”

That it was also a hunting term might be shown, adds Dyce,⁴³² by quotations from various old writers. In the inventories of the wardrobe belonging to King Henry VIII., we frequently find the allowance of certain quantities of stuff for the purpose of making “stalking coats and stalking hose for the use of his Majesty.”⁴³³

Again, the forehorse of a team was generally gaily ornamented with tufts, and ribbons, and bells. Hence in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (ii. 1), Bertram complains that bedizened like one of these animals, he will have to squire ladies at the court, instead of achieving honour in the wars.”

“I shall stay here the forehorse to a smock,
Creaking my shoes on the plain masonry,
Till honour be bought up and no sword worn
But one to dance with.”

A familiar name for a common horse was “Cut,”—either from its being docked or gelded—a name occasionally applied to a man as a term of contempt. In “Twelfth Night” (ii. 3), Sir Toby Belch says: - “Send for money, knight; if thou hast her not i’ the end, call me cut.” In “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1), the carrier says: - “I prithee, Tom, beat Cut’s saddle.” We may compare, too, what Falstaff says further on in the same play (ii. 4), “I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse.” Hence, *call me Cut* is the same as *call me horse*—both expressions having been used.

In Shakespeare’s day, a *race* of horses was the term for what is now called a stud. So in “Macbeth” (ii. 4), Rosse says:—

⁴³¹ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 106; Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 830.

⁴³² “Glossary,” p. 412.

⁴³³ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” p. 48.

“And Duncan’s horses—a thing most strange and certain,
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn’d wild in nature.”

The words “minions of the race,” according to Steevens, mean the favourite horses on the race-ground.

Lion.—The traditions and stories of the darker ages abounded with examples of the lion’s generosity. “Upon the supposition that these acts of clemency were true, Troilus, in the passage below, reasons not improperly (“Troilus and Cressida,” v. 3) that to spare against reason, by mere instinct and pity, became rather a generous beast than a wise man.”⁴³⁴

“Brother, you have a vice of mercy in you,
Which better fits a lion, than a man.”

It is recorded by Pliny ⁴³⁵that “the lion alone of all wild animals is gentle to those that humble themselves before him, and will not touch any such upon their submission, but spareth what creature soever lieth prostrate before him.” Hence Spenser’s Una, attended by a lion; and Perceval’s Lion, in “Morte Arthur,” (b. xiv. c. 6). Bartholomæus says the lion’s “mercie is known by many and oft ensamples: for they spare them that lie on the ground.” Shakespeare again alludes to this notion in “As you Like It” (iv. 3)—

“For ‘tis
The royal disposition of that beast
To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead.”

It was also supposed that the lion would not injure a royal prince. Hence in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) the Prince says - “You are lions too, you ran away upon instinct, you will not touch the true prince; no, fie!”⁴³⁶The same notion is alluded to by Beaumont and Fletcher in “The Mad Lover” (iv. 5)—

“Fetch the Numidian lion I brought over;
If she be sprung from royal blood, the lion
He’ll do you reverence, else—

.....

He’ll tear her all to pieces.”

According to some commentators there is an allusion in “3 Henry VI.” (i. 3) to the practice of confining lions and keeping them without food that they may devour criminals exposed to them—

“So looks the pent-up lion o’er the wretch
That trembles under his devouring paws.”

Mole.—The eyes of the mole are so extremely minute, and so perfectly hid in its hair, that our ancestors considered it blind—a vulgar error to which reference is made by Caliban in the “Tempest” (iv. 1) - “Pray you tread softly that the blind mole may not hear a foot fall.” And again by Pericles (i. 1) - “The blind mole casts copp’d hills towards heaven.” Hence the expression “blind as a mole.” Alexander Ross ⁴³⁷absurdly speaks of the mole’s eyes as only the “forms of eyes,” given by nature “rather for ornament than for use; as wings are given to the ostrich which never flies, and a long tail to the rat, which serves for no other purpose but

⁴³⁴ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1875, vii. p. 277.

⁴³⁵ “Nat. History,” book viii. chap. 19.

⁴³⁶ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 2839, pp. 189, 190.

⁴³⁷ “Arcana Microcosmi,” p. 151.

to be caught sometimes by it." Sir Thomas Browne, however, in his "Vulgar Errors" (Bk. iii. xviii.)⁴³⁸ has, with his usual minuteness, disproved this idea, remarking "that they have eyes in their head is manifested unto any that wants them not in his own." A popular term for the mole was the "Moldwarp" or "Mouldiwarp,"⁴³⁹ so called from the Anglo-Saxon, denoting turning the mould. Thus in "1 Henry IV." (iii. 1) Hotspur says—

"Sometime he angers me
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant."

Mouse.—This word was formerly used as a term of endearment, from either sex to the other. In this sense it is used by Rosaline in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2)—

"What's your dark meaning, mouse, of this light word."

And again in "Hamlet" (iii. 4).

Some doubt exists as to the exact meaning of "Mouse-hunt," by Lady Capulet, in "Romeo and Juliet" (iv. 4)—

"Ay, you have been a mouse-hunt in your time,
But I will watch you from such watching now."

According to some, the expression implies "a hunter of gay-women," mouse having been used in this signification.⁴⁴⁰ Others are of opinion that the stoat⁴⁴¹ is meant, the smallest of the weasel tribe, and others again the pole-cat. Mr Staunton⁴⁴² tells us that the mouse-hunt is the marten, an animal of the weasel tribe which prowls about for its prey at night, and is applied to any one of rakish propensities.

Holinshed in his "History of Scotland" (1577, p. 181) quotes from the laws of Kenneth II., King of Scotland - "If a sowe eate her pigges, let hyr be stoned to death and buried, that no man eate of hyr fleshe." This offence is probably alluded to by Shakespeare in "Macbeth" (iv. 1) where the witch says—

"Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten
Her nine farrow."

Pole-Cat, or Fitchew.—This animal is supposed to be very amorous; and hence its name, Mr Steevens says, was often applied to ladies of easy or no virtue. In "Othello" (iv. 1) Cassio calls Bianca a "fitchew," and in "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 1) Thersites alludes to it.⁴⁴³

Porcupine.—Another name for this animal was the porpentine, which spelling occurs in "Hamlet" (i. 5). "Like quills upon the fretful porpentine." And again in "2 Henry IV." (iii. 2) York speaks of "a sharp-quill'd porpentine." Ajax, too, in "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. 1) applies the term to Thersites, "do not, porpentine." In the above passages, however, and elsewhere, the word has been altered by editors to porcupine. According to a popular error, the porcupine could dart his quills. They are easily detached, very sharp, and slightly barbed, and may easily stick to a person's legs, when he is not aware that he is near enough to touch them.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁸ 1852, i. pp. 312–315.

⁴³⁹ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 577; Singer's "Shakespeare," v. p. 97.

⁴⁴⁰ Halliwell-Phillipps's "Handbook Index to Shakespeare," 1866, p. 331.

⁴⁴¹ Forby's "Vocabulary of East Anglia," ii. p. 222.

⁴⁴² See Staunton's "Shakespeare," i. p. 278.

⁴⁴³ Cf. "King Lear" (iv. 6).

⁴⁴⁴ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 673.

Rabbit.—In “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 2), this animal is used as a term of reproach, a sense in which it was known in Shakespeare’s day. The phrase “Cony-catch,” which occurs in “Taming of the Shrew” (v. 1) - “Take heed, Signior Baptista, lest you be cony-catched in this business,” implied the act of deceiving or cheating a simple person—the cony or rabbit being considered a foolish animal.⁴⁴⁵ It has been shown from Dekker’s “English Villanies,” that the system of cheating was carried to a great length in the early part of the seventeenth century, that a collective society of sharpers was called “a warren,” and their dupes, “rabbit-suckers,” *i.e.*, young rabbit or conies.⁴⁴⁶ Shakespeare has once used the term to express harmless roguery, in the “Taming of Shrew” (iv. 1). When Grumio, will not answer his fellow-servants, except in a jesting way, Curtis says to him: - “Come, you are so full of cony-catching.”

Rat.—The fanciful idea, that rats were commonly rhymed to death, in Ireland, is said to have arisen from some metrical charm or incantation, used there for that purpose—to which there are constant allusions in old writers. In the “Merchant of Venice” (iv. 1), Shylock says—

“What if my house be troubled with a rat
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
To have it baned?”

And in “As You Like It” (iii. 2), Rosaline says: - “I was never so be-rhymed since Pythagoras’ time, that I was an Irish rat, which I can hardly remember.” We find it mentioned by Ben Jonson, in the “Poetaster,” (v. 1)—

“Rhime them to death, as they do Irish rats,
In drumming tunes.”

“The reference, however, is generally referred in Ireland,” says Mr Mackay, “to the supposed potency of the verses pronounced by the professional rhymers of Ireland, which according to popular superstition, could not only drive rats to destruction, but could absolutely turn a man’s face to the rack of his head.”⁴⁴⁷

Sir W. Temple, in his “Essay on Poetry,” seems to derive the idea from the Runic incantations, for, after speaking of them in various ways, he adds, “and the proverb of rhyming rats to death, came, I suppose, from the same root.”

According to a superstitious notion of considerable antiquity, rats leaving a ship are considered indicative of misfortune to a vessel, probably from the same idea that crows will not build upon trees that are likely to fall. This idea is noticed by Shakespeare in the “Tempest” (i. 2), where Prospero, describing the vessel in which himself and daughter had been placed, with the view to their certain destruction at sea, says—

”They hurried us aboard a bark,
Bore us some leagues to sea; where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a boat; not rigg’d,

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., ii. p. 189.

⁴⁴⁶ See D’Israeli’s “Curiosities of Literature,” iii. p. 78.

⁴⁴⁷ The strange phrase and the superstition that arose out of it, seem to have been produced by a mistranslation by the English-speaking population of a considerable portion of Ireland, of two Celtic or Gaelic words, *ran*, to *roar*, to shriek, to bellow, to make a great noise on a wind instrument; and *rann*, to versify, to rhyme. It is well-known that rats are scared by any great and persistent noise in the house which they infest. The Saxon English, as well as Saxon Irish, of Shakespeare’s time, confounding *rann*, a rhyme, with *ran aroar*, fell into the error which led to the English phrase as used by Shakespeare.” “Antiquarian Magazine and Bibliographer,” 1882, ii. p. 9. “On Some Obscure Words and Celtic Phrases in “Shakespeare” by Charles Mackay.

Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
Instinctively had quit it.”

The *Shipping Gazette* of April 1869 contained a communication entitled, “A Sailor’s Notion About Rats,” in which the following passage occurs - “It is a well-authenticated fact that rats have often been known to leave ships in the harbour previous to their being lost at sea. Some of those wiseacres who want to convince us against the evidence of our senses will call this superstition. As neither I have time, nor you space, to cavil with such at present, I shall leave them alone in their glory.” The fact, however, as Mr Hardwick has pointed out in his “Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-lore” (1872, p. 251), that rats do sometimes migrate from one ship to another, or from one barn or corn-stack to another, from various causes, ought to be quite sufficient to explain such a superstition. Indeed, a story is told of a cunning Welsh captain who wanted to get rid of rats that infested his ship, then lying in the Mersey, at Liverpool. Having found out that there was a vessel laden with cheese in the basin, and getting alongside of her about dusk, he left all his hatches open, and waited till all the rats were in his neighbour’s ship, and then moved off.

Snail.—A common amusement among children consists in charming snails, in order to induce them to put out their horns—a couplet, such as the following, being repeated on the occasion—

“Peer out, peer out, peer out of your hole,
Or else I’ll beat you as black as a coal.”

In Scotland, it is regarded as a token of fine weather if the snail obey the command and put out its horn ⁴⁴⁸—

“Snaffle, snailie, shoot out your horn,
And tell us if it will be a bonnie day the morn.”

Shakespeare alludes to snail-charming in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 2), where Mrs Page says of Mrs Ford’s husband, he “so buffets himself on the forehead, crying, *Peer out! peer out!* that any madness I ever yet beheld seemed but tameness, civility, and patience, to this his distemper he is in now.” In “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 2), the snail is used to denote a lazy person.

Tiger.—It was an ancient belief that this animal roared and raged most furiously in stormy and high winds—a piece of folk-lore alluded to in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 3), by Nestor, who says—

“The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger: but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shade, why, then, the thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise.”

Unicorn.—In “Julius Caesar” (ii. 1), Decius tells how “unicorns may be betray’d with trees,” alluding to their traditionary mode of capture. They are reported to have been taken by one, who, running behind a tree, eluded the violent push the animal was making at him, so that his horn spent its force on the trunk, and stuck fast, detaining the animal till he was despatched by the hunter.⁴⁴⁹In Topsell’s “History of Beasts” (1658, p. 557), we read of the unicorn - “He is an enemy to the lions, wherefore, as soon as ever a lion seeth a unicorn, he runneth to a tree

⁴⁴⁸ See “English Folk-lore,” 1878, p. 120.

⁴⁴⁹ See Brewer’s “Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,” p. 922.

for succour, that so when the unicorn maketh force at him, he may not only avoid his horn, but also destroy him; for the unicorn, in the swiftness of his course, runneth against the tree, wherein his sharp horn sticketh fast, that when the lion seeth the unicorn fastened by the horn, without all danger he falleth upon him and killeth him.” With this passage we may compare the following from Spenser’s “Fairy Queen” (Bk. ii. canto 5)—

“Like as a lyon, whose imperiall power
A proud rebellious unicorn defyes,
T’ avoide the rash assault and wrathful stowre
Of his fiers foe, him to a tree applyes,

And when him ronning in full course he spyes,
He slips aside: the whiles that furious beast
His precious home, sought of his enemyes
Strikes in the stocke, ne thence can be releast,
But to the mighty victor yields a bounteous feast.”

Weasel.—To meet a weasel was formerly considered a bad omen.⁴⁵⁰ That may be a tacit allusion to this superstition in “Lucrece” (p. 307)—

“Night wandering weasels shriek to see him there;
They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear.”

It appears that weasels were kept in houses, instead of cats, for the purpose of killing vermin. Phædrus notices this their feline office in the first and fourth fables of his fourth book. The supposed quarrelsomeness of this animal is spoken of by Pisanio in “Cymbeline” (iii. 4), who tells Imogen that she must be “as quarrelous as the weasel;” and in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 3), Lady Percy says to Hotspur—

“A weasel hath not such a deal of spleen
As you are toss’d with.”

This character of the weasel is not, however, generally mentioned by naturalists.

⁴⁵⁰ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 283.

8. Plants

That Shakespeare possessed an extensive knowledge of the history and superstitions associated with flowers is evident, from even only a slight perusal of his plays. Apart from the extensive use which he has made of these lovely objects of nature for the purpose of embellishing, or adding pathos to, passages here and there; he has also, with a master hand, interwoven many a little legend or superstition, thereby infusing an additional force into his writings. Thus we know with what effect he has made use of the willow in "Othello," in that touching passage where Desdemona (iv. 3), anticipating her death, relates how her mother had a maid called Barbara—

"She was in love, and he she lov'd, prov'd mad,
And did forsake her; she had a song of willow,
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song, to-night,
Will not go from my mind."

In a similar manner, Shakespeare has frequently introduced the notice of flowers with a wonderful aptness, as in the case of poor Ophelia. Those, however, desirous of gaining a good insight into Shakespeare's knowledge of flowers, as illustrated by his plays, would do well to consult Mr Ellacombe's exhaustive work on the "Plant-Lore of Shakespeare," a book to which we are much indebted in the following pages, as also to Mr Biesly's "Shakspeare's Garden."

Aconite. ⁴⁵¹—This plant from the deadly virulence of its juice, which, Mr Turner says, "is of all poysones the most hastie poyson," is compared by Shakespeare to gunpowder, as in "2 Henry IV." (iv. 4)—

"The united vessel of their blood
Mingled with venom of suggestion
As, force perforce, the age will pour it in,
Shall never leak, though it do work as strong
As aconitum or rash gunpowder."

It is probably, too, alluded to in the following passage in "Romeo and Juliet" (v. 1), where Romeo says—

"Let me have
A dram of poison, such soon speeding geer
As will disperse itself through all the veins
That the life-weary taker may fall dead
And that the trunk may be discharged of breath
As violently as hasty powder fired
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb."

According to Ovid, it derived its name from growing upon rock (Metam. vii. 419)—

"Quæ, quia nascuntur dura vivacia caute,
Agrestes aconita vocant."

⁴⁵¹ *Aconitum napellus*, Wolf's-bane or Monk's-hood.

It is probably derived from the Greek ἀκόνιτον, without a struggle, in allusion to the intensity of its poisonous qualities. Virgil ⁴⁵²speaks of it, and tells us “how the aconite deceives the wretched gatherers, because often mistaken for some harmless plant.”⁴⁵³ The ancients fabled it as the invention of Hecate,⁴⁵⁴ who caused the plant to spring from the foam of Cerberus, when Hercules dragged him from the gloomy regions of Pluto. Ovid pictures the stepdame as preparing a deadly potion of aconite, (Metam. i. I47)—

“Lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercæ.”

In hunting the ancients poisoned their arrows with this venomous plant, as “also when following their mortal brutal trade of slaughtering their fellow creatures.”⁴⁵⁵ Numerous instances are on record of the fatal results through persons eating this plant. In the “Philosophical Transactions” (1732, vol. 38), we read of a man who was poisoned in that year, by eating some of it in a salad, instead of celery. Dr Turner mentions the case of some Frenchmen at Antwerp, who eating the shoots of this plant for masterwort, all died, with the exception of two, in forty-eight hours. The aconitum is equally pernicious to animals.

Anemone.—This favourite flower of early spring is probably alluded to in the following passage of “Venus and Adonis”—

“By this, the boy that by her side lay killed
Was melted like a vapour from her sight;
And in the blood that on the ground lay spill’d,
A purple flower sprung up chequer’d with white,
Resembling well his pale cheeks, and the blood
Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.”

According to Bion, it is said to have sprung from the tears that Venus wept over the body of Adonis—

“Alas, the Paphian! fair Adonis slain!
Tears plenteous as his blood she pours amain,
But gentle flowers are born, and bloom around,
From every drop that falls upon the ground
Where streams his blood, there blushing springs the rose,
And where a tear has dropp’d a wind-flower blows.”

Other classical writers make the anemone to be the flower of Adonis. Mr Ellacombe,⁴⁵⁶ says that although Shakespeare does not actually name the anemone, yet the evidence is in favour of this plant. The “purple colour,” he adds, is no objection, for purple in Shakespeare’s time had a very wide signification, meaning almost any bright colour, just as “purpureus” had in Latin.⁴⁵⁷

Apple.—Although Shakespeare has so frequently introduced the apple into his Plays, yet he has abstained from alluding to the extensive folk-lore associated with this favourite fruit.

Indeed, beyond mentioning some of the popular nicknames by which the apple was known in his day, little is said about it. The term apple was not originally confined to the fruit now so called, but was a generic name applied to any fruit, as we still speak of the love-apple, pine-

⁴⁵² “Miseros fallunt aconita legentes” (Georgic, ii. 152).

⁴⁵³ See Ellacombe’s “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” 1878, pp. 7, 8.

⁴⁵⁴ Dr Prior’s “Popular Names of British Plants,” 1870, pp. 1, 2.

⁴⁵⁵ Phillips “Flora Historica,” 1829, ii. pp. 122, 128.

⁴⁵⁶ “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” pp. 10, 11.

⁴⁵⁷ Phillips, “Flora Historica,” 1829, i. p. 104.

apple, &c.”⁴⁵⁸ So when Shakespeare (“Sonnet” xciii.), makes mention of Eve’s apple, he simply means that it was some fruit that grew in Eden—

“How like Eve’s apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show.”

(a.) The “Apple-john,” called in France *deux-années* or *deux-ans*, because it will keep two years, and considered to be in perfection when shrivelled and withered,⁴⁵⁹ is evidently spoken of in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3) where Falstaff says - “My skin hangs about me like an old lady’s loose gown; I am withered like an old apple-john.” In “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) there is a further allusion - “1st Drawer. What the devil hast thou brought there? apple-johns? thou knowest Sir John cannot endure an apple-john. 2nd Drawer. Mass, thou sayest true. The prince once set a dish of apple johns before him, and told him there were five more Sir Johns, and, putting off his hat, said, ‘I will now take my leave of these six dry, round, old, withered knights.’” This apple, too, is well described by Phillips (“Cider,” B. i.)—

“Nor John Apple, whose wither’d rind, entrench’d
By many a furrow, aptly represents
Decrepid age.”

In Ben Jonson’s “Bartholomew Fair” (i. 1) where Little-wit encourages Quarlus to kiss his wife, he says, “she may call you an apple-john if you use this.” “Here apple-john⁴⁶⁰ evidently means a procuring John, besides the allusion to the fruit so called.⁴⁶¹

(b.) The “Bitter-sweet or sweeting” to which Mercutio alludes in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 4) - “Thy wit is a very bitter sweeting; it is a most sharp sauce;” was apparently a favourite apple, which furnished many allusions to poets. Gower in his “Confessio Amantis” (1554, fol. 174) speaks of it—

“For all such time of love is lore
And like unto the bitter swete,
For though it thinke a man first swete,
He shall well felen atte laste,
That it is sower, and maie not laste.”

The name is “now given to an apple of no great value as a table fruit, but good as a cider apple, and for use in silk dyeing.”⁴⁶²

(c.) The “Crab” roasted before the fire and put into ale was a very favourite indulgence, especially at Christmas, in days gone by, and is referred to in the song of winter in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2)—

“When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl
Then nightly sings the staring owl.”

The beverage thus formed was called “Lambs-wool,” and generally consisted of ale, nutmeg, sugar, toast, and roasted crabs, or apples. It formed the ingredient of the wassail-bowl;⁴⁶³ and

⁴⁵⁸ Ellacombe’s “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 13.

⁴⁵⁹ Dyce’s “Glossary to Shakespeare,” p. 15.

⁴⁶⁰ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 29, probably synonymous with the term “Apple-Squire,” which formerly signified a pimp.

⁴⁶¹ Forby, in his “Vocabulary of East Anglia,” says of this Apple, “we retain the name, but whether we mean the same variety of fruit which was so called in Shakespeare’s time, it is not possible to ascertain.”

⁴⁶² Ellacombe’s “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 16; Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 430; Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 81; Coles’s “Latin and English Dictionary.” “A bitter-suete [apple]—Amari-mellum.”

⁴⁶³ See chapter XI., Customs connected with the Calendar.

also of the gossip's bowl ⁴⁶⁴alluded to in "Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1) where Puck says—

"And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale."

In Peele's "Old Wives' Tale," it is said—

"Lay a crab in the fire to roast for lamb's wool."⁴⁶⁵

And in Herrick's "Poems"—

"Now crowne the bowle
With gentle lamb's wooll,
Add sugar, and nutmegs, and ginger."

(d.) The "Codling," spoken of by Malvolio in "Twelfth Night," (i. 5), "Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy, as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple,"—is not the variety now so-called, but was the popular term for an immature apple, such as would require cooking to be eaten, being derived from "coddle," to stew or boil lightly,—hence it denoted a boiling apple, an apple for coddling or boiling.⁴⁶⁶ Mr Gifford ⁴⁶⁷says that codling was used by our old writers for that early state of vegetation when the fruit, after shaking off the blossom, began to assume a globular and determinate form.

(e.) The "Leather Coat" was the apple generally known as "the golden russeting."⁴⁶⁸ Davy, in "2 Henry IV," (v. 3), says: - "There's a dish of leather coats for you."

(f.) The "Pippin" was formerly a common term for an apple, to which reference is made in "Hudibras Redivivus," (1705),—

"A goldsmith telling o'er his cash,
A pipping-monger selling trash."

In Taylor's *Workes* ⁴⁶⁹ (1630), we read:—

"Lord, who would take him for a pippin squire,
That's so bedaub'd with lace and rich attire?"

Mr Ellacombe ⁴⁷⁰says the word "pippin" denoted an apple raised from pips and not from grafts, and "is now, and probably was in Shakespeare's time, confined to the bright-coloured long-keeping apples of which the golden pippin is the type." Justice Shallow, in "2 Henry IV," (v. 3), says: - "Nay, you shall see my orchard, where in an arbour we will eat a last year's pippin of my own graffing."

(g.) The "Pomewater" was a species of apple evidently of a juicy nature, and hence of high esteem in Shakespeare's time, for in "Love's Labour's Lost," (iv. 2), Holofernes says: - "The

⁴⁶⁴ See chapter on Customs connected with Birth and Baptism.

⁴⁶⁵ Edited by Dyce, 1861, p. 446. Many fanciful derivations for this word have been thought of, but it was no doubt named from its smoothness and softness, resembling the wool of lambs.

⁴⁶⁶ Dr Prior's "Popular Names of British Plants," 1870, p. 50.

⁴⁶⁷ Note on "Jonson's Works," iv. p. 24.

⁴⁶⁸ Dyce's "Glossary," p. 242.

⁴⁶⁹ Quoted by Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 662.

⁴⁷⁰ "Plant-Lore of Shakespeare," p. 16.

deer was, as you know, sanguis, in blood; ripe as the pomewater, who now hangeth like a jewel in the ear of cœlo,—the sky, the welkin, the heaven; and anon falleth like a crab on the face of *terra*,—the soil, the land, the earth.”

Parkinson ⁴⁷¹tells us the “Pomewater is an excellent, good, and great whiteish apple, full of sap or moisture, somewhat pleasant sharp, but a little bitter withal; it will not last long, the winter’s frost soon causing it to rot and perish.

It appears that apples and carraways were formerly always eaten together; and it is said that they are still served up on particular days at Trinity College, Cambridge. This practice is probably alluded to by Justice Shallow in the much disputed passage in “2 Henry IV.,” (iii. 5), when he speaks of eating “a last year’s pippin, with a dish of caraways.” The phrase, too, seems further explained by the following quotations from Cogan’s “Haven of Health,” (1599). After stating the virtues of the seed, and some of its uses, he says: - “For the same purpose *careway seeds* are used to be made in comfits, and to be eaten with apples, and surely very good for that purpose, for all such things as breed wind would be eaten with other things that break wind.” Again, in his chapter on apples, he says: - “Howbeit wee are wont to eat carrawaies or biskets, or some other kind of comfits, or seeds together with apples, thereby to breake winde ingendred by them, and surely this is a verie good way for students.” Mr Ellacombe,⁴⁷²however, considers that in “the dish of carraways” mentioned by Justice Shallow, neither caraway seeds, nor cakes made of caraways, are meant; but the carraway or carraway-russet apple. Most of the commentators are in favour of one of the former explanations. Mr Dyce ⁴⁷³reads caraways in the sense of comfits or confections made with caraway-seeds, and quotes from Shadwell’s “Woman-Captain” the following: - “The fruit, crab-apples, sweetings, and horse-plumbs; and for confections, a few carraways in a small sawcer, as if his worship’s house had been a lousie inn.”

Apricot. This word, which is spelt by Shakespeare “Apricock,” occurs in “Richard II.,” (iii. 4), where the gardener says:—

“Go, bind thou up yon dangling apricocks,
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight.”

And in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. i), Titania gives directions:—

“Be kind and courteous to this gentleman,
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries.”

The spelling “Apricock,”⁴⁷⁴is derived from the Latin *præcox*, or *præcoquus*; and it was called “the precocious tree” because it flowered and fruited earlier than the peach. The term “Apricock” is still in use in Northamptonshire.

Aspen.—According to a mediæval legend, the perpetual motion of this tree dates from its having supplied the wood of the Cross, and that its leaves have trembled ever since at the recollection of their guilt. De Quincey in his essay on “Modern Superstition” says, that this belief is co-extensive with Christendom. The following verses,⁴⁷⁵after telling how other trees were passed by in the choice of wood for the Cross, describe the hewing down of the aspen, and the dragging of it from the forest to Calvary—

⁴⁷¹ “Theatrum Botanicum,” 1640.

⁴⁷² “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” pp. 17, 37.

⁴⁷³ “Glossary,” pp. 65, 66.

⁴⁷⁴ See “Notes and Queries,” i. s. ii. p. 420.

⁴⁷⁵ See Henderson’s “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” 1879, pp. 151, 152.

“On the morrow stood she, trembling
At the awful weight she bore,
When the sun in midnight blackness
Darkened on Judea’s shore.

Still when not a breeze is stirring,
When the mist sleeps on the hill,
And all other trees are moveless
Stands the aspen trembling still.”

The Germans, says Mr Henderson, have a theory of their own, embodied in a little poem, which may be thus translated:—

“Once, as our Saviour walked with men below,
His path of mercy through a forest lay;
And mark how all the drooping branches show,
What homage best a silent tree may pay.

Only the aspen stands erect and free,
Scorning to join that voiceless worship pure;
But see! He casts one look upon the tree,
Struck to the heart she trembles evermore!”

Another legend tells us ⁴⁷⁶that the aspen was said to have been the tree on which Judas hanged himself after the betrayal of his Master, and ever since its leaves have trembled with shame. Shakespeare twice alludes to the trembling of the aspen. In “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 4), Marcus exclaims:—

“O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble, like aspen leaves, upon the lute?”

And in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), the hostess says: - “Feel, masters, how I shake. Yea, in very truth, do I, an ‘twere an aspen leaf.”

Bachelor’s Buttons.—This was a name given to several flowers, and perhaps in Shakespeare’s time was more loosely applied to any flower in bud. It is now usually understood to be a *double variety* of ranunculus; according to others, the *Lychnis Sylvestris*; and in some counties it is applied to the *Scabiosa Succisa*.⁴⁷⁷ According to Gerarde, this plant was so called from the similitude of its flowers “to the jagged cloathe buttons, anciently worne in this kingdome.” It was formerly supposed by country people to have some magical effect upon the fortunes of lovers. Hence, it was customary for young people to carry its flowers in their pockets, judging of their good or bad success, in proportion as these retained or lost their freshness. It is to this sort of divination that Shakespeare probably refers in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 2) where he makes the hostess say: - “What say you to young Master Fenton? He capers, he dances, he has eyes of youth, he writes verses, he speaks holiday, he smells April and May; he will carry ‘t, he will carry ‘t; ‘tis in his buttons; he will carry ‘t.” Mr Warter, in one of his notes in Southey’s “Common-Place Book” (1851, 4th series 244) says that this practice was common in his time, in Shropshire and Staffordshire. The term “to wear bachelor’s buttons,” seems to have grown into a phrase for being unmarried.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Napier’s “Folk-Lore of West of Scotland,” 1879, p. 124.

⁴⁷⁷ Dr Prior’s “Popular Names of British Plants,” p. 13.

⁴⁷⁸ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 45.

Balm.—From very early times, the balm or balsam has been valued for its curative properties, and, as such, is alluded to in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 1)—

“But, saying thus, instead of oil and balm,
Thou lay’st in every gash that love hath given me
The knife that made it.”

In “3 Henry VI.” (iv. 8) King Henry says ⁴⁷⁹—

“My pity hath been balm to heal their wounds.”

Alcibiades, in “Timon of Athens” (iii. 5), says—

“Is this the balsam, that the usuring senate
Pours into captains’ wounds? Banishment?”

Macbeth, too, in the well-known passage (ii. 2), introduces it—

“Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.”

As the oil of consecration, ⁴⁸⁰it is spoken of by Richard (“Richard II.,” iii. 2)—

“Not all the water in the rough, rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.”

And again, in “3 Henry VI.” (iii. 1), King Henry, when in disguise, speaks thus—

“Thy place is filled, thy sceptre wrung from thee,
Thy balm wash’d off wherewith thou wast anointed.
No bending knee will call thee Cæsar now.”

The origin of balsam, says Mr Ellacombe ⁴⁸¹“was for a long time a secret, but it is now known to have been the produce of several gum-bearing trees, especially the *pistacia lentiscus* and the *balsamodendron gileadense*, and now, as then, the name is not strictly confined to the produce of any one plant.”

Barley.—The barley broth, of which the Constable in “Henry V.” (iii. 5) spoke so contemptuously as the food of English soldiers, was probably beer, ⁴⁸²which long before the time of Henry was so celebrated that it gave its name to the plant (barley being simply the beer-plant)—

”Can sodden water,
A drench for surrein’d jades, their barley broth,
Decoct their cold blood to such valiant heat.”

Bay-tree.—The withering and death of this tree were reckoned a prognostic of evil, both in ancient and modern times, a notion ⁴⁸³to which Shakespeare refers in “Richard II.” (ii. 4)—

“’Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay.
The bay-trees in our country are all wither’d”

⁴⁷⁹ See “Richard III.,” i. 2; “Timon of Athens,” iii. 5.

⁴⁸⁰ See “2 Henry IV.,” iv. 5.

⁴⁸¹ “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 22.

⁴⁸² Ellacombe’s “Plant-lore of Shakespeare,” p. 23.

⁴⁸³ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 32.

—having obtained it probably from Holinshed, who says - “In this yeare, in a manner throughout all the realme of Englande, old baie trees withered.” Lupton, in his “Syxt Booke of Notable Things,” mentions this as a bad omen - “Neyther falling-sickness, neyther devyll, wyll infest or hurt one in that place whereas a bay-tree is. The Romaynes call it the plant of the good angel.”⁴⁸⁴

Camomile.—It was formerly imagined that this plant grew the more luxuriantly for being frequently trodden or pressed down; a notion alluded to in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), by Falstaff - “For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted the sooner it wears.” Nares ⁴⁸⁵considers that the above was evidently written in ridicule of the following passage, in a book very fashionable in Shakespeare’s day, Lyly’s “Euphues,” of which it is a parody - “Though the camomile, the more it is trodden and pressed down, the more it spreadeth; yet the violet, the oftener it is handled and touched, the sooner it withereth and decayeth,” &c.

Clover.—According to Johnson, the “honey-stalks” in the following passage (“Titus Andronicus,” iv. 4), are “clover-flowers, which contain a sweet juice.” It is not uncommon for cattle to overcharge themselves with clover and die, hence the allusion by Tamora—

“I will enchant the old Andronicus
With words more sweet, and yet more dangerous,
Than baits to fish, or honey-stalks to sheep.”

Columbine.—This was anciently termed “a thankless flower,” and was also emblematical of forsaken lovers. It is somewhat doubtful to what Ophelia alludes in “Hamlet” (iv. 5), where she seems to address the king—

“There’s fennel for you, and columbines.”

Perhaps she regarded it as symbolical of ingratitude:

Crow-flowers.—This name, which in Shakespeare’s time was applied to the “ragged robin,” is now used for the buttercup. It was one of the flowers that poor Ophelia wove into her garland (“Hamlet” iv. 7)—

“There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples.”

Cuckoo-buds.—Commentators are uncertain as to what flower Shakespeare refers in “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” (v. 2):—

“When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight.”

Mr Miller, in his “Gardener’s Dictionary,” says that the flower here alluded to is the “*Ranunculus Bulbosus*”; but Mr Beisly, in his “Shakspeare’s Garden,” considers it to be the “*Ranunculus Ficaria*,” (lesser celandine), or pile-wort, as this flower appears earlier in spring, and is in bloom at the same time as the other flowers named in the song. Mr Swinfen Jervis, however, in his “Dictionary of the Language of Shakespeare” (1868), decides in favour of

⁴⁸⁴ See also Evelyn’s “*Sylva*,” 1776, p. 396.

⁴⁸⁵ “Glossary,” i. p. 150. See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 63.

cowslips ⁴⁸⁶; and Dr Prior suggests the buds of the crowfoot. At the present day the nickname cuckoo-bud is assigned to the meadow cress (*cardamine pratensis*).

Cuckoo-Flowers.—By this flower, Mr Beisly ⁴⁸⁷says, the ragged robin is meant, a well-known meadow and marsh plant, with rose-coloured flowers and deeply-cut narrow segments. It blossoms at the time the cuckoo comes, hence one of its names. In “King Lear,” (iv. 4), Cordelia narrates how:—

”He was met even now
As mad as the vex’d sea—singing aloud;
Crown’d with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,
With burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn.”

Cypress.—From the earliest times the cypress has had a mournful history, being associated with funerals and churchyards, and as such is styled by Spenser “cypress funereal.”

In Quarles’s “Argalus and Parthenia,” (1726, bk. iii.), a knight is introduced whose

“Horse was black as jet, His furniture was round about beset
With branches slipt from the sad cypress tree.”

Formerly coffins were frequently made of cypress wood, a practice to which Shakespeare probably alludes in “Twelfth Night,” (ii. 4), where the clown says: - “In sad cypress let me be laid. Some, however, prefer ⁴⁸⁸understanding cypress to mean “a shroud of cyprus or cypress,”—a fine transparent stuff, similar to crape, either white or black, but more commonly the latter.⁴⁸⁹Douce ⁴⁹⁰thinks that the expression “laid” seems more applicable to a coffin than to a shroud, and also adds that the shroud is afterwards expressly mentioned by itself.

Daffodil.—The daffodil of Shakespeare is the wild daffodil which grows so abundantly in many parts of England. Perdita, in “Winter’s Tale,” (iv. 4), mentions a little piece of weather-lore, and tells us how—

”Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.”

And Autolycus in the same play (iv. 3), sings thus:—

“When daffodils begin to peer,
With heigh! the doxy over the dale,
Why, then comes in the sweet o’ the year.”

⁴⁸⁶ See Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 212.

⁴⁸⁷ “Shakspeare’s Garden,” p. 343.

⁴⁸⁸ See “Winter’s Tale,” (iv. 4):—

“Lawn as white as driven snow,
Cyprus black as e’er was crow.”

Its transparency is alluded to in “Twelfth Night,” (iii. 1):—

“A cypress, not a bosom,
Hideth my heart.”

⁴⁸⁹ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” 1872, p. 113.

⁴⁹⁰ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” 1839, p. 56. See Mr Gough’s “Introduction to Sepulchral Monuments,” p. lxvi.; also Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 221.

Darnel.—This plant, like the cockle, was used in Shakespeare's day to denote any hurtful weed. Newton,⁴⁹¹ in his "Herbal to the Bible," says that "under the name of cockle and darnel is comprehended all vicious, noisome, and unprofitable graine, encombring and hindering good corne." Thus Cordelia, in "King Lear," (iv. 4), says:—

"Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn."

According to Gerarde, "darnel hurteth the eyes, and maketh them dim, if it happen either in corne for breade, or drinke." Hence, it is said, originated the old proverb, "lolio victitare,"—applied to such as were dim-sighted. Steevens considers that Pucelle in the following passage from "1 Henry VI.," (iii. 2), alludes to this property of the darnel—meaning to intimate that the corn she carried with her had produced the same effect on the guards of Rouen; otherwise they would have seen through her disguise, and defeated her stratagem:—

"Good morrow, gallants! want ye corn for bread?
I think the Duke of Burgundy will fast
Before he'll buy againe at such a rate:
'Twas full of darnel: do you like the taste?"

Date.—This fruit of the palm-tree was once a common ingredient in all kinds of pastry, and some other dishes, and often supplied a pun for comedy, as for example, in "All's Well that End's Well" (i. 1), where Parolles says: - "Your date is better in your pie and your porridge, than in your cheek." And in "Troilus and Cressida" (i. 2): - "Ay, a minced man; and then to be baked with no date in the pye; for then the man's date's out."

Ebony.—The wood of this tree was regarded as the typical emblem of darkness—the tree itself, however, was unknown in this country in Shakespeare's time. It is mentioned in "Love's Labour's Lost" (iv. 3)—

"*King* By heaven thy love is black as ebony,
Biron. Is ebony like her? O wood divine!
A wife of such wood were felicity."

In the same play we read of "the ebon-coloured ink" (i. 1), and in "Venus and Adonis" (948), of "Death's Ebon Dart."

Elder.—This plant whilst surrounded by an extensive folklore, has from time immemorial possessed an evil reputation, and been regarded as one of bad omen. According to a popular tradition "Judas was hanged on an elder,"—a superstition mentioned by Biron in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2); and also by Ben Jonson in "Every Man Out of Humour" (iv. 4) - "He shall be your Judas, and you shall be his elder-tree to hang on." In "Piers Plowman's Vision" (l. 593–6), we are told how—

"Judas, he japed
With jewen silver,
And sithen on an eller
Hanged hymselfe."

So firmly rooted was this belief in days gone by that Sir John Mandeville tells us in his travels, which he wrote in 1364, that he was actually shown the identical tree at Jerusalem, "And faste by is zit, the tree of Elder that Judas henge himself upon, for despeyr that he hadde when he solde and betrayed oure Lord." This tradition no doubt, in a great measure,

⁴⁹¹ See Dr Prior's "Pop. Names of British Plants," 1870, p. 63.

helped to give it its bad fame; causing it to be spoken of as “the stinking elder.” Shakespeare makes it an emblem of grief. In “Cymbeline” (iv. 2) Arviragus says—

”Grow, patience!
And let the stinking elder, grief, untwine
His perishing root with the increasing vine.”

The Dwarf Elder ⁴⁹²(*Sambucus Ebulus*) is said only to grow where blood has been shed either in battle or in murder. The Welsh call it “Llysan gward gwyr,” or “plant of the blood of man.” Shakespeare perhaps had this piece of folklore in mind when he represents Bassianus, in “Titus and Andronicus” (ii. 4), as killed at a pit beneath an elder tree - “This is the pit and this the elder tree.”

*Eryngo*es.—These were formerly said to be strong pro-vocatives, and as such are mentioned by Falstaff in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5). “Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of Green Sleeves, hail kissing comfits, and snow eryngoes.” Mr Ellacombe ⁴⁹³thinks that in this passage the Globe Artichoke is meant, “which is a near ally of the Eryngium, and was a favourite dish in Shakespeare’s time.”

Fennel.—This was generally considered as an inflammatory herb; and to eat “conger and fennel” was “to eat two high and hot things together,” which was an act of libertinism.⁴⁹⁴ Thus in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) Falstaff says of Poins he “eats conger and fennel.” Mr Beisly states ⁴⁹⁵that fennel was used as a sauce with fish hard of digestion, being aromatic, and as the old writers term it, “hot in the third degree.” One of the herbs distributed by poor Ophelia in her distraction is fennel which she offers either as a cordial or as an emblem of flattery - “There’s fennel for you, and columbine.”

Mr Staunton, however, considers that fennel here signifies *lust*, while Mr Beisly thinks its reputed property of clearing the sight is alluded to. It is more probable that it denotes flattery; especially, as in Shakespeare’s time, it was regarded emblematical of flattery. In this sense it is often quoted by old writers. In Greene’s “Quip for an Upstart Courtier,” we read - “Fennel I meane for flatterers.” In “Phyala Lachrymarum”⁴⁹⁶we find—

“Nor fennel-finkle bring for flattery,
Begot of his, and famed courtesie.”

Fern.—According to a curious notion fern-seed was supposed to possess the power of rendering persons invisible. Hence it was a most important object of superstition, being gathered mystically, especially on Midsummer Eve. It was believed at one time to have neither flower nor seed; the seed, which lay on the back of the leaf, being so small as to escape the detection of the hasty observer. On this account, probably, proceeding on the fantastic doctrine of signatures, our ancestors derived the notion that those who could obtain and wear this invisible seed would be themselves invisible; a belief which is referred to in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1)—

“*Gadshill*. We have the receipt of fern-seed, we walk invisible.

“*Chamberlain*. Nay, by my faith, I think you are more beholding to the night than to fern-seed for your walking invisible.”

⁴⁹² “Flower Lore,” p. 35.

⁴⁹³ “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 66.

⁴⁹⁴ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 302; Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 159.

⁴⁹⁵ “Shakspeare’s Garden,” p. 158.

⁴⁹⁶ Quoted in Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 303.

This superstition is mentioned by many old writers; a proof of its popularity in times past. It is alluded to in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Fair Maid of the Inn" (i. 1)—

"Did you think that you had Gyges' ring?
Or the herb that gives invisibility?"

Again, in Ben Jonson's "New Inn" (i. 1)—

"I had
No medicine, sir, to go invisible,
No fern-seed in my pocket."

As recently as Addison's day, we are told in the "Tatler" (No. 240), that "it was impossible to walk the streets without having an advertisement thrust into your hand of a doctor who had arrived at the knowledge of the green and red dragon, and had discovered the female fern-seed."⁴⁹⁷

Fig—Formerly the term *fig* served as a common expression of contempt, and was used to denote a thing of the least importance. Hence the popular phrase, "not to care a fig for one;" a sense in which it is sometimes used by Shakespeare, who makes Pistol say, in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (i. 3), "a fico for the phrase;" and in "Henry V." (iii. 6), Pistol exclaims, "figo for thy friendship." In "Othello" (i. 3), Iago says, "Virtue! a fig."

The term, "to give or make the fig," as an expression of insult, has for many ages been very prevalent among the nations of Europe, and according to Douce⁴⁹⁸ was known to the Romans. It consists in thrusting the thumb between two of the closed fingers, or into the mouth, a practice, as some say,⁴⁹⁹ in allusion to a contemptuous punishment inflicted on the Milanese, by the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa in 1162, when he took their city. This, however, is altogether improbable, the real origin no doubt being a coarse representation of a disease, to which the name of *ficus* or fig has always been given.⁵⁰⁰

The "fig of Spain" spoken of in "Henry V." (iii. 6), may either allude to the poisoned fig employed in Spain as a secret way of destroying an obnoxious person, as in Webster's "White Devil"⁵⁰¹—

"I do look now for a Spanish fig, or an Italian salad, daily,"

And in Shirley's "Brothers"⁵⁰²—

"I must poison him; One fig sends him to Erebus."

It may, as Mr Dyce remarks,⁵⁰³ simply denote contempt or insult in the sense already mentioned.

Flower-de-luce.—The common purple iris which adorns our gardens is now generally agreed upon as the fleur-de-luce, a corruption of fleur de Louis—being spelt either fleur-de-lys or fleur-de-lis. It derives its name from Louis VII., King of France, who chose this flower as his heraldic emblem when setting forth on his crusade to the Holy Land. It had already been used by the other French kings, and by the emperors of Constantinople; but it is still a matter of

⁴⁹⁷ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, i. pp. 314–316.

⁴⁹⁸ "Illustrations of Shakespeare," pp. 302–8.

⁴⁹⁹ See Nares' "Glossary," i. 305.

⁵⁰⁰ See Gifford's note on "Jonson's Works," i. p. 52; Dyce's "Glossary," p. 161; Du Cange's "Glossary;" Connelly's "Spanish and English Dictionary," 4to.

⁵⁰¹ Edited by Dyce, 1857, p. 30.

⁵⁰² Edited by Gifford and Dyce, i. p. 231.

⁵⁰³ "Glossary," p. 161.

dispute among antiquarians as to what it was originally intended to represent. Some say a flower, some a toad, some a halbert-head. It is uncertain as to what plant is referred to by Shakespeare when he alludes to the fleur-de-luce in the following passage ⁵⁰⁴in “2 Henry VI.” (v. 1) where the Duke of York says—

“A sceptre shall it have, hive I a soul,
On which I’ll toss the flower-de-luce of France.”

In “1 Henry VI.” (i. 2), Pucelle declares—

“I am prepared; here is my keen edged sword,
Deck’d with five flower-de-luces on each side.”

Some think the lily is meant, others the iris. For the lily theory, says Mr Ellacombe, ⁵⁰⁵“there are the facts that Shakespeare calls it one of the lilies, and that the other way of spelling is fleur-de-lys.”

Chaucer seems to connect it with the lily (C. T. Prol, 238)—

“Her nekke was white as the flour-de-lis.”

On the other hand, Spenser separates the lilies from the flower-de-lutes in his “Shepherd’s Calendar;” and Ben Jonson mentions “rich carnations, flower-de-luces, lilies.”

The fleur-de-lis was not always confined to royalty as a badge. Thus in the square of La Pucelle, in Rouen, there is a statue of Jeanne D’Arc with fleur-de-lys sculptured upon it, and an inscription as follows:—

“The maiden’s sword protects the royal crown;
Beneath the maiden’s sword the lilies safely blow.”

St Louis conferred upon the Chateaubriands the device of a fleur-de-lis, and the motto, “Mon sang teint les bannières de France.” When Edward III. claimed the crown of France, in the year 1340, he quartered the ancient shield of France with the lions of England. It disappeared, however, from the English shield in the first year of the present century.

Gilliflower.—This was the old name for the whole class of carnations, pinks, and sweet-williams, from the French *girofle*, which is itself corrupted from the Latin *cariophyllum*. ⁵⁰⁶The streaked gillyflowers, says Mr Beisly, ⁵⁰⁷noticed by Perdita in “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4)—

“The fairest flowers o’ the season
Are our carnations and streak’d gillyvors,
Which some call nature’s bastards”

“are produced by the flowers of one kind being impregnated by the pollen of another kind, and this art (or law) in nature Shakspeare alludes to in the delicate language used by Perdita, as well as to the practice of increasing the plants by slips.” Tusser, in his “Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry,” says—

“The gilliflower also the skilful doe know,
Doth look to be covered in frost and in snow.”

⁵⁰⁴ See “Winter’s Tale,” iv. 3; “Henry V.,” v. 2; “1 Henry VI.,” i. 1.

⁵⁰⁵ “Plant-lore of Shakespeare,” p. 73.

⁵⁰⁶ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 363.

⁵⁰⁷ “Shakspeare’s Garden,” p. 82. See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 184.

Harebell.—This flower, mentioned in “Cymbeline” (iv. 2), is no doubt another name for the wild hyacinth.

Arviragus says of Imogen—

“Thou shalt not lack
The flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azured harebell, like thy veins.”

Hemlock.—In consequence of its bad and poisonous character, this plant was considered an appropriate ingredient for witches’ broth. In “Macbeth,” (iv. 1), we read of “root of hemlock digg’d i’ the dark.” Its scientific name, *conium*, is from the Greek word meaning cone or top, whose whirling motion resembles the giddiness produced on the constitution by its poisonous juice. It is by most persons supposed to be the death-drink of the Greeks, and the one by which Socrates was put to death.

Herb of Grace or *Herb Grace.*—A popular name in days gone by for rue. The origin of the term is uncertain. Most probably it arose from the extreme bitterness of the plant, which, as it had always borne the name *rue* (to be sorry for anything), was not unnaturally associated with repentance. It was, therefore, the herb of repentance,⁵⁰⁸ and this was soon changed into ‘herb of grace,’ repentance being the chief sign of grace.” The expression is several times used by Shakespeare. In “Richard II.” (iii. 4), the gardener narrates—

“Here did she fall a tear; here in this place
I’ll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace:
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
In the remembrance of a weeping queen.”

In “Hamlet” (iv. 5), Ophelia, when addressing the queen, says, “There’s rue for you; and here’s some for me: we may call it herb-grace o’ Sundays: O, you must wear your rue with a difference.”⁵⁰⁹

Malone observes that there is no ground for supposing that rue was called “herb of grace” from its being used in exorcisms in churches on Sunday, a notion entertained by Jeremy Taylor, who says, referring to the *Flagellum Dæmonum*, “First, they (the Romish exorcisers) are to try the devil by holy water, incense, sulphur, rue, which from thence, as we suppose, came to be called “herb of grace.”⁵¹⁰ Rue was also a common subject of puns, from being the same word which signified sorrow or pity (see “Richard II.” iii. 4 cited above).

Holy Thistle.—The *Carduus Benedictus*, called also “blessed thistle,” was so named, like other plants which bear the specific name of “blessed,” from its supposed power of counteracting the effect of poison.⁵¹¹ Cogan, in his “Haven of Health,” 1595, says, “This herbe may worthily be called *Benedictus*, or *Omnimorbia*, that is, a salve for every sore, not known to physitions of old time, but lately revealed by the special providence of almighty God.” It is alluded to in “Much Ado about Nothing” (iii. 4)—

“*Margaret.* Get you some of this distilled *Carduus Benedictus*, and lay it to your heart; it is the only thing for a qualm.

“*Hero.* There thou prickest her with a thistle.

⁵⁰⁸ Ellacombe’s “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 204; Prior’s “Popular Names of British Plants,” 1870, p. 111.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. “All’s Well that Ends Well,” iv. 5; “Antony and Cleopatra,” iv. 2; “Romeo and Juliet,” ii. 3, where Friar Laurence says “In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will.”

⁵¹⁰ “A Dissuasive from Popery,” pt. i., chap. ii. sec. 9; see Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 371.

⁵¹¹ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 464.

“*Beatrice*. Benedictus! why Benedictus? You have some moral in this Benedictus.

“*Margaret*. Moral! no, by my troth, I have no moral meaning: I mean plain holy-thistle.”

Insane Root.—There is much doubt as to what plant is meant by Banquo in “Macbeth” (i. 3)—

“Have we eaten of the insane root

That takes the reason prisoner?”

The origin of this passage is probably to be found in North’s “Plutarch—Life of Antony,” 1579 (p. 990), where mention is made of a plant which “made them out of their wits.” Several plants have been suggested—the hemlock, belladonna, mandrake, henbane, &c. Douce supports the last, and cites the following passage ⁵¹²: - “Henbane . . . is called *insana*, mad, for the use thereof is perillous; for if it be eate or dronke, it breedeth madness, or slow lykenesse of sleepe.” Nares ⁵¹³ quotes from Ben Jonson (“Sejanus” iii. 2), in support of hemlock—

“Well, read my charms,

And may they lay that hold upon thy senses

As thou hadst snufft up hemlock.”

Ivy.—It was formerly the general custom in England, as it is still in France and the Netherlands, to hang a bush of ivy at the door of a vintner. Hence the allusion in “As You Like It” (v. 4, Epilogue), where Rosalind wittingly remarks, “If it be true that good wine needs no bush, ‘tis true that a good play needs no epilogue.” This custom is often referred to by our old writers, as, for instance, in Nash’s “Summer’s Last Will and Testament;” ⁵¹⁴ “1600—

“Green ivy bushes at the vintner’s doors.”

And in the “Rival Friends,” 1632—

“‘Tis like the ivy bush unto a tavern.”

This plant was no doubt chosen from its being sacred to Bacchus. The practice was observed at statute hirings, wakes, &c., by people who sold ale at no other time. The manner, says Mr Singer, ⁵¹⁵ in which they were decorated appears from a passage in Florio’s “Italian Dictionary,” in voce *trcmola*, “Gold foile, or thin leaves of gold or silver, namely, thinne plate, as our vintners adorn their bushes with.” We may compare the old sign of “An owl in an ivy bush,” which perhaps denoted the union of wisdom or prudence with conviviality, as “be merry and wise.”

Kecksies.—These are the dry hollow stalks of hemlock. In “Henry V.” (v. 2), Burgundy makes use of the word:—

“And nothing teems,

But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,

Losing both beauty and utility.”

It has been suggested ⁵¹⁶ that kecksies may be a mistaken form of the plural *kex*; and that *kex* may have been formed from *keck*, something so dry that the eater would keck at it, or be

⁵¹² Batman “Uppon Bartholomæus de Propriet. rerum,” lib. xvii. chap. 87.

⁵¹³ “Glossary,” i. p. 465.

⁵¹⁴ See Hotten’s “History of Sign Boards.”

⁵¹⁵ “Shakespeare,” iii. p. 112.

⁵¹⁶ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 482.

unable to swallow it. The word is probably derived from the Welsh “cecys,” which is applied to several plants of the umbelliferous kind. Dr Prior,⁵¹⁷ however, says that kecksies is from an old English word keek, or kike, retained in the northern counties in the sense of “peep” or “spy.”

Knotgrass. ⁵¹⁸—The allusion to this plant in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 2):—

”Get you gone, you dwarf,
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made,
You bead, you acorn”

refers to its supposed power of hindering the growth of any child or animal, when taken in an infusion, a notion alluded to by Beaumont and Fletcher (“Coxcombe” ii. 2):—

“We want a boy extremely for this function,
Kept under for a year with milk and knot-grass.”

In “The Knight of the Burning Pestle” (ii. 2), we read: - “The child’s a fatherless child, and say they should put him into a strait pair of gaskins, ‘twere worse than knot-grass; he would never grow after it.”

Lady Smocks.—This plant is so-called from the resemblance of its white flowers to little smocks hung out to dry (“Love’s Labour’s Lost” v. 2), as they used to be at that season of the year especially:—

“When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white
And cuckoo buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,

When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks.”

According to another explanation, the lady’s smock is a corruption of “Our Lady’s Smock,” so called from its first flowering about Lady-tide. This plant has also been called cuckoo-flower, because, as Gerarde says, “it flowers in April and May when the cuckoo doth begin to sing her pleasant notes without stammering.”

Laurel.—From the very earliest times this classical plant has been regarded as symbolical of victory, and used for crowns. In “Titus Andronicus” (i. 1), Titus says:—

“Cometh Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs.”

And in “Antony and Cleopatra” (v. 3), the latter exclaims:—

“Upon your sword
Sit laurelled victory.”⁵¹⁹

Leek.—The first of March is observed by the Welsh in honour of St David, their patron saint, when, as a sign of their patriotism, they wear a leek. Much doubt exists as to the origin of this custom. According to the Welsh, it is because St David ordered his Britons to place leeks in their caps, that they might be distinguished in fight from their Saxon foes. Shakespeare in “Henry V.” (iv. 7), alludes to the custom when referring to the battle of Cressy. Fluellen says:

⁵¹⁷ “Popular Names of British Plants,” 1879, p. 128.

⁵¹⁸ Polygonum Aviculare.

⁵¹⁹ See “3 Henry VI.” iv. 6; “Troilus and Cressida,” i. 3.

- "If your majesties is remembered of it, the Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Monmouth caps, which your majesty know to this hour is an honourable badge of the service; and I do believe your majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy's Day."⁵²⁰ Dr Owen Pughe ⁵²¹supposes the custom arose from the practice of every farmer contributing his leek to the common repast when they met at the Cymmortha, an association by which they reciprocated assistance in ploughing the land. Anyhow, the subject is one involved in complete uncertainty, and the various explanations given are purely conjectural (see page 284).

Lily.—Although so many pretty legends and romantic superstitions have clustered round this sweet and favourite flower, yet they have escaped the notice of Shakespeare, who, whilst attaching to it the choicest epithets, has simply made it the type of elegance and beauty, and the symbol of purity and whiteness.

Long Purples.—This plant mentioned by Shakespeare in "Hamlet" (iv. 7) as forming part of the nosegay of poor Ophelia, is generally considered to be the early purple orchis (*orchis mascula*) which blossoms in April or May. It grows in meadows and pastures, and is about ten inches high. Tennyson ("A Dirge") uses the name—

"Round thee blow, self-pleached deep,
Bramble roses, faint and pale,
And long purples of the dale."

Another term applied by Shakespeare to this flower was "Dead Men's Fingers," from the pale colour and hand-like shape of the palmate tubers—

"Our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them."

In "Flowers from Stratford-on-Avon" it is said "there can be no doubt that the wild arum is the plant alluded to by Shakespeare," but there seems no authority for this statement.

Love-in-Idleness, or, with more accuracy, *Love-in-Idle*,⁵²² is one of the many nicknames of the pansy or heart's-ease—a term said to be still in use in Warwickshire. It occurs in "Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1) ⁵²³where Oberon says—

"Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness."

The phrase literally signifies love in vain, or to no purpose, as Taylor alludes to it in the following couplet:—

"When passions are let loose without a bridle,
Then precious time is turned to love and idle."

That flowers, and pansies especially, were used as love-philtres,⁵²⁴ or for the object of casting a spell over people in Shakespeare's day, is shown in the passage already quoted, where Puck

⁵²⁰ See "Henry V." iv. 1.

⁵²¹ "Cambrian Biography," 3803, p. 86; see Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 3849, i. pp. 302–108.

⁵²² See Dr Prior's "Popular Names of British Plants," 1870, p. 339.

⁵²³ Cf. "Taming of the Shrew," i. 3.

⁵²⁴ Cf. what Egeus says (i. 1) when speaking of Lysander—

"This man hath bewitch'd the bosom of my child;
Thou, thou Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes
And interchanged love-tokens with my child."

and Oberon amuse themselves at Titania's expense. Again, a further reference occurs (iv. 1) where the king removes the spell—

“But first I will release the fairy queen.

Be as thou wast wont to be:

See as thou wast wont to see:

Dian's bud ⁵²⁵o'er Cupid's flower⁵²⁶

Hath such force and blessed power.

Now, my Titania; wake you, my sweet queen.”

“It has been suggested,” says Mr Aldis Wright,⁵²⁷“that the device employed by Oberon to enchant Titania by anointing her eyelids with the juice of a flower, may have been borrowed by Shakespeare from the Spanish Romance of Diana by George of Montemayor. But apart from the difficulty which arises from the fact that no English translation of this romance is known before that published by Young in 1598, there is no necessity to suppose that Shakespeare was indebted to anyone for what must have been a familiar element in all incantations at a time when a belief in witchcraft was common.” Percy (“Reliques,” iii. b. 2) quotes a receipt by the celebrated astrologer, Dr Dee, for “an ungent to anoynt under the eyelids, and upon the eyelids eveninge and morninge, but especially when you call,” that is, upon the fairies. It consisted of a decoction of various flowers.

Mandragora or Mandrake.—No plant, perhaps, has had, at different times, a greater share of folk-lore attributed to it than the mandrake; partly owing probably to the fancied resemblance of its root to the human figure, and the accidental circumstance of man being the first syllable of the word. An inferior degree of animal life was assigned to it; and it was commonly supposed that, when torn from the ground, it uttered groans of so pernicious a character, that the person who committed the violence either went mad or died. In “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 2), Suffolk says:—

“Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
I would invent, &c.

And Juliet (iv. 3) speaks of—

“Shrieks like mandrake's torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad.”

To escape this danger, it was recommended to tie one end of a string to the plant and the other to a dog, upon whom the fatal groan would discharge its whole malignity. The ancients, it appears, were equally superstitious with regard to this mysterious plant, and Columella, in his directions for the site of gardens, says they may be formed where—

“The mandrake's flowers
Produce, whose root shews half a man, whose juice
With madness strikes.”

Pliny ⁵²⁸informs us that those who dug up this plant paid particular attention to stand so that the wind was at their back; and before they began to dig, they made three circles round the plant with the point of the sword, and then proceeding to the west commenced digging it up.

⁵²⁵ Dian's bud is the bud of the agnus castus, or chaste tree. “The virtue this herbe is, that he will kepe man and woman chaste.” “Macer's Herbal,” 1527.

⁵²⁶ Cupid's flower, another name for the pansy.

⁵²⁷ Notes to “A Midsummer Night's Dream,” 1877. Preface p. xx.

⁵²⁸ “Natural History,” book xxv. chap. 94.

It seems to have been well known as an opiate in the time of Shakespeare, who makes Iago say in "Othello," (iii. 3):—

"Not poppy, nor mandragora.
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which you owedst yesterday."

In "Antony and Cleopatra," (i. 5), the latter pathetically says:—

"Give me to drink mandragora.
Char. Why, madam?
Cleo. That I might sleep out this great gap of time,
My Antony is away."

Lyte, in his translation of "Dodoens," (1578, 438), tells us that "the leaves and fruit be also dangerous, for they cause deadly sleepe, and peevish drowsiness, like opium." It was sometimes regarded as an emblem of incontinence, as in "2 Henry IV." (i. 2):—

"Yes, lecherous as a monkey, and the whores call him mandrake."

A very diminutive figure was, too, often compared to a mandrake. In "2 Henry IV." (i. 2), Falstaff says:—

"Thou whoreson mandrake, thou are fitter to be worn in my cap than to wait at my heels."

Tracing back the history of this plant into far distant times, it is generally believed that it is the same as that which the ancient Hebrews called Dudain.⁵²⁹ That these people held it in the highest esteem in the days of Jacob is evident from its having been found by Reuben, who carried the plant to his mother, and the inducement which tempted Leah to part with it, proves the value then set upon this celebrated plant. According to a curious superstition this plant was thought to possess the properties of making childless wives become mothers, and hence some suppose Rachel became so desirous of possessing the mandrakes which Reuben had found. Among the many other items of folk-lore associated with the mandrake; there is one which informs us that "it is perpetually watched over by Satan, and if it be pulled up at certain holy times, and with certain invocations, the evil spirit will appear to do the bidding of the practitioner."⁵³⁰ In comparatively recent times, quacks and impostors counterfeited with the root briony figures resembling parts of the human body, which were sold to the credulous as endued with specific virtues.⁵³¹ The Germans, too, equally superstitious, formed little idols of the roots of the mandrake, which were regularly dressed every day, and consulted as oracles,—their repute being such that they were manufactured in great numbers and sold in cases. They were, also, imported into this country during the time of Henry VIII., it being pretended that they would; with the assistance of some mystic words, increase whatever money was placed near them. In order, too, to enhance the value of these so-called miracle workers, it was said that the roots of this plant were produced from the flesh of criminals which fell from the gibbet, and that it only grew in such a situation.⁵³²

Marigold.—This flower was a great favourite with our old writers, from a curious notion that it always opened or shut its flowers at the sun's bidding; in allusion to which Perdita remarks in "Winter's Tale," (iv. 3):—

⁵²⁹ Phillips' "Flora Historica," 1829, i. pp. 324, 325. See Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," 1869, ii. p. 1777.

⁵³⁰ "Mystic Trees and Flowers," by M. D. Conway; "Fraser's Mag.," 1870, ii. p. 705.

⁵³¹ Singer's "Shakespeare," 1875, v. p. 153.

⁵³² See Sir Thomas Browne's "Vulgar Errors," 1852, ii. p. 6.

“The marigold, that goes to bed wi’ the sun
And with him rises weeping.”

It was also said, but erroneously, to turn its flowers to the sun, a quality attributed to the sunflower (*helianthus annuus*), and thus described by Moore:—

“The sunflower turns on her god when he sets
The same look which she did when he rose.”

A popular name for the marigold was “mary-bud,” mention of which we find in “Cymbeline,” (ii. 3):—

“Winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes.”

Medlar.—This fruit, which Shakespeare describes as only fit to be eaten when rotten, is applied by Lucio to a woman of loose character, as in “Measure for Measure,” (iv. 3):” They would else have married me to the rotten medlar.”

Chaucer, in the “Reeve’s Prologue,” applies the same name to it—

“That ilke fruit is ever lenger the wers,
Till it be roten in mullok, or in stre.
We olde men, I drede, so faren we,
Till we be roten can we not be ripe.”

Mistletoe.—This plant, which from the earliest times has been an object of interest to naturalists, on account of its curious growth, deriving its subsistence entirely from the branch to which it annexes itself, has been the subject of wide-spread superstition. In “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 3), Tamora describes it in the graphic passage below as “the baleful mistletoe,” an epithet which, as Mr Douce observes, is extremely appropriate either conformably to an ancient, but erroneous, opinion, that the berries of the mistletoe were poisonous; or on account of the use made of this plant by the Druids during their detestable human sacrifices.⁵³³

Demetrius. How now, dear sovereign, and our gracious mother,
Why doth your highness look so pale and wan?

Tamora. Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?
These two have ‘tic’d me hither to this place:—
A barren detested vale you see it is;
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O’ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe:
Here never shines the sun; here nothing breeds,
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven.”

Mushroom.—Besides his notice of the mushroom in the following passages, Shakespeare alludes to the fairy rings ⁵³⁴which are formed by fungi, though, as Mr Ellacombe ⁵³⁵points out, he probably knew little of this. In the “Tempest” (v. 1), Prospero says of the fairies—

”You demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make,

⁵³³ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 386.

⁵³⁴ See page 15.

⁵³⁵ “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 131.

Whereof the ewe not bites, and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms.”

the allusion in this passage being to the superstition that sheep will not eat the grass that grows on fairy rings.

Mustard.—Tewkesbury mustard, to which reference is made in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), where Falstaff speaks of “wit as thick as Tewkesbury mustard,” was formerly very famous. Shakespeare speaks only of its thickness, but others have celebrated its pungency. Coles, writing in 1657, says:” In Gloucestershire, about Teuxbury, they grind mustard and make it into balls, which are brought to London, and other remote places, as being the best that the world affords.”

Narcissus.—The old legend attached to this flower is mentioned by Emilia in “The Two Noble Kinsmen” (ii. 1)—

“That was a fair boy certain, but a fool,
To love himself; were there not maids enough.”

Nutmeg.—A gilt nutmeg was formerly a common gift at Christmas and on other festive occasions, a notice of which occurs in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), in the following dialogue⁵³⁶—

“*Armado*. The omnipotent Mars, of lances the almighty,
Gave Hector a gift.
Dumain. A gilt nutmeg.”

Oak.—A crown of oak was considered by the Romans worthy of the highest emulation of statesmen and warriors. To him who had saved the life of a Roman soldier was given a crown of oak leaves; one, indeed, which was accounted more honourable than any other. In “Coriolanus” (ii. 1), Volumnia says - “He comes the third time home with the oaken garland.” And again (i. 3) - “To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak.” Montesquieu, indeed, said that it was with two or three hundred crowns of oak that Rome conquered the world. Although so much historical and legendary lore have clustered round the oak, yet scarcely any mention is made of this by Shakespeare. The legend of Herne the hunter, which seems to have been current at Windsor, is several times alluded to, as for instance in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 4)—

“There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,
Sometime a keeper in Windsor forest,
Doth all the winter time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg’d horns.”

”*Page*. There want not many that do fear
In deep of night to walk by this Herne’s oak.”

Herne’s Oak, so long an object of much curiosity and enthusiasm, is now no more. According to one theory, the old tree was blown down, August 31st, 1863; and a young oak was planted by Her Majesty, September 12th, 1863, to mark the spot where Herne’s oak stood.⁵³⁷ Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, however, tells us, “the general opinion is that it was accidentally destroyed in the year 1796, through an order of George III. to the bailiff Robinson, that all the unsightly trees in the vicinity of the castle, should be removed; an opinion confirmed by a well-established fact, that a person named Grantham, who contracted with the bailiff for the

⁵³⁶ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 612.

⁵³⁷ See “Windsor Guide,” p. 5.

removal of the trees, fell into disgrace with the king for having included the oak in his gatherings.”⁵³⁸

Olive.—This plant ever famous from its association with the return of the dove to the oak, has been considered typical of peace. It was as an emblem of peace, that a garland of olive was given to Judith when she restored peace to the Israelites by the death of Holofernes (Judith xv. i3). It was equally honoured by Greeks and Romans. It is, too, in this sense, that Shakespeare speaks of it when he makes Viola in “Twelfth Night” (i. 5), say - “I bring no overture of war, no taxation of homage; I hold the olive in my hand, my words are as full of peace as matter.” In his “Sonnet” (cvii.), here are too those well-known lines⁵³⁹—

“And peace proclaims olives of endless age.”

Palm.—As the symbol of victory, this was carried before the conqueror in triumphal processions. Its classical use is noticed by Shakespeare in “Coriolanus” (v. 3). Volumnia says⁵⁴⁰—

“And bear the palm for having bravely shed
Thy wife and children’s blood.”

In “Julius Cæsar” (i. 2), Cassius exclaims—

“Ye gods, it doth amaze me,
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone.”

Pilgrims were formerly called “palmer,” from the staff or bough of palm they were wont to carry. So in “All’s Well That End’s Well” (iii. 5), Helena asks—

“Where do the palmers lodge, I do beseech you?”

Pear.—In his few notices of the pear, Shakespeare only mentions two by name, the warden and the poperin—the former was chiefly used for roasting or baking, and is mentioned by the clown in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 3)—

“I must have saffron to colour the warden pies.”

Hence, Ben Jonson makes a pun upon Church-Warden pie’s. According to some antiquarians, the name warden is from the Anglo-Saxon *wearden*, to preserve, as it keeps for a long time; but it is more probable that the word had its origin from the horticultural skill of the Cistercian monks of Warden Abbey, in Bedfordshire, founded in the twelfth century. Three warden pears appeared on the armorial bearings of the Abbey.⁵⁴¹ It is noticeable that the warden pies of Shakespeare’s day, coloured with saffron, have been replaced by stewed pears coloured with cochineal.

The Poperin.—This pear was probably introduced from Flanders by the Antiquary Leland, who was made rector of Popering, by Henry VIII. It is alluded to by Mercutio in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 1), where he wishes that Romeo were “a poperin pear.” In the old dramas there is much attempt at wit on this pear.

Peas.—A practice called “peascod wooing” was formerly a common mode of divination in love affairs. The cook, when shelling green peas, would, if she chanced to find a pod having

⁵³⁸ See “Notes and Queries,” 3d Series, xii. p. 160.

⁵³⁹ “3 Henry VI.,” iv. 6; “Timon of Athens,” v. 4; “Antony and Cleopatra,” iv. 6; “2 Henry IV.,” iv. 4.

⁵⁴⁰ See “As You Like It,” iii. 2; “Timon of Athens,” v. i; Cf. “Henry VIII.,” iv. 2.

⁵⁴¹ See “Archæological Journal,” v. p. 301.

nine, lay it on the lintel of the kitchen door, and the first man who entered was supposed to be her future husband. Another way of divination by peascod consisted in the lover selecting one growing on the stem, snatching it away quickly, and if the good omen of the peas remaining in the husk were preserved, in then presenting it to the lady of his choice. Touchstone in "As You Like It" (ii. 4), alludes to this piece of popular suggestion: - "I remember the wooing of a peascod ⁵⁴²instead of her." Gay, who has carefully chronicled many a custom of his time, says in his "Fourth Pastoral":—

"As peascods once I pluck'd, I chanc'd to see,
One that was closely fill'd with three times three,
Which when I cropp'd I safely home convey'd,
And o'er my door the spell in secret laid."

We may quote as a further illustration the following stanza from Browne's "Pastorals" (Bk. ii., song 3).

"The peascod greene, oft with no little toyle,
He'd seek for in the fattest, fertil'st soile,
And rende it from the stalke to bring it to her,
And in her bosom for acceptance woee her."⁵⁴³

Plantain.—The leaves of this plant were carefully valued by our forefathers for their supposed efficacy in healing wounds, &c. It was also considered as a preventive of poison. And to this supposed virtue we find an allusion in "Romeo and Juliet"(i. 2):—

"*Benvolio*. Take thou some new infection to thy eye,
And the rank poison of the old will die.
Romeo. Your plantain leaf is excellent for that.
Benvolio. For what, I pray thee?
Romeo. For your broken skin."⁵⁴⁴

In the "Two Noble Kinsmen" (i. 2), Palamon says:—

"These poor slight sores
Need not a plantain."

Poppy.—The plant referred to by Shakespeare in "Othello" (iii. 3), is the opium poppy, well known in his day for its deadly qualities. It is described by Spencer, "Faerie Queene" (ii. 7, 52), as the "dead-sleeping poppy," and Drayton ("Nymphal" v.), enumerates it among the flowers that procure "deadly sleeping."

Potato.—It is curious enough, says Nares ⁵⁴⁵to find that excellent root which now forms a regular portion of the daily nutriment of every individual, and is the chief or entire support of multitudes in Ireland, spoken of continually as having some powerful effect upon the human frame, in exciting the desires and passions—yet this is the case in all the writings contemporary with Shakespeare. Thus Falstaff in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (v. 5) says: - "Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of Green Sleeves, hail kissing comfits," &c. In "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 2) Thersites adds: - "How the devil Luxury with his fat rump and potato finger, tickles these together."⁵⁴⁶It appears, too, that the medical writers of

⁵⁴² The cod was what we now call the pod.

⁵⁴³ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, ii. p. 99.

⁵⁴⁴ See "Love's Labour's Lost," iii. 1.

⁵⁴⁵ "Glossary," ii. p. 677.

⁵⁴⁶ See Beaumont & Fletcher, "Elder Brother," iv. 4; Massinger, "New Way to Pay," ii. 2; Ben Jonson, "Cynthia's Revels," ii. 1, etc.

the times countenanced this fancy. Mr Ellacombe⁵⁴⁷ observes that the above passages are of peculiar interest inasmuch as they contain almost the earliest notice of potatoes after their introduction into England.

Primrose.—Although the early primrose has always been such a popular and favourite flower, yet it seems to have been associated with sadness,⁵⁴⁸ or even worse than sadness; for in the following passages the “primrose paths,” and “primrose way,” are meant to be suggestive of sinful pleasures. Thus in “Hamlet” (i. 3), Ophelia says:—

“Like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.”

And in “Macbeth” (ii. 3), the porter declares:—

“I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.”

Curious to say, too, Shakespeare’s only epithets for this fair flower are “pale,” “faint,” “that die unmarried.” Nearly all the poets of that time spoke of it in the same strain, with the exception of Ben Jonson and the two Fletchers.

Reed—Among the uses to which the reed was formerly applied were the thatching of houses, and the making of shepherds’ pipes. The former is alluded to in the “Tempest” (v. i.): - “His tears run down his beard, like winter’s drops from eaves of reeds”; and the latter in “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 4), where Portia speaks of “a reed voice.” It has generally been regarded as the emblem of weakness, as in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 7) - “A reed that will do me no service.”

Rose.—As might be expected, the rose is the flower most frequently mentioned by Shakespeare; denoting, in many cases the symbol of all that is fair and lovely. Thus, for instance, in “Hamlet” (iii. 4), the queen says

“Such an act . . . takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there.”

And Ophelia (iii. i), describes Hamlet as—

“The expectancy and rose of the fair state.”

In days gone by the rose entered largely into the customs and superstitions of most nations, and even now-a-days there is an extensive folklore associated with it.

It appears that in Shakspeare’s time one of the fashions of the day was the wearing of enormous roses on the shoes, of which full-length portraits afford striking examples.⁵⁴⁹ Hamlet (iii. 2) speaks “of two provincial roses on his razed shoes.”—meaning, no doubt, rosettes of ribbon in the shape of roses of Provins or Provence. Douce favours the former, Warton the latter locality. In either case it was a large rose. The Province or damask rose, was probably the better known. Gerarde in his “Herbal,” says that the damask rose is

⁵⁴⁷ “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 173.

⁵⁴⁸ Ellacombe, “Plant-Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 179.

⁵⁴⁹ Singer’s “Shakspeare,” 1875, ix. p. 227.

called by some “*Rosa provincialis*.”⁵⁵⁰ Mr Fairholt ⁵⁵¹quotes from Friar Bacon’s Prophecy, 1604, the following in allusion to this fashion:—

“When roses in the gardens grew,
And not in ribbons on a shoe:
Now ribbon roses take such place
That garden roses want their grace.”

Again, in *King John* (i. 1), where the Bastard alludes to the three-farthing silver pieces of Queen Elizabeth, which were extremely thin, and had the profile of the sovereign, with a rose on the back of her head, there doubtless is a fuller reference to the court fashion of sticking roses in the ear:—⁵⁵²

”My face so thin,
That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose,
Lest men should say, ‘Look, where three-farthings goes.’”

Shakspeare also mentions the use of the rose in rose-cakes and rose-water, the former in “*Romeo and Juliet*” (v. r), where Romeo speaks of “old cakes of roses,” the latter in “*Taming the Shrew*” (induction, sc. 1):—

“Let one attend him with a silver basin
Full of rose water and bestrewed with flowers.”

Referring to its historical lore, we may mention its famous connection with the “Wars of the Roses.” In the fatal dispute in the Temple Gardens, Somerset, on the part of Lancaster, says, (“*1 Henry VI.*” ii. 3):—

“Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
But dare maintain the party of the truth,
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.”

Warwick, on the part of York, replies:—

“I have no colours, and without all colour
Of base insinuating flattery
I pluck this white rose with Plantagenet.”

The trailing white dog-rose is commonly considered to have been the one chosen by the house of York. A writer however, in the “*Quarterly Review*” (vol. cxiv.), has shown that the white rose has a very ancient interest for Englishmen, as, long before the brawl in the Temple Gardens, the flower had been connected with one of the most ancient names of our island. The elder Pliny, in discussing the etymology of the word Albion, suggests that the land may have been so named from the white roses which abounded in it. The York and Lancaster rose, with its pale striped flowers, is a variety of the French rose known as *Rosa Gallica*. It became famous when the two emblematical roses, in the persons of Henry VII. and Elizabeth of York at last brought peace and happiness to the country which had been so long divided by internal warfare. The canker rose referred to by Shakspeare is the wild dog rose, a name occasionally applied to the common red poppy.

⁵⁵⁰ “*Hamlet*,” Wright and Clarke, 1876, p. 579.

⁵⁵¹ “*Costume in England*,” p. 238. At p. 579 the author gives several instances of the extravagances to which this fashion led.

⁵⁵² Some gallants had their ears bored, and wore their mistresses’ silken shoe-strings in them. See Singer’s notes, iv. 257.

Rosemary.—This plant was formerly in very high esteem, and was devoted to various uses. It was supposed to strengthen the memory, hence it was regarded as a symbol of remembrance, and on this account was often given to friends. Thus, in “Hamlet” (iv. 5), where Ophelia seems to be addressing Laertes, she says:—

“There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance.”

In the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4), rosemary and rue are beautifully put together:—

“For you there’s rosemary and rue, these keep;
Seeming and savour all the winter long:
Grace and Remembrance be to you both,
And welcome to our shearing.”

Besides being used at weddings, it was also in request at funerals, probably for its odour, and as a token of remembrance of the deceased. Thus the Friar in “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 5) says:—

“Dry up your tears, and stick your rosemary
On this fair corse.”

This practice is thus touchingly alluded to by Gay in his “Pastorals”—

“To shew their love, the neighbours far and near
Followed with wistful look, the damsel’s bier:
Sprigg’d rosemary the lads and lasses bore,
While dismally the parson walk’d before.”

Rosemary, too, was one of the evergreens with which dishes were anciently garnished during the season of Christmas, an allusion to which occurs in “Pericles” (iv. 6) - “Marry, come up my dish of chastity, with rosemary and bays.”

Rush.—Before the introduction of carpets, the floors of churches and houses were strewed with rushes, a custom to which Shakespeare makes several allusions. In “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. i.) Grumio asks - “Is supper ready, the house trimmed, rushes strewed, cobwebs swept;” and Glendower in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 1) says—

“She bids you on the wanton rushes lay you down
And rest your gentle head upon her lap.”⁵⁵³

At the coronation of Henry V. (“2 Henry IV.,” v. 5) when the procession is coming, the grooms cry, “More rushes, more rushes,” which seems to have been the usual cry for rushes to be scattered on a pavement or a platform when a procession was approaching. Again, in “Richard II.” (i. 3) the custom is further alluded to by John of Gaunt, who speaks of the presence strew’d,” referring to the presence chamber. So, too, in “Cymbeline” (ii. 2), Iachimo soliloquizes—

“Tarquin thus
Did softly press the rushes ere he waken’d
The chastity he wounded.”

And in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4) Romeo says—

“Let wantons light of heart
Tickle the senseless rushes with their heels.”

⁵⁵³ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 373.

—an expression which Middleton has borrowed in his “Blunt Master Constable,” 1602—

“Bid him, whose heart no sorrow feels,
Tickle the rushes with his wanton heels,
I have too much lead at mine.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (ii. 1) the gaoler’s daughter is represented carrying “strewings” for the two prisoners’ chamber.

Rush-bearings were a sort of rural festival, when the parishioners brought rushes to strew the church.⁵⁵⁴

The “rush-ring” appears to have been a kind of token for plighting of troth among rustic lovers. It was afterwards vilely used, however, for mock marriages, as appears from one of the Constitutions of Salisbury. In “All’s Well that Ends Well” (ii. 2) there seems a covert allusion to the rush-ring—

“As a Tib’s Rush for Tom’s forefinger.”

Spenser, in the “Shepherd’s Kalendar,” speaks of—

“The knotted rush-rings and gilt Rosemarie.”

Du Breul, in his “Antiquities of Paris,”⁵⁵⁵ mentions the rush-ring as “a kind of espousal used in France by such persons as meant to live together in a state of concubinage; but in England it was scarcely ever practised except by designing men, for the purpose of corrupting those young women to whom they pretended love.”

The “rush candle,” which in times past was found in nearly every house, and served as a night-light for the rich and candle for the poor, is mentioned in “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. 5)—

“Be it moon or sun, or what you please:
An if you please to call it a rush candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.”

Saffron.—In the following passage (“All’s Well that Ends Well,” iv. 5) there seems to be an allusion⁵⁵⁶ by Lafeu to the fashionable and fantastic custom of wearing yellow, and to that of colouring paste with saffron: - “No, no, no, your son was misled with a snipt-taffeta fellow, whose villanous saffron would have made all the unbaked and doughy youth of a nation in his colour.”

Spear-grass.—This plant—perhaps the common reed—is noticed in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) as used for tickling the nose and making it bleed. In Lupton’s “Notable Things” it is mentioned as part of a medical recipe - “Whoever is tormented with sciatica or the hip gout, let them take an herb called spear-grass, and stamp it and lay a little thereof upon the grief.” Mr Ellacombe⁵⁵⁷ thinks that the plant alluded to is the common couch grass, (*Triticum repens*), which is still known in the Eastern Counties as spear-grass.

Stover.—This word, which is often found in the writings of Shakespeare’s day, denotes fodder and provision of all sorts for cattle. In Cambridgeshire, stover signifies hay made of

⁵⁵⁴ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. pp. 13, 14.

⁵⁵⁵ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, p. 194.

⁵⁵⁶ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 381.

⁵⁵⁷ “Plant Lore of Shakespeare,” p. 319.

coarse rank grass, such as even cows will not eat while it is green. In the "Tempest" (iv. 1) Iris says—

"Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep."

According to Steevens, stover was used as a thatch for cart-lodges and other buildings that required but cheap coverings.

Strawberry.—Shakespeare's mention of the strawberry in connection with the nettle in "Henry V." (i. 1):—

"The strawberry grows underneath the nettle
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best
Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality."

deserves, says Mr. Ellacombe, a passing note. "It was the common opinion in his day that plants were affected by the neighbourhood of other plants to such an extent that they imbibed each other's virtues and faults. Thus sweet flowers were planted near fruit trees with the idea of improving the flavour of the fruit, and evil-smelling trees, like the elder, were carefully cleared away from fruit trees, lest they should be tainted. But the strawberry was supposed to be an exception to the rule, and was said to thrive in the midst of 'evil communications without being corrupted.'"

Thorns.—The popular tradition which represents the marks on the moon to be that of a man carrying a thorn-bush on his head, is alluded to in "Midsummer Night's Dream" (v. 1) in the prologue: "This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn, presenteth Moonshine." Little else is mentioned by Shakespeare with regard to thorns, save that they are generally used by him as the emblems of desolation and trouble.

Violets.—An old superstition is alluded to by Shakespeare, when he makes Laertes wish that violets may spring from the grave of Ophelia ("Hamlet" v. 1):—

"Lay her i' the earth:
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring."

an idea which occurs in Persius's "Satires" (i. 39)

"—E tumulo fortunataque favilla
Nascentur violæ."

The violet has generally been associated with early death. This, Mr Ellacombe considers⁵⁵⁸ "may have arisen from a sort of pity for flowers that were only allowed to see the opening year, and were cut off before the first beauty of summer had come, and so were looked upon as apt emblems of those who enjoyed the bright springtide of life and no more." Thus, the violet is one of the flowers which Marina carries to hang "as a chaplet on the grave" in "Pericles" (iv. 1):—

"The yellows, blues,
The purple violets and marigolds,
Shall as a carpet hang upon thy grave,
While summer-days do last."

⁵⁵⁸ "Plant-Lore of Shakespeare," p. 248.

Again, in that exquisite passage in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4), where Perdita enumerates the flowers of spring, she speaks of:—

”Violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes
Or Cytherea’s breath.”

Upon which Mr Singer ⁵⁵⁹thus comments: - “The eyes of Juno were as remarkable as those of Pallas, and:—

“Of a beauty never yet
Equalled in height of tincture.”

The beauties of Greece and other Asiatic nations tinged their eyes of an obscure violet colour, by means of some unguent, which was doubtless perfumed like those for the hair, etc., mentioned by Athenæus.

Willow.—From time immemorial the willow has been regarded as the symbol of sadness. Hence it was customary for those who were forsaken in love, to wear willow garlands—a practice to which Shakespeare gives several allusions. In “Othello” (iv. 3), Desdemona, anticipating her death, says:—

“My mother had a maid call’d Barbara;
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
And did forsake her: she had a song of willow,
An old thing ‘twas, but it express’d her fortune,
And she died singing it: that song to-night
Will not go from my mind.”

The following is the song ⁵⁶⁰:—

“The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow:
The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur’d her moans,
Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her, and soften’d the stones,
Sing willow, willow, willow:
Sing all a green willow must be my garland.”

And further on Emilia says (v. 2):—

“I will play the swan,
And die in music [singing], willow, willow, willow.”

And, again, Lorenzo, in “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1), narrates:—

“In such a night
Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks.”

⁵⁵⁹ “Shakespeare,” iv. p. 76.

⁵⁶⁰ “The old ballad on which Shakespeare formed this song is given in Percy’s ‘Reliques of Ancient Poetry’ (1794, i. p. 208), from a copy in the Pepysian collection. A different version of it may be seen in Chappell’s ‘Popular Music of the Olden Time’ (2d edition, i. p. 207). The original ditty is the lamentation of a lover for the inconstancy of his mistress.”—Dyce’s “Shakespeare,” vii. p. 450.

It was, too, in reference to this custom that Shakespeare in "Hamlet" (iv. 7), represented poor Ophelia hanging her flowers on the "willow aslaunt a brook." "This tree," says Douce ⁵⁶¹"might have been chosen as the symbol of sadness from the cxxxvii. Psalm (verse 2)—'We hanged our harps upon the willows;' or else from a coincidence between the weeping-willow and falling tears." Another reason has been assigned. The agnus castus was supposed to promote chastity, and "the willow being of a much like nature," says Swan, in his "Speculum Mundi," 1635, "it is yet a custom that he which is deprived of his love must wear a willow garland." Bona, the sister of the King of France, on receiving news of Edward the Fourth's marriage with Elizabeth Grey, exclaimed, "In hope he'll prove a widower shortly, I'll wear a willow garland for his sake."

Wormwood.—The use of this plant in weaning infants is alluded to in "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 3) by Juliet's nurse in the following passage—

"For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,

.....

When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool."

Yew.—This tree styled by Shakespeare "the dismal yew" ("Titus and Andronicus," ii. 3) apart from the many superstitions associated with it, has been very frequently planted in churchyards, besides being used at funerals. Paris in "Romeo and Juliet" (v. 3) says—

"Under yon yew trees lay thee all along,
Holding thine ear close to the hollow ground;
So shall no foot upon the churchyard tread,
Being loose, unfirm, with digging up of graves,
But thou shalt hear it."

Although various reasons have been assigned for planting the yew tree in churchyards, it seems probable that the practice had a superstitious origin. As witches were supposed to exercise a powerful influence over the winds, they were believed occasionally to exert their formidable power against religious edifices. Thus Macbeth says (iv. i)—

"Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches."

To counteract, therefore, this imaginary danger, our ancestors may have planted the yew tree in their churchyards—not only on account of its vitality as an evergreen, but as connected, in some way in heathen times, with the influence of evil powers.⁵⁶²In a statute made in the latter part of Edward the First's reign, to prevent rectors from cutting down trees in churchyards, we find the following: "Verum arbores ipsæ, propter ventorum impetus ne ecclesiis noceant, sæpe plantantur."⁵⁶³

The custom of sticking yew in the shroud is alluded to in the following song in "Twelfth Night" (ii. 4)—

"My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it."

⁵⁶¹ "Illustrations of Shakspeare," p. 105.

⁵⁶² Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare," p. 244.

⁵⁶³ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, ii. pp. 255–266

Through being reckoned poisonous, it is introduced in "Macbeth" (iv. 1), in connection with the witches—

"Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse."

"How much the splitting or tearing off of the slip had to do with magic we learn from a piece of Slavonic folk-lore. It is unlucky to use for a beam, a branch, or a tree, broken by the wind. The devil, or storm spirit, claims it as his own, and, were it used, the evil spirit would haunt the house. It is a broken branch the witches choose; a sliver'd slip the woodman will have none of."⁵⁶⁴

Its epithet, "double fatal" "Richard II." (iii. 2), no doubt refers to the poisonous quality of the leaves, and on account of its wood being employed for instruments of death. Sir Stephen Scroop, when telling Richard of Bolingbroke's revolt, declares that "the very beadsmen learn to bend their bows of double-fatal yew against thy state."

It has been suggested that the poison intended by the Ghost in "Hamlet" (i. 5), when he speaks of the juice of cursed ebenon is that of the yew, and is the same as Marlowe's "juice of hebon" ("Jew of Malta," iii. 4). The yew is called hebon by Spenser, and by other writers of Shakespeare's age; and, in its various forms of eben, eiben, hiben, etc., this tree is so named in no less than five different European languages.

From medical authorities, both of ancient and modern times, it would seem that the juice of the yew is a rapidly fatal poison; next, that the symptoms attendant upon yew poisoning correspond, in a very remarkable manner, with those which follow the bites of poisonous snakes; and lastly, that no other poison but the yew produces the "lazar-like" ulcerations on the body, upon which Shakespeare, in this passage, lays so much stress.⁵⁶⁵

Amongst the other explanations of this passage, is the well-known one which identifies "hebenon" with henbane. Mr Beisly suggests that nightshade may be meant, while Nares considers that ebony is meant.⁵⁶⁶

From certain ancient statutes it appears that every Englishman, while archery was practised, was obliged to keep in his house either a bow of yew or some other wood.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ "Notes and Queries," 5th S. xii. p. 468.

⁵⁶⁵ Extract of a paper read by Rev. W. A. Harrison—New Shakespeare Society, 12th May 1882.

⁵⁶⁶ See Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare;" Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 412; Beisly's "Shakspeare's Garden," p. 4.

⁵⁶⁷ Singer's "Shakespeare," iv. p. 427. See a paper in the "Antiquary" (1882, vi. p.33), by Mr George Black, on the yew in Shakespearian folk-lore.

9. Insects And Reptiles

As Dr Johnson has truly remarked, Shakespeare is “the poet of nature,” for “his attention was not confined to the actions of men; he was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world; his descriptions have always some peculiarity, gathered by contemplating things as they really exist. Whether life or nature be his subject, Shakespeare shows plainly that he has seen with his own eyes.” So, too, he was in the habit of taking minute observation of the popular notions relating to natural history, so many of which he has introduced into his plays—using them to no small advantage. In numerous cases, also, the peculiarities of certain natural objects have furnished the poet with many excellent metaphors. Thus, in “Richard II.” (ii. 3), Bolingbroke speaks of “the caterpillars of the commonweath,” and in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 1), the Duke of York’s reflection on the destruction of his hopes, is—

“Thus are my blossoms blasted in the bud,
And caterpillars eat my leaves away - “

their destructive powers being familiar.

Ant.—An ancient name for the ant is “Pismire,” probably a Danish word, from *paid* and *myre*, signifying such ants as live in hillocks. In “1 Henry IV.,” (I. 3), Hotspur says:—

“Why, look you, I am whipp’d and scourged with rods,
Nettled and stung with pismires, when I hear
Of this vile politician, Bolingbroke.”

Blue-bottle.—This well-known insect has often been used as a term of reproach. Thus, in “2 Henry IV.,” (v. 4), it furnishes an epithet applied by the abusive tongue of Doll Tearsheet, to the beadle who had her in custody. She reviles him as a “blue-bottle rogue,” a term, says Mr Patterson,⁵⁶⁸ “evidently suggested by the similarity of the colours of his costume to that of the insect.”

Bots.—Our ancestors imagined that poverty or improper food engendered these worms, or that they were the offspring of putrefaction. In “1 King Henry IV.,” (ii. 1), one of the carriers says: - “Peas and beans are as dank here as a dog, and that is the next way to give poor jades the bots.” And one of the misfortunes of the miserable nag of Petruchio is, (“Taming of the Shrew,” iii. 2), “that he is so begnawn with the bots.”

Cricket—The presence of crickets in a house has generally been regarded as a good omen, and said to prognosticate cheerfulness and plenty. Thus, Poins, in answer to the Prince’s question in “1 Henry IV.,” (ii. 4), “Shall we be merry?” replies, “As merry as crickets.” By many of our poets the cricket has been connected with cheerfulness and mirth. Thus, in Milton, “il Penseroso” desires to be—

“Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth.”

It has not always, however, been regarded in the same light, for Gay, in his “Pastoral Dirge,” among the rural prognostications of death, gives the following:—

“And shrilling crickets in the chimney cry’d.”

⁵⁶⁸ “Insects mentioned by Shakspeare,” 1841, p. 181.

And in Dryden's "Ædipus" occurs the subjoined:—

"Owls, ravens, crickets, seem the watch of death."

Lady Macbeth, also, (ii. 2), in replying to the question of her husband after the murder of Duncan, says:—

"I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry."

In "Cymbeline," too, (ii. 2), when Iachimo, at midnight, commences his survey of the chamber where Imogen lies sleeping, his first words refer to the chirping of crickets, rendered all the more audible by the repose which at that moment prevailed throughout the palace:—

"The crickets sing, and man's o'er labour'd sense
Repairs itself by rest."

Gilbert White, in his "History of Selborne," (1853, p. 174), remarks that "it is the housewife's barometer, foretelling her when it will remain; and is prognostic sometimes, she thinks, of ill or good luck, of the death of a near relation, or the approach of an absent lover. By being the constant companion of her solitary home, it naturally becomes the object of her superstition."⁵⁶⁹

Its supposed keen sense of hearing is referred to in the "Winter's Tale," (ii. 1), by Mamillius, who, on being asked by Hermione to tell a tale, replies:—

"I will tell it softly;
Yond crickets shall not hear it."

Frog.—In the "Two Noble Kinsmen," the gaoler's daughter (iii. 4), says:—

"Would I could find a fine frog! he would tell me
News from all parts o' the world; then would I make
A carack of a cockle-shell, and sail
By east and north-east to the King of Pigmies,
For he tells fortunes rarely."

In days gone frogs were extensively used for the purpose of divination.⁵⁷⁰

Gadfly.—A common name for this fly is the "brize" or "breese," an allusion to which occurs in "Troilus & Cressida," (i. 3), where Nestor, speaking of the sufferings which cattle endure from this insect, says:—

"The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger."

And in "Antony and Cleopatra," (iii. 9), Shakespeare makes the excited Scarus draw a comparison between the effect which this insect produces on a herd of cattle, and the abruptness and sudden frenzy of Cleopatra's retreat from the naval conflict:—

"You ribaudred nag of Egypt,
Whom leprosy o'ertake! i' the midst o' the fight,
When vantage like a pair of twins appear'd
Both the same, or rather ours the elder,
The breese upon her, like a cow in June,
Hoists sails and flies."

⁵⁶⁹ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 190, 191.

⁵⁷⁰ See Patterson's "Insects mentioned by Shakespeare," 1841, pp. 104, 105.

It is said that the terror this insect causes in cattle proceeds solely from the alarm occasioned by “a peculiar sound it emits while hovering for the purpose of oviposition.”⁵⁷¹

Lady-bird.—This is used in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 3), as a term of endearment. Lady Capulet having inquired after her daughter Juliet, the nurse replies:—

“I bade her come. What, lamb! What, lady-bird!
God forbid! Where’s this girl! What, Juliet!”

Mr Staunton regards this passage as an exquisite touch of nature. “The old nurse,” he says, in her fond garrulity uses ‘lady-bird’ as a term of endearment; but recollecting its application to a female of loose manners, checks herself—‘God forbid!’ her darling should prove such a one.” Mr Dyce,⁵⁷² however, considers this explanation incorrect, and gives the subjoined note: - “The nurse says that she has already bid Juliet come”; she then calls out, “What, lamb! What, lady-bird!” and Juliet not yet making her appearance, she exclaims, “God forbid! Where’s this girl?” The words, “God forbid,” being properly an ellipsis of “God forbid that any accident should keep her away,” but used here merely as an expression of impatience.”

Lizard.—It was a common superstition in the time of Shakespeare that lizards were venomous, a notion which probably originated in their singular form. Hence the lizard’s leg was thought a suitable ingredient for the witches’ cauldron in “Macbeth” (iv. 1). Suffolk in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 2), refers to this idea:—

“Their chiefest prospect murdering basilisks!
Their softest touch as smart as lizards’ stings.”

Again in “3 Henry VI.” (ii. 2.) Queen Margaret speaks of—

“Venom toads, or lizards’ dreadful stings.”

In “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1), it is classed with the toad and the owl.

Moth.—This term, as Mr Patterson remarks in his “Insects mentioned in Shakespeare’s Plays” (1841, p. 164), does not awaken many pleasing associations. In the minds of most people it stands for an insect either contemptible from its size and inertness, or positively obnoxious from its attacks on many articles of clothing. Thus Shakespeare, he says, employs the expression “moth” to denote something trifling or extremely minute.⁵⁷³ And in “King John” (iv. 1), we have the touching appeal of Prince Arthur to Hubert, in which for mote he would substitute moth:—

“*Arthur.* Is there no remedy?
Hubert. None but to lose your eyes.
Arthur. O heaven, that there were but a mote in yours,
A grain, a dust, a gnat, a wandering hair,
Any annoyance in that precious sense!
Then feeling what small things are boisterous there,
Your vile intent must needs seem horrible”

in “Henry V.” (iv. 1).

In these two passages, however, the correct reading is probably “mote.”

⁵⁷¹ “Linnæan Transactions,” xv. p. 407; Cf. Virgil’s “Georgic III.” l. 148

⁵⁷² “Glossary,” 1876, p. 238.

⁵⁷³ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 973.

Serpent.—A term used by our old writers to signify a serpent was “a worm,” which is still found in the north of England in the same sense. It is used several times by Shakespeare, as for instance, in “Measure for Measure” (iii. 1), where the Duke, addressing Claudio, says:—

“Thou’rt by no means valiant;
For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
Of a poor worm.”

This passage also illustrates an error very prevalent in days gone by that the forked tongue of the serpent tribe was their instrument of offence; without any thought of the teeth or fangs which are its real weapons.⁵⁷⁴ Again, the “blind-worm” or “slow-worm”—a little snake with very small eyes, falsely supposed to be venomous—is spoken of in “A Mid-summer Night’s Dream” (ii. 2), in that charming passage where the fairies are represented as singing to their Queen Titania:—

“You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorn y hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind-worms do no wrong,
Come not near our fairy queen.”

In “Macbeth” (iv. 1) one of the ingredients of the witches’ cauldron is—

“Adder’s fork and blind-worm’s sting.”

To quote a further allusion from “Timon of Athens” (iv. 3), Shakespeare speaks of—

“The gilded newt and eyeless venom’d worm.”

Massinger employs the same term in his “Parliament of Love” (iv. 2)

“The sad father
That sees his son stung by a snake to death,
May, with some justice, stay his vengeful hand,
And let the worm escape, than you vouchsafe him
A minute to repent.”⁵⁷⁵

There was an old notion that the serpent caused death without pain, a popular fancy which Shakespeare has introduced in his “Antony and Cleopatra” (v. 2):

“Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there,
That kills and pains not?”

The term “worm” was also occasionally used to signify a . “poor creature,” as also was the word “snake.” Thus, in the “Taming of the Shrew” (v. 2), Katharina says:—

“Come, come, you froward and unable worms!
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more.”

So, in “As you Like it” (iv. 3), Rosalind uses snake in the sense of reproach: - “Well, go your way to her, for I see love hath made thee a tame snake.”

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. “Macbeth” (iii. iv.)

“There the grown serpent lies; the worm that’s fled
Hath nature that in time will venom breed.”

⁵⁷⁵ Worm is used for serpent or viper, in the English Testament of the Geneva version, in Acts xxviii. 4, 5.

The serpent, as the emblem of ingratitude, is alluded to by King Lear (ii. 4), who, referring to his daughter, says how she—

”Struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart:
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top!”

According to a popular belief, still credited, a poisonous bite could be cured by the blood of the viper which darted the poison. Thus, in “King Richard II.” (i. 1), Mowbray says:—

“I am disgraced, impeached, and baffled here,
Pierced to the soul with slander’s venom’d spear,
The which no balm can cure but his heart blood
Which breathed this poison.”

In Cornwall it is still believed that the dead body of a serpent bruised on the wound it has occasioned, is an infallible remedy for its bite.⁵⁷⁶Hence has originated the following rhyme:—

“The beauteous adder hath a sting,
Yet bears a balsam too.”

The old notion that the snake, in the casting of its slough or skin annually, is supposed to regain new vigour and fresh youth, is alluded to by King Henry (“King Henry V.,” iv. 1), who speaks of “With casted slough and fresh legerity”—legerity meaning lightness, nimbleness. In “Twelfth Night” (ii. 5), in the letter which Malvolio finds, there is this passage: - “To inure thyself to what thou art like to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh.” One of the most useful miracles which St Patrick is reported to have performed was his driving the venomous reptiles out of Ireland and forbidding them to return. This tradition is probably alluded to by King Richard (ii. 1):—

”Now for our Irish wars:
We must supplant these rough rug-headed kerns;
Which live like venom where no venom else,
But only they have privilege to live.”

The way, we are told, by which the Saint performed this astounding feat of his supernatural power, was by means of a drum. Even spiders, too, runs the legend, were included in this summary process of excommunicating the serpent race. One of the customs, therefore, observed on St Patrick’s day is visiting Croagh Patrick. This sacred hill is situated in the county of Mayo, and is said to have been the spot chosen by St Patrick for banishing the serpents and other noxious animals into the sea.

In “Julius Cæsar” (ii. 1), where Brutus says—

“It is the bright day that brings forth the adder;
And that craves wary walking,”

we may compare the popular adage—

⁵⁷⁶ See Hunt’s “Popular Romances of the West of England,” 1871, p. 415; and Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 270.

“March wind
Wakes the ether (*i.e.* adder) and blooms the whin.”⁵⁷⁷

Spider.—This little creature, which in daily life is little noticed except for its cobweb, the presence of which in a house generally betokens neglect, has, however, an interesting history, being the subject of many a curious legend and quaint superstition. Thus, it has not escaped the all-pervading eye of Shakespeare, who has given us many curious scraps of folk-lore concerning it. In days gone by the web of the common house-spider was much in request for stopping the effusion of blood; and hence, Bottom, in addressing one of his fairy attendants in “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” (iii. 1) says - “I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good master Cobweb: if I cut my finger, I shall make bold with you.”

Its medicinal virtues, however, do not end here, for in Sussex ⁵⁷⁸it is used in cases of jaundice; many an old doctress prescribing “a live spider rolled up in butter.” It is stated, too, that the web is narcotic, and has been administered internally, in certain cases of fever, with success.⁵⁷⁹ As a remedy for ague it has been considered most efficacious. Some years ago a lady in the South of Ireland was celebrated far and near for her cure of this disorder. Her remedy was a large house spider taken alive enveloped in treacle or preserve. Of course, the parties were carefully kept in ignorance of what the wonderful remedy was.⁵⁸⁰

According to a universal belief spiders were formerly considered highly venomous; in allusion to which notion King Richard II. (iii. 2) in saluting the “dear earth” on which he stands, after “late tossing on the breaking seas,” accosts it thus—

“Feed not thy sovereign’s foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous Sense,
But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet,
Which with usurping steps do trample thee.”

Again Leontes in the “*Winter’s Tale*” (ii. 1) remarks—

“There may be in the cup
A spider steep’d.”

In “*Cymbeline*” (iv. 2), and “*Richard III.*” (i. 2) Shakespeare classes it with adders and toads; and in the latter play (i. 3) when Queen Margaret is hurling imprecations on her enemies, she is turned from her encounter with Gloucester, by a remark made by the Queen: and while a pitying spirit seems for a minute to supplant her rage, she addresses her successor in these words—

“Poor painted queen, vain flourish of my fortune!
Why strew’st thou sugar on that bottled spider,
Whose deadly web ensnareth thee about?”

In another part of the same play (iv. 4) the epithet “bottled” is again applied in a similar manner by Queen Elizabeth—

“Thou bottled spider, that foul bunch-back’d toad!”

⁵⁷⁷ Denham’s “*Weather Proverbs*,” 1842.

⁵⁷⁸ “*Folk-Lore Record*,” 1878, i. p. 45.

⁵⁷⁹ See Brand’s “*Popular Antiquities*,” iii. pp. 223, 287, 381.

⁵⁸⁰ See Article on “*Spider-Lore*” in “*Graphic*,” November 13th, 1880.

Ritson on these two passages has the following remarks on the term bottled spider: - “A large, bloated, glossy spider, supposed to contain venom proportionate to its size.”

The origin of the silvery threads of gossamer which are so frequently seen extending from bush to bush was formerly unknown. Spenser, for instance, speaks of them as “scorched dew;” and Thomson in his “Autumn” mentions “the filmy threads of dew evaporate,” which probably, says Mr Patterson,⁵⁸¹ refers to the same object. The gossamer is now, however, known to be the production of a minute spider. It is twice mentioned by Shakespeare; but not in connection with the little being from which it originates. One of the passages is in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 6)—

“A lover may bestride the gossamer
That idles in the wanton summer air,
And yet not fall; so light is vanity.”

The other occurs in “King Lear” (iv. 6) where Edgar accosts his father, after his supposed leap from that

“Cliff, whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully on the confined deep.”

He says—

“Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating,
Thou’dst shiver’d like an egg.”

In each case, it is expressive of extreme lightness. Nares in his “Glossary” (i. 378) considers that the term “gossamer” originally came from the French *gossampine*, the cotton tree, and is equivalent to cotton wool. He says that it also means any light downy matter, such as the flying seeds of thistles and other plants, and in poetry is not unfrequently used to denote the long floating cobwebs seen in fine weather. In the above passage from “King Lear” he thinks it has the original sense, and in the one from “Romeo and Juliet” probably the last. Some are of opinion that the word is derived from goss, the gorse or furze.⁵⁸² In Germany, the popular belief attributes the manufacture of the gossamer to the dwarfs and elves. Of King Oberon, it may be remembered, we are told—

“A rich mantle he did wear,
Made of tinsel gossamer,
Bestarred over with a few
Diamond drops of morning dew.”

Hogg, too, introduces it as a vehicle fit for the fairy bands, which he describes as—

- “Sailing ‘mid the golden air
In skiffs of yielding gossamer.”

Toad.—Among the vulgar errors of Shakespeare’s day was the belief that the head of the toad contained a stone possessing great medicinal virtues. In “As you Like It” (ii. 1) the Duke says—

⁵⁸¹ “Insects mentioned by Shakespeare,” 1841, p. 220.

⁵⁸² See Croker’s “Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland,” edited by T. Wright, 1862, p. 215.

“Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

Lupton in his “One Thousand Notable Things” says that “a toadstone, called *Crepaudina*, touching any part envenomed by the bite of a rat, wasp, spider, or other venomous beast, ceases the pain and swelling thereof.” In the Londesborough Collection is a silver ring of the fifteenth century, in which one of these stones is set.⁵⁸³

It was also generally believed that the toad was highly venomous—a notion to which there are constant allusions in Shakespeare’s Plays; as, for example, in the above passage (ii. 1), where it is spoken of as “ugly and venomous.” In Richard III. (i. 2) Lady Anne says to Gloucester—

“Never hung poison on a fouler toad.”

And in another scene (i. 3) Queen Margaret speaks of “that poisonous bunch-back’d toad.”

Once more, in “Titus Andronicus” (iv. 2) the nurse describes Queen Tamora’s babe as being “as loathsome as a toad.” There is doubtless some truth in this belief, as the following quotation from Mr Frank Buckland’s “Curiosities of Natural History” seems to show: -

“Toads are generally reported to be poisonous; and this is perfectly true to a certain extent. Like the lizards, they have glands in their skin which secrete a white highly acid fluid, and just behind the head are seen two eminences like split beans; if these be pressed this acid fluid will come out—only let the operator mind that it does not get into his eyes, for it generally comes out with a jet. There are also other glands dispersed through the skin. A dog will never take a toad in his mouth, and the reason is that this glandular secretion burns his tongue and lips. It is also poisonous to the human subject. Mr Blick, surgeon, of Islip, Oxfordshire, tells me that a man once made a wager, when half drunk in a village public-house, that he would bite a toad’s head off; he did so, but in a few hours his lips, tongue, and throat began to swell in a most alarming way, and he was dangerously ill for some time.”⁵⁸⁴

Owing to the supposed highly venomous character of the toad, “Superstition,” says Pennant,⁵⁸⁵ “gave it preternatural powers, and made it a principal ingredient in the incantations of nocturnal hags.” Thus in “Macbeth” (iv. 1) the witch says—

“Toad that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one,
Swelter’d venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i’ the charmed pot.”

Pennant adds that this was intended “for a design of the first consideration, that of raising and bringing before the eyes of Macbeth a hateful second-sight of the prosperity of Banquo’s line. This shows the mighty power attributed to this animal by the dealers in the magic art.”

The evil spirit, too, has been likened by one of our master bards to the toad, as a semblance of all that is devilish and disgusting (“Paradise Lost,” iv. 800):—

”Him they found,
Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,

⁵⁸³ See Brand’s “Pop Antiq.,” ii, pp. 50–55. Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” pp. 181–183.

⁵⁸⁴ See “Notes and Queries,” 6th, series v. pp. 32, 173; also Gilbert White’s “Natural History of Selborne,” Letter xvii.

⁵⁸⁵ “Zoology,” 1766, iii. p. 15.

Assaying with all his devilish art to reach
The organs of her fancy.”

In “Macbeth” (i. 1), the paddock or toad is made the name of a familiar spirit:—

“Paddock ⁵⁸⁶calls; anon, anon.”

Wasp.—So easily, we are told,⁵⁸⁷is the wrathful temperament of this insect aroused, that extreme irascibility can scarcely be better expressed than by the term “waspish.” It is in this sense that Shakespeare has applied the epithet, “her waspish-headed son,” in the “Tempest” (iv. 1), where we are told that Cupid is resolved to be a boy outright. Again, in “As You Like It” (iv. 3), Silvius says:—

“I know not the contents; but, as I guess
By the stern brow and waspish action,
Which she did use as she was writing of it,
It bears an angry tenour.”

Again, in the “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1), Petruchio addresses his intended spouse in language not highly complimentary:—

“*Pet.* Come, come, you wasp; i’ faith, you are too angry.

Kath. If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

Pet. My remedy is, then, to pluck it out.”

In the celebrated scene in “Julius Cæsar” (iv. 3), in which the reconciliation between Brutus and Cassius is effected, the word is used in a similar sense:—

“I’ll use you for my mirth, yea, for my laughter,
When you are waspish.”⁵⁸⁸

Water-Fly.—This little insect which, on a sunny day, may be seen almost on every pool, dimpling the glassy surface of the water, is used as a term of reproach by Shakespeare. Thus, “Hamlet” (v. 2), speaking of Osric, asks Horatio, “Dost know this water-fly?” In “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1), Thersites exclaims: - “Ah, how the poor world is pestered with such water-flies, diminutives of nature.” Johnson says it is the proper emblem of a busy trifler, because it skips up and down upon the surface of the water, without any apparent purpose.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. “Hamlet,” iii. 4, here paddock is used for a toad.

⁵⁸⁷ Patterson’s “Insects Mentioned by Shakespeare,” 1841, p. 137.

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. “Titus Andronicus,” ii. 3; “Henry VIII.” iii. 3.

10. Folk Medicine

Without discussing the extent of Shakespeare's technical medical knowledge, the following pages will suffice to show that he was fully acquainted with many of the popular notions prevalent in his day, respecting certain diseases and their cures. These, no doubt, he collected partly from the literature of the period with which he was so fully conversant, besides gathering a good deal of information on the subject from daily observation. Anyhow, he has bequeathed to us some interesting particulars relating to the folk-medicine of bygone times, which is of value, in so far as it helps to illustrate the history of medicine in past years. In Shakespeare's day the condition of medical science was very unlike that at the present day. As Mr Goadby, in his "England of Shakespeare" (1881, p. 104), remarks, "the man of science was always more or less of an alchemist, and the students of medicine were usually extensive dealers in charms and philtres "If a man wanted bleeding he went to a barber-surgeon, and when he required medicine he consulted an apothecary; the shop of the latter being well described by Romeo (v. 1):—

"And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes,
Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds,
Remnants of pack-thread and old cakes of roses,
Were thinly scattered to make up a show."

Such a man was as ready "to sell love philtres to a maiden as narcotics to a friar."

Bleeding.—Various remedies were in use in Shakespeare's day to stop bleeding. Thus, a key, on account of the coldness of the metal of which it is composed, was often employed; hence the term "key cold" became proverbial, and is referred to by many old writers. In "King Richard III." (i. 2), Lady Anne, speaking of the corpse of King Henry the Sixth, says—

"Poor key-cold figure of a holy king."

In the "Rape of Lucrece" (l. 1774) the same expression is used—

"And then in key-cold Lucrece's bleeding stream
He falls, and bathes the pale fear in his face."

In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Wild Goose Chase" (iv. 3), we read - "For till they be key-cold dead, there's no trusting of 'em."⁵⁸⁹

Another common remedy was the one alluded to in "King Lear" (iii. 7), where one of the servants says—

"I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face."

This passage has been thought to be parodied in Ben Jonson's play, "The Case is Altered" (ii. 4) - "Go, get a white of .an egg and a little flax, and close the breach of the head, it is the most conducive thing that can be." Mr Gifford, however, has shown the incorrectness of this

⁵⁸⁹ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 482; also Brand's "Pop. Antiq." 1849, iii. p. 311; Henderson's "Folk-Lore of Northern Counties," 1879, pp. 168, 169.

assertion, pointing out that Jonson's play was written in 1599, some years before "King Lear" appeared, while the allusion is "to a method of cure common in Jonson's time to every barber-surgeon and old woman in the kingdom."⁵⁹⁰

Cobwebs are still used to staunch the bleeding from small wounds, and Bottom's words seem to refer to this remedy of domestic surgery - "I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good master Cobweb; if I cut my finger, I shall make bold with you."

Anciently, says Mr Singer, "a superstitious belief was annexed to the accident of bleeding at the nose," hence in the "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 5), Launcelot says - "It was not for nothing that my nose fell a bleeding on Black Monday last." In days gone, it was customary with our forefathers to be bled periodically, in spring and in autumn, in allusion to which custom King Richard II. (i. 1), refers, when he says to his uncle—

"Our doctors say this is no month to bleed."

Hence the almanacks of the time generally gave particular seasons as the most beneficial for bleeding. The forty-seventh aphorism of Hippocrates (sect. 6), is that "persons who are benefited by venesection or purging, should be bled or purged in the spring."

Blindness.—The exact meaning of the term "sand-blind," which occurs in the "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 2), is somewhat obscure—

"*Launcelot.* O heavens, this is my true-begotten father! who, being more than sand-blind, high gravel blind, knows me not.

* * * * *

Gobbo. Alack, sir, I am sand-blind, I know you not."

It probably means very dim-sighted,⁵⁹¹ and in Nares' "Glossary"⁵⁹² it is thus explained: - "Having an imperfect sight, as if there was sand in the eye." The expression is used by Beaumont and Fletcher in "Love's Cure" (ii. 1) - "Why, signors, and my honest neighbours, will you impute that as a neglect of my friends, which is an imperfection in me? I have been *sand-blind* from my infancy." The term was probably one in vulgar use.⁵⁹³

Blister.—In the following passage of "Timon of Athens" (v. 1), Timon appears to refer to the old superstition that a lie produces a blister on the tongue, though in the malice of his rage he imprecates the minor punishment on truth, and the old surgery of cauterization on falsehood⁵⁹⁴—

"Thou sun, that comfort'st, burn! speak, and be hang'd;
For each true word, a blister! and each false
Be as a cauterizing to the root o' the tongue,
Consuming it with speaking."

We may also compare the passage in "Winter's Tale" (ii. 2), where Paulina declares—

"If I prove honey-mouth'd, let my tongue blister
And never to my red-look'd anger be
The trumpet any more."⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁰ Aldis Wright's Notes to "King Lear," 1877, p. 179.

⁵⁹¹ Dyce's "Glossary," p. 381, cf. the word "Berlué, pur-blinded, made sand-blind," Cotgrave's "Fr. and Eng. Dict."

⁵⁹² ii. p. 765.

⁵⁹³ Bucknill's "Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare," p. 93.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 258.

⁵⁹⁵ Cf., too, "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2)—

Bone-ache.—This was a nickname in bygone years for the *Lues venerea*, an allusion to which we find in “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 3), where Thersites speaks of “the bone-ache as the curse dependant on those that war for a placket.” Another name for this disease was the “brenning or burning,” a notice of which we find in “King Lear” (iv. 6).

Bubukle.—According to Johnson this denoted “a red pimple.” Nares says it is “a corrupt word for a carbuncle or something like; and Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in his “Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words,” defines it as a botch or imposthume. It occurs in “King Henry V.” (iii. 6), where Fluellen describes Bardolph’s face “as all bubukles.”

Bruise.—A favourite remedy in days past for bruises was parmaceti, a corruption of spermaceti, in allusion to which Hotspur, in “1 Henry IV.” (i. 3), speaks of it as “the sovereign’st thing on earth for an inward bruise.” So, too, in Sir T. Overbury’s “Characters,” 1616 [An Ordinarie Fencer], “His wounds are seldom skin-deepe; for an *inward bruise* lambstones and sweetbreads are his only spermaceti.” A well-known plant called the “Shepherd’s Purse,” has been popularly nicknamed the “Poor Man’s Parmacetti,” being a joke on the Latin word *bursa*, a purse, which, to a poor man, is always the best remedy for his bruises.⁵⁹⁶In “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 2), a plantain leaf is pronounced to be an excellent cure “for your broken shin.” “Plantain water was a remedy in common use with the old surgeons.”⁵⁹⁷

Burn.—The notion of one heat driving out another gave rise to the old-fashioned custom of placing a burnt part near the fire to drive out the fire,—a practice, says Dr Bucknill,⁵⁹⁸certainly not without benefit, acting on the same principle as the application of turpentine and other stimulants to recent burns. This was one of the many instances of the ancient homoeopathic doctrine, that what hurts will also cure.⁵⁹⁹Thus, in “King John” (iii. 1), Pandulph speaks of it:—

“And falsehood falsehood cures, as fire cools fire
Within the scorched veins of one new burn’d.”

Again, in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 4), Proteus tells how—

“Even as one heat another heat expels,
Or as one nail by strength drives out another,
So the remembrance of my former love
Is by a newer object quite forgotten.”

We may also compare the words of Mowbray in “King Richard II.” (i. 1), where a similar idea is contained:—

“I am disgraced, impeach’d, and baffled here,
Pierced to the soul with slander’s venom’d spear,
The which no balm can cure but his heart-blood
Which breathed this poison.”

Once more, in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 2) Benvolio relates how—

“A blister on his sweet tongue, with my heart,
That put Armado’s page out of his part.”

⁵⁹⁶ Dr Prior’s “Popular Names of British Plants,” 1870, p. 185.

⁵⁹⁷ “The Medical Knowledge of Shakspeare,” 1860, p. 78.

⁵⁹⁸ “The Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 65.

⁵⁹⁹ See Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” i. p. 761.

“One fire burns out another’s burning,
 One pain is lessen’d by another’s anguish;
 Turn giddy, and be holp by backward turning;
 One desperate grief cures with another’s anguish.”

Cataract.—One of the popular names for this disease of the eye was the “web and the pin.” Markham in his “Cheap and Good Husbandry” (Bk. i. chap. 37), thus describes it in horses: - “But for the wart, pearle, pin or web, which are evils grown in or upon the eye, to take them off, take the juyce of the herb betin and wash the eye therewith, it will weare the spots away.” Florio (“Ital. Dict.”), gives the following: - “Cataratta is a dimnesse of sight occasioned by humores hardened in the eies called a cataract or a pin and a web.” Shakespeare uses the term in the “Winter’s Tale” (i. 2), where Leontes speaks of “all eyes blind with the pin and web but theirs,” and in “King Lear” (iii. 4), alluding to “the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet,” says “he gives the web and the pin.”⁶⁰⁰Acerbi, in his “Travels” (ii. 290), has given the Lapland method of cure for this disease. In a fragment of an old medical treatise, it is thus described: - “Another sykenes ther byth of *yezen*; *on a webbe*, a nother a wem, that hydyth the myddel of the yezen; and this hes to maners, other whilys he is white and thynne, and other whilys he is thykke, as whenne the obtalmye ne is noght clene yhelyd up, bote the rote abydyth styлле. Other whilys the webbe is noght white but rede, other blake.”⁶⁰¹In the Statute of the 34 and 35 of “Henry VIII.” a pin and web in the eye is recited among the “customable diseases,” which honest persons, not being surgeons, might treat with herbs, roots, and waters, with the knowledge of whose nature God had endowed them.

Chilblains.—These are probably alluded to by the Fool in “King Lear” (i. 5):—

“If a man’s brains were in ‘s heels, were’t not in danger of kibes.”

Hamlet, too, says (v. 1): - “The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe.”

Deformity.—It was an old prejudice which is not quite extinct that those who are defective or deformed are marked by nature as prone to mischief. Thus in “King Richard III.” (i. 3), Margaret says of Richard, Duke of Gloster:—

“Thou elvish-mark’d, abortive, rooting hog!
 Thou that was seal’d in thy nativity,
 The slave of nature and the son of hell.”

She calls him *hog*, in allusion to his cognizance, which was a boar. A popular expression in Shakespeare’s day for a deformed person was a “stigmatic.” It denoted anyone who had been *stigmatised*, or burnt with an iron, as an ignominious punishment; and hence was employed to represent a person on whom nature has set a mark of deformity. Thus in “3 Henry VI.” (ii. 2), Queen Margaret says:—

“But thou art neither like thy sire nor dam;
 But like a foul misshapen stigmatic

Mark’d by the destinies to be avoided,
 As venom toads, or lizards’ dreadful stings.”

Again in “2 Henry VI.” (v. 1), young Clifford says to Richard: - “Foul stigmatic, that’s more than thou canst tell.” We may note, too, how in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1),

⁶⁰⁰ See Nares’ “Glossary” ii. pp. 660, 661; Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 322.

⁶⁰¹ Quoted in Singer’s “Shakespeare.”

mothers' marks and congenital forms are deprecated by Oberon from the issue of the happy lovers:—

“And the blots of Nature's hand
Shall not in their issue stand;
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despised in nativity,
Shall upon their children be.”⁶⁰²

Indeed, constant allusions are to be met with in our old writers relating to this subject, showing how strong were the feelings of our forefathers on the point. But, to give one further instance of this superstition given by Shakespeare, we may quote the words of King John (iv. 2), with reference to Hubert and his supposed murder of Prince Arthur:—

“A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,
Quoted and sign'd to do a deed of shame,
This murder had not come into my mind.”

This adaptation of the mind to the deformity of the body concurs, too, with Bacon's theory: -
“Deformed persons are commonly even with nature, for, as nature hath done ill by them, so do they by nature, being void of natural affection, and so they have their revenge on nature.”

Drowning.—The old superstition ⁶⁰³of its being dangerous to save a person from drowning is supposed, says Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, to be alluded to in “Twelfth Night.” It was owing to the belief that the person saved would sooner or later injure the man who saved him. Thus, in Sir Walter Scott's “Pirate,” Bryce, the pedlar, warns the hero not to attempt to resuscitate an inanimate form, which the waves had washed ashore on the mainland of Shetland. “‘Are you mad,’ exclaimed the pedlar, ‘you that have lived sae lang in Zetland, to risk the saving of a drowning man? Wot ye not if ye bring him to life again, he will do you some capital injury.’”

Epilepsy.—A popular name for this terrible malady was the “Falling Sickness,” because, when attacked with one of these fits, the patient falls suddenly to the ground. In “Julius Cæsar,” (i. 2), it is thus mentioned in the following dialogue:—

“*Cassius.* But, soft, I pray you: what, did Cæsar swoon?
Casca. He fell down in the market-place, and foamed at mouth, and was speechless.
Brutus. ‘Tis very like; he hath the falling sickness.
Cassius. No, Cæsar hath it not, but you and I,
And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness.”

Fistula.—At the present day a fistula means an abscess external to the rectum, but in Shakespeare's day it was used in the more general signification for a burrowing abscess in any situation.⁶⁰⁴The play of “All's Well that Ends Well” has a special interest, because, as Dr Bucknill says, its very plot may be said to be medical. “The orphan daughter of a physician cures the king of a fistula by means of a secret remedy left to her as a great treasure by her father. The royal reward is the choice of a husband among the nobles of the court, and ‘thereby hangs the tale.’” The story is taken from the tale of Gilletta of Narbonne, in the Decamerone of Boccaccio. It came to Shakespeare through the medium of Painter's “Palace

⁶⁰² Cf. “King John” (iii. 1) where Constance gives a catalogue of congenital defects.

⁶⁰³ “Handbook Index to the Works of Shakespeare,” p. 150; see “Notes and Queries” for superstitions connected with drowning, 5th series, ix. pp. 111, 228, 478, 516; x. pp. 38, 276; xi. pp. 119, 278.

⁶⁰⁴ Dr Bucknill's “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 95.

of Pleasure,” and is to be found in the first volume, which was printed as early as 1566.⁶⁰⁵ The story is thus introduced by Shakespeare in the following dialogue (i. 1), where the Countess of Rousillon is represented as inquiring:—

“What hope is there of his majesty’s amendment?

Lafeu. He hath abandoned his physicians, madam; under whose practices he hath persecuted time with hope; and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time.

Count. This young gentlewoman had a father—O, that ‘had!’ how sad a passage ‘tis!— whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work. Would, for the king’s sake, he were living! I think it would be the death of the king’s disease.

Laf. How called you the man you speak of, madam?

Count. He was famous, sir, in his profession, and it was his great right to be so; Gerard de Narbon.

Laf. He was excellent, indeed, madam; the king very lately spoke of him admiringly and mourningly; he was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality.

Ber. What is it, my good lord, the king languishes of?

Laf. A fistula, my lord.”

The account given of Helena’s secret remedy and the King’s reason for rejecting it, give, says Dr Bucknill, “an excellent idea of the state of opinion with regard to the practice of physic in Shakespeare’s time.”

Fit.—Formerly the term “rapture” was synonymous with a fit or trance. The word is used by Brutus in “Coriolanus” (ii. 1)—

”Your prattling nurse
Into a rapture lets her baby cry
While she chats him.”

Steevens quotes from the “Hospital for London’s Follies” (1602) where Gossip Luce says. -
“Your darling will weep itself into a rapture, if you take not good heed.”⁶⁰⁶

Gold.—It was a long prevailing opinion that a solution of gold had great medicinal virtues; and that the incorruptibility of the metal might be communicated to a body impregnated with it. Thus in “2 Henry IV.” (iv. 4) Prince Henry, in the course of his address to his father, says—

“Coming to look on you thinking you dead,
And dead almost, my liege, to think you were,
I spake unto this crown as having sense
And thus upbraided it: ‘The care on thee depending
Hath fed upon the body of my father;
Therefore, thou best of gold are worst of gold;
Other, less fine in carat, is more precious,
Preserving life in medicine potable.’”

Potable gold was one of the panaceas of ancient quacks. In John Wight’s translation of the “Secretes of Alexis” is a receipt “to dissolve and reducte golde into a potable licour, which

⁶⁰⁵ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” iii. p. 225.

⁶⁰⁶ See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” vii. p. 347.

conserveth the youth and healthe of a man, and will heale every disease that is thought incurable, in the space of seven daies at the furthest.” The receipt, however, is a highly complicated one, the gold being acted upon by juice of lemons, honey, common salt, and *aqua vitæ*, and distillation frequently repeated from an “urinall of glass,”—as the oftener it is distilled, the better it is. “Thus doynge,” it is said, “ye shall have a right naturall, and perfecte potable golde, whereof somewhat taken alone every monthe once or twice, or at least with the said licour, whereof we have spoken in the second chapter of this boke, is very excellent to preserve a man’s youthe and healthe, and to heale in a few daies any disease rooted in a man, and thought incurable. The said gold will also be good and profitable for diverse other operations and effectes: as good wittes and diligent searchers of the secretes of nature may easily judge.” A further allusion to gold as a medicine is probably alluded to in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (v. 3) where the King says to Bertram—

”Plutus himself,
That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine,
Hath not in nature’s mystery more science
Than I have in this ring.”

Chaucer, too, in his sarcastic excuse for the doctor’s avarice refers to this old belief—

“And yet he was but esy of despence:
He kept that he wan in the pestilence.
For gold in physic is a cordial;
Therefore he loved it in special.”

Once more, in Sir Kenelm Digby’s *Receipts* (A.D. 1674) we are told that the gold is to be calcined with three salts, ground with sulphur, burnt in a reverbatory furnace with sulphur twelve times, then digested with spirit of wine “which will be tinted very yellow, of which, few drops for a dose in a fit vehicle hath wrought great effects.”

The term “grand liquor” is also used by Shakespeare for the aurum potable of the alchymist, as in “*Tempest*” (iv. 1)—

“Where should they
Find this grand liquor that hath gilded them.”

Good Year.—This is evidently a corruption of *goujere*, a disease derived from the French *gouge*, a common camp-follower, and probably alludes to the *Morbus Gallicus*. Thus, in “*King Lear*” (v. 3), we read—

“The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep.”

With the corruption, however, of the spelling, the word lost in time its real meaning, and it is consequently found in passages where a sense opposite to the true one is intended.⁶⁰⁷ It was often used in exclamations, as in “*Merry Wives of Windsor*” (i. 4)—

“We must give folks leave to prate: what, the good-ger!”

In “*Troilus and Cressida*” (v. 1) Thersites, by the “rotten diseases of the south” probably meant the “*Morbus Gallicus*.”

⁶⁰⁷ Wright’s Notes to “*King Lear*,” 1877, p. 196.

Handkerchief.—It was formerly a common practice in England for those who were sick to wear a kerchief on their heads, and still continues at the present day among the common people in many places. Thus, in “Julius Cæsar” (ii. 1), we find the following allusion:—

“*Brutus*. O, what a time have you chose out, brave Caius,
To wear a kerchief! Would you were not sick.”

“If,” says Fuller, “this county (Cheshire) hath bred no writers in that faculty (physic), the wonder is the less, if it be true what I read, that if any here be sick, they make him a posset and tye a kerchief on his head, and if that will not mend him, then God be merciful to him.”—*Worthies of England*, 1662, p. 180.

Hysteria.—This disorder which, in Shakespeare’s day, we are told, was known as “the mother,” or “*hysterica passio*,” was not considered peculiar to women only. It is probable that when the poet wrote the following lines in “King Lear” (ii. 4), where he makes the king say—

“O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
Hysterica passio! down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy element’s below!—Where is this daughter?”

he had in view the subjoined passages from Harsnet’s “Declaration of Popish Impostures” (1603), a work which, it has been suggested,⁶⁰⁸ “he may have consulted in order to furnish out his character of Tom of Bedlam with demoniacal gibberish.” The first occurs at p. 25: - “Ma. Maynie had a spice of the *hysterica passio*, as it seems, from his youth; hee himselfe termes it the moother (as you may see in his confessione). Master Richard Mainy, who was persuaded by the priests that he was possessed of the devil, deposes as follows (p. 263):—The disease I speake of was a spice of the Mother, wherewith I had been troubled (as is before mentioned) before my going into Fraunce. Whether I doe rightly *terme* it the mother or no I know not.” Dr Jordan, in 1603, published “A Briefe Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother.”

Infection.—According to an old, but erroneous belief, infection communicated to another left the infector free, in allusion to which Timon (iv. 3) says, - “I will not kiss thee; then the rot returns to thine own lips again.”

Among other notions prevalent in days gone by was the general contagiousness of disease, to which an allusion seems to be made in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (i. 1), where Helena says,—

“Sickness is catching: O, were favour so,
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go.”

Malone considers that Shakespeare, in the following passage in “Venus and Adonis” alludes to a practice of his day, when it was customary, in time of the plague, to strew the rooms of every house with rue and other strong-smelling herbs to prevent infection

“Long may they kiss each other, for this cure!
O never let their crimson liveries wear!
And as they last, their verdure still endure
To drive infection from the dangerous year.”

Again, the contagiousness of pestilence is thus alluded to by Beatrice in “Much Ado about nothing” (i. 1):—O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease; he is sooner caught than the

⁶⁰⁸ Singer’s “Shakspeare,” pp. 384, 385; Wright’s Notes to “King Lear,” pp. 154, 155.

pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad.” The belief too, that the poison of pestilence dwells in the air is spoken of in “Timon of Athens” (iv. 3):—

“When Jove
Will o’er some high-vised city hang his poison
In the sick air.”

And again, in “King Richard II.” (i. 3):—

“Devouring pestilence hangs in our air.”

It is alluded to also in “Twelfth Night” (i. 1), where the Duke says:—

“O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence!”

While on this subject, we may quote the following dialogue from the same play (ii. 3), which, as Dr Bucknill ⁶⁰⁹remarks, “involves the idea that contagion is bound up with something appealing to the sense of smell, a mellifluous voice being miscalled contagious; unless one could apply one organ to the functions of another, and thus admit contagion, not through its usual portal, the nose”:—

“*Sir Andrew*. A mellifluous voice, as I am true knight.
Sir Toby. A contagious breath.
Sir Andrew. Very sweet and contagious, i’ faith.
Sir Toby. To hear by the nose, it is dulcet in contagion.”

Insanity.—That is a common idea that the symptoms of madness are increased by the full moon. Shakespeare mentions this popular fallacy in “Othello” (v. 2), where he tells us that the moon makes men insane, when she comes nearer the earth than she was wont. ⁶¹⁰

Music, as a cure for madness, is perhaps referred to in “King Lear” (iv. 7), where the physician of King Lear says: - “Louder the musick there.”⁶¹¹Mr Singer, however, has this note: - “Shakespeare considered soft music favourable to sleep. Lear, we may suppose, had been thus composed to rest; and now the physician desires louder music to be played, for the purpose of waking him.”

So in “Richard II.” (v. 5), the king says:—

“This music mads me; let it sound no more:
For though it holp madmen to their wits,
In me it seems it will make wise men mad.”

The power of music as a medical agency, has been recognized from the earliest times, and in mental cases has often been highly efficacious.⁶¹²Referring to music as inducing sleep, we may quote the touching passage in “2 Henry IV.” (iv. 5), where the King says:—

“Let there be no noise made, my gentle friends;
Unless some dull and favourable hand
Will whisper music to my weary spirit.
Wor. Call for the music in the other room.”

Ariel in the “Tempest” (ii. 1) enters playing solemn music to produce this effect.

⁶⁰⁹ “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 121.

⁶¹⁰ See p. 70.

⁶¹¹ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” 1866, p. 333

⁶¹² “A Book of Musical Anecdote” by F. Crowest, 1878, ii. 251, 252.

A mad-house seems formerly to have been designated a “dark-house.” Hence in the “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), the reason for putting Malvolio into a dark room, was to make him believe that he was mad. In the following act (iv. 2) he says, “Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad, they have laid me here in hideous darkness,” and further on (v. 1), he asks, “Why have you suffer’d me to be imprison’d, kept in a dark-house?”

In “As You Like It” (iii. 2), Rosalind says that “love is merely a madness, and deserves as well a dark-house and a whip, as madmen do.”

The expression “horn-mad,” *i.e.* quite mad, occurs in the “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 1):—

“Why, mistress, sure my master is horn-mad.”

And again, in “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 4), Mistress Quickly says, “If he had found the young man, he would have been horn-mad.”

Madness in cattle was supposed to arise from a distemper in the internal substance of their horns, and furious or mad cattle had their horns bound with straw.

King’s Evil.—This was a common name in years gone by for scrofula, because the sovereigns of England were supposed to possess the power of curing it, “without other medicine, save only by handling and prayer.” This custom of “touching for the king’s evil” is alluded to in “Macbeth” (iv. 3), where the following dialogue is introduced:—

“*Malcolm.* Comes the king forth, I pray you?

Doctor. Ay, sir; there are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure; their malady convinces
The great assay of art; but at his touch—

Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand—
They presently amend.

Malcolm. I thank you, doctor.

Macduff. What’s the disease he means?

Malcolm. ‘Tis call’d the evil:

A most miraculous work in this good king;
Which often, since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows: but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: and ‘tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction. With this strange virtue
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy;
And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace.”

This reference, which has nothing to do with the progress of the drama, is introduced obviously in compliment to King James, who fancied himself endowed with the confessor’s powers.⁶¹³ The poet found authority for the passage in Holinshed (i. 279) - “As hath bin thought, he was enspired with the gift of prophecie, and also to haue hadde the gift of healing

⁶¹³ See Beckett’s “Free and Impartial Enquiry into the Antiquity and Efficacy of Touching for the King’s Evil,” 1722.

infirmities and diseases. Namely, he vsed to help those that were vexed with the disease, commonly called the kyngs euill, and left that vertue as it were a portion of inheritance vnto his successors the kyngs of this realme.” Edward’s miraculous powers were believed in, we are told, by his contemporaries, or at least soon after his death, and were expressly recognised by Pope Alexander III., who canonized him. In Plot’s “Oxfordshire” (chap. x. sec. 125) there is an account, accompanied with a drawing, of the touch piece supposed to have been given by this monarch. James First’s practice of touching for the evil is frequently mentioned in Nichols’ “Progresses.” Charles I., when at York, touched seventy persons in one day. Indeed, few are aware to what an extent this superstition once prevailed. In the course of twenty years, between 1660 and 1682, no less than 92,107 persons were touched for this disease. The first English monarch who refused to touch for the King’s Evil was William III., but the practice was resumed by Queen Anne, who officially announced, in the “London Gazette,” March 12, 1712, her royal intention to receive patients afflicted with the malady in question. It was probably about that time that Johnson was touched by her Majesty, upon the recommendation of the celebrated physician Sir John Floyer, of Lichfield. King George I. put an end to this practice, which is said to have originated with Edward the Confessor in 1058.⁶¹⁴ The custom was also observed by French kings, and on Easter Sunday, 1686, Louis XIV. is said to have touched 1600 persons.

Lethargy.—This is frequently confounded by medical men of former times, and by Shakespeare himself, with apoplexy. The term occurs in the list of diseases quoted by Thersites in “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1).⁶¹⁵

Leprosy.—This was in years gone by used to denote the *lues venerea*, as in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 8)—

“Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt,
Whom leprosy o’ertake!
Hoists sail and flies.”

Leech.—The old medical term for a leech is a “bloodsucker,” and a knot would be an appropriate term for a number of clustering leeches. So in “Richard III.” (iii. 3), Grey being led to the block, says of Richard’s minions—

“A knot you are of damned blood-suckers.”

In “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 2), mention is made by Warwick of the “bloodsucker of sleeping men,” which, says Dr Bucknill, appears to mean the vampire bat.

Measles.—This word originally signified leprosy, although in modern times used for a very different disorder. Its derivation is the old French word *meseau*, or *mesel*, a leper. Thus Cotgrave has “meseau, a meselled, scurvy, leporous, lazarous person.” Distempered, or scurvied hogs are still said to be measled. It is in this sense that Coriolanus uses it (iii. 1):—

“As for my country I have shed my blood,
Not fearing outward force, so shall my lungs
Coin words till their decay against those measels,
Which we disdain should tetter us, yet sought
The very way to catch them.”

⁶¹⁴ See “Notes and Queries,” 1861, 2nd Series, xi., p. 71; Burns’ “History of Parish Registers,” 1862, pp. 179, 180; Pettigrew’s “Superstitions connected with Medicine and Surgery,” 1844, pp. 117–154.

⁶¹⁵ Bucknill’s “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 235.

Pleurisy.—This denotes a plethora, or redundancy of blood, and was so used probably from an erroneous idea that the word was derived from *plus pluris*. It is employed by Shakespeare in “Hamlet” (iv. 7)—

“For goodness, growing to a plurisy
Dies in his own too much.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (v. 1), there is a similar phrase:

“That heal’st with blood
The earth when it is sick, and cur’st the world
O’ the plurisy of people.”

The word is frequently used by writers contemporary with Shakespeare. Thus, for instance, Massinger in “The Picture” (iv. 2), says:—

“A plurisy of ill blood you must let out
By labour.”

Mummy.—This was a preparation, for magical purposes, made from dead bodies, and was used as a medicine both long before and long after Shakespeare’s day. Its virtues seem to have been chiefly imaginary, and even the traffic of it fraudulent.⁶¹⁶ The preparation of mummy is said to have been first brought into use in medicine by a Jewish physician, who wrote that flesh thus embalmed was good for the cure of divers diseases, and particularly bruises, to prevent the blood’s gathering and coagulating. It has, however, long been known that no use whatever can be derived from it in medicine, and “that all which is sold in the shops, whether brought from Venice or Lyons, or even directly from the Levant by Alexandria, is factitious, the work of certain Jews, who counterfeit it by drying carcasses in ovens, after having prepared them with powder of Myrrh, caballine aloes, Jewish pitch, and other coarse or unwholesome drugs.”⁶¹⁷ Shakespeare speaks of this preparation. Thus Othello (iii. 4), referring to the handkerchief which he had given to Desdemona relates how—

“It was dyed in mummy which the skilful
Conserved of maidens’ hearts.”

And in “Macbeth” (iv. 1), the “Witches’ Mummy” forms one of the ingredients of the boiling cauldron. Webster in “The White Devil” (1857, p. 5), speaks of it:—

“Your followers
Have swallow’d you like mummia, and, being sick,
With such unnatural and horrid physic,
Vomit you up i’ the kennel.”

Sir Thomas Browne, in his interesting Fragment on Mummies,⁶¹⁸ tells us that Francis the First always carried mummy with him as a panacea against all disorders. Some used it for epilepsy, some for gout, some used it as a stiptic. He further adds: “The common opinion of the virtues of mummy bred great consumption thereof, and princes and great men contended for this strange panacea, wherein Jews dealt largely, manufacturing mummies from dead carcasses, and giving them the names of kings, while specifics were compounded from crosses and gibbets leavings.”

⁶¹⁶ See Pettigrew’s “History of Mummies,” 1834; also Gannal, “Traité d’Embaumement,” 1838.

⁶¹⁷ Rees “Encyclopædia,” 1829, vol. xxiv.

⁶¹⁸ Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in his “Handbook Index to Shakespeare” (1866, p. 332), calls it a balsamic liquid.

Nightmare.—There are various charms practised in this and other countries for the prevention of nightmare, many of which are exceedingly quaint. In days gone by it appears that St Vitalis, whose name has been corrupted into St. Withold, was invoked; and by way of illustration Theobald quotes from the old play of “King John”⁶¹⁹the following:—

“Sweet S. Withold of thy lenitie, defend us from extremitie.”

Shakespeare alluding to the nightmare in his “King Lear” (iii. 4), refers to the same Saint, and gives us a curious old charm:—

“S. Withold footed thrice the old; [wold]
He met the night-mare, and her nine-fold;
Bid her alight
And her troth plight,
And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee.”

For what purpose, as Mr Singer ⁶²⁰has pointed out, the incubus is enjoined to “plight her troth” will appear from a charm against the nightmare in Reginald Scot’s “Discovery of Witchcraft,” which occurs with slight variation in Fletcher’s “Monsieur Thomas” (iv. 6):—

“St George, St George, our lady’s knight,
He walks by day, so does he by night,
And when he had her found,
He her beat and her bound,
Until to him her troth she plight,
She would not stir from him that night.”

Paralysis.—An old term for chronic paralysis was “cold palsies,” which is used by Thersites in “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 1).⁶²¹

Philosopher’s Stone.—This was supposed by its touch to convert base metal into gold. It is noticed by Shakespeare in “Antony and Cleopatra” (i. 5)—

“*Alexas.* Sovereign of Egypt, hail!
Cleopatra. How much unlike art thou Mark Antony!
Yet, coming from him, that great medicine hath
With his tinct gilded thee.”

The alchemists call the matter, whatever it may be, says Johnson, by which they perform transmutation a medicine. Thus Chapman in his “Shadow of Night” (1594) - “O then, thou great elixir of all treasures;” on which passage he has the following note: - “The philosopher’s stone, or *philosophica medicina*, is called the *great elixir*.” Another reference occurs in “Timon of Athens” (ii. 1) where the Fool in reply to the question of Varro’s servant, “What is a whoremaster, fool?” answers - “A fool in good clothes, and something like thee. ‘Tis a spirit: sometime ‘t appears like a lord; sometime like a lawyer; sometime like a philosopher, with two stones moe than’s artificial one,” etc., a passage which Johnson explains as meaning “more than the philosopher’s stone,” or twice the value of a philosopher’s stone; though, as Farmer observes, “Gower has a chapter in his ‘Confessio Amantis,’ of the three stones that philosophers made.” Singer,⁶²² in his note on the philosopher’s stone, says that Sir Thomas Smith was one of those who lost considerable sums

⁶¹⁹ “Six old Plays,” Ed. Nichols, p. 256, quoted by Mr Aldis Wright in his notes to “King Lear,” 1877, p. 170.

⁶²⁰ “Shakespeare,” ix. p. 413.

⁶²¹ Bucknill’s “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 235.

⁶²² “Shakespeare,” 1875, viii. p. 284.

in seeking of it. Sir Richard Steele was one of the last eminent men who entertained hopes of being successful in this pursuit. His laboratory was at Poplar.⁶²³

Pimple.—In the Midland Counties a common name for a pimple, which by rubbing is made to smart, or rubbed to sense, is “a quat.” The word occurs in “Othello” (v. 1) where Roderigo is so called by Iago—

“I have rubb’d this young quat almost to the sense,
And he grows angry.”

—Roderigo being called a quat by the same mode of speech as a low fellow is now called a *scab*. It occurs in Langham’s “Garden of Health,” p. 1.53 - “The leaves [of coleworts] laid to by themselves, or bruised with barley meale, are good for the inflammations, and soft swellings, burnings, impostumes, and cholerick sores or gnats,” etc.

Plague. - “Tokens” or “God’s tokens” were the terms for those spots on the body which denoted the infection of the plague. In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2)—

“For the lord’s tokens on you do I see,”

and in “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 10) there is another allusion—

“*Enobarbus*. How appears the fight?
Scarus. On our side like the token’d pestilence,
Where death is sure.”

In “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 3) Ulysses says of Achilles—

“He is so plaguy proud that the death tokens of it
Cry, ‘no recovery.’”

King Lear, too, it would seem, compares Goneril (ii. 4) to these fatal signs, when he calls her “a plague sore.” When the tokens had appeared on any of the inhabitants, the house was shut up, and “Lord have mercy upon us” written or printed upon the door. Hence Biron in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2) says—

“Write, ‘Lord have mercy on us,’ on those there;
They are infected, in their hearts it lies,
They have the plague, and caught it of your eyes.”

The “red pestilence,” referred to by Volumnia in “Coriolanus,” (iv. 1), probably alludes to the cutaneous eruptions common in the plague:—

“Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,
And occupations perish.”

In the “Tempest,” (i. 2), Caliban says, to Prospero, “The red plague rid you.”

Poison.—According to a vulgar error prevalent in days gone by, poison was supposed to swell the body, an allusion to which occurs in “Julius Cæsar,” (iv. 3), where, in the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, the former declares:—

“You shall digest the venom of your spleen,
Though it do split you.”

We may also compare the following passage in “2 King Henry IV.,” (iv. 4), where the king says:—

⁶²³ See Pettigrew’s “Medical Superstitions,” pp. 13, 14.

“Learn this, Thomas,
 And thou shalt prove a shelter to thy friends,
 A hoop of gold to bind thy brothers in,
 That the united vessel of their blood,
 Mingled with venom of suggestion,
 As, force perforce, the age will pour it in—
 Shall never leak, though it do work as strong
 As aconitum or rash gunpowder.”

In “King John,” Hubert, when describing the effect of the poison upon the monk (v. 6), narrates how his “bowels suddenly burst out.” This passage also contains a reference to the popular custom prevalent in the olden days, of great persons having their food tasted by those who were supposed to have made themselves acquainted with its wholesomeness. This practice, however, could not always afford security when the taster was ready to sacrifice his own life, as in the present case ⁶²⁴:—

“*Hubert*. The king, I fear, is poisoned by a monk:
 I left him almost speechless. . . .
Bastard. How did he take it? Who did taste to him?
Hubert. A monk, I tell you; a resolved villain.”

The natives of Africa have been supposed to be possessed of the secret how to temper poison with such art as not to operate till several years after they were administered. Their drugs were then as certain in their effect as subtle in their preparation. ⁶²⁵Thus, in the “Tempest,” (iii. 3), Gonzalo says of the fiends:—

“All three of them are desperate: their great guilt,
 Like poison given to work a great time after,
 Now ‘gins to bite the spirits.”

The belief, also, in slow poisoning was general in bygone times, although no better founded on fact, remarks Dr Bucknill, ⁶²⁶than the notion that persons burst with poison, or that narcotics could, like an alarum clock, be set for a certain number of hours. So in “Cymbeline,” (v. 5), Cornelius relates to the king the queen’s confession:—

“She did confess she had
 For you a mortal mineral; which, being took,
 Should by the minute feed on life, and lingering
 By inches waste you.”

Pomander.—This was either a composition of various perfumes wrought in the shape of a ball or other form, and worn in the pocket or hung about the neck, and even sometimes suspended to the wrist; or a case for containing such a mixture of perfumes. It was used as an amulet against the plague or other infections, as well as for an article of luxury. There is an allusion to its use in “The Winter’s Tale,” (iv. 3), by Autolycus, who enumerates it among all his trumpery that he had sold. The following recipe for making a pomander we find in an old play ⁶²⁷: - “Your only way to make a pomander is this,—take an ounce of the purest garden mould, cleans’d and steep’d seven days in change of motherless rose-water. Then take the best labdanum, benjoin, with storaxes, ambergris, civet, and musk. Incorporate them together,

⁶²⁴ Bucknill’s “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 136.

⁶²⁵ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” i. p. 65.

⁶²⁶ “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 226.

⁶²⁷ Quoted in Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 671.

and work them into what form you please. This, if your breath be not too valiant, will make you smell as sweet as any lady's dog."

Rheumatism.—In Shakespeare's day this was used in a far wider sense than now-a-days, including, in addition to what is now understood by the term, distillations from the head, catarrhs, &c. Malone quotes from the "Sydney Memorials," (i. 94), where the health of Sir Henry Sidney is described: - "He hath verie much distempored divers parts of his bodie; as namelie, his heade, his stomack, &c., and thereby is always subject to distillacions, coughes, and other rumatick diseases." Among the many superstitions relating to the moon, one is mentioned in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," (ii. 1), where Titania tells how the moon—

"Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound."

The word "rheumatic" was also formerly used in the sense of choleric or peevish, as in "2 Henry IV.," (ii. 4), where the hostess says: - "You two never meet but you fall to some discord: you are both, i' good truth, as rheumatic as two dry toasts." Again, in "Henry V.," (ii. 3), the hostess says of Falstaff: - "A' did in some sort, indeed, handle women; but then he was rheumatic,⁶²⁸ and talked of the whore of Babylon."

Serpigo.—This appears to have been a term extensively used by old medical authors for any creeping skin disease; being especially applied to that known as the *herpes circinatus*. The expression occurs in "Measure for Measure" (iii. 1), being coupled by the Duke with "the gout" and the "rheum." In "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. 3), Thersites says: - "Now the dry serpigo on the subject."

Sickness.—Sickness of stomach, which the slightest disgust is apt to provoke, is still expressed by the term "queasy;" hence the word denoted delicate, unsettled; as in "King Lear" (ii. 1), where it is used by Edmund:—

"I have one thing, of a queasy question,
Which I must act."

So Ben Jonson employs it in *Sejanus* (i. 1):—

"These times are rather queasy to be touched."

Sigh.—It was a prevalent notion that sighs impair the strength, and wear out the animal powers. Thus, in "2 Henry VI." (iii. 2), Queen Margaret speaks of "blood-drinking sighs." We may, too, compare the words of Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (iii. 2), who refers to "sighs of love that costs the fresh blood dear." In "3 Henry VI." (iv. 4), Queen Elizabeth says:—

"For this I draw in many a tear
And stop the rising of blood-sucking sighs."

Once more in "Hamlet" (iv.. 7), the king mentions the "spendthrift's sigh that hurts by easing." Fenton in his "Tragical Discourses." (1579), alludes to this notion in the following words: - "Your scorching sighes that have already drayned your body of his wholesome humoures."

It was also an ancient belief that sorrow consumed the blood, and shortened life. Hence Romeo tells Juliet (iii. 5),—

⁶²⁸ Malone suggests that the hostess may mean "then he was lunatic."

“And trust me, love, in my eye so do you:
Dry sorrow drinks our blood.”

Small-pox.—Such a terrible plague was this disease in the days of our ancestors, that its name was used as an imprecation. Thus, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), the princess says:—

“A pox of that jest.”

Saliva.—The colour of the spittle was, with the medical men of olden times, an important point of diagnosis. Thus in “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2), Falstaff exclaims against fighting on a hot day, and wishes he may “never spit white again,” should it so happen.⁶²⁹

Sterility.—The charm against sterility referred to by Cæsar in “Julius Cæsar” (i. 2), is copied from Plutarch, who, in his description of the festival Lupercalia, tells us how “noble young men run naked through the city, striking in sport whom they meet in the way with leather thongs,” which blows were commonly believed to have the wonderful effect attributed to them by Cæsar—

“The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.”

Suicide.—Cominius, in “Coriolanus” (i. 9), arguing against Marcius’s overstrained modesty, refers to the manner in which suicide was thought preventable in olden times—

“If ‘gainst yourself you be incensed, we’ll put you,
Like one that means his proper harm, in manacles,
Then reason safely with you.”

Toothache.—It was formerly a common superstition—and one, too, not confined to our own country—that toothache was caused by a little worm, having the form of an eel, which gradually gnawed a hole in the tooth. In “Much Ado About Nothing” (iii. 2), Shakespeare speaks of this curious belief—

“*Don Pedro.* What! sigh for the toothache?
Leonata. Where is but a humour or a worm.”

This notion was some years ago prevalent in Derbyshire,⁶³⁰ where there was an odd way of extracting, as it was thought, the worm. A small quantity of a mixture, consisting of dry and powdered herbs, was placed in some small vessel, into which a live coal from the fire was dropped. The patient then held his or her open mouth over the vessel, and inhaled the smoke as long as it could be borne. The cup was then taken away, and in its place a glass of water was put before the patient. Into this glass the person breathed hard for a few moments, when it was supposed the grub or worm could be seen in the water. In Orkney, too, toothache goes by the name of “the worm,” and, as a remedy, the following charm, called “wormy lines,” is written on a piece of paper, and worn as an amulet by the person affected, in some part of his dress:—

“Peter sat on a marble stone weeping;
Christ came past, and said, ‘What aileth thee, Peter?’
‘O my Lord, my God, my tooth doth ache.’
‘Arise, O Peter! go thy way; thy tooth shall ache no more.’”

⁶²⁹ Bucknill’s “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 150.

⁶³⁰ See “English Folk-Lore,” p. 156.

This notion is still current in Germany, and is mentioned by Thorpe in his "Northern Mythology" (iii. 167), who quotes a North German incantation, beginning—

"Pear tree, I complain to thee;
Three worms sting me."

It is found, too, even in China and New Zealand,⁶³¹ the following charm being used in the latter country—

"An eel, a spiny back
True indeed, indeed: true in sooth, in sooth.
You must eat the head
Of said spiny back."

A writer in the *Athenaeum* (Jan. 28, 1860), speaking of the Rev. R. H. Cobbold's "Pictures of the Chinese, Drawn by themselves," says - "The first portrait is that of a quack doctress, who pretends to cure toothache by extracting a maggot—the cause of the disorder. This is done—or rather pretended to be done—by simply placing a bright steel pin on the part affected, and tapping the pin with a piece of wood. Mr Cobbold compares the operation to procuring worms for fishing, by working a spade backwards and forwards in the ground. He and a friend submitted to the process, but in a very short time compelled the doctress to desist, by the excessive precautions they took against imposition." We may further note that John of Gatisden, one of our oldest medical authors, attributes decay of the teeth to "a humour or a worm." In his "Rosa Anglica,"⁶³² he says - "Si vermes sint in dentibus, R, semen porri, seu lusquiami contere et misce cum cera, pone super carbones, et fumus recipiatur per embotum, quoniam sanat. Solum etiam semen lusquiami valet coctum in aqua calida, supra quam aquam patiens palatum apertum si tenuerit, cadent vermes evidenter vel in illam aquam, vel in aliam quæ ibi fuerit ibi posita. De myrrha et aloe ponantur in dentem, ubi est vermis: semen caulis, et absinthium, per se vermes interficit."

Tub-fast.—In years past "the discipline of sweating in a heated tub for a considerable time, accompanied with strict abstinence, was thought necessary for the cure of venereal taint."⁶³³ Thus, in "Timon of Athens" (iv. 3), Timon says to Timandra—

"Be a whore still! they love thee not that use thee;
Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust.
Make use of thy salt hours: season the slaves
For tubs and baths: bring down rose-cheeked youth
To the tub-fast and the diet."

As beef, too, was usually salted down in a tub, the one process was jocularly compared to the other. So, in "Measure for Measure" (iii. 2), Pompey, when asked by Lucio about his mistress, replies, "Troth, sir, she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub." Again, in "Henry V." (ii. 1), Pistol speaks of "the powdering tub of infamy."

Vinegar.—In Shakespeare's day this seems to have been termed "eisel" (from A.—S. aisel), being esteemed highly efficacious in preventing the communications of the plague and other contagious diseases. In this sense it has been used by Shakespeare in his 111th sonnet—

"Like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eisel, 'gainst my strong infection."

⁶³¹ See Shortland's "Traditions and Superstitions of the New Zealanders," 1856, p. 131.

⁶³² Liber Secundus—"De Febribus," p. 923, edit. 1595.

⁶³³ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 906.

In a MS. Herbal in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge occurs “aceturum, an^{ce} vynegre or aysel.” The word occurs again in “Hamlet” (v. 1), where Laertes is challenged by Hamlet—

“Woo’t drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?”

The word woo’t in the northern counties is the common contraction of wouldst thou, which is the reading of the old copies. In former years it was the fashion with gallants to do some extravagant feat as a proof of their love in honour of their mistresses, and among others the swallowing of some nauseous potion was one of the most frequent. Hence in the above passage some bitter potion is evidently meant, which it was a penance to drink. Some are of opinion that *wormwood* is alluded to; and Mr Singer thinks it probable that “the propoma called absinthites, a nauseously bitter medicament then much in use, may have been in the poet’s mind to drink up a quantity of which would be an extreme pass of amorous demonstration.” It has been suggested by a correspondent of “Notes and Queries”⁶³⁴ that the reference in this passage from “Hamlet” is to a lake Esyl which figures in Scandinavian legends. Messrs Wright and Clark, however, in their Notes to “Hamlet” (1876, p. 218), say that they have consulted Mr Magnusson on this point, and ‘he writes as follows: - “No such lake as Esyl is known to Norse mythology and folk-lore.” Steevens supposes it to be the river Yssell.⁶³⁵

Water-casting.—The fanciful notion of recognising diseases by the mere inspection of the urine was denounced years ago by an old statute of the College of Physicians, as belonging to tricksters and impostors, and any member of the college was forbidden to give advice by this so-called “water-casting” without he also saw the patient. The statute of the college runs as follows: - “Statuimus, et ordinamus, ut nemo, sive socius, sive candidatus, sive permissus consilii quidquam impertiat veteratoriis, et impostoribus, super urinarum nuda inspectione, nisi simul ad ægrum vocetur, ut ibidem, pro re natû, idonea medicamenta ab honesto aliquo pharmacopoea componenda præscribat.” An allusion to this vulgar error occurs in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 1), where, after Speed has given to Valentine his amusing description of a lover, in which, among other signs, are “to walk alone like one that had the pestilence,” and “to fast like one that takes diet,” the following quibble takes place upon the within and the without of the symptoms—

“*Valentine.* Are all these things perceived in me?

Speed. They are all perceived without ye.

Valentine. Without me? they cannot.

Speed. Without you? nay, that’s certain, for without you were so simple, none else would: but you are so without these follies, that these follies are within you and shine through you like the water in an urinal, that not an eye that sees you but is a physician to comment on your malady.”

This singular pretence, says Dr Bucknill,⁶³⁶ is “alleged to have arisen, like the barber surgery, from the ecclesiastical interdicts upon the medical vocations of the clergy. Priests and monks being unable to visit their former patients are said first to have resorted to the expedient of divining the malady, and directing the treatment upon simple inspection of the urine. However this may be, the practice is of very ancient date.” Numerous references to this piece of medical quackery occur in many of our old writers, most of whom condemn it in very strong terms. Thus Forestus in his “Medical Politics” speaks of it as being, in his opinion, a

⁶³⁴ See 4th Series, x. pp. 108, 150, 229, 282, 356.

⁶³⁵ See Dyce’s “Shakespeare,” vii. p. 239.

⁶³⁶ “The Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” 1860, pp. 61–64.

practice altogether evil, and expresses an earnest desire that medical men would combine to repress it. Shakespeare gives a further allusion to it in the passage where he makes Macbeth (v. 3) say—

“If thou couldst, doctor, cast
The water of my land, and her disease,
And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo.”

And in “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2) Falstaff asks the page, “What says the doctor to my water?” and once more in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), Fabian, alluding to Malvolio, says, “Carry his water to the wise woman.”

It seems probable, too, that in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 3), the term “mock-water” employed by the host to the French Dr Caius, refers to the mockery of judging of diseases by the water or urine, - “mock-water” in this passage being equivalent to “you pretending water-doctor!”

11. Customs Connected With The Calendar

In years gone by the anniversaries connected with the calendar were kept up with an amount of enthusiasm and merrymaking quite unknown at the present day. Thus, for instance, Shakespeare tells us, with regard to the May-day observance, that it was looked forward to so eagerly as to render it impossible to make the people sleep on this festive occasion. During the present century the popular celebrations of the festivals have been gradually on the decline, and nearly every year marks the disuse of some local custom. Shakespeare has not omitted to give a good many scattered allusions to the old superstitions and popular usages associated with the festivals of the year, some of which still survive in our midst.

Alluding to the revels, there can be no doubt that Shakespeare was indebted to the revel-books for some of his plots. Thus, in the "Tempest" (iv. 1), Prospero remarks to Ferdinand and Miranda, after Iris, Ceres, and Juno have appeared, and the dance of the nymphs is over:—

"You look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismay'd; be cheerful, sir,
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."

It has been inferred that Shakespeare was present at Kenilworth, in 1575, when Elizabeth was so grandly entertained there. Lakes and seas are represented in the mask. Triton, in the likeness of a mermaid, came towards the queen, says George Goscoyne, and "Arion appeared sitting on a dolphin's back." In the dialogue in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" between Oberon and Puck (ii. 1), there seems a direct allusion to this event:—

"*Oberon.* My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberst
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.
Puck. I remember," etc.

Then, too, there were the "Children of the Revels," a company who performed at Blackfriars Theatre. In "Hamlet" (ii. 2), Shakespeare alludes to these "children-players."⁶³⁷ Rosencrantz says, in the conversation preceding the entry of the players, in reply to Hamlet's inquiry whether the actors have suffered through the result of the late inhibition, evidently referring to the plague, "Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace; but there is, sir, an aery of

⁶³⁷ The "England of Shakespeare," E. Goadby, 1881, p. 153.

children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for 't; these are now the fashion, and, so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come hither.”

Twelfth-Day.—There can be no doubt that the title of Shakespeare's play, “Twelfth-Night,” took its origin in the festivities associated with this festival. The season has from time immemorial been one of merriment, “the more decided from being the proper close of the festivities of Christmas, when games of chance were traditionally rife, and the sport of sudden and casual elevation gave the tone of the time. Of like tone is the play, and to this,” says Mr Lloyd,⁶³⁸ “it apparently owes its title.” The play, it appears, was probably originally acted at the barristers' feast at the Middle Temple, on February 2, 1601–2, as Manningham tells us in his “Diary” (Camden Society, 1868, ed. J. Bruce, p. 18). It is worthy of note that the festive doings of the Inns of Court, in days gone by at Christmas-tide, were conducted on the most extravagant scale.⁶³⁹ In addition to the merry disports of the Lord of Misrule, there were various revels. The Christmas masque at Gray's Inn, in 1594, was on a magnificent scale.

St Valentine's Day (Feb. 14).—Whatever may be the historical origin of this festival, whether heathen or Christian, there can be no doubt of its antiquity. According to an old tradition, to which Chaucer refers, birds choose their mates on this day; and hence, in the “Midsummer Night's Dream” (iv. 1) Theseus asks—

“Good morrow, friends. St Valentine is past;
Begin these wood-birds but to couple now?”

From this notion, it has been suggested, arose the once popular practice of choosing valentines, and also the common belief that the first two single persons who meet in the morning of St Valentine's day have a great chance of becoming to each other. This superstition is alluded to in Ophelia's song in “Hamlet” (iv. 5):—

“To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your valentine.”

There seems every probability that St Valentine's day, with its many customs, has come down to us from the Romans, but was fathered upon St Valentine in the earlier ages of the Church in order to Christianise it.⁶⁴⁰ In France the Valentine was a moveable feast, celebrated on the first Sunday in Lent, which was called the *jour des brandons*, because the boys carried about lighted torches on that day.

Shrove-Tuesday.—This day was formerly devoted to feasting and merriment of every kind, but whence originated the custom of eating pancakes is still a matter of uncertainty. The practice is alluded to in “All's Well that Ends Well” (ii. 1), where the clown speaks of “a pancake for Shrove-Tuesday.”⁶⁴¹ In “Pericles” (ii. 1) they are termed “flap-jacks,” a term used by Taylor, the water-poet, in his “Jacke-a-Lent Workes” (1630, i. 115): “Until at last by the skill of the cooke it is transformed into the form of a flap-jack, which in our translation is

⁶³⁸ “Critical Essays on the Plays of Shakespeare,” 1875, p. 145; see Singer's “Shakespeare” iii. pp 347, 348.

⁶³⁹ See “British Popular Customs,” p. 473.

⁶⁴⁰ “Notes and Queries,” 6th S. i. p. 129.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. “As you Like It” (i. 2). Touchstone alludes to a “certain knight that swore by his honour they were good pancakes.”

called a pancake." Shrovetide was in times gone by a season of such mirth that *shroving*, or to *shrove*, signified to be merry. Hence in "2 Henry IV." (v. 3) Justice Silence says—

"Be merry, he merry, my wife has all;
For women are shrews, both short and tall;
'Tis merry in hall, when beards wag all,
And welcome merry shrove-tide,
Be merry, be merry."

It was a day of holiday and licence, for apprentices, labouring persons, and others.⁶⁴²

Lent—This season was at one time marked by a custom now fallen into disuse. A figure made up of straw and castoff clothes, was drawn or carried through the streets amid much noise and merriment; after which it was either burnt, shot at, or thrown down a chimney. This image was called a "Jack-a-Lent," and was, according to some, intended to represent Judas Iscariot. It occurs twice in the "Merry Wives of Windsor;" once merely as a jocular appellation (iii. 3), where Mrs Page says to Robin, "you little Jack-a-Lent, have you been true to us;" and once (v. 5) as a butt, or object of satire and attack, Falstaff remarking, "how wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent, when 'tis upon ill employment!" It is alluded to by Ben Jonson in his "Tale of a Tub" (iv. 2)—

"Thou cam'st but half a thing into the world,
And wast made up of patches, parings, shreds;
Thou, that when last thou wert put out of service,
Travell'd to Hamstead Heath on an Ash Wednesday,
Where thou didst stand six weeks the Jack of Lent,
For boys to hurl three throws a penny at thee,
To make thee a purse."

Elderton, in a ballad called "Lenton Stuff," in a MS. in the Ashmolean Museum, thus concludes his account of Lent⁶⁴³ —

"When Jakke a' Lent comes justlynge in,
With the hedpeece of a herynge,
And saythe, repent yowe of yower syn,
For shame, syrs, leve yowre swerynge:
And to Palme Sunday doethe he ryde,
With sprots and herryngs by his syde,
And makes an end of Lenton tyde!"⁶⁴⁴

In the reign of Elizabeth, butchers were strictly enjoined not to sell flesh meat in Lent, not with a religious view, but for the double purpose⁶⁴⁵ of diminishing the consumption of flesh meat during that period, and so making it more plentiful during the rest of the year, and of encouraging the fisheries and augmenting the number of seamen. Butchers, however, who had an interest at court, frequently obtained a dispensation to kill a certain number of beasts a week during Lent; of which indulgence the wants of invalids, who could not subsist without animal food, was made the pretence. It is to this practice that Cade refers in "2 Henry VI."

⁶⁴² See Hone's "Every Day Book," 1836, i. p. 258; "Book of Days," i. p. 239; see also Dekker's "Seven Deadly Sins," 1606, p. 35; "British Popular Customs," pp. 62–91.

⁶⁴³ "Notes and Queries," 1st Series, xii. p. 297.

⁶⁴⁴ See Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 443; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, i. p. 101. Taylor, the Water-Poet, has a tract entitled "Jack-a-Lent, his Beginning and Entertainment, with the mad Prankes of Gentlemen-Usher, Shrove Tuesday."

⁶⁴⁵ Singer's "Shakespeare," v i. p. 219.

(iv. 3), where he tells Dick, the butcher of Ashford - "Therefore, thus will I reward thee, the Lent shall be as long again as it is; and thou shalt have a license to kill for a hundred lacking one."

In "2 Henry IV." (ii. 4), Falstaff mentions an indictment against Hostess Quickly, "for suffering flesh to be eaten in thy house, contrary to the law, for the which I think thou wilt howl." Whereupon she replies, "all victuallers do so: what's a joint of mutton or two in a whole Lent?"

The sparing fare in olden days, during Lent, is indirectly referred to by Rosencrantz in "Hamlet" (ii. 2) - "To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive." We may compare, too, Maria's words in "Twelfth Night" (i. 5), where she speaks of a good lenten answer, *i.e.*, short.

By a scrap of proverbial rhyme quoted by Mercutio in "Romeo and Juliet" (ii. 4), and the speech introducing it, it appears that a stale hare might be used to make a pie in Lent; he says—

"No hare, sir; unless a hare, sir, in a lenten pie, that is something stale and hoar ere it be spent.

An old hare hoar,
And an old hare hoar,
Is very good meat in Lent," &c.

Scambling days.—The days so called were Mondays and Saturdays in Lent, when no regular meals were provided, and our great families scambled. There may possibly be an indirect allusion to this custom in "Henry V." (v. 2), where Shakespeare makes King Henry say - "If ever thou beest mine, as I have a saving faith within me tells me thou shalt, I get thee with scambling." In the old household book of the fifth Earl of Northumberland, there is a particular section appointing the order of service for these days, and so regulating the licentious contentions of them. We may also compare another passage in the same play (i. 1), where the Archbishop of Canterbury speaks of "the scambling and unquiet time."

Good Friday.—Beyond the bare allusion to this day, Shakespeare makes no reference to the many observances formerly associated with it. In "King John" (i. 1), he makes Philip the bastard say to Lady Faulconbridge:—

"Madam, I was not old Sir Robert's son:
Sir Robert might have eat his part in me
Upon Good Friday and ne'er broke his fast."

And in "1 Henry IV." (i. 2), Poinciville enquires: - "Jack! how agrees the devil and thee about thy soul, that thou soldest him on Good Friday last for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg."

Easter.—According to a popular superstition it is considered unlucky to omit wearing new clothes on Easter Day, to which Shakespeare no doubt alludes in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 1), when he makes Mercutio ask Benvolio whether he did "not fall out with a tailor for wearing his new doublet before Easter." In East Yorkshire, on Easter Eve, young folks go to the nearest market-town to buy some new article of dress or personal ornament, to wear for the first time on Easter Day, as otherwise they believe that birds—notably rooks or "crakes"—will spoil their clothes.⁶⁴⁶In "Poor Robin's Almanac" we are told:—

⁶⁴⁶ "Notes and Queries," 4th S., v. p. 595.

“At Easter let your clothes be new
Or else be sure you will it rue.”

Some think that the custom of “clacking” at Easter—which is not quite obsolete in some counties—is incidentally alluded to in “Measure for Measure” (iii. 2), by Lucio:—

“His use was to put a ducat in her clack-dish.”⁶⁴⁷

The clack or clap-dish was a wooden dish, with a moveable cover, formerly carried by beggars, which they clacked and clattered to show that it was empty. In this they received the alms. Lepers and other paupers deemed infectious originally used it, that the sound might give warning not to approach too near, and alms be given without touching the person.

A popular name for Easter-Monday was Black Monday, so called, says Stow, because “in the 34th of Edward III. (1360), the 14th of April, and the morrow after Easter-Day, King Edward, with his host, lay before the city of Paris; which day was full dark of mist and hail, and so bitter cold, that many men died on their horses’ backs with the cold. Wherefore unto this day it hath been call’d the Blacke Monday.” Thus in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 5); Launcelot says “it was not for nothing that my nose fell a-bleeding on Black Monday last at six o’clock i’ the morning.”

St David’s Day (March 1st).—This day is observed by the Welsh in honour of St David, their Patron Saint, when, as a sign of their patriotism, they wear a leek. Much doubt exists as to the origin of this custom. According to the Welsh, it is because St David ordered his Britons to place leeks in their caps, that they might be distinguished from their Saxon foes. Shakespeare introduces the custom into his play of “Henry V.” (iv. 6), where Fluellen addressing the Monarch says:—

“Your grandfather of famous memory, an ‘t please your majesty, and your great uncle Edward the Plack Prince of Wales, as I have read in the chronicles, fought a most prave pattle here in France.

K. Hen. They did, Fluellen.

Flu. Your majesty says very true: if your majesties is remembered of it, the Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Monmouth caps; which, your majesty know, to this hour is an honourable badge of the service; and, I do believe your majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon St Tavy’s day.”

It has been justly pointed out, however, that this allusion by Fluellen to the Welsh having worn the leek in battle under the Black Prince, is not, as some writers suppose, wholly decisive of its having originated in the fields of Cressy, but rather shows that when Shakespeare wrote Welshmen wore leeks. In the same play, too (iv. 1), the well-remembered Fluellen’s enforcement of Pistol, to eat the leek he had ridiculed, further establishes the wearing as a usage.⁶⁴⁸Pistol says:—

“Tell him, I’ll knock his leek about his pate
Upon St Davy’s day.”

In days gone by, this day was observed by Royalty; and in 1695, we read how William III. wore a leek on St David’s Day, “presented to him by his sergeant, Porter, who hath as perquisites all the wearing apparel his majestie had on that day, even to his sword.” It appears that formerly, amongst other customs, a Welshman was burnt in effigy upon “St Tavy’s Day,” an allusion to which occurs in “Poor Robin’s Almanack” for 1757:—

⁶⁴⁷ See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” i. p. 362. Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 164. Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.” 1849, iii. p. 94.

⁶⁴⁸ See Hone’s “Every Day Book” i. p. 318; “British Popular Customs” pp. 110–113.

“But it would make a stranger laugh,
To see th’ English hang poor Taff:
A pair of breeches and a coat,
Hat, shoes, and stockings, and what not,
And stuffed with hay, to represent
The Cambrian hero thereby meant.”

St Patrick’s Day (March 17th).—Shakespeare, in “Hamlet” (i. 5), makes the Danish prince swear by St Patrick, on which Warburton remarks that the whole northern world had their learning from Ireland.⁶⁴⁹ As Mr Singer⁶⁵⁰ observes, however, it is more probable that the poet seized the first popular imprecation that came to his mind, without regarding whether it suited the country or character of the person to whom he gave it. Some, again, have supposed that there is a reference here to St Patrick’s purgatory, but this does not seem probable.

St George’s Day (April 23rd).—St George, the guardian saint of England, is often alluded to by Shakespeare. His festival, which was formerly celebrated by feasts of cities and corporations, is now almost passed over without notice. Thus Bedford, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1), speaks of keeping “our great Saint George’s feast withal.” “God and St George,” was once a common battle cry, several references to which occur in Shakespeare’s plays. Thus, in “Henry V.” (iii. 1), the king says to his soldiers⁶⁵¹—

“Cry, God for Harry, England and Saint George.”

Again, in “1 Henry VI.” (iv. 2), Talbot says—

“God and Saint George, Talbot and England’s right,
Prosper our colours in this dangerous fight.”

The following injunction, from an old act of war, concerning the use of St George’s name in onsets, is curious - “Item, that all souldiers entering into battaile, assault, skirmish, or other faction of armes, shall have for their common crye and word, *St George, forward, or upon them St George*, whereby the soldier is much comforted, and the enemie dismaied, by calling to minde the ancient valour of England, with which that name has so often been victorious.”⁶⁵²

The combat of this saint on horseback with a dragon has been very long established as a subject for sign painting. In “King John” (ii. 1), Philip says—

“Saint George, that swinged the dragon, and e’er since
Sits on his horse back at mine hostess’ door.”

It is still a very favourite sign. In London alone⁶⁵³ there are said to be no less than sixty-six public houses and taverns with the sign of “St George and the Dragon,” not counting beer-houses and coffee-houses.

May day.—The festival of May day has, from the earliest times, been most popular in this country, on account of its association with the joyous season of spring. It was formerly celebrated with far greater enthusiasm than now-a-days, for Bourne tells us how the young people were in the habit of rising a little after midnight and walking to some neighbouring wood, accompanied with music and the blowing of horns, where they broke down branches

⁶⁴⁹ St Patrick rids Ireland of snakes, see p. 242.

⁶⁵⁰ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1870, ix. p. 168.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. “Henry V.,” v. 2; “3 Henry VI.,” ii. i, 2; “Taming of the Shrew,” ii. i; “Richard II.,” i. 3.

⁶⁵² Cited by Warton in a note on “Richard III.,” v. 3.

⁶⁵³ Hotten’s “History of Sign Boards,” 1866, 3rd edition, p. 287.

from the trees, which, decorated with nosegays and garlands of flowers, were brought home soon after sunrise, and placed at their doors and windows. Shakespeare, alluding to this practice, informs us how eagerly it was looked forward to, and that it was impossible to make the people sleep on May morning. Thus, in "Henry VIII." (v. 4), it is said—

"Pray, sir, be patient: 'tis as much impossible—
Unless we sweep 'em from the door with cannons
To scatter 'em, as 'tis to make 'em sleep
On May-day morning."

Again, in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" (i. 1), Lysander, speaking of these May-day observances says to Hermia—

"If thou lovest me then,
Steal forth thy father's house to-morrow night;
And in the wood, a league without the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
To do observance to a morn of May,
There will I stay for thee."

And Thersites says (iv. 1)—

"No doubt they rose up early to observe
The rite of May."⁶⁵⁴

In the "Two Noble Kinsmen" (i. 2), one of the four countrymen asks - "Do we all hold against the maying?"

In Chaucer's "Court of Love," we read that early on May-day "Fourth goth al the Court, both most and lest, to fetche the flowris fresh and blome." In the reign of Henry the Eighth, it is on record that the heads of the Corporation of London went out into the high grounds of Kent to gather the May, and were met on Shooter's Hill by the king and his queen, Catherine of Arragon, as they were coming from the palace of Greenwich. Until within a comparatively recent period this custom still lingered in some of the counties. Thus, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the following doggerel was sung:—

"Rise up, maidens, fie for shame!
For I've been four long miles from hame,
I've been gathering my garlands gay,
Rise up, fair maidens, and take in your May."

Many of the ballads sung now-a-days in country places by the village children on May morning, as they carry their garlands from door to door, undoubtedly refer to the old practice of going-a-Maying, although fallen into disuse.

In olden times nearly every village had its May-pole, around which, decorated with wreaths of flowers, ribbons, and flags, our merry ancestors danced from morning till night. The earliest representation of an English May-pole is that published in the *Variorum* "Shakespeare," and depicted on a window at Betley, in Staffordshire, then the property of Mr Tollet, and which he was disposed to think as old as the time of Henry VIII. The pole is planted in a mound of earth, and has affixed to it St George's red-cross banner, and a white pennon or streamer with a forked end. The shaft of the pole is painted in a diagonal line of black colours upon a yellow ground, a characteristic decoration of all these

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. "Twelfth Night" (iii. 4)—"More matter for a May morning."

ancient maypoles, as alluded to by Shakespeare in his “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 2), where it gives point to Hermia’s allusion to her rival Helena, as “a painted maypole.”⁶⁵⁵ The popularity of the maypole in former centuries is shown by the fact that one of our London parishes, St Andrew Undershaft, derives its name from the maypole which overhung its steeple, a reference to which we find made by Geoffrey Chaucer, who, speaking of a vain boaster, says—

“Right well aloft, and high ye bear your head,
As ye would bear the great shaft of Cornhill.”

London, indeed, had several maypoles, one of which stood in Basing Lane, near St Paul’s Cathedral. It was a large fir pole, forty feet high and fifteen inches in diameter, and fabled to be the justing staff of Gerard the Giant. Only a few, however, of the old maypoles remain scattered here and there throughout the country. One still supports a weather-cock in the churchyard at Pendleton, Manchester; and in Derbyshire, a few years ago, several were to be seen standing on some of the village greens. The rhymes made use of as the people danced round the maypole varied according to the locality, and oftentimes combined a curious mixture of the jocose and sacred.

Another feature of the May-day festivities was the Morris dance, the principal characters of which generally were Robin Hood, Maid Marian, Scarlet, Stokesley, Little John, the Hobby Horse, the Bavian or Fool, Tom the Piper, with his pipe and tabor. The number of characters varied much at different times and places. In “All’s Well That Ends Well” (ii. 2), the Clown says - “As fit as ten groats for the hand of an attorney,—a Morris for May-day.”⁶⁵⁶

In “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 2) the Duke of York says of Cade—

”I have seen
Him caper upright like a wild Morisco,
Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (iii. 5) Gerrold, the schoolmaster, thus describes to King Theseus the morris dance:—

“If you but favour, our country pastime made is.
We are a few of those collected here,
That rude tongues distinguish villagers; And, to say verity and not to fable,
We are a merry rout, or else a rabble,
Or company, or, by a figure, choris,

That ‘fore thy dignity, will dance a morris.
And I, that am the rectifier of all,
By title *Pædagogus*, that let fall
The birch upon the breeches of the small ones,
And humble with a ferula the tall ones,
Do here present this machine, or this frame;
And, dainty duke, whose doughty dismal fame,
From Dis to Dædalus, from post to pillar,
Is blown abroad, help me, thy poor well wilier,
And, with thy twinkling eyes, look right and straight
Upon this mighty *morr*—of mickle weight—

⁶⁵⁵ “Book of Days,” i. p. 575; see “British Popular Customs,” pp. 228–230, 249.

⁶⁵⁶ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” i. pp. 247–270; “Book of Days,” i. pp. 630–633.

Is—now comes in, which being glu'd together
 Makes *morris*, and the cause that we came hither,
 The body of our sport, of no small study.
 I first appear, though rude, and raw, and muddy,
 To speak, before thy noble grace, this tenner;
 At whose great feet I offer up my penner:
 The next, the Lord of May and Lady bright,
 The chambermaid and serving-man, by night
 That seek out silent hanging; then mine host
 And his fat spouse, that welcome to his cost
 The galled traveller, and with a beck'ning.
 Inform the tapster to inflame the reck'ning,
 Then the beast-eating clown, and next the fool,
 The bavian, with long tail and eke long tool;
Cum multis aliis that make a dance:
 Say 'ay,' and all shall presently advance."

Amongst the scattered allusions to the characters of this dance may be noticed that in "1 Henry IV." (iii. 3): - "And for woman-hood, Maid Marian may be the deputy's wife of the ward to thee,"—the allusion being to "the degraded Maid Marian of the later morris dance, more male than female."⁶⁵⁷

The "hobby-horse," another personage of the morris dance on May-day, was occasionally omitted, and appears to have given rise to a popular ballad, a line of which is given by Hamlet (iii. 2):—

"For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot."

This is quoted again in "Love's Labour's Lost" (iii. 1). The hobby horse was formed by a pasteboard horse's head, and a light frame made of wicker-work to join the hinder parts. This was fastened round the body of a man, and covered with a foot-cloth which nearly reached the ground and concealed the legs of the performer, who displayed his antic equestrian skill, and performed various juggling tricks to the amusement of the bystanders. In Sir Walter Scott's "Monastery" there is a spirited description of the "hobby horse."

The term "hobby horse" was applied to a loose woman, and in the "Winter's Tale" (i. 2) it is so used by Leontes, who says to Camillo:—

"Then say
 My wife's a hobby-horse, deserves a name
 As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
 Before her troth-plight."

In "Othello" (iv. 1), Bianca, speaking of Desdemona's handkerchief, says to Cassio: - "This is some minx's token, and I must take out the work? There; give it your hobbyhorse."

It seems also to have denoted a silly fellow, as in "Much Ado about Nothing" (iii. 2), where it is so used by Benedick.

Another character was Friar Tuck, the chaplain of Robin Hood, and as such is noticed in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (iv. 1), where one of the outlaws swears—

"By the bare scalp of Robin Hood's fat friar."

⁶⁵⁷ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 550.

He is also represented by Tollet as a Franciscan friar in the full clerical tonsure, for, as he adds, "When the parish priests were inhibited by the diocesan to assist in the May games, the Franciscans might give attendance, as being exempted from Episcopal jurisdiction."⁶⁵⁸

It was no uncommon occurrence, for metrical interludes of a comic species, and founded on the achievements of the outlaw Robin Hood, to be performed after the Morris, on the Maypole green. Mr Drake thinks that these interludes are alluded to in "Twelfth Night" (iii. 4), where Fabian exclaims on the approach of Sir Andrew Aguecheek with his challenge, "More matter for May morning."

Whitsuntide.—Apart from its observance as a religious festival, Whitsuntide was, in times past, celebrated with much ceremony. In the Catholic times of England, it was usual to dramatise the descent of the Holy Ghost, which this festival commemorates. A custom which we find alluded to in Barnaby Googe's translation of *Naogeorgus*;—

"On Whit-Sunday white pigeons tame in strings from heaven flie,
And one that framed is of wood still hangeth in the skie,
Thou seest how they with idols play, and teach the people too:
None otherwise than little girls with puppets used to do."

This custom appears to have been carried to an extravagant height in Spain, for Mr Fosbroke⁶⁵⁹ tells us that the gift of the Holy Ghost was represented by "thunder from engines which did much damage." Water, oak leaves, burning torches, wafers, and cakes, were thrown down from the church roof; pigeons and small birds with cakes tied to their legs were let loose; and a long censor was swung up and down. In our own country, many costly pageants were exhibited at this season. Thus, at Chester, the Whitsun Mysteries were acted during the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Whitsun week. The performers were carried from one place to another by means of a scaffold—a huge and ponderous machine mounted on wheels, gaily decorated with flags, and divided into two compartments—the upper of which formed the stage, and the lower, defended from vulgar curiosity by coarse canvas draperies, answered the purposes of a green room. To each craft in the city, a separate mystery was allotted. Thus, the drapers exhibited the "Creation," the tanners took the Fall of Lucifer, the water-carriers of the Dee acted the Deluge, etc. The production, too, of these pageants was extremely costly; indeed, each one has been set down at fifteen or twenty pounds sterling. An allusion to this custom is made in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (iv. 4), where Julia says:—

"—At Pentecost,
When all our pageants of delight were play'd,
Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
And I was trimm'd in Madam Julia's gown."

The Morris dance, too, was formerly a common accompaniment to the Whitsun ales, a practice which is still kept up in many parts of the country. In "Henry V." (ii. 4), the Dauphin thus alludes to it:—

"I say 'tis meet we all go forth
To view the sick and feeble parts of France
And let us do it with no show of fear;

⁶⁵⁸ See Drake's "Shakspeare and his Times," 1817, i. p. 163.

⁶⁵⁹ "Encyclopædia of Antiquities," 1843, ii. p. 653.

No, with no more than if we heard that England
Were busied with a Whitsun Morris dance.”

And once more in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4), Perdita says to Florizel:—

“Methinks I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun pastorals.”

A custom formerly kept up in connection with Whitsuntide was the “Whitsun ale.” Ale was so prevalent a drink amongst us in olden times as to become a part of the name of various festal meetings, as Leet ale, Lamb ale, Bride ale (bridal), and, as we see, Whitsun ale. Thus our ancestors were in the habit of holding parochial meetings every Whitsuntide, usually in some barn near the church, consisting of a kind of pic-nic, as each parishioner brought what victuals he could spare. The ale, which had been brewed pretty strong for the occasion, was sold by the churchwardens, and from its profits a fund arose for the repair of the church.

⁶⁶⁰These meetings are referred to by Shakespeare in “Pericles” (i. 1)—

“It hath been sung at festivals,
On ember-eves and holy ales”

In “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 5), when Launce tells Speed, “Thou hast not so much charity in thee as to go to the ale with a Christian,” these words have been explained to mean the rural festival so named, though, as Mr Dyce remarks (“Glossary,” p. 10), the previous words of Launce, “go with me to the ale-house,” shows this explanation to be wrong.

In the old miracle-plays performed at this and other seasons Herod was a favourite personage, and was generally represented as a tyrant of a very overbearing, violent character. Thus Hamlet says (iii. 2)—

“O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise: I would have such a fellow whipped for o’er-doing Termagant: it out-herods Herod.”

On this account Alexas mentions him as the most daring character when he tells Cleopatra (iii. 3)—

“Good majesty,
Herod of Jewry dare not look upon you
But when you are well pleased.”

In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 1), Mrs Page speaks of him in the same signification—

“What a Herod of Jewry is this!”

Mr Dyce in his “Glossary” (p. 207) has this note: - “If the reader wishes to know what a swaggering, uproarious tyrant Herod was represented to be in those old dramatic performances let him turn to ‘Magnus Herodes’ in ‘The Towneley Mysteries,’ p. 140, ed. Surtees Society; to ‘King Herod’ in the ‘Coventry Mysteries,’ p. 188, ed. Shakespeare Society; and to ‘The Slaughter of the Innocents’ in ‘The Chester Plays,’ vol. i., p. 172, ed. Shakespeare Society.”

⁶⁶⁰ See “British Popular Customs,” p. 278; Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, i. p. 276.

Like Herod, Termagant⁶⁶¹ was a hectoring tyrant of the miracle plays, and as such is mentioned by Hamlet in the passage quoted above. Hence in course of time the word was used as an adjective, in the sense of violent, as in “1 Henry IV.” (v. 4), “this hot Termagant Scot.” Hall mentions him in his first satire—

“Nor fright the reader with the Pagan vaunt
Of mighty Mahound and great Termagaunt.”

Whilst speaking of the old mysteries or miracle-plays we may also here refer to the moralities, a class of religious plays in which allegorical personifications of the virtues, and vices were introduced as dramatis personæ. These personages at first only took part in the play along with the Scriptural or legendary characters, but afterwards entirely superseded them. They continued in fashion till the time of Queen Elizabeth. Several allusions are given by Shakespeare to these moral plays. Thus, in “Twelfth Night” (iv. 1), the Clown sings—

“I am gone, sir,
And anon, sir,
I’ll be with you again
In a trice,
Like to the old Vice,
Your need to sustain;

Who, with dagger of lath,
In his rage and his wrath,
Cries, ah, ha! to the devil,” etc.

Again, in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), Prince Henry speaks of that “reverend vice, that grey iniquity;” and ill “2 Henry IV.” (iii. 2), Falstaff says, “Now is this vice’s dagger become a squire.”

Again, further allusions occur in “King Richard III.,” (iii. 1). Gloucester says,—

“Thus, like the formal vice, Iniquity,
I moralize two meanings in one word.”

And once more, Hamlet (iii. 4), speaks of “a Vice of kings,” “a king of shreds and patches.”

According to Nares, “vice” had the name sometimes of one vice, sometimes of another, but most commonly of *Iniquity*, or Vice itself. He was grotesquely dressed in a cap with ass’s ears, a long coat, and a dagger of lath. One of his chief employments was to make sport with the devil, leaping on his back, and belabouring him with his dagger of lath, till he made him roar. The devil, however, always carried him off in the end. He was, in short, the buffoon of the morality, and was succeeded in his office by the clown, whom we see in Shakespeare and others.⁶⁶²

Again, there may be a further allusion to the “moralities in “King Lear,” (ii. 2), where Kent says to Oswald, “Take vanity, the puppet’s part against the royalty of her father.”

Then, too, there were the “pageants,”—shows which were usually performed in the highways of our towns, and assimilated in some degree to the miracle plays, but were of a more mixed character, being partly drawn from profane history. According to Strutt they were more frequent in London, being required at stated periods, such as the setting of the Midsummer

⁶⁶¹ According to the crusaders and the old romance writers a Saracen deity.—See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ix. p. 214.

⁶⁶² See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 482.

Watch, and the Lord Mayor's show.⁶⁶³ Among the allusions to these shows given by Shakespeare, we may quote one in "Richard III," (iv. 4), where Queen Margaret speaks of—
 "The flattering index of a direful pageant"

—the pageants displayed on public occasions being generally preceded by a brief account of the order in which the characters were to walk. These indexes were distributed among the spectators, that they might understand the meaning of such allegorical representations as were usually exhibited. In the "Merchant of Venice," (i. 1), Salarino calls argosies "the pageants of the sea," in allusion, says Douce,⁶⁶⁴ "to those enormous machines, in the shapes of castles, dragons, ships, giants, etc., that were drawn about the streets in the ancient shows or pageants, and which often constituted the most important part of them." Again, in "As You Like It," (iii. 4), Corin says:—

"If you will see a pageant truly play'd,
 Between the pale complexion of true love
 And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain,
 Go hence a little and I shall conduct you,
 If you will mark it."

And in "Antony and Cleopatra," (iv. 14), Antony speaks of "black vesper's pageants."

The nine worthies, originally comprising Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus, Hector, Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bulloigne, appear from a very, early period to have been introduced occasionally in the shows and pageants of our ancestors. Thus, in "Love's Labour's Lost," (v. 2), the "pageant of the nine worthies" is introduced. As Shakespeare, however, introduces Hercules and Pompey among his presence of worthies, we may infer that the characters were sometimes varied to suit the circumstances of the period, or the taste of the auditory. A MS. preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, mentions the "Six Worthies" having been played before the Lord Deputy Sussex in 1557.⁶⁶⁵

Another feature of the Whitsun merrymakings were the Cotswold games, which were generally on the Thursday in Whitsun week, in the vicinity of Chipping Campden. They were instituted by an attorney of Burton-on-the-Heath, in Warwickshire, named Robert Dover, and like the Olympic games of the ancients, consisted of most kinds of manly sports, such as wrestling, leaping, pitching the bar, handling the pike, dancing, and hunting. Ben Jonson, Drayton, and other poets of that age wrote verses on this festivity, which in 1636 were collected into one volume, and published under the name of "Annalia Dubrensis."⁶⁶⁶ In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (i. 1), Slender asks Page, "How does your fallow greyhound, sir? I heard say he was outrun on Cotsall?" And in "2 Henry IV."⁶⁶⁷ (iii. 1), Shallow, by distinguishing Will Squele as "a Cotswold man," meant to imply that he was well versed in manly exercises, and consequently of a daring spirit and athletic constitution. A sheep was jocularly called a "Cotsold," or "Cotswold lion," from the extensive pastures in that part of Gloucestershire.

Whilst speaking of Whitsuntide festivities, we may refer to the "roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly," to which Prince Henry alludes in "1 Henry IV." (ii. 4).⁶⁶⁸ It appears

⁶⁶³ "Sports and Pastimes," 1876, pp. 25–28; see Warton's "History of English Poetry," ii. p. 202.

⁶⁶⁴ "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 154.

⁶⁶⁵ Staunton's "Shakespeare," 1864, i. pp. 147, 148.

⁶⁶⁶ See "Book of Days," i. p. 712.

⁶⁶⁷ See Singer's "Shakespeare," v. p. 206.

⁶⁶⁸ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 506.

that Manningtree, in Essex, formerly enjoyed the privilege of fairs, by the tenure of exhibiting a certain number of Stage Plays yearly. There were, also, great festivities there, and much good eating, at Whitsun ales and other times. Hence, it seems that roasting an ox whole was not uncommon on such occasions. The pudding spoken of by Prince Henry often accompanied the ox, as we find in a ballad written in 1658 ⁶⁶⁹—

“Just so the people stare
At an ox in the fair
Roasted whole with a pudding in ‘s belly.”

Sheep-shearing Time commences as soon as the warm weather is so far settled that the sheep may, without danger, lay aside their winter clothing; the following tokens being laid down by Dyer in his “Fleece” (book i.), to mark out the proper time ⁶⁷⁰—

”If verdant elder spreads
Her silver flowers; if humble daisies yield
To yellow crowfoot and luxuriant grass
Gay shearing time approaches.”

Our ancestors, who took advantage of every natural holiday, to keep it long and gladly, celebrated the time of sheep-shearing by a feast exclusively rural. Drayton, the countryman of Shakespeare, has graphically described this festive scene, the Vale of Evesham being the locality of the sheep-shearing which he has pictured so pleasantly—

“The shepherd king,
Whose flock hath chanc’d that year the earliest lamb to bring,
In his gay baldric sits at his low grassy board.
With flawns, curds, clouted cream, and country dainties stored;
And whilst the bag-pipe plays, each lusty jocund swain
Quaffs syllabubs in cans, to all upon the plain,
And to their country girls, whose nosegays they do wear;
Some roundelays do sing; the rest the burthen bear.”⁶⁷¹

In the “Winter’s Tale,” one of the most delicious scenes (iv. 4), is that of the sheep-shearing, in which we have the more poetical “shepherd-queen.” Mr Furnivall,⁶⁷² in his introduction to this play justly remarks: “How happily it brings Shakespeare before us, mixing with his Stratford neighbours at their sheep-shearing and country sports, enjoying the vagabond pedlar’s gammon and talk, delighting in the sweet Warwickshire maidens, and buying them ‘fairings,’ telling goblin stories to the boys, ‘There was a man dwelt in a churchyard,’ opening his heart afresh to all the innocent mirth, and the beauty of nature around him.” The expense attaching to these festivities appears to have afforded matter of complaint. Thus the Clown asks, “What am I to buy for our sheep-shearing feast?” and then proceeds to enumerate various things which he will have to purchase. In Tusser’s “Five Hundred Points of Husbandry,” this festival is described under “The Ploughman’s Feast-days.”

“Wife, make us a dinner, spare flesh neither come,
Make wafers and cakes, for our sheep must be shorne;

⁶⁶⁹ See Nichol’s “Collection of Poems,” 1780, iii. p. 204.

⁶⁷⁰ See Knight’s “Life of Shakespeare,” 1845, p. 71; Howitt’s “Pictorial Calendar of the Seasons,” 1854, pp. 254–267.

⁶⁷¹ “Polyolbion,” song 14, see Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, ii. p. 34; Timbs’ “A Garland for the Year,” pp. 74, 75.

⁶⁷² Introduction to the “Leopold Shakspeare,” p. xci.

At sheepe-shearing, neighbours none other things crave,
But good cheere and welcome like neighbours to have.”

Midsummer Eve appears to have been regarded as a period when the imagination ran riot, and many a curious superstition was associated with this season. Thus people gathered on this night the rose, St John’s wort, vervain, trefoil and rue, all of which were supposed to have magical properties. They set the orpine in clay upon pieces of slate or potsherd in their houses, calling it a “Midsummer man.” As the stalk was found next morning to incline to the right or left, the anxious maiden knew whether her lover would prove true to her or not. Young men sought also for pieces of coal, but in reality certain hard, black, dead roots, often found under the living mug-wort, designing to place these under their pillows, that they might dream of themselves.⁶⁷³ It was also supposed that any person fasting on Mid-summer eve, and sitting in the church porch, would at midnight see the spirits of those persons of that parish who would die that year, come and knock at the church door, in the order and succession in which they would die. Midsummer was formerly thought to be a season productive of madness. Thus Malvolio’s strange conduct is described by Olivia in “*Twelfth Night*” (iii. 4) as “a very midsummer madness.” And hence, “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” is no inappropriate title for “the series of wild incongruities of which the play consists.”⁶⁷⁴ The Low Dutch have a proverb that when men have passed a troublesome night’s rest, and could not sleep, “they have passed St John Baptist’s night”—that is, they have not taken any sleep, but watched all night. Heywood seems to allude to a similar notion when he says—

“As mad as a March hare: where madness compares,
Are not midsummer hares as mad as March hares?”

A proverbial phrase, too, to signify that a person was mad was, “‘Tis midsummer moon with you”—hot weather being supposed to affect the brain.

Dog-days.—A popular superstition—in all probability derived from the Egyptians—referred to the rising and setting of Sirius, or the Dog-star, as infusing madness into the canine race. Consequently the name of “Dog-days” was given by the Romans to the period between the 3d July and nth August, to which Shakespeare alludes in “*Henry VIII.*” (v. 4), “the dog-days now reign.” It is obvious that the notion is utterly groundless, for not only does the star vary in its rising, but is later and later every year. According to the Roman belief, “at the rising of the dog-star, the seas boil, the wines ferment in the cellars, and standing waters are set in motion; the dogs also go mad, and the sturgeon is blasted.” The term dog-days is still a common phrase, and it is difficult to say whether it is from superstitious adherence to old custom, or from a belief of the injurious effect of heat upon the canine race that the magistrates often unwisely at this season of the year, order them to be muzzled or tied up.

Lammas Day (August 1).—According to some antiquarians, Lammas is a corruption of loaf-mass, as our ancestors made an offering of bread from new wheat on this day. Others derive it from lamb-masse, because the tenants who held lands under the Cathedral Church of York, were bound by their tenure to bring a live lamb into the church at high mass.⁶⁷⁵ It appears to have been a popular day in times past; and is mentioned in the following dialogue in “*Romeo and Juliet*” (i. 3), where the Nurse enquires—

“How long is it now
To Lammas-tide?”

La. Capulet. A fortnight, and odd days

⁶⁷³ “*Book of Days*,” i. p. 816. See Brand’s “*Pop. Antiq.*,” i. p. 314; Soane’s “*Book of the Months.*”

⁶⁷⁴ See Brand’s “*Pop. Antiq.*,” 1849, 1. pp. 336–337

⁶⁷⁵ See “*British Popular Customs*,” pp. 347–351.

Nurse. Even or odd, of all days in the year,
Come Lammas-eve at night, shall she be fourteen.”

In Neale’s “Essays on Liturgiology” (2nd ed., p. 526), the Welsh equivalent for Lammas Day is given as “dydd degwm wyn,” lamb-tithing day.

St Charity (August 1).—This saint is found in the Martyrology on the first of August - “Romæ passio Sanctarum Virginum Fidei, Spei, et Charitatis, quæ sub Hadriano principe martyriæ coronam adeptæ sunt.”⁶⁷⁶She is alluded to by Ophelia in her song in “Hamlet” (iv. 5)—

“By Gis,⁶⁷⁷ and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame,” &c.

In the “Faire Maide of Bristowe,” 1605, we find a similar allusion—

“Now by Saint Charity, if I were iudge,
A halter were the least should hamper him.”

St Bartholomew’s Day (August 24).—The anniversary of this festival was formerly signalized by the holding of the great Smithfield Fair—the only real fair held within the city of London. One of the chief attractions of Bartholomew Fair were roasted pigs. They were sold “piping hot, in booths and on stalls, and ostentatiously displayed to excite the appetite of passengers.” Hence a “Bartholomew pig,” became a popular subject of allusion. Falstaff, in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), in coaxing ridicule of his enormous figure, is playfully called by his favourite Doll—

“Thou whoreson, little, tidy Bartholomew boar-pig.”

Dr Johnson, however, thought that paste pigs were meant in this passage, but this is improbable, as the true Bartholomew pigs were real roasted pigs, as may be seen from Ben Jonson’s play of “Bartholomew Fair,” (i. 6), where Ursula, the pigwoman, is an important personage.⁶⁷⁸Gay, too, speaks of the pig-dressers: - “Like Bartholomew fair pig-dressers, who look like the dams, as well as the cooks of what they roasted.” A further allusion to this season is found in “Henry V.,” (v. 2), where Burgundy tells how “maids, well-summered, and warm kept, are like flies at Bartholomew-tide, blind, though they have eyes; and then they will endure handling, which before would not abide looking on.”

Harvest Home.—The ceremonies which graced the in-gathering of the harvest in bygone times have gradually disappeared, and at the present day only remnants of the old usages which once prevailed are still preserved. Shakespeare, who has chronicled so many of our old customs, and seems to have had a special delight in illustrating his writings with these characteristics of our social life, has given several interesting allusions to the observances which in his day graced the harvest field. Thus, in Warwickshire, the labourers at their harvest home appointed a judge to try misdemeanours committed during harvest, and those who were sentenced to punishment were placed on a bench and beaten with a pair of boots. Hence the ceremony was called “giving them the boots.” It has been suggested that this custom is alluded to in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona,” (i. 1), where he makes Proteus, parrying Valentine’s raillery, say, “Nay, give me not the boots.”

⁶⁷⁶ Douglas’s “Criterion,” p. 68, cited by Ritson. See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 475.

⁶⁷⁷ This is perhaps a corrupt abbreviation of “By Jesus.” Some would read “By Cis,” and understand by it “St Cicely.”

⁶⁷⁸ See Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 57; Morley’s “Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair,” 1859.

In Northamptonshire, when anyone misconducted himself in the field during harvest, he was subjected to a mock trial at the harvest-home feast, and condemned to be booted, a description of which we find in the introduction to Clare's "Village Minstrel": - "A long form is placed in the kitchen, upon which the boys who have worked well sit, as a terror and disgrace to the rest, in a bent posture, with their hands laid on each other's backs, forming a bridge for the "hogs," (as the truant boys are called), to pass over; while a strong chap stands on each side with a boot-legging, soundly strapping them as they scuffle over the bridge, which is done as fast as their ingenuity can carry them." Some, however, think the allusion in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" is to the diabolical torture of the boot. Not a great while before this play was written, it had been inflicted, says Douce,⁶⁷⁹ in the presence of King James on one Dr Fian, a supposed wizard, who was charged with raising the storms that the king encountered in his return from Denmark. The unfortunate man was afterwards burned. This horrible torture, we are told,⁶⁸⁰ consisted in the leg and knee of the criminal being enclosed within a tight iron boot or case, wedges of iron being then driven in with a mallet between the knee and the iron boot. Sir Walter Scott, in "Old Mortality," has given a description of Macbriar undergoing this punishment. At a later period "the boot" signified, according to Nares,⁶⁸¹ an instrument for tightening the leg or hand, and was used as a cure for the gout, and called a "bootikins." The phrase "to give the boots" seems to have been a proverbial expression, signifying "don't make a laughing stock of me; don't play upon me."

Again, in the "Merchant of Venice" (v. 1), where Lorenzo says—

"Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music"

we have, doubtless, an allusion to the "Hock Cart" of the old harvest-home. This was the cart which carried the last corn away from the harvest field;⁶⁸² and was generally profusely decorated and accompanied by music, old and young shouting at the top of their voices a doggerel after the following fashion—

"We have ploughed, we have sowed,
We have reaped, we have mowed,
We have brought home every load,
Hip, hip, hip! harvest home."⁶⁸³

In "Poor Robin's Almanack" for August 1676, we read—

"Hoacky is brought home with hallowing,
Boys with plumb-cake the cart following,"

Holyrood-Day (September 14).—This festival,⁶⁸⁴ called also Holy-Cross-day, was instituted by the Romish Church on account of the recovery of a large piece of the supposed cross by the Emperor Heraclius, after it had been taken away, on the plundering of Jerusalem, by

⁶⁷⁹ "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 21.

⁶⁸⁰ Dyce's "Glossary," p. 47; Douce has given a representation of this instrument of torture from Millceus's "Praxis Criminis Persequendi," Paris, 1541.

⁶⁸¹ "Glossary," i. p. 95.

⁶⁸² Cf., "1 Henry IV." (i. 3)—

"His chin, new reap'd,
Show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home."

⁶⁸³ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, ii. pp. 16–33.

⁶⁸⁴ See "British Pop. Customs," pp. 372, 373. In Lincolnshire this day is called "Hally-Loo-Day."

Chosroes, king of Persia. Among the customs associated with this day was one of going-a-nutting, alluded to in the old play of "Grim the Collier of Croydon" (ii. 1)—

"To-morrow is Holy-rood-day,
When all a-nutting take their way."

Shakespeare mentions this festival in "1 Henry IV." (i. 1), where he represents the Earl of Westmoreland relating how—

"On Holyrood day, the gallant Hotspur there,
Young Harry Percy and brave Archibald,
That ever-valiant and approved Scot,
At Holmedon met."

St Lambert's-Day (September 17).—This saint, whose original name was Landebert, but contracted into Lambert, was a native of Maestricht, in the seventh century, and was assassinated early in the eighth.⁶⁸⁵ His festival is alluded to in "Richard II." (i. 1), where the king says—

"Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
At Coventry, upon St Lambert's day."

Michaelmas.—In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (i. 1), this festival is alluded to by Simple, who, in answer to Slender, whether he had "The Book of Riddles" about him, replies - "Why, did you not lend it to Alice Shortcake upon All-hallowmas last, a fortnight afore Michaelmas." This doubtless being an intended blunder.

In "1 Henry IV." (ii. 4), Francis says - "Let me see—about Michaelmas I shall be - "

St Etheldreda, or *Audry*, commemorated in the Romish Calendar on the 23d of June, but in the English Calendar on the 17th of October, was daughter of Annas, king of the East Angles. She founded the convent and Church of Ely on the spot where the cathedral was subsequently erected. Formerly, at Ely, a fair was annually held, called in her memory St Audry's Fair, at which much cheap lace was sold to the poorer classes, which at first went by the name of St Audry's lace, but in time was corrupted into "tawdry lace." Shakespeare makes an allusion to this lace in the "Winter's Tale," (iv. 4), where Mopsa says,—

"Come, you promised me a tawdry lace, and a pair of sweet gloves"

although in his time the expression rather meant a rustic necklace.⁶⁸⁶ An old English historian makes St Audry die of a swelling in her throat, which she considered as a particular judgment for having been in her youth addicted to wearing fine necklaces.⁶⁸⁷

St Crispin's Day (October 25th), has for centuries been a red-letter day in the calendar of the shoemakers, being the festival of their patron saint. According to tradition, the brothers Crispin and Crispinian, natives of Rome, having become converted to Christianity, travelled to Soissons, in France, in order to preach the Gospel. Being desirous, however, of rendering themselves independent, they earned their daily bread by making shoes, with which, it is said, they furnished the poor at an extremely low price. When the governor of the town discovered that they maintained the Christian faith, and also tried to make proselytes of the inhabitants, he ordered them to be beheaded. From this time the shoemakers have chosen them for their

⁶⁸⁵ See Butler's "Lives of the Saints."

⁶⁸⁶ See Nares's "Glossary," ii. p. 868; Brady's "Clavis Calendaria."

⁶⁸⁷ Nich Harpsfield, "Hist. Eccl. Anglicana," p. 86.

tutelary saints. Shakespeare has perpetuated the memory of this festival by the speech which he has given to Henry V., before the battle of Agincourt (iv. 3),—

“This day is call’d the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a-tip-toe when this day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say, ‘To-morrow is Saint Crispian!’”

St Dennis has been adopted as the patron saint of France (October 9th), in the same manner as the English have chosen St George. The guardianship of the two countries is thus expressed in the chorus to the old ballad,—

“St George he was for England,
St Denis was France,
Singing, Honi soit qui mal y pense.”

King Henry (“Henry V.,” v. 2), says to Kate, “Shall not thou and I, between St Dennis and St George, compound a boy, half French, half English,” etc. In “1 Henry VI.,” (iii. 2), Charles says,—

“St Dennis bless this happy stratagem,
And once again we’ll sleep secure in Rouen.”

Hallowmas (November 1) is one of the names for the feast of All-hallows, that is All Saints. Shakespeare alludes to a custom relative to this day, some traces of which are still to be found in Staffordshire, Cheshire, and other counties. The poor people go from parish to parish *a-souling*, as they term it, that is, begging, in a certain lamentable tone, for soul-cakes, at the same time singing a song which they call the souler’s song. This practice is no doubt a remnant of the Popish ceremony of praying for departed souls, especially those of friends, on the ensuing day, November 2nd, the feast of All Souls.⁶⁸⁸ The following is a specimen of the doggerel sung on these occasions—

“Soul! soul! for a soul cake;
Pray, good mistress, for a soul cake.
One for Peter, and two for Paul,
Three for them who made us all.
Soul! soul! for an apple or two;
If you’ve got no apples, pears will do.
Up with your kettle, and down with your pan,
Give me a good big one, and I’ll be gone.
Soul! soul! for a soul cake, &c.

An apple, a pear, a plum, or a cherry,
Is a very good thing to make us merry.”

In the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 1), Speed thus speaks of this practice - “To watch, like one that fears robbing; to speak puling,⁶⁸⁹ like a beggar at Hallowmas.”

⁶⁸⁸ See “British Popular Customs,” p. 404.

⁶⁸⁹ Puling, or singing small, as Bailey explains the word.

The season of Hallowmas having been frequently mild has been, from time immemorial, proverbially called "All-hallown Summer," *i.e.*, late summer. Thus,⁶⁹⁰ in "1 Henry IV." (i. 2), Prince Henry, likening Falstaff, with his old age and young passions to this November summer, addresses him: - "Farewell, thou latter spring; farewell, thou All Hallown summer." In some parts of Germany there is a proverb, "All Saints' Day brings the second summer; and in Sweden there is often about this time a continuance of warm still weather, which is called "the All Saints' rest."

There is another reference to this festival in "Richard II." (v. 1), where the king says of his wife—

"She came adorned hither like sweet May,
Sent back like Hallowmas or short'st of day."

All Souls' Day (November 2d.),—which is set apart by the Roman Catholic Church for a solemn service for the repose of the dead, was formerly observed in this country, and among the many customs celebrated in its honour were ringing the passing bell, making soul-cakes, blessing beans, &c.⁶⁹¹ In "Richard III." (v. 1), Buckingham, when led to execution, says—

"This is All Souls' Day, fellows, is it not?"

to which the sheriff replies—

"It is, my lord"

whereupon Buckingham says—

"Why, then, All Souls' Day is my body's doomsday."

Lord Mayor's Day (November 9th). A custom which was in days gone by observed at the inauguration dinner was that of the Lord Mayor's fool leaping, clothes and all, into a large bowl of custard. It is alluded to in "All's Well that Ends Well," (ii. 5), by Lafeu, - "You have made shift to run int 't, boots and spurs and all, like him that leaped into the custard." Ben Jonson, in his "Devil's an Ass" (i. 1), thus refers to it:—

"He may, perchance, in tail of a sheriff's dinner,
Skip with a rime o' the table, from new nothing,
And take his almain leap into a custard,
Shall make my lady mayoress and her sisters,
Laugh all their hoods over their shoulders."

St Martin's Day (November 11th).—The mild weather about this time has given rise to numerous proverbs; one of the well-known ones being, "St Martin's little summer," an allusion to which we find in "1 Henry VI." (i. 2), where Joan of Arc says—

"Expect St Martin's summer, halcyon days"

which Johnson paraphrases thus - "Expect prosperity after misfortune, like fair weather at Martlemas, after winter has begun." As an illustration, too, of this passage, we may quote from the "Times," October 6, 1864 - "It was one of those rare but lovely exceptions to a cold season, called in the Mediterranean St Martin's summer."

A corruption of Martinmas is Martlemas. Falstaff is jocularly so called by Poins, in "2 Henry IV." (ii. 2), as being in the decline, as the year is at this season—

⁶⁹⁰ See Swainson's "Weather Lore," 1873, pp. 141-143.

⁶⁹¹ See "British Popular Customs," p. 409.

“And how doth the martlemas, your master.”

This was the customary time for hanging up provisions to dry, which had been salted for winter provision.

St Nicholas (December 6th).—This saint was deemed the patron of children in general, but more particularly of all schoolboys, amongst whom his festival used to be a very great holiday. Various reasons have been assigned for his having been chosen as the patron of children,—either because the legend makes him to have been a bishop while yet a boy, or from his having restored three young scholars to life who had been cruelly murdered,⁶⁹² or again, on account of his early abstinence when a boy. In the “Two Gentlemen of Verona,” (iii. 1), he is alluded to in this capacity,—

“*Seed*. Come, fool, come; try me in thy paper,
Launce. There: and Saint Nicholas be thy speed.”

Nicholas’ clerks was, and still is, a cant term for highwaymen and robbers; but though the expression is very common, its origin is a matter of uncertainty. In “1 Henry IV.,” (ii. 1), it is thus alluded to,—

“*Gadshill*. Sirrah, if they meet not with Saint Nicholas’ clerks, I’ll give thee this neck.
Chamb. No, I’ll none of it: I pray thee, keep that for the hangman: for I know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas as truly as a man of falsehood may.”

Christmas.—Among the observances associated with this season to which Shakespeare alludes, we may mention the Christmas Carol, a reference to which is probably made in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” (ii. 1), by Titania, - “No night is now with hymn or carol blest.” Hamlet (ii. 2) quotes two lines from a popular ballad, entitled the “Song of Jephtha’s Daughter,” and adds,—

“The first row of the pious chanson will show you more.”⁶⁹³

In days gone by, the custom of carol-singing was most popular, and Warton, in his “History of English Poetry,” notices a licence granted in 1562 to John Tysdale for printing “Certayne goodly carowles to be songe to the glory of God;” and again “Crestenmas Carowles auctorisshed by my lord of London.”⁶⁹⁴

In the “Taming of the Shrew,” (ind., sc. 2), Sly asks whether “a comonty⁶⁹⁵ is not a Christmas gambol.” Formerly the sports and merry-makings at this season were on a most extensive scale, being presided over by the “Lord of Misrule.”⁶⁹⁶ Again, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” (v. 2), Biron speaks of “A Christmas Comedy.”

As we have noticed, too, in our chapter on plants, a gilt nutmeg was formerly a common gift at Christmas, and on other festive occasions, to which an allusion is probably made in the same scene. Formerly, at this season, the head of the house assembled his family around a bowl of spiced ale, from which he drank their healths, then passed it to the rest, that they might drink too. The word that passed amongst them was the ancient Saxon phrase *wass hael*, *i.e.*, to your health. Hence this came to be recognised as the wassail or wassel-bowl; and

⁶⁹² See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 25; “The Church of Our Fathers,” by D. Rock, 1853, iii. p. 215; “Gent. Mag.,” 1777, xliii. p. 158; see Nares’s “Glossary,” ii. pp. 601–2; Brady’s “Clavis Calendaria.”

⁶⁹³ Drake’s “Shakspeare and his Times,” i. p. 198.

⁶⁹⁴ See Sandy’s “Christmastide, its History, Festivities, and Carols;” also “Athenæum,” Dec. 20, 1856.

⁶⁹⁵ His blunder for Comedy.

⁶⁹⁶ See “British Popular Customs,” 1876, pp. 459, 463; Nares’s “Glossary,” ii. p. 943; “Antiquarian Repertory,” i. p. 218.

was the accompaniment to festivity of every kind throughout the year. Thus Hamlet (i. 4) says—

“The king doth wake to-night, and takes his rouse,⁶⁹⁷
Keeps wassail.”

And in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), Biron speaks of—

“Wakes and wassails, meetings, markets, fairs.”

In “Macbeth” (i. 7), it is used by Lady Macbeth in the sense of intemperance, who, speaking of Duncan’s two chamberlains, says—

“Will I with wine and wassel so convince,
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only.”

In “Antony and Cleopatra” (i. 4), Cæsar advises Antony to live more temperately, and to leave his “lascivious wassails.”⁶⁹⁸

In the same way a “wassail candle” denoted a large candle lighted up at a festival, a reference to which occurs in “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2)—

“*Ch. Jus.* You are as a candle, the better part burnt out.
Falstaff. A wassail candle, my lord, all tallow.”

A custom which formerly prevailed at Christmas, and has not yet died out, was for mummers to go from house to house attired in grotesque attire, performing all kind of odd antics.⁶⁹⁹ Their performances, however, were not confined to this season. Thus, in “Coriolanus” (ii. 1) Menenius speaks of making “faces like mummers.”

Cakes and Ale.—It was formerly customary on holidays and saints’ days to make cakes in honour of the day. In “Twelfth Night” (ii. 3), Sir Toby says - “Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?” To which the Clown replies - “Yes, by St Anne; and ginger shall be hot i’ the mouth too.”

Wakes.—In days gone by, the church wake was an important institution, and was made the occasion for a thorough holiday. Each church, when consecrated, was dedicated to a saint, and on the anniversary of that day was kept the wake. In many places there was a second wake on the birthday of the saint. At such seasons, the floor of the church was strewed with rushes and flowers, and in the churchyard tents were erected to supply cakes and ale for the use of the merrymakers on the following day, which was kept as a holiday. They are still kept up in many parishes, but in a very different manner.⁷⁰⁰ In “King Lear” (iii. 6), Edgar says - “Come, march to wakes and fairs, and market towns.” We may also compare “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), and “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 2). In “Hamlet” (i. 4), it is used in the sense of revel.

⁶⁹⁷ This was a deep draught to the health of anyone, in which it was customary to empty the glass or vessel.

⁶⁹⁸ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, pp. 441–449.

⁶⁹⁹ See “British Popular Customs,” pp. 461, 469, 478, 480.

⁷⁰⁰ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, i. pp. 1–15.

12. Birth And Baptism

As every period of human life has its peculiar rites and ceremonies, its customs and superstitions, so has that ever all-eventful hour which heralds the birth of a fresh actor upon the world's great stage. From the cradle to the grave, through all the successive epochs of man's existence, we find a series of traditional beliefs and popular notions, which have been handed down to us from the far-off distant past. Although, indeed, these have lost much of their meaning in the lapse of years, yet in many cases they are survivals of primitive culture, and embody the conceptions of the ancestors of the human race. Many of these have been recorded by Shakespeare, who, acting upon the great principle of presenting his audience with matters familiar to them, has given numerous illustrations of the manners and superstitions of his own country, as they existed in his day. Thus, in "Richard III.," (iii. 1), when he represents the Duke of Gloucester saying

"So wise so young, they say, do never live long"

he alludes to the old superstition, still deeply rooted in the minds of the lower orders, that a clever child never lives long. In Bright's "Treatise of Melancholy," (1586, p. 52), we read, - "I have knowne children languishing of the splene, obstructed and altered in temper, talke with gravity and wisdom surpassing those tender years, and their judgments carrying a marvellous imitation of the wisdome of the ancient, having after a sort attained that by disease, which others have by course of yeares; whereof I take it the proverb ariseth, that 'they be of shorte life who are of wit so pregnant.'" There are sundry superstitious notions relating to the teething of children prevalent in our own and other countries. In "3 Henry VI.," (v. 6), the Duke of Gloucester, alluding to the peculiarities connected with his birth relates how—

"The midwife wonder'd, and the women cried
'O, Jesu bless us, he is born with teeth!
And so I was; which plainly signified
That I should snarl and bite and play the dog."

It is still believed, for instance, in many places, that if a child's first tooth appears in the upper jaw, it is an omen of its dying in infancy; and when the teeth come early, it is regarded as indication that there will soon be another baby. In Sussex there is a dislike to throwing away the cast teeth of children, from a notion that should they be found and gnawed by any animal, the child's new tooth would be exactly like the animal's that had bitten the old one. In Durham, when the first teeth come out, the cavities must be filled with salt, and each tooth burned, while the following words are repeated,—

"Fire, fire, burn bone,
God send me my tooth again."

In the above passage, then, Shakespeare simply makes the Duke of Gloucester refer to that extensive folk-lore associated with human birth, showing how careful an observer he was in noticing the whims and oddities of his countrymen.

Again, one of the foremost dangers supposed to hover round the new born infant, was the propensity of witches and fairies, to steal the most beautiful and well-favoured children, and to leave in their places such as were ugly and stupid. These were usually called "changelings." Shakespeare alludes to this notion in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1), where Puck says:—

“Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling.”

And further on in the same scene Oberon says:—

“I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my henchman.”

As a fairy is in each case the speaker, the changeling in this case denotes the child taken by them. So, too, in the “Winter’s Tale” (iii. 3), in the passage where the shepherd relates: - “It was told me I should be rich by the fairies: This is some changeling open’t.” As the child here found was a beautiful one, the changeling must naturally mean the child stolen by the fairies, especially as the gold left with it, is conjectured to be fairy gold. The usual signification, however, of the term *changeling*, is thus marked by Spenser (“Faerie Queene” I. x. 65):—

“From thence a faery thee unweeting reft,
There as thou slepst in tender swadling band,
And her base elfin brood there for thee left:
Such men do chaungelings call, so chaunged by faeries theft.”

Occasionally, fairies played pranks with new-born children by exchanging them. To this notion Henry the Fourth refers (“1 Henry IV.” i. 1), when, speaking of Hotspur compared with his own profligate son, he exclaims:—

“O that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle clothes our children where they lay
And call’d mine Percy, his Plantagenet.”

To induce the fairies to restore the stolen child, it was customary in Ireland, either to put the one supposed of being a changeling on a hot shovel, or to torment it in some other way. It seems that, in Denmark, the mother heats the oven, and places the changeling on the peel, pretending to put it in, or whips it severely with a rod, or throws it into the water. In the Western Isles of Scotland, idiots are supposed to be the fairies’ changelings, and, in order to regain the lost child, parents have recourse to the following device. They place the changeling on the beach, below high-water mark, when the tide is out, and pay no heed to its screams, believing that the fairies, rather than suffer their offspring to be drowned by the rising water, will convey it away and restore the child they had stolen. The sign that this has been done is the cessation of the child’s screaming. The most effectual preservative, however, against fairy influence is supposed to be baptism, and hence among the superstitious this rite is performed as soon as possible.

A form of superstition very common in days gone by was the supposed influence of the “Evil eye;” being designated by the terms “o’erlooked,” “forelooked,” or “eye-bitten,” certain persons being thought to possess the power of inflicting injury by merely looking on those whom they wished to harm. Even the new-born child was not exempt from this danger, and various charms were practised to avert it. In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 5), Pistol says of Falstaff—

“Vile worm, thou wast o’erlook’d even at thy birth.”

This piece of folk-lore may be traced back to the time of the Romans, and in the late Professor Conington’s translation of the “Satires of Persius” it is thus spoken of: - “Look here! a grandmother or a superstitious aunt has taken baby from his cradle, and is charming his forehead against mischief by the joint action of her middle-finger and her purifying

spittle; for she knows right well how to check the evil eye.”⁷⁰¹It is again alluded to in the “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 2), where Portia, expressing to Bassanio her feelings of regard, declares:—

“Beshrew your eyes,
They have o’erlooked me and divided me:
One half of me is yours, the other half yours.”

and in “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 1), Aaron speaks of Tamora as—

“Faster bound to Aaron’s charming eyes
Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus.”

This superstition, however, is not yet obsolete, but lingers on in many country places.

We may also compare a similar phrase made use of by “Cleopatra” (iii. 7), in answer to Enobarbus: - “Thou hast forspoke my being in these wars,” the word *forespeak* having anciently had the meaning of charm or bewitch, like *forbid* in “Macbeth” (i. 3); “he shall live a man forbid.”⁷⁰²

Among the numerous customs associated with the birth of a child, may be mentioned the practice of giving presents at the announcement of this important event. In “King Henry VIII.” (v. 1), on the old lady’s making known to the king the happy tidings of the birth of a princess, he says to Lovell:—

“Give her an hundred marks. I’ll to the queen.”

The old lady, however, resents what she considers a paltry sum:—

“An hundred marks! By this light I’ll ha’ more.
An ordinary groom is for such payment.
I will have more, or scold it out of him.”

It was an ancient custom—one which is not quite out of use—for the sponsors at christenings to offer silver or gilt spoons as a present to the child. These were called “apostle spoons,” because the extremity of the handle was formed into the figure of one or other of the apostles. Such as were opulent and generous gave the whole twelve; those who were moderately rich or liberal escaped at the expense of the four evangelists, or even sometimes contented themselves with presenting one spoon only, which exhibited the figure of any saint, in honour of whom the child received its name. In “King Henry VIII.” (v. 2), it is in allusion to this custom that, when Cranmer professes to be unworthy of being a sponsor to the young princess, Shakespeare makes the king reply—

“Come, come, my lord, you’ld spare your spoons.”

A story is related of Shakespeare promising spoons to one of Ben Jonson’s children in a collection of anecdotes, entitled “Merry Passages and Jests,” compiled by Sir Nicholas L’Estrange (MSS. Harl. 6395): - “Shakespeare was godfather to one of Ben Jonson’s children, and after the christ’ning, being in a deepe study, Jonson came to cheere him up, and ask’t him why he was so melancholy. ‘No faith, Ben (sayes he), not I; but I have been considering a great while what should be the fittest gift for me to bestow upon my godchild, and I have resolv’d at last.’ ‘I pr’y thee, what?’ sayes he. ‘I’ faith, Ben, I’le e’en give him a douzen good Latin spoones, and thou shalt translate them.’” “Shakespeare,” says Mr

⁷⁰¹ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 383; Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, iii. pp. 44–46, 326.

⁷⁰² See Napier’s “Folk-lore of West of Scotland,” 1879. pp. 34–40. Keightley’s “Fairy Mythology;” Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1849, iii. pp. 73, 74.

Thoms,⁷⁰³ “willing to show his wit, if not his wealth, gave a dozen spoons, not of silver, but of latten, a name formerly used to signify a mixed metal resembling brass, as being the most appropriate gift to the child of a father so learned.” In Middleton’s “Chaste Maid of Cheapside,” 1620—

“2 *Goss.* What has he given her? What is it, gossip?

3 *Goss.* A fair, high-standing cup, and two great ‘postle spoons, one of them gilt.”

And Beaumont and Fletcher in the “Noble Gentleman” (v. I)—

“I’ll be a gossip, Beaufort,
I have an odd apostle spoon.”

The gossip’s feast, held in honour of those who were associated in the festivities of a christening, was a very ancient English custom, and is frequently mentioned by dramatists of the Elizabethan age. The term gossip or godsip, a Saxon word signifying *cognata ex parte dei*, or godmother, is well defined by Richard Verstegan, in his “Restitution of Decayed Intelligence.” He says: “Our Christian ancestors, understanding a spiritual affinity to grow between the parents and such as undertooke for the child at baptism, called each other by the name of *godsib*, which is as much as to say that they were *sib* together, that is, of *kin* together through God. And the childe, in like manner, called such his godfathers or godmothers.”

As might be expected, it is often alluded to by Shakespeare. Thus, in the “Comedy of Errors” (v. 1), we read—

“*Abbess.* Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail
Of you, my sons: and till this present hour
My heavy burthen ne’er delivered.
The duke, my husband and my children both,
And you the calendars of their nativity,
Go to a gossip’s feast, and go with me;
After so long grief, such festivity!
Duke. With all my heart, I’ll gossip at this feast.”

And again in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1), the mischievous Puck says:—

“Sometime lurk I in a gossip’s bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her wither’d dewlap pour the ale.”

And once more, we find Capulet in “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 5), saying to the Nurse:—

“Peace, you mumbling fool!
Utter your gravity o’er a gossip’s bowl;
For here we need it not.”

Referring to entertainments at christenings, we find the following in the “Batchelor’s Banquet,” 1603 [attributed to Dekker]: - “What cost and trouble it will be to have all things fine against the Christening Day; what store of sugar, biskets, comphets, and caraways, marmalet, and marchpane, with all kinds of sweet-suckers and superfluous banqueting stuff, with a hundred other odd and needless trifles, which at that time must fill the pockets of dainty dames,” by which it appears the ladies not only eat what they pleased, but pocketed

⁷⁰³ “Anecdotes and Traditions,” 1839, p. 3.

likewise. Upon this and the falling off of the custom of giving “apostle spoons” at the christening, we read in “Shipman’s Gossip,” 1666:—

“Especially since gossips now
Eat more at christenings than bestow.
Formerly when they us’d to troul
Gilt bowls of sack, they gave the bowl;
Two spoons at least; an use ill kept;
'Tis well now if our own be left.”

Strype tells us that in 1559 the son of Sir Thomas Chamberlayne was baptised at St. Benet’s Church, Paul’s Wharf, when “the Church was hung with cloth of arras, and after the christening were brought wafers, comfits, and divers banqueting dishes, and hypocras and Muscadine wine, to entertain the guests.”

“In Henry VIII.” (v. 4), the Porter says:—

“Do you look for ale and cakes here, you rude rascals?”

A term formerly in use for the name given at baptism was “Christendom;” an allusion to which we find in “All’s well that ends Well” (i. 1) where Helena says:—

“With a world
Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms
That blinking Cupid gossips,”

the meaning evidently being a number of pretty fond adopted appellations or christian names to which blind Cupid stands godfather. The expression is often used for baptism by old writers; and Singer ⁷⁰⁴quotes from “King John” (iv. 1):—

”By my christendom,
So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
I should be merry as the day is long.”

Steevens observes that in the puritanical times it was usual to christen children from the titles of moral and religious virtues—a practice to which allusion seems to be made in the “Tempest” (ii. 1), by Antonio:—

“Temperance was a delicate wench.”

So Taylor, the water-poet, in his description of a strumpet says:—

“Though bad they be, they will not bate an ace,
To be call’d Prudence, Temperance, Faith or Grace.”

In days gone a “Christom-Child” was one who had recently been baptized, and died within the month of birth,—the term having originated in the “face-cloth, or piece of linen put upon the head of a child newly baptised.” The word “chrisom” was formed from the chrism, that is, the anointing which formed a part of baptism before the Reformation. Thus, in “King Henry V.” (ii. 3), the hostess, Mrs Quickly, means “chrisom child” in the following passage, where she speaks of Falstaff’s death: - “A made a finer end, and went away an’ it had been any chrisom child.” In a beautiful passage of Bishop Taylor’s “Holy Dying” (chap. i. sec. 2), this custom is thus spoken of: - “Every morning creeps out of a dark cloud, leaving behind it an ignorance and silence deep as midnight, and undiscerned as are the phantoms that made a chrisom-child to smile.” Referring to the use of the chrisom-cloth in connection with baptism,

⁷⁰⁴ “Shakespeare,” 1875, iv. p. 314.

it appears that after the usual immersion in water, the priest made a cross on the child's head with oil, after which the chrisom was put on, the priest asking at the same time the infant's name, and saying, - "Receive this white, pure, and holy vestment, which thou shalt wear before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest inherit eternal life. Amen." It was to be worn seven days; but after the Reformation, however, the use of oil was omitted, and the chrisom was worn by the child till the mother's churching, when it was returned to the church. If the child died before the churching, it was buried in the chrisom, and hence it may be that the child itself was called a chrisom or chrisomer.⁷⁰⁵ Thus, it will be seen that Dame Quickly simply compares the manner of Falstaff's death to that of a young infant. In Registers and Bills of Mortality we find infants alluded to under the term "Chrisoms." Burn, in his "History of Parish Registers," (1862, p. 127), gives the subjoined entry from a register of Westminster Abbey, - "The Princess Ann's child a chrissome, bu. in y^e vault, Oct. 22, 1687."

In Graunt's "Bills of Mortality," cited in Johnson's "Dictionary," we read, - "When the convulsions were but few, the number of chrisoms and infants was greater." The "bearing cloth" was the mantle which generally covered the child when it was carried to the font. It is noticed in "The Winter's Tale," (iii. 3), by the shepherd, who, on the discovery of Paulina, says to the clown, - "Here's a sight for thee; look thee, a bearing-cloth for a squire's child! look thee here; take up, take up, boy; open't." In Stow's "Chronicle," (1631, p. 1039), we are told that about this time it was not customary "for godfathers and godmothers generally to give plate at the baptisme of children, but only to give "christening shirts," with little bands and cuffs, wrought either with silk or blue thread. The best of them, for chief persons, were edged with a small lace of black silk and gold, the highest price of which for great men's children was seldom above a noble, and the common sort, two, three, or four, and six shillings a piece."

⁷⁰⁵ Douce's. "Illustrations of Shakspeare," 1859, pp. 299, 300; Nares's "Glossary," i. p. 160; see Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, ii. pp. 84, 85.

13. Marriage

The style of courtship which prevailed in Shakespeare's time, and the numerous customs associated with the marriage ceremony, may be accurately drawn from the many allusions interspersed through his plays. From these, it would seem that the mode of love-making was much the same amongst all classes, often lacking that polish and refined expression which are distinguishing characteristics now-a-days. As Mr Drake remarks,⁷⁰⁶ the amatory dialogues of Hamlet, Hotspur, and Henry the Fifth, are not more refined than those which occur between Master Fenton and Anne Page in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," between Lorenzo and Jessica in the "Merchant of Venice," and between Orlando and Rosalind in "As You Like It." These last, which may be considered as instances taken from the middle class of life, together with a few drawn from the lower rank of rural manners, such as the courtship of Touchstone and Audrey, and of Silvius and Phoebe, in "As You Like It," are good illustrations of this subject, although it must be added, that in point of fancy, sentiment, and simplicity, the most pleasing love scenes in Shakespeare are those of Romeo and Juliet, and of Florizel and Perdita.

The ancient ceremony of betrothing seems still to have been in full use in Shakespeare's day. Indeed, he gives us several interesting passages upon the subject of troth-pledge. Thus, in "Measure for Measure," (iii. 1), we learn that the unhappiness of the poor, dejected Mariana was caused by a violation of the troth-pledge:—

Duke. She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wrecked at sea, having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark how heavily this befell to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him, the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo.

Isab. Can this be so? did Angelo so leave her?

Duke. Left her in her tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort; swallowed his vows whole, pretending in her discoveries of dishonour: in few, bestowed her on her own lamentation, which she yet wears for his sake; and he, a marble to her tears, is washed with them, but relents not."

It is evident that Angelo and Mariana were bound by oath, the nuptial was appointed; there was a prescribed time between the contract and the performance of the solemnity of the Church. The lady, however, having lost her dowry, the contract was violated by her "combinate" or affianced husband—the oath, no doubt, having been tendered by a minister of the Church in the presence of witnesses. In "Twelfth Night" (iv. 3), we have a minute description of such a ceremonial; for when Olivia is hastily espoused to Sebastian, she says—

"Now go with me and with this holy man
Into the chantry by: there, before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith;
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace. He shall conceal it,

⁷⁰⁶ "Shakspeare and His Times," 1817, i. p. 220.

Whiles you are willing it shall come to note;
 What time we will our celebration keep
 According to my birth.”

This, then, was a private ceremony before a single witness, who would conceal it till the proper period of the public ceremonial. Olivia, fancying that she has thus espoused the page, repeatedly calls him “husband;” and, being rejected, she summons the priest to declare (v. 1)—

“What thou dost know
 Hath newly pass’d between this youth and me.”

The priest answers—

“A contract of eternal bond of love,
 Confirm’d by mutual joinder of your hands,
 Attested by the holy close of lips,
 Strengthen’d by interchangement of your rings:
 And all the ceremony of this compact
 Seal’d in my function, by my testimony:
 Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave
 I have travell’d but two hours.”

Again, in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4), which contains many a perfect picture of real rustic life, it appears that occasionally the troth-plight was exchanged without the presence of a priest; but that witnesses were essential to the ceremony

“*Florizel*. O, hear me breathe my life
 Before this ancient sir, who, it should seem,
 Hath sometime loved. I take thy hand, this hand,
 As soft as dove’s down and as white as it,
 Or Ethiopian’s tooth, or the fann’d snow that’s bolted
 By the northern blasts twice o’er.

Polixenes. What follows this?—

How prettily the young swain seems to wash
 The hand was fair before! I have put you out:
 But to your protestation; let me hear
 What you profess.

Flor. Do, and be witness to ‘t.

Pol. And this my neighbour too?

Flor. And he, and more

Than he, and men, the earth, the heavens, and all;
 That, were I crown’d the most imperial monarch,
 Thereof most worthy, were I the fairest youth
 That ever made eye swerve, had force and knowledge
 More than was ever man’s, I would not prize them
 Without her love; for her employ them all;
 Commend them and condemn them to her service,
 Or to their own perdition.

Pol. Fairly offer’d.

Cam. This shows a sound affection.

Shep. But, my daughter,
 Say you the like to him?

Per. I cannot speak
 So well, nothing so well; no, nor mean better:
 By the pattern of mine own thoughts I cut out
 The purity of his.
Shep. Take hands, a bargain!
 And, friends unknown, you shall bear witness to ‘t:

I give my daughter to him, and will make
 Her portion equal his.⁷⁰⁷

Flor. O, that must be
 I’ the virtue of your daughter: one being dead,
 I shall have more than you can dream of yet;
 Enough then for your wonder. But, come on,
 Contract us ‘fore these witnesses.

Shep. Come, your hand;
 And, daughter, yours.”

To the argument of Polixenes, that the father of Florizel ought to know of his proceeding, the young man answers—

“*Flor.* Come, come, he must not:
 Mark our contract.”

And then the father, discovering himself, exclaims—

“Mark your divorce, young sir.”

Here, then, as Mr Knight remarks,⁷⁰⁸ in the publicity of a village festival, the hand of the loved one is solemnly taken by her lover, who breathes his life before the ancient stranger who is accidentally present. The stranger is called to be a witness to the protestation, and so is the neighbour who has come with him. The maiden is called upon by her father to speak, and then the old man adds—

“Take hands, a bargain!”

The friends are to bear witness to it—

“I give my daughter to him, and will make
 Her portion equal his.”

The impatient lover then again exclaims—

“Contract us ‘fore these witnesses.”

⁷⁰⁷ On entering into any contract, or plighting of troth, the clapping of the hands together set the seal, as in the “*Winter’s Tale*” (i. 2), where Leontes says—

“Ere I could make thee open thy white hand,
 And clap thyself my love; then thou didst utter
I am yours for ever.”

So, too, in the “*Tempest*” (iii. 1)—

Mir. “My husband then?”

Fer. Ay, with a heart as willing
 As bondage e’er of freedom: here’s my hand.

Mir. And mine, with my heart in it.”

And in the old play of “*Ram Alley*,” by Barry (1611), we read, “Come, clap hands, a match.” The custom is not yet disused in common life.

⁷⁰⁸ “*The Stratford Shakespeare*,” 1854, i. p. 70.

The shepherd takes the hand of the youth and the maiden. Again the lover exclaims—
 “Mark our contract.”

The ceremony is left incomplete, for the princely father discovers himself with—
 “Mark your divorce, young sir.”

It appears, therefore, that espousals before witnesses were considered as constituting a valid marriage, if followed up within a limited time by the marriage of the Church. However much the Reformed Church might have endeavoured to abrogate this practice, it was unquestionably the ancient habit of the people.⁷⁰⁹ It was derived from the Roman law, and still prevails in the Lutheran Church.

Besides exchanging kisses,⁷¹⁰ accompanied with vows of everlasting affection and whispering lovers' reassurances of fidelity, it was customary to interchange rings. In Shakespeare's plays, however, espousals are made with and without the use of the ring. Thus, in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, we read of their joining hands only (“*Tempest*,” iii. 1)—

“*Ferd.* Ay, with a heart as willing
 As bondage e'er of freedom; here's my hand.
Mir. And mine, with my heart in't; and now farewell
 Till half an hour hence.”

In the passage already quoted from “*Twelfth Night*” (v. 1) there seems to have been a mutual interchange of rings.

Some, indeed, considered that a betrothal was not complete unless each spouse gave the other a circlet. Lady Anne, in “*Richard III.*” (i. 2), is made to share in this misconception:—

“*Gloster.* Vouchsafe to wear this ring.
Anne. To take is not to give.

Gloster. Look, how this ring encompasseth thy finger,
 Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart:
 Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.”

In “*Two Gentlemen of Verona*” (ii. 2), we read:—

“*Julia.* Keep this remembrance for thy Julia's sake, (*giving a ring*).
Proteus. Why, then, we'll make exchange; here, take you this.
Julia. And seal the bargain with a holy kiss.”

A joint, or gimmel ring, was anciently a common token among lovers; an allusion to which is made by Emilia in “*Othello*” (iv. 3): “I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring.” Their nature will be best understood by a passage in Dryden's “*Don Sebastian*,” 1690 (act v.):—

“A curious artist wrought them,
 With joints so close, as not to be perceiv'd;
 Yet are they both each other's counterpart,
 **and in the midst,
 A heart divided in two halves was plac'd.”

⁷⁰⁹ Knight's “*Stratford Shakespeare*,” p. 73.

⁷¹⁰ Cf. “*King John*” (ii. 2)—

“*K. Phil.* Young princes close your hands.
Aust. And your lips too; for, I am well assured,
 That I did so, when I was first assured.”

They were generally made of two or three hoops, so chased and engraved that when fastened together by a single rivet, the whole three formed one design—the usual device being a hand. When an engagement was contracted the ring was taken apart, each spouse taking a division, and the third one being presented to the principal witness of the contract.⁷¹¹ Hence such a ring was known as a “Sponsalium Annulis,” to which Herrick thus refers:—

“Thou sent’st me a true-love knot, but I
Returned a ring of jimmals, to imply
Thy love hath one knot, mine a triple tye.”

The term is used by the Duke of Anjou, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 2):—

“I think, by some old gimmors or device
Their arms are set like clocks, still to strike on;
Else ne’er could they hold out so as they do.”

Again in “Henry V.” (iv. 2), Grandpré tells how:—

“In their pale dull mouths the gimmel bit
Lies foul with chew’d grass, still and motionless.”

Most readers of the “Merchant of Venice,” remember the mirthful use which Shakespeare makes of lover’s rings. Portia says (iii. 2), when giving her wealth and self to Bassanio.

”I give them with this ring;
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love.”

The last act, too, gives several particulars about lovers’ rings, which in Elizabethan England,⁷¹² often had posies engraved on them, and were worn by men on the left hand. Gratiano, for example, says:—

“About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
That she did give me, whose posy was
For all the world’s like cutler’s poetry
Upon a knife, ‘Love me and leave me not.”

Again Bassiano exclaims:—

“Why, I were best to cut my left hand off,
And swear I lost the ring defending it.”

In “Taming of the Shrew,” Shakespeare gives numerous allusions to the customs of his day connected with courtship and marriage. Indeed, in the Second Act (2), we have a perfect betrothal scene:—

“*Petruchio*. Give me thy hand, Kate: I will unto Venice,
To buy apparel ‘gainst the wedding day.
Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests:
I will be sure my Katharine shall be fine.
Baptista. I know not what to say; but give me your hands;
God send you joy, Petruchio, ‘tis a match.
Gremio and Tranio. Amen, say we; we will be witnesses.
Petruchio. Father, and wife, and gentlemen, adieu;

⁷¹¹ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 363; “Archæologia,” xiv. p. 7; Jones’s “Finger Ring Lore,” 1877, pp. 313–318.

⁷¹² See Jeaffreson’s “Brides and Bridals,” 1873, i. pp. 77, 78.

I will to Venice, Sunday comes apace;
 We will have rings and things and fine array;
 And kiss me, Kate, we will be married o' Sunday."

Although Katharina is only his spouse, and Baptista not yet his father-in-law, Petruchio in accordance with fashion calls her "wife" and him "father." The spouses of old times used to term one another "husband" and "wife," for, as they argued, they were as good as husband and wife.

Formerly there was a kind of betrothal or marriage contract prevalent among the lower orders, called "hand-fasting," or "hand-festing," said to have been much in use among the Danes, and which is mentioned by Ray in his "Glossary of Northumbrian Words." It simply means hand-fastening or binding. In "Cymbeline" (i. 5), the phrase is used in its secondary sense by the Queen, who, speaking of Pisanio, declares that he is—

"A sly and constant knave,
 Not to be shaked; the agent for his master,
 And the remembrancer of her to hold
 The hand-fast to her lord."

In the "Christian State of Matrimony," 1543, we find the following illustration of this custom: "Yet in this thing almost must I warn every reasonable and honest person to beware that in the contracting of marriage they dissemble not, nor set forth any lie. Every man, likewise, must esteem the person to whom he is 'handfasted' none otherwise than for his own spouse; though as yet it be not done in the church, nor in the street. After the handfasting and making of the contract, the church-going and wedding should not be deferred too long." The author then goes on to rebuke a custom, "that at the handfasting there is made a great feast and superfluous banquet." Sir John Sinclair, in the "Statistical Account of Scotland," (1794, xii. 615), tells us that at a fair annually held at Eskdalemuir, Co. Dumfries, "it was the custom for the unmarried persons of both sexes to choose a companion according to their liking, with whom they were to live till that time next year. This was called 'handfasting,' or hand-in-fist. If they were pleased with each other at that time then they continued together for life; if not, they separated, and were free to make another choice as at the first."

Shakespeare has given us numerous illustrations of the marriage customs of our forefathers, many of which are interesting as relics of the past, owing to their having long ago fallen into disuse. The fashion of introducing a bowl of wine into the church at a wedding, which is alluded to in the "Taming of the Shrew," (iii. 2), to be drunk by the bride and bridegroom and persons present immediately after the marriage ceremony, is very ancient. Gremio relates how Petruchio,—

"Stamp'd and swore,
 As if the vicar meant to cozen him.
 But after many ceremonies done,
 He calls for wine: - "A health," quoth he, as if
 He had been aboard, carousing to his mates
 After a storm,—quaff'd off the muscadel,
 And threw the sops all in the sexton's face;
 Having no other reason
 But that his beard grew thin and hungerly,
 And seem'd to ask him sops as he was drinking."

It existed even among our Gothic ancestors, and is mentioned in the ordinances of the household of Henry VII., "For the Marriage of a Princess:—"Then pottes of ipocrice to be

ready, and to be put into cupps with soppe, and to be borne to the estates, and to take a soppe and drinke.”⁷¹³It was also practised at the magnificent marriage of Queen Mary and Philip, in Winchester Cathedral, and at the marriage of the Elector Palatine to the daughter of James I., in 1612–13. Indeed, it appears to have been the practice at most marriages. In Jonson’s “Magnetic Lady” it is called a “knitting cup”; in Middleton’s “No Wit like a Woman’s” the “contracting cup.” In Robert Armin’s comedy of “The History of the Two Maids of More Clacke,” 1609, the play begins with,

“Enter a maid strewing flowers, and a serving-man perfuming the door.

Maid. Strew, strew.

Man. The muscadine stays for the bride at church:
The priest and Hymen’s ceremonies tend
To make them man and wife.”

Again, in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Scornful Lady,” (i. 1), the custom is referred to ⁷¹⁴:—

“If my wedding smock were on,
Were the gloves bought and given, the licence come,
Were the rosemary branches dipp’d, and all
The hippocras and cakes eat and drunk off.”

We find it enjoined in the Hereford Missal. By the Sarum missal it is directed that the sops immersed in this wine, as well as the liquor itself, and the cup that contained it, should be blessed by the priest. The beverage used on this occasion was to be drunk by the bride and bridegroom and the rest of the company.

The nuptial kiss in the church was anciently part of the marriage ceremony, as appears from a rubric in one of the Salisbury missals. In the “Taming of the Shrew,” Shakespeare has made an excellent use of this custom, where he relates how Petruchio (iii. 2)

”Took the bride about the neck
And kiss’d her lips with such a clamorous smack
That at the parting all the church did echo.”

Again, in “King Richard II.” (v. r), where the Duke of Northumberland announces to the king that he is to be sent to Pomfret, and his wife to be banished to France, the king exclaims—

“Doubly divorced!—Bad men, you violate
A twofold marriage,—’twixt my crown and me,
And then betwixt me and my married wife.
Let me unkiss the oath ‘twixt thee and me;
And yet not so, for with a kiss ‘twas made.”

Marston, too, in his “Insatiate Countess,” mentions it—

“The kisse thou gav’st me in the church, here take.”

The practice is still kept up among the poor; and Brand ⁷¹⁵says it is “still customary among persons of middling rank as well as the vulgar, in most parts of England, for the young men present at the marriage ceremony to salute the bride, one by one, the moment it is concluded.”

⁷¹³ Sops in wine.

⁷¹⁴ See “Brand’s Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. pp. 136, 139.

⁷¹⁵ “Pop. Antiq.,” ii. p. 140.

Music was the universal accompaniment of weddings in olden times.⁷¹⁶The allusions to wedding music that may be found in the works of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other Elizabethan dramatists, testify, as Mr Jeaffreson points out, that, in the opinion of their contemporaries, a wedding without the braying of trumpets, and beating of drums, and clashing of cymbals, was a poor affair. In “As You Like It” (v. 4), Hymen says—

“Whiles a wedlock hymn we sing.”

And in “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 5) Capulet says—

“Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change.”

It seems to have been customary for the bride at her wedding to wear her hair unbraided and hanging loose over her shoulders. There may be an allusion to this custom in “King John” (iii. 1) where Constance says—

“O Lewis, stand fast! the devil tempts thee here
In likeness of a new untrimmed bride.”

At the celebration of her marriage with the Palatine, Elizabeth Stuart wore “her hair dishevelled and hanging down her shoulders.” Heywood speaks of this practice in the following graphic words—

“At length the blushing bride comes, with her hair
Dishevelled ‘bout her shoulders.”

It has been suggested that the bride’s veil, which of late years has become one of the most conspicuous features of her costume, may be nothing more than a milliner’s substitute, which in old time concealed not a few of the bride’s personal attractions, and covered her face when she knelt at the altar. Mr Jeaffreson⁷¹⁷ thinks it may be ascribed to the Hebrew ceremony; or has come from the East, where veils have been worn from time immemorial. Some again connect it with the yellow veil which was worn by the Roman brides. Strange, too, as it may appear, it is nevertheless certain that knives and daggers were formerly part of the customary accoutrements of brides. Thus, Shakespeare, in the old quarto, 1597, makes Juliet wear a knife at the friar’s cell, and when she is about to take the potion. This custom, however, is easily accounted for, when we consider that women anciently wore a knife suspended from their girdle. Many allusions to this practice occur in old writers.⁷¹⁸In Dekker’s “Match Me in London,” 1631, a bride says to her jealous husband—

“See at my girdle hang my wedding knives!
With those dispatch me.”

In the “Witch of Edmonton,” 1658, Somerton says—

“But see, the bridegroom and bride come; the new
Pair of Sheffield knives fitted both to one sheath.”

Among other wedding customs alluded to by Shakespeare we may mention one referred to in “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1), where Katharine, speaking of Bianca, says to her father—

⁷¹⁶ “Brides and Bridals,” 1873, i. p. 252.

⁷¹⁷ “Brides and Bridals,” i. p. 177.

⁷¹⁸ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. pp. 131–133.

“She is your treasure, she must have a husband:
I must dance bare-foot on the wedding-day,
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell,”

it being a popular notion that unless the elder sisters danced barefoot at the marriage of a younger one, they would inevitably become old maids, and be condemned “to lead apes in hell.” The expression “to lead apes in hell,” applied above to old maids, has given rise to much discussion, and the phrase has not yet been satisfactorily explained. Steevens suggests that it might be considered an act of posthumous retribution for women who refused to bear children, to be condemned to the care of apes in leading strings after death. Malone says that “to lead apes” was in Shakespeare’s time one of the employments of a bear-ward, who often carried about one of these animals with his bear.” Nares explains the expression by reference to the word ape as denoting a fool, it probably meaning that those coquettes who made fools of men, and led them about without real intention of marriage, would have them still to lead against their will hereafter. In “Much Ado about Nothing” (ii. 1), Beatrice says, “Therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bear-ward, and lead his apes into hell.”

Douce ⁷¹⁹tells us that homicides and adulterers were in ancient times compelled, by way of punishment, to lead an ape by the neck, with their mouths affixed in a very unseemly manner to the animal’s tail.

In accordance with an old custom, the bride on the wedding night had to dance with every guest, and play the amiable, however much against her own wishes. In “Henry VIII.” (v. 2), there seems to be an allusion to this practice, where the King says—

”I had thought
They had parted so much honesty among ‘em,
At least, good manners, as not thus to suffer
A man of his place, and so near our favour,
To dance attendance on their lordships’ pleasures,” etc.

In the “Christian State of Matrimony” (1543), we read thus: - “Then must the poor bryde kepe foote with a dauncers, and refuse none, how scabbed, foule, droncken, rude, and shameless soever he be.”

As in our own time, so, too, formerly flowers entered largely into the marriage festivities. Most readers will at once call to mind that touching scene (iv. 5) in “Romeo and Juliet,” where Capulet says, referring to Juliet’s supposed untimely death—

“Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse.”

It seems, too, in days gone by to have been customary to deck the bridal bed with flowers, various allusions to which are given by Shakespeare. Thus, in “Hamlet” (v. 1), the Queen, speaking of poor Ophelia, says—

“I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck’d, sweet maid.”

In the “Tempest” (iv. 1), we may compare the words of Prospero, who, alluding to the marriage of his daughter Miranda with Ferdinand, by way of warning, cautions them lest—

“Barren hate,
Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew

⁷¹⁹ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 203.

The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both.”

In the Papal times no new married couple could go to bed together till the bridal-bed had been blessed—this being considered one of the most important of the marriage ceremonies. “On the evening of the wedding day,” says Mr Jeaffreson,⁷²⁰ “when the married couple sat in state in the bridal-bed, before the exclusion of the guests, who assembled to commend them yet again to Heaven’s keeping, one or more priests attended by acolytes swinging to and fro lighted censurs, appeared in the crowded chamber to bless the couch, its occupants, and the truckle-bed, and fumigate the room with hallowing incense.” In “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), Oberon says:—

“Now, until the break of day,
Through the house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessed be
And the issue they create
Ever shall be fortunate.”

Steevens in illustration of this custom quotes from Chaucer’s “The Merchant’s Tale” (ed. Tyrwhitt), line 9693:—

“And when the bed was with the preest yblessed.”

The formula for this curious ceremony is thus given in the Manual for the use of Salisbury: - “Nocte vero sequente cum sponsus et sponsa ad lectum pervenerint, accedat sacerdos et benedicat thalamum, dicens. Benedic, Domine, thalamum istum et omnes habitantes in eo; ut in tua pace consistant, et in tua voluntate permaneant: et in tuo amore vivant et senescant et multiplicentur in longitudine dierum. Per Dominum.—Item benedictio super lectum. Benedic, Domine, hoc cubiculum, respice, quoniam dormis neque dormitas. Qui custodis Israel, custodi famulos tuos in hoc lecto quiescentes ab omnibus fantasmaticis demonum illusionibus. Custodi eos vigilantes ut in preceptis tuis meditentur dormientes, et te per soporem sentiant; ut hic et ubique depensionis tuæ muniantur auxilio. Per Dominum—Deinde fiat benedictio super eos in lecto tantum cum oremus. Benedicat Deus corpora vestra et animas vestras; et det super eos benedictionem sicut benedixit Abraham, Isaac, et Jacob, Amen.—His peractis aspergat eos aqua benedicta, et sic discedat et dimittat eos in pace.”⁷²¹

In the French romance of Melusine, the Bishop who marries her to Raymondin blesses the nuptial bed. The ceremony is there presented in a very ancient cut, of which Douce has given a copy. The good prelate is sprinkling the parties with holy water. It appears that, occasionally during the benediction, the married couple only sat on the bed; but they generally received a portion of the consecrated bread and wine. It is recorded in France, that, on frequent occasions, the priest was improperly detained till midnight, while the wedding guests rioted in the luxuries of the table, and made use of language that was extremely offensive to the clergy. It was therefore ordained, in the year 1577, that the ceremony of blessing the nuptial bed should for the future be performed in the day-time, or at least before supper, and in the presence of the bride and bridegroom, and of their nearest relations only.

On the morning after the celebration of the marriage, it was formerly customary for friends to serenade a newly married couple, or to greet them with a morning song to bid them good

⁷²⁰ “Brides and Bridals,” i. p. 98; see Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.” ii. p. 175.

⁷²¹ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” pp. 123, 124.

morrow. In "Othello" (iii. i), this custom is referred to by Cassio, who speaking of Othello and Desdemona, says to the musicians:—

"Masters, play here, I will content your pains;
Something that's brief; and bid—'Good morrow, general."

According to Cotgrave, the morning-song to a newly married woman was called the "hunt's up." It has been suggested that this may be alluded to by Juliet (iii. 5) who, when urging Romeo to make his escape tells him—

"Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes;
O, now I would they had changed voices too!
Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,
Hunting thee hence with hunt's-up to the day.
O, now be gone."

In olden times torches were used at weddings—a practice, indeed, dating as far back as the time of the Romans. From the following lines in Herrick's "Hesperides," it has been suggested that the custom once existed in this country

"Upon a maid that dyed the day she was married
That morne which saw me made a bride,
The eve'ning witnest that I dy'd.
Those holy lights, wherewith they guide
Unto the bed the bashful bride,
Serv'd but as tapers for to burne
And light my reliques to their urne.
This epitaph which here you see,
Supply'd the Epithalamie."⁷²²

Shakespeare alludes to this custom in "1 Henry VI." (iii. 2), where Joan of Arc, thrusting out a burning torch on the top of the tower at Rouen, exclaims—

"Behold, this is the happy wedding torch
That joineth Rouen unto her countrymen."

In "Tempest," too, (iv. 1), Iris says—

"No bed-right shall be paid
Till Hymen's torch be lighted."

According to a Roman marriage custom, the bride on her entry into her husband's house was prohibited from treading over his threshold, and lest she should even so much as touch it, she was always lifted over it. Shakespeare seems inadvertently to have overlooked this usage in "Coriolanus" (iv. 5), where he represents Aufidius as saying to Coriolanus:—

"I loved the maid I married; never man
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold."

Lucan in his "Pharsalia" (lib. ii. 359), says:—

⁷²² See Brand's "Pop. Antiq." 1849, ii, p. 159.

“Translata vetuit contingere limina planta.”

Once more, Sunday appears to have been a popular day for marriages; the brides of the Elizabethan dramas being usually represented as married on Sundays. In the “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1), Petruchio after telling his future father-in-law “that upon Sunday is the wedding-day,” and laughing at Katharine’s petulant exclamation, “I’ll see thee hanged on Sunday first,” says:—

“Father, and wife, and gentlemen adieu;
I will to Venice, Sunday comes apace:
We will have rings and things and give array;
And, kiss me Kate, we will be married o’ Sunday.”

Thus, Mr Jeaffreson, speaking of this custom in his “Brides and Bridals,” rightly remarks, - “A fashionable wedding, celebrated on the Lord’s Day in London, or any part of England, would now-a-days be denounced by religious people of all Christian parties. But in our feudal times, and long after the Reformation, Sunday was of all days of the week the favourite one for marriages. Long after the theatres had been closed on Sundays, the day of rest was the chief day for weddings with Londoners of every social class.”

Love charms have from the earliest times been much in request amongst the credulous anxious to gain an insight into their matrimonial prospects.⁷²³In the “Merchant of Venice,” (v. 1), we have an allusion to the practice of kneeling and praying at wayside crosses for a happy marriage, in the passage where Stephano tells how his mistress

”Doth stray about
By holy crosses, where she kneels and prays
For happy wedlock hours.”

The use of love potions by a despairing lover to secure the affections of another was a superstitious practice much resorted to in olden times.⁷²⁴This mode of enchantment, too, was formerly often employed in our own country, and Gay, in his “Shepherd’s Week,” relates how Hobnelia was guilty of this questionable practice:—

“As I was wont, I trudged, last market-day,
To town with new-laid eggs, preserved in hay.
I made my market long before ‘twas night;
My purse grew heavy, and my basket light.
Straight to the ‘pothecary’s shop I went,
And in love-powder all my money spent.

Behap what will, next Sunday after prayers,
When to the ale-house Lubberkin repairs,
These golden flies into his mug I’ll throw,
And soon the swain with fervent love shall glow.”

In the “Character of a Quack Astrologer,” 1673, quoted by Brand, we are told how “he trappans a young heiress to run away with a footman, by persuading a young girl ‘tis her destiny; and sells the old and ugly philtres and love-powder to procure them sweet-hearts.” Shakespeare has represented Othello as accused of winning Desdemona “by conjuration and mighty magic.” Thus Brabantio (i. 2), says:—

⁷²³ See “Merry Wives of Windsor,” iv. 2.

⁷²⁴ See Potter’s “Antiquities of Greece”; Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” iii, p. 306.

“Thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That waken motion.”

And in the following scene he further repeats the same charge against Othello:—

“She is abused, stol’n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not.”

Othello, however, in proving that he had won Desdemona only by honourable means, addressing the Duke, replies,—

“By your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish’d tale deliver
Of my whole course of love; what drugs, what charms,
What conjurations and what mighty magic,
For such proceeding I am charged withal,
I won his daughter.”

It may have escaped the poet’s notice that, by the Venetian law, the giving love-potions was held highly criminal, as appears in the code “Della Promission del Malefico,” cap. xvii., “Dei Maleficii et Herbarie.”

A further allusion to this practice occurs in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1), where Puck and Oberon amuse themselves at Titania’s expense.⁷²⁵

An expression common in Shakespeare’s day for any one born out of wedlock is mentioned by the Bastard in “King John” (i. 1)—

“In at the window, or else o’er the hatch.”

The old saying also that “hanging and wives go by destiny,” is quoted by Nerissa in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 9). In “Much Ado about Nothing” (ii. 1), Don Pedro makes use of an old popular phrase in asking Claudio, “When mean you to go to church?” referring to his marriage.

A solemn and even melancholy air was often affected by the beaux of Queen Elizabeth’s time, as a refined mark of gentility, a most sad and pathetic allusion to which custom is made by Arthur in “King John” (iv. 1)—

“Methinks, nobody should be sad but I:
Yet, I remember, when I was in France,
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
Only for wantonness.”⁷²⁶

There are frequent references to this fashion in our old writers. Thus, in Ben Jonson’s “Every Man in His Humour” (i. 3), we read:—

“Why, I do think of it; and I will be more proud, and melancholy, and gentlemanlike than I have been, I’ll insure you.”

⁷²⁵ See p. 215.

⁷²⁶ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 563.

14. Death And Burial

From a very early period there has existed a belief in the existence of a power of prophecy at that period which precedes death. It took its origin in the assumed fact that the soul becomes divine in the same ratio as its connection with the body is loosened. It has been urged in support of this theory that at the hour of death the soul is, as it were, on the confines of two worlds, and may possibly at the same moment possess a power which is both prospective and retrospective. Shakespeare, in "Richard II." (ii. 1), makes the dying Gaunt exclaim, alluding to his nephew, the young and self-willed king—

"Methinks I am a prophet new inspired
And thus expiring do foretell of him."

Again, the brave Percy, in "1 Henry IV." (v. 4), when in the agonies of death, expresses the same idea—

"O, I could prophesy,
But that the earthy and cold hand of death
Lies on my tongue."

We may also compare what Nerissa says of Portia's father in "Merchant of Venice" (i. 2), "Your father was ever virtuous; and holy men at their death have good inspirations."

Curious to say this notion may be traced up to the time of Homer. Thus Patroclus prophesies the death of Hector ("Iliad," π. 852): - "You yourself are not destined to live long, for even now death is drawing nigh unto you, and a violent fate awaits you—about to be slain in fight by the hands of Achilles." Aristotle tells us that the soul, when on the point of death, foretells things about to happen. Others have sought for the foundation of this belief in the 49th chapter of Genesis: - "And Jacob called his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into his bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." Whether, however, we accept this origin or not, at any rate it is very certain that the notion in question has existed from the earliest times, being alluded to also by Socrates, Xenophon, and Diodorus Siculus. It still lingers on in Lancashire and other parts of England.

Among other omens of death may be mentioned high spirits, which have been supposed to presage impending death. Thus, in "Romeo and Juliet" (v. 3), Romeo exclaims—

"How oft when men are at the point of death
Have they been merry! which their keepers call
A lightning before death."

This idea is noticed by Ray, who inserts it as a proverb, "It's a lightning before death;" and adds this note: "This is generally observed of sick persons, that a little before they die their pains leave them, and their understanding and memory return to them—as a candle just before it goes out gives a great blaze." It was also a superstitious notion that unusual mirth was a forerunner of adversity. Thus, in the last act of "Romeo and Juliet" (1), Romeo comes on saying—

"If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand:
My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne;

And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts."

Immediately, however, a messenger enters to announce Juliet's death.

In "King Richard III." (iii. 2), Hastings is represented as rising in the morning in unusually high spirits. Stanley says—

"The lords at Pomfret, when they rode from London,
Were jocund, and supposed their state was sure,
And they indeed had no cause to mistrust;
But yet, you see, how soon the day o'ercast."

This idea, it may be noted, runs throughout the whole scene. Before dinner-time, Hastings was beheaded.

Once more, in "2 Henry IV." (iv. 2), the same notion is alluded to in the following dialogue:—

Westmoreland. Health to my lord and gentle cousin,
Mowbray. Mowbray. You wish me health in very happy season;
For I am, on the sudden, something ill.
Arch. Against ill chances men are ever merry;
But heaviness foreruns the good event.
West. Therefore be merry, coz; since sudden sorrow
Serves to say thus, 'Some good thing comes to-morrow.'
Arch. Believe me, I am passing light in spirit.
Mowb. So much the worse, if your own rule be true."

Tytler, in his "History of Scotland," thus speaks of the death of King James I. - "On this fatal evening (Feb. 20, 1436), the revels of the Court were kept up to a late hour. The prince himself appears to have been in unusually gay and cheerful spirits. He even jested, if we may believe the contemporary manuscript, about a prophecy which had declared that a king that year should be slain." Shelley strongly entertained this superstition - "During all the time he spent in Leghorn, he was in brilliant spirits, to him a sure prognostic of coming evil."

Again, it is a very common opinion that death announces its approach by certain mysterious noises, a notion, indeed, which may be traced up to the time of the Romans, who believed that the genius of death announced his approach by some supernatural warning. In "Troilus and Cressida" (iv. 4), Troilus says—

"Hark! you are call'd: some say, the Genius so
Cries 'come' to him that instantly must die."

This superstition was frequently made use of by writers of bygone times, and often served to embellish, with touching pathos, their poetic sentiment. Thus Flatman, in some pretty lines, has embodied this thought—

"My soul, just now about to take her flight,
Into the regions of eternal night,
Methinks I hear some gentle spirit say,
Be not fearful, come away."

Pope speaks in the same strain—

"Hark! they whisper, angels say,
Sister spirit, come away."

Shakespeare, too, further alludes to this idea in “Macbeth” 3), where, it may be remembered, Lennox graphically describes how, on the awful night in which Duncan is so basely murdered—

“Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i’ the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events,
New hatch’d to the woeful time.”

As in Shakespeare’s day, so, too, at the present time, there is perhaps no superstition so deeply rooted in the minds of many people as the belief in what are popularly termed “death-warnings.” Modern folk-lore holds either that a knocking or rumbling in the floor is an omen of a death about to happen, or that dying persons themselves announce their dissolution to their friends in such strange sounds.⁷²⁷ Many families are supposed to have particular warnings, such as the appearance of a bird, the figure of a tall woman, etc. Such, moreover, are not confined to our own country, but in a variety of forms are found on the continent. According to another belief, it was generally supposed that when a man was on his death-bed, the devil or his agents tried to seize his soul, if it should happen that he died without receiving the sacrament of the eucharist, or without confessing his sins. Hence, in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 3), the king says:—

“O, beat away the busy meddling fiend
That lays strong siege unto this wretch’s soul,
And from his bosom purge this black despair.”

In the old office books of the church, these “busy meddling fiends” are often represented with great anxiety besieging the dying man; but on the approach of the priest and his attendants, they are shown to display symptoms of despair at their impending discomfiture. Douce⁷²⁸ quotes from an ancient manuscript book of devotion, written in the reign of Henry the Sixth, the following prayer to St George: - “Judge for me whan the moste hedyous and damnable dragons of helle shall be redy to take my poore soule and engloute it in to theyr infernall belyes.”

Some think that the “passing bell,” which was formerly tolled for a person who was dying, was intended to drive away the evil spirit that might be hovering about to seize the soul of the deceased.⁷²⁹ Its object, however, was probably to bespeak the prayers of the faithful, and to serve as a solemn warning to the living. Shakespeare has given several touching allusions to it. Thus, in his seventy-first sonnet he says—

“No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world.”

In “2 Henry IV.” (i. 1), Northumberland speaks in the same strain—

“Yet the first bringer of unwelcome news
Hath but a losing office, and his tongue

⁷²⁷ Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” 1873, i. p. 145.

⁷²⁸ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1829, pp. 324–326.

⁷²⁹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.” 1849, ii. p. 202.

Sounds ever after as a sullen bell,
Remember'd tolling a departing friend.”

We may quote a further allusion in “Venus and Adonis” (701)—

“And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore sick that hears the passing bell.”

In a statute passed during the reign of Henry VIII., it is ordered “that clarks are to ring no more than the passing bell for poare people, nor less for an honest householder, and he be a citizen; nor for children, maydes, journeymen, apprentices, daylabourers, or any other poare person.” In 1662, the Bishop of Worcester ⁷³⁰asks in his visitation charge: - “Doth the parish clerk or sexton take care to admonish the living, by tolling of a passing-bell of any that are dying, thereby to meditate of their own deaths, and to commend the other’s weak condition to the mercy of God.” It was, also, called the “soul-bell,” upon which Bishop Hall remarks - “We call it the soul-bell because it signifies the departure of the soul, not because it helps the passage of the soul.” Ray in his “Collection of Proverbs” has the following couplet—

“When thou dost hear a toll or knell
Then think upon thy passing bell.”

It was formerly customary to draw away the pillow from under the heads of dying persons, so as to accelerate their departure—an allusion to which we find in “Timon of Athens” (iv. 3), where Timon says

“Pluck stout men’s pillows from below their heads.”

This, no doubt, originated in the notion that a person cannot die happily on a bed with pigeons’ feathers. Grose says: - “It is impossible for a person to die whilst resting on a pillow stuffed with the feathers of a dove; but that he will struggle with death in the most exquisite torture. The pillows of dying persons are therefore frequently taken away when they appear in great agonies, lest they may have pigeon’s feathers in them.” Indeed, in Lancashire, this practice is carried to such an extent that some will not allow dying persons to lie on a feather bed, because they hold that it very much increases their pain and suffering, and actually retards their departure.⁷³¹

The departure of the human soul from this world, and its journey to its untried future, have become interwoven with an extensive net-work of superstitions, varying more or less in every country and tribe. Shakespeare has alluded to the numerous destinations of the disembodied spirit, enumerating the many ideas prevalent in his time on the subject. In “Measure for Measure” (iii. 1), Claudio thus speaks:—

“Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;

This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison’d in the viewless winds,

⁷³⁰ “Annals of Worcester,” 1845.

⁷³¹ Harland and Wilkinson’s “Lancashire Folk-Lore,” 1869, p. 268; see “English Folk-Lore,” 1878, pp. 99, 100; also “Notes and Queries,” 1 s. iv. p. 133.

And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world.”⁷³²

We may compare also the powerful language of Othello (v. 2):—

“This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl!
Even like thy chastity. O cursed slave!
Whip me, ye devils.
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!”

Douce ⁷³³says that in the former passage it is difficult to decide whether Shakespeare is alluding to the pains of hell or purgatory. Both passages are obscure, and have given rise to much criticism. It seems probable, however, that whilst partly referring to the notions of the time, relating to departed souls, Shakespeare has in a great measure incorporated the ideas of what he had read in books of Catholic divinity. The passages quoted above remind us of the legend of St. Patrick’s purgatory, where mention is made of a lake of ice and snow into which persons were plunged up to their necks; and of the description of hell, given in the “Shepherd’s Calendar”

“—a great froste in a water rounes
And after a bytter wynde comes
Which gothe through the soules with eyre;
Fends with pokes pulle theyr flesshe ysondre,
They fight and curse, and eche on other wonder.”

We cannot here enter, however, into the mass of mystic details respecting “the soul’s dread journey ⁷³⁴by caverns and rocky paths and weary plains, over steep and slippery mountains, by frail bank or giddy bridge, across gulfs or rushing rivers, abiding the fierce onset of the soul-destroyer or the doom of the stern guardian of the other world.” Few subjects indeed have afforded greater scope for the imagination than the hereafter of the human soul, and hence, as might be expected, numerous myths have been invented in most countries to account for its mysterious departure in the hour of death, from the world of living men to its unseen, unknown home in the distant land of Spirits.

Shakespeare several times uses the word “limbo” in a general signification for hell, as in “Titus Andronicus” (iii. 1)—

“As far from help as Limbo is from bliss.”

And in “All’s Well That Ends Well” (v. 3), Parolles says - “For indeed he was mad for her, and talked of Satan, and of Limbo, and of Furies, and I know not what.” In “Henry VIII.” (v. 4), “In Limbo Patrum” is jocularly put for a prison; and again, in “Comedy of Errors” (iv. 2), “He’s in Tartar limbo.” “According to the schoolmen, *Limbus Patrum* was the place, bordering on hell, where the souls of the patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament remained till the death of Christ, who, descending into hell, let them free.”⁷³⁵

⁷³² Cf. Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” v. 595–683.

⁷³³ See “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, pp 82, 83.

⁷³⁴ Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” ii. p. 46.

⁷³⁵ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 246.

One of the punishments invented of old for the covetous and avaricious in hell was to have melted gold poured down their throats, to which allusion is made by Flaminius in “Timon of Athens” (iii. 1), who, denouncing Lucullus for his mean insincerity towards his friend Timon, exclaims, on rejecting the bribe offered him to tell his master that he had not seen him—

“May these add to the number that may scald thee!
Let molten coin be thy damnation.”

In the “Shepherd’s Calendar,” Lazarus declares himself to have seen covetous men and women in hell dipped in caldrons of molten lead. Malone quotes the following from an old black-letter ballad of “The Dead Man’s Song”—

“Ladles full of melted gold
Were poured down their throats.”

Crassus was so punished by the Parthians.⁷³⁶

There is possibly a further allusion to this imaginary punishment in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 5), where Cleopatra says to the Messenger—

”But, sirrah, mark, we use
To say the dead are well; bring it to that,
The gold I give thee will I melt and pour
Down thy ill-uttering throat.”

According to a well-known superstition among sailors, it is considered highly unlucky to keep a corpse on board, in case of a death at sea. Thus, in “Pericles” (iii. 1), this piece of folklore is alluded to—

“1 *Sail*. Sir, your queen must overboard; the sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be cleared of the dead.

Per. That’s your superstition.

1 *Sail*. Pardon us, sir; with us at sea it hath been still observed; and we are strong in custom. Therefore briefly yield her; for she must overboard straight.”

It was also a popular opinion that death is delayed until the ebb of the tide—a superstition to which Mrs Quickly refers, in “Henry V.” (ii. 3), speaking of Falstaff’s death, she says - “A made a finer end and went away an it had been any christom child; ‘a parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o’ the tide.” Hence, in cases of sickness, many pretended that they could foretell the hour of the soul’s departure. It may be remembered how Mr Peggotty explained to David Copperfield, by poor Barkis’s bedside, that “people can’t die along the coast except when the tide’s pretty nigh out. They can’t be born unless it’s pretty nigh in—not properly born till flood. He’s agoing out with the tide—he’s agoing out with the tide. It’s ebb at half-arter three, slack-water half-an-hour. If he lives till it turns he’ll hold his own till past the flood, and go out with the next tide.” Mr Henderson⁷³⁷ quotes from the parish register of Heslidon, near Hartlepool, the subjoined extracts of old date, in which the state of the tide at the time of death is mentioned—

“The xith daye of Maye, A.D. 1595, at vi. of ye clocke in the morninge, being full water, Mr Henrye Mitford, of Hoolam, died at Newcastel, and was buried the xvith daie, being Sondaie, at evening prayer, the hired preacher maid ye sermon.”

⁷³⁶ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1875, viii. p. 291.

⁷³⁷ “Folk-Lore of Northern Counties,” 1880, p. 58.

“The xviith daie of Maie, at xii. of ye clock at noon, being lowe water, Mrs Barbara Mitford died, and was buried the xviiith daie of Maie, at ix of the clocke. Mr Holsworth maid ye sermon.”

According to Mr Henderson, this belief is common along the east coast of England, from Northumberland to Kent. It has been suggested that there may be “some slight foundation for this belief in the change of temperature, which undoubtedly takes place on the change of tide, and which may act on the flickering spark of life, extinguishing it as the ebbing sea recedes.”

We may compare, too, the following passage in “2 Henry IV.” (iv. 4), where Clarence, speaking of the approaching death of the king, says—

“The river hath thrice flow’d, no ebb between;
And the old folk, time’s doting chronicles,
Say it did so a little time before
That our great grandsire, Edward, sick’d and died.”

This was an historical fact, having happened on October 12th, 1411.

The prayers of the Church which are used for the recovery of the sick were, in the olden time, also supposed to have a morbid influence, to which Gloucester attributes the death of the king in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1)—

“The church! where is it? Had not churchmen pray’d,
His thread of life had not so soon decay’d.”

Once more, the custom of closing the eyes at the moment of death is touchingly referred to in “Antony and Cleopatra” (v. 2), where Charmian may be supposed to close Cleopatra’s eyes—

”Downy windows, close;
And golden Phœbus never be beheld
Of eyes again so royal.”

Passing on from that solemn moment in human life when the soul takes its flight from the fragile tenement of clay that contained it during its earthly existence, we find that even among the lowest savages there has generally been a certain respect paid to the dead body; and consequently various superstitious rites have from time to time been associated with its burial, which has been so appropriately termed “the last act.” Whilst occasionally speaking of death, Shakespeare has not only pictured its solemnity in the most powerful and glowing language, but, as opportunity allowed, given us a slight insight into those customs that formerly prevailed in connection with the committal of the body to its final resting place in the grave. At the present day, when there is an ever-growing tendency to discard and forget as irrational and foolish the customs of by-gone years, it is interesting to find chronicled for all future time in the immortal pages of our illustrious poet those superstitious rites and social usages which may be said to have been most intimately identified with the age to which they belonged. One custom, perhaps, that will always retain its hold amongst us—so long as we continue to bury the remains of our departed ones—is the scattering of flowers on their graves, a practice indeed which may be traced up to Pagan times. It is frequently mentioned by Shakespeare in some of his superb passages, as, for instance, in “Cymbeline” (iv. 2), where Arviragus says—

“With fairest flowers,
Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I’ll sweeten thy sad grave: thou shalt not lack
The flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose, nor

The azured hare-bell, like thy veins; no, nor
 The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
 Out-sweeten'd not thy breath.

.....

Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
 To winter-ground thy corse."

In "Hamlet" (iv. 5), the poor bewildered Ophelia sings—

"Larded with sweet flowers;
 Which bewept to the grave did go
 With true-love showers."

Then further on (v. 1) there is the affecting flower-strewing scene, where the Queen, standing over the grave of Ophelia, bids her a long farewell—

"Sweets to the sweet, farewell!
 I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
 I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
 And not have strew'd thy grave."

In "Romeo and Juliet" (iv. 5), Capulet says—

"Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse."

And further on (v. 3) the Page says—

"He came with flowers to strew his lady's grave."⁷³⁸

Once more, in "Pericles" (iv. 1), Marina is introduced, entering with a basket of flowers, uttering these sad words—

"No, I will rob Tellus of her weed,
 To strew thy green with flowers; the yellows, blues,
 The purple violets, and marigolds,
 Shall as a carpet hang upon thy grave,
 While summer-days do last."

Flowers, which so soon droop and wither, are indeed sweet emblems of that brief life which is the portion of mankind in this world; while, at the same time, their exquisite beauty is a further type of the glory that awaits the redeemed hereafter, when, like fair flowers, they shall burst forth in unspeakable grandeur on the resurrection morn. There is a pretty custom observed in South Wales on Palm Sunday, of spreading fresh flowers upon the graves of friends and relatives,—the day being called Flowering Sunday.

The practice of decorating the corpse is mentioned by many old writers. In "Romeo and Juliet," (iv. 5), Friar Laurence says,—

"Dry up your tears, and stick your rosemary
 On this fair corse; and, as the custom is,
 In all her best array bear her to church."

Queen Katharine, in "Henry VIII.," (iv. 2), directs,—

⁷³⁸ Cf. "Winter's Tale," iv. 4.

“When I am dead, good wench,
Let me be used with honour: strew me over
With maiden flowers.”

It was formerly customary, in various parts of England, to have a garland of flowers and sweet herbs carried before a maiden’s coffin, and afterwards to suspend it in the church. In allusion to this practice the priest in “Hamlet” (v. 1), says:

“Yet here she is allow’d her virgin crants,
Her maiden strewments and the bringing home
Of bell and burial.”

—crants ⁷³⁹meaning garlands. It may be noted that no other instance has been found of this word in English. These garlands are thus described by Gay:—

“To her sweet mem’ry flow’ry garlands strung,
On her now empty seat aloft were hung.”

Nichols, in his “History of Lancashire,” (ii., pt. i. 382), speaking of Waltham in Framland Hundred, says: “In this Church, under every arch, a garland is suspended, one of which is customarily placed there whenever any young unmarried woman dies.” Brand ⁷⁴⁰tells us he saw in the churches of Wolsingham and Stanhope, in the County Durham, specimens of these garlands; the form of a woman’s glove, cut in white paper, being hung in the centre of each of them.

The funerals of knights and persons of rank were in Shakespeare’s day performed with great ceremony and ostentation. Sir John Hawkins observes that “the sword, the helmet, the gauntlet, spens, and tabard are still hung over the grave of every knight.” In “Hamlet,” (iv. 5), Laertes speaks of this custom:—

“His means of death, his obscure burial,
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o’er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard, as ‘twere from heaven to earth
That I must call’t in question.”

Again, in “2 Henry VI.,” (iv. 10), Iden says:—

“Is’t Cade that I have slain, that monstrous traitor?
Sword, I will hallow thee for this thy deed,
And hang thee o’er my tomb when I am dead.”

The custom of bearing the dead body in its ordinary habiliments, and with the face uncovered—a practice referred to in “Romeo and Juliet,” (iv. 1),—appears to have been peculiar to Italy,—

“Then, as the manner of our country is,
In thy best robes uncover’d on the bier
Thou shalt be borne to that same ancient vault
Where all the kindreds of the Capulets lie.”

In Coryat’s “Crudities” (1776, ii. p. 27), the practice is thus described: - “The burials are so strange, both in Venice and all other cities, towns, and parishes of Italy, that they differ not

⁷³⁹ The word in German is kranz, in other Teutonic dialects krants, krans, and crance,—the latter being Lowland Scotch,—and having cransies for plural. Clark and Wright’s “Hamlet,” 1876, 216.

⁷⁴⁰ “Popular Antiquities,” ii. p. 303

only from England, but from all other nations whatever in Christendom. For they carry the corse to church with the face, hands, and feet all naked, and wearing the same apparel that the person wore lately before it died, or that which it craved to be buried in; which apparel is interred together with their bodies.⁷⁴¹ Singer⁷⁴² says that Shakespeare no doubt had seen this custom particularly described in the “Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliet,”—

“Another use there is, that whosoever dies,
Borne to the Church, with open face upon the bier he lies,
In wonted weed attir’d, not wrapt in winding sheet.”

He alludes to it again in Ophelia’s song in “Hamlet” (iv. 5):—

“They bore him barefaced on the bier.”

It was in bygone times customary to bury the Danish kings in their armour—hence the remark of Hamlet (i. 4), when addressing the Ghost:—

”What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisit’st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous.”

Shakespeare was probably guilty of an anachronism in “Coriolanus” (v. 6), when he makes one of the lords say:—

”Bear from hence his body;
And mourn you for him: let him be regarded
As the most noble corse that ever herald
Did follow to his urn,”

the allusion being to the public funerals of English Princes, at the conclusion of which a herald proclaimed the style of the deceased.

We may compare what Queen Katharine says in “King Henry VIII.” (iv. 2):—

“After my death I wish no other herald,
No other speaker of my living actions,
To keep my honour from corruption
But such an honest chronicler as Griffith.”

It seems to have been the fashion, as far back as the thirteenth century, to ornament the tombs of eminent persons with figures and inscriptions on plates of brass; hence in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (i. 1), the King says:—

“Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live register’d upon our brazen tombs.”

In “Much ado about Nothing” (v. 1), Leonato speaking of his daughter’s death says:—

“Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb,
And sing it to her bones, sing it to-night.”

And also in a previous scene (iv. 1), this graceful custom is noticed:—

⁷⁴¹ See Staunton’s “Shakespeare,” 1864, i., p. 305.

⁷⁴² Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1895, ix. pp. 209, 210.

“Maintain a mourning ostentation
And on your family’s old monument
Hang a mournful epitaph.”

It was also the custom, in years gone by, on the death of an eminent person, for his friends to compose short laudatory verses, epitaphs, &c., and to affix them to the hearse or grave with pins, wax, paste, &c. Thus in “Henry V.” (i. 2), Henry declares:—

“Either our history shall with full mouth
Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,
Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,
Not worshipp’d with a waxen epitaph,”

meaning, says Gifford, “I will either have my full history recorded with glory, or lie in an undisturbed grave; not merely without an inscription sculptured in stone, but un-worshipped, unhonoured, even by a waxen epitaph.”⁷⁴³

We may also compare what Lucius says in “Titus Andronicus” (i. 1):—

“There lie thy bones, sweet Mutius, with thy friends,
Till we with trophies do adorn thy tomb.”

The custom was still general when Shakespeare lived; many fine and interesting examples existing in the old Cathedral of St. Paul’s, and other churches of London, down to the time of the Great Fire, in the form of pensil-tables of wood and metal, painted or engraved with poetical memorials, suspended against the columns and walls.

“Feasts of the Dead,” which have prevailed in this and other countries from the earliest times are, according to some antiquarians, supposed to have been borrowed from the *caena feralis* of the Romans—an offering, consisting of milk, honey, wine, olives, and strewed flowers, to the ghost of the deceased. In a variety of forms this custom has prevailed amongst most nations—the idea being that the spirits of the dead feed on the viands set before them; hence the rite in question embraced the notion of a sacrifice. In Christian times, however, these funeral offerings have passed into commemorative banquets, under which form they still exist amongst us. In allusion to these feasts, Hamlet (i. 2), speaking of his mother’s marriage, says:—

”The funeral baked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.”

Again, in “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 5), Capulet narrates how—

“All things that we ordained festival,
Turn from their office to black funeral;
Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast.”

Mr Tylor,⁷⁴⁴ in discussing the origin of funeral feasts, and in tracing their origin back to the savage and barbaric times of the institution of feast of departed souls, says we may find a lingering survival of this old rite in the doles of bread and drink given to the poor at funerals, and “soul-mass cakes” which peasant girls beg for at farmhouses with the traditional formula,—

⁷⁴³ Notes on “Jonson’s Works,” ix. p. 58.

⁷⁴⁴ “Primitive Culture,” ii. p. 43.

“Soul, soul, for a soul cake,
Pray you, mistress, a soul cake.”⁷⁴⁵

In the North of England, the funeral feast is called an “arval,” and the loaves that are sometimes distributed among the poor are termed “arval bread.”

Among other funeral customs mentioned by Shakespeare, may be mentioned his allusion to the burial service. Originally, before the reign of Edward VI., it was the practice for the priest to throw earth on the body in the form of a cross, and then to sprinkle it with holy water. Thus, in the “Winter’s Tale,” (iv. 4), the Shepherd says,—

“Some hangman must put on my shroud and lay me
Where no priest shovels in dust,”

—implying, “I must be buried as a common malefactor, out of the pale of consecrated ground, and without the usual rites of the dead,”—a whimsical anachronism, as Mr Douce⁷⁴⁶ points out, when it is considered that the old Shepherd was a pagan, a worshipper of Jupiter and Apollo.

In “Antony and Cleopatra,” (i. 3), we find an allusion to the lachrymatory vials filled with tears, which the Romans were in the habit of placing in the tomb of a departed friend. Cleopatra sorrowfully exclaims,—

“O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
In Fulvia’s death, how mine received shall be.”

This is another interesting instance of Shakespeare’s knowledge of the manners of distant ages, showing how varied and extensive his knowledge was, and his skill in applying it whenever occasion required.

The winding or shrouding-sheet, in which the body was wrapped previous to its burial, is alluded to in “Hamlet,” (v. 1), in the song of the clown,—

“A pick-axe, and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet:
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.”

Again, in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” (v. 1), Puck says,—

“The screech owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe
In remembrance of a shroud.”

Ophelia speaks of the shroud as white as the mountain snow (“Hamlet,” iv. 5). The following song, too, in “Twelfth Night,” (ii. 4), mentions the custom of sticking yew in the shroud,—

“Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath:
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.”

⁷⁴⁵ See “British Popular Customs,” p. 404; “Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. pp. 237, 246; Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, p. 439.

⁷⁴⁶ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, p. 222.

“My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it!”

To quote two further illustrations, Desdemona (“Othello,” iv. 2) says to Emilia, “Lay on my bed my wedding-sheets,” and when in the following scene Emilia answers—

“I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed”

Desdemona adds—

“If I do die before thee, pr’ithee, shroud me
In one of those same sheets.”

—a wish, indeed, which her cruel fate so speedily caused to be realised.

And in “3 Henry VI.” (i. 1), we have King Henry’s powerful words—

“Think’st thou that I will leave my kingly throne,
Wherein my grandsire and my father sat?
No: first shall war unpeople this my realm;

Ay, and their colours, often borne in France,
And now in England to our heart’s great sorrow
Shall be my winding-sheet.”

The custom still prevalent of carrying the dead to the grave with music—a practice which existed in the primitive church—to denote that they have ended their spiritual warfare, and are become conquerors, formerly existed very generally in this country.⁷⁴⁷In “Cymbeline” (iv. 2), Arviragus says—

“And let us, Polydore, though now our voices
Have got the mannish crack, sing him to the ground,
As once our mother; use like note and words,
Save that Euriphile must be Fidele.”

The tolling of bells at funerals is referred to in “Hamlet” (v. 1), where the priest says of Ophelia—

”—She is allow’d her virgin crants,
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
Of bell and burial.”

It has been a current opinion for centuries, that places of burial are haunted with spectres and apparitions—a notion, indeed, that prevailed as far back as the times of heathenism. Ovid speaks of ghosts coming out of their sepulchres and wandering about; and Virgil, quoting the popular opinion of his time, tells us how Moeris could call the ghosts out of their sepulchres (“Bucol.” viii. 98):—

“Mœrim, sæpe animas imis excire sepulcris,
Atque satas alio vidi traducere messes.”

Indeed, the idea of the ghost remaining near the corpse is of world-wide prevalence; and as Mr Tylor⁷⁴⁸ points out, “through all the changes of religious thought from first to last in the

⁷⁴⁷ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. pp. 267–270.

⁷⁴⁸ “Primitive Culture,” ii. p. 30.

course of human history, the hovering ghosts of the dead make the midnight burial-ground a place where men's flesh creeps with terror." In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (v. 1), Puck declares—

"Now it is the time of night
That the graves all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide."

In the same play, too, (iii. 2) Puck speaking of "Aurora's harbinger," says—

"At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards: damned spirits all,
That in cross ways and floods have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone;
For fear lest day should look their shames upon."

In this passage two curious superstitions are described;—the ghosts of self-murderers, who are buried in cross-roads; and of those who have been drowned at sea, being said to wander for a hundred years, owing to the rites of sepulture having never been properly bestowed on their bodies.

We may further compare Hamlet's words (iii. 2)—

"'Tis now the very witching time of night;
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world."

From the earliest period much importance has been attached to the position of the grave, the popular direction being from east to west, that from north to south being regarded not only dishonourable but unlucky. Thus, in "Cymbeline" (iv. 2), Guiderius, when arranging about the apparently dead body of Imogen, disguised in man's apparel, says—

"Nay, Cadwal, we must lay his head to the east;
My father had a reason for't."

Indeed, the famous antiquary Hearne had such precise views in this matter that he left orders for his grave to be made straight by a compass, due east and west. This custom was practised by the ancient Greeks, and thus, as Mr Tylor points out,⁷⁴⁹ it is not to late and isolated fancy, but to the carrying on of ancient and widespread solar ideas, that we trace the well-known legend that the body of Christ was laid with the head towards the west, thus looking eastward, and the Christian usage of digging graves east and west which prevailed through mediæval times, and is not yet forgotten. The rule of laying the head to the west, and its meaning that the dead shall rise looking towards the east, are perfectly stated in the following passage from an ecclesiastical treatise of the 16th century⁷⁵⁰: - "Debet autem quis sic sepeliri ut capite ad occidentem posito, pedes dirigat ad Orientem, in quo quasi ipsa positione orat: et innuit quod promptus est, ut de occasu festinet ad ortum: de mundo ad seculum."⁷⁵¹

Within old monuments and receptacles for the dead perpetual lamps were supposed to be lighted up, an allusion to which is made by Pericles (iii. 1), who, deploring the untimely death

⁷⁴⁹ "Primitive Culture," 2873, ii. p. 423.

⁷⁵⁰ Durandus, "De Officio Mortuorum," lib. vii. chap. 35-39.

⁷⁵¹ Dr Johnson thought the words of the clown in "Hamlet" (v. 1), "make her grave straight," meant, "make her grave from east to west, in a direct line parallel to the church." This interpretation seems improbable, as the word straight in the sense of immediately occurs frequently in Shakespeare's plays.

of Thaisa at sea, and the superstitious demand made by the sailors that her corpse should be thrown overboard, says—

“Nor have I time
To give thee hallow’d to thy grave, but straight
Must cast thee, scarcely coffin’d, in the ooze;
Where, for a monument upon thy bones,
And e’er-remaining lamps, the belching whale
And humming water must o’erwhelm thy corpse,
Lying with simple shells.”

Again, in “Troilus and Cressida” (iii. 2), we find a further reference in the words of Troilus—

“O that I thought it could be in a woman,
To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love.”

Pope, too, in his “Eloisa to Abelard,” has a similar allusion (l. 261–2)—

“Ah, hopeless lasting flames, like those that burn
To light the dead, and warm th’ unfruitful urn!”

D’Israeli, in his “Curiosities of Literature,” thus explains this superstition - “It has happened frequently that inquisitive men, examining with a flambeau ancient sepulchres which have just been opened, the fat and gross vapours engendered by the corruption of dead bodies, kindled as the flambeau approached them, to the great astonishment of the spectators, who frequently cried out a miracle! This sudden inflammation, although very natural, has given room to believe that these flames proceeded from perpetual lamps, which some have thought were placed in the tombs of the ancients, and which, they said, were extinguished at the moment that these tombs opened, and were penetrated by the exterior air.” Mr Dennis, however, in his “Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria” (1878, ii. p. 404), says that the use of sepulchral lamps by the ancients is well known, and gave rise to the above superstition. Sometimes lamps were kept burning in sepulchres long after the interment, as in the case of the Ephesian widow, described by Petronius (“Satyr,” c. 13), who replaced the lamp placed in her husband’s tomb.

A common expression formerly applied to the dead occurs in the “Winter’s Tale” (v. 1), where Dion asks—

“What were more holy,
Than to rejoice the former queen is well?”

So in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 5)—

“*Mess.* First, madam, he is well.
Cleo. Why, there’s more gold.
But, sirrah, mark, we use
To say the dead are well.”⁷⁵²

Lastly, commentators have differed as to the meaning of the words of Julia, in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (i. 2)—

“I see you have a month’s mind to them.”

Douce says she refers to the mind or remembrance days of our Popish ancestors; persons in their wills having often directed that in a month, or at some other specific time, some solemn

⁷⁵² See Malone’s Note, Variorum edition, xiv. 400.

office, as a mass or a dirge, should be performed for the repose of their souls. Thus Ray quotes a proverb, "To have a month's mind to a thing," and quotes the above custom. For a further and not improbable solution of this difficulty, the reader may consult Dyce's "Glossary" (p. 277).

15. Rings And Precious Stones

From a very early period, rings and precious stones have held a prominent place in the traditionary lore, customs, and superstitions of most nations. Thus rings have been supposed “to protect from evil fascinations of every kind, against the evil eye, the influence of demons, and dangers of every possible character; though it was not simply in the rings themselves that the supposed virtues existed, but in the materials of which they were composed,—in some particular precious stone that was set in them as charms or talismans, in some device or inscription on the stone, or some magical letters engraved on the circumference of the ring.”⁷⁵³Rings, too, in days gone by, had a symbolical importance. Thus, it was anciently the custom for every monarch to have a ring, the temporary possession of which invested the holder with the same authority as the owner himself could exercise. Thus, in “Henry VIII.,” (v. 1), we have the king’s ring given to Cranmer, and presented by him (sc. 2), as a security against the machinations of Gardiner and others of the Council, who were plotting to destroy him. Thus the King says,—

“If entreaties
Will render you no remedy, this ring
Deliver them, and your appeal to us
There make before them.”

This custom, too, was not confined to royalty, for in “King Richard II.,” (ii. 2), the Duke of York gives this order to his servant,—

“Sirrah, get thee to Plashy, to my sister Gloucester;
Bid her send me presently a thousand pound:
Hold, take my ring.

There is an interesting relic of the same custom still kept up at Winchester College.⁷⁵⁴When the captain of the school petitions the head-master for a holiday, and obtains it, he receives from him a ring, in token of the indulgence granted, which he wears during the holiday, and returns to the headmaster when it is over. The inscription upon the ring was formerly “Potentiam fero, geroque.” It is now “Commendat rarior usus,” (Juvenal, Sat. xi. 208).

Token Rings date from very early times. Edward the First in 1297 presented Margaret, his fourth daughter, with a golden pyx, in which he deposited a ring, as a token of his unfailing love.

When Richard III. (i. 2), brings his hasty wooing to a conclusion, he gives the Lady Anne a ring, saying,—

“Look, how this ring encompasseth thy finger,
Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart;
Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.”

In “Cymbeline,” (i. 1), Imogen gives Posthumus a ring when they part, and he presents her with a bracelet in exchange,—

“Look here, love;
This diamond was my mother’s; take it, heart;

⁷⁵³ Jones’s “Finger-Ring Lore,” 1877, p. 91.

⁷⁵⁴ Wordsworth’s “Shakespeare and the Bible,” 1880, p. 283.

But keep it till you woo another wife,
 When Imogen is dead.
Posthumus. How! how! another?
 You gentle gods, give me but this I have,
 And sear up my embracements from a next
 With bonds of death! Remain, remain, thou here,
 (*Putting on the ring.*)
 While sense can keep it on.”

Yet he afterwards gives it up to Iachimo (ii. 4)—upon a false representation—to test his wife’s honour,—

“Here, take this too;
 It is a basilisk unto my eye,
 Kills me to look on’t.”

The exchange of rings, a solemn mode of private contract between lovers, we have already referred to in the chapter on Marriage,—a practice alluded to in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (ii. 2) where Julia gives Proteus a ring, saying - “Keep this remembrance for thy Julia’s sake”; and he replies, “Why, then we’ll make exchange: here, take you this.”

Death’s-head rings.—Rings engraved with skulls and skeletons were not necessarily mourning rings, but were also worn by persons who affected gravity; and, curious to say, by the procuresses of Elizabeth’s time. Biron, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), refers to “a death’s face in a ring;” and we may quote Falstaff’s words in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) - “Peace, good Doll! do not speak like a death’s head; do not bid me remember mine end.” We may compare the following, “The Chances” (i. 5), by Beaumont and Fletcher:—

“As they keep deaths’ heads in rings,
 To cry ‘memento’ to me.”

According to Mr Fairholt, “the skull and skeleton decorations for rings first came into favour and fashion at the obsequious Court of France, when Diana, of Poitiers, became the mistress of Henry the Second. At that time she was a widow, and in mourning, so black and white became fashionable colours; jewels were formed like funeral memorials; golden ornaments shaped like coffins, holding enamelled skeletons, hung from the neck; watches, made to fit in little silver skulls were attached to the waists of the denizens of a court that alternately indulged in profanity or piety, but who mourned show.”⁷⁵⁵

Posy-rings were formerly much used—it having been customary to inscribe a motto or “posy” within the hoop of the betrothal ring.⁷⁵⁶ Thus in the “Merchant of Venice” (v. 1), Gratiano, when asked by Portia the reason of his quarrel with Nerissa, answers—

“About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
 That she did give me, whose posy was
 For all the world like cutler’s poetry
 Upon a knife, ‘Love me, and leave me not.’”

In “As You Like It” (iii. 2), Jaques tells Orlando “you are full of pretty answers. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths’ wives, and conned them out of rings?”

Again, Hamlet (iii. 2), asks

⁷⁵⁵ See Jones’s “Finger Ring Lore,” 1877, p. 372.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 390–418; see “Notes and Queries.”

“Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?”

Many of our old writers allude to the “posy-rings.” Thus Herrick in his “Hesperides,” says:—

“What posies for our wedding rings,
What gloves we’ll give and ribbonings.”

Henry VIII. gave Anne of Cleves a ring with the following posy - “God send me well to kepe,” a most unpropitious alliance, as the king expressed his dislike to her soon after the marriage.

Thumb-rings.—These were generally broad gold rings worn on the thumb by important personages. Thus Falstaff (“1 Henry IV.” ii. 4), bragged that in his earlier years he had been so slender in figure as to “creep into an alderman’s thumb-ring;” and a ring thus worn—probably as more conspicuous—appears to have been considered as appropriate to the customary attire of a civic dignitary at a much later period. A character in the Lord Mayor Show in 1664 is described as ‘habited like a grave citizen—gold girdle and gloves hung thereon, rings on his fingers, and a seal ring on his thumb.’”⁷⁵⁷ Chaucer in his “Squire’s Tale,” says of the rider of the brazen horse who advanced into the hall, Cambuscan, that “upon his thumb he had of gold a ring.” In “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4), Mercutio speaks of the—

”Agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman.”

It has been suggested that Shakespeare in the following passage alludes to the annual celebration at Venice of the wedding of the Doge with the Adriatic, when he makes Othello say (i. 2):—

“But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea’s worth.”

This custom, it is said, was instituted by Pope Alexander III., who gave the doge a gold ring from his own finger in token of the victory by the Venetian fleet at Istria over Frederick Barbarossa, in defence of the Pope’s quarrel. When his holiness gave the ring, he desired the doge to throw a similar ring into the sea every year on Ascension Day, in commemoration of the event.

Agate.—This stone was frequently cut to represent the human form, and was occasionally worn in the hat by gallants. In “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2), Falstaff says, “I was never manned with an agate till now,” meaning, according to Johnson, “had an agate for my man;” was waited on by an agate.

Carbuncle.—The supernatural lustre of this gem ⁷⁵⁸is supposed to be described in “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 3), where, speaking of the ring on the finger of Bassianus, Martius says—

“Upon his bloody finger he doth wear
A precious ring, that lightens all the hole,
Which, like a taper in some monument,
Doth shine upon the dead man’s earthy cheeks,
And shows the ragged entrails of the pit.”

⁷⁵⁷ See Jones’s “Finger Ring Lore,” 1877, p. 88.

⁷⁵⁸ See Sir Thomas Browne’s “Vulgar Errors.”

In Drayton's "Muses' Elysium" ("Nymphal," ix.), it is thus eulogised—

"That admired mighty stone,
The carbuncle that's named,
Which from it such a flaming light
And radiancy ejecteth—
That in the very darkest night
The eye to it directeth."

Milton, speaking of the cobra, says—

"His head
Crested aloof, and carbuncle his eyes."

John Norton,⁷⁵⁹ an alchemist in the reign of Edward IV., wrote a poem entitled the "Ordinal," or a manual of the chemical art. One of his projects, we are told, was a bridge of gold over the Thames, crowned with pinnacles of gold, which, being studded with carbuncles, would diffuse a blaze of light in the dark. Amongst the other references to it given by Shakespeare may be mentioned one in "Henry VIII." (ii. 3), where the Princess Elizabeth is spoken of as—

"A gem
To lighten all this isle."

And Hamlet (ii. 2) uses the phrase, "With eyes like carbuncles."

Chrysolite.—This stone was supposed to possess peculiar virtues, and, according to Simon Maiolus, in his "Dierum Caniculares" (1615–19), Thetel the Jew, who wrote a book, "De Sculpturiis," mentions one naturally in the form of a woman, which was potent against fascination of all kinds. Othello (v. 2) thus alludes to this stone in reference to his wife—

"Nay, had she been true,
If heaven could make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it."

Pearls.—The eastern custom of powdering sovereigns at their coronation with gold dust and seed pearl is alluded to in "Antony and Cleopatra"⁷⁶⁰(ii. 5)—

"I'll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail
Rich pearls upon thee."

So Milton ("Paradise Lost," ii. 4):—

"The gorgeous east, with liberal hand
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold."

Again, to swallow a pearl in a draught seems to have been common to royal and mercantile prodigality. In "Hamlet" (v. 2), the King says—

"The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath;
And in the cup an union ⁷⁶¹shall he throw."

Further on Hamlet himself asks, tauntingly—

⁷⁵⁹ Jones' "Precious Stones," 1880, p. 62.

⁷⁶⁰ See Singer's "Shakespeare," x. p. 213.

⁷⁶¹ An union is a precious pearl, remarkable for its size.

“Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?”

Malone, as an illustration of this custom, quotes from the second part of Heywood’s “If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody”—

“Here sixteen thousand pound at one clap goes
Instead of sugar. Gresham drinks this pearl
Unto the queen his mistress.”

In former times, powdered pearls were considered invaluable for stomach complaints; and Rondeletius tells us that they were supposed to possess an exhilarating quality - “Uniones quæ a conchis, et valde cordiales sunt.”

Much mystery was in bygone days thought to hang over the origin of pearls, and according to the poetic Orientals,⁷⁶² “Every year, on the sixteenth day of the month Nisan, the pearl oysters rise to the sea and open their shells, in order to receive the rain which falls at that time, and the drops thus caught become pearls.” Thus, in “Richard III.” (iv. 4), the king says:—

“The liquid drops of tears that you have shed
Shall come again, transform’d to orient pearl,
Advantaging their loan with interest
Of ten times double gain of happiness.”

Moore, in one of his melodies, notices this pretty notion—

“And precious the tear as that rain from the sky
Which turns into pearls as it falls in the sea.”

Turquoise.—This stone was probably more esteemed for its secret virtues than from any commercial value; the turquoise, turkise, or turkey-stone, having from a remote period, been supposed to possess talismanic properties. Thus, in the “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 1), Shylock says: - “It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.” Mr Dyce⁷⁶³ says that Shylock valued his turquoise, “not only as being the gift of Leah, but on account of the imaginary virtues ascribed to it; which was supposed to become pale or to brighten according as the health of the wearer was bad or good.” Thus, Ben Jonson in “Sejanus” (i. 1), alludes to its wonderful properties—

“And true as turkoise in the dear lord’s ring,
Look well or ill with him.”

Fenton, in his “Certain Secret Wonders of Nature” (1569), thus describes it: - “The turkeys doth move when there is any evil prepared to him that weareth it.” There were numerous other magical properties ascribed to the turquoise. Thus, it was supposed to lose its colour entirely at the death of its owner, but to recover it when placed upon the finger of a new and healthy possessor. It was also said that whoever wore a turquoise, so that either it or its setting touched the skin, might fall from any height; the stone attracting to itself the whole force of the blow. With the Germans, the turquoise is still the gem appropriated to the ring, the “gage d’amour,” presented by the lover on the acceptance of his suit, the permanence of its colour being believed to depend upon the constancy of his affection.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶² See Jones’s “History and Mystery of Precious Stones,” p. 116.

⁷⁶³ “Glossary,” p. 465.

⁷⁶⁴ See C. W. King on “Precious Stones.” 1867, p. 267.

16. Sports And Pastimes

Very many of the old sports and pastimes in popular use in Shakespeare's day, have long ago not only been laid aside, but in the course of years have become entirely forgotten. This is to be regretted, as a great number of these capital diversions were admirably suited both for in and out of doors; the simplicity which marked them being one of their distinguishing charms. That Shakespeare, too, took an interest in these good old sources of recreation, may be gathered from the frequent reference which he has made to them; his mention of some childish game even serving occasionally as an illustration in a passage characterized by its force and vigour.

Archery.—In Shakespeare's day this was a very popular diversion, and the "Knights of Prince Arthur's Round Table" was a society of archers instituted by Henry VIII., and encouraged in the reign of Elizabeth.⁷⁶⁵Fitzstephen, who wrote in the reign of Henry II., notices it among the summer pastimes of the London youth; and the repeated Statutes from the 13th to the 16th century enforcing the use of the bow, generally ordered the leisure time upon holidays to be passed in its exercise.⁷⁶⁶Shakespeare seems to have been intimately acquainted with the numerous terms connected with archery, many of which we find scattered throughout his plays. Thus, in "Love's Labour's Lost" (iv. 1), Maria uses the expression, "Wide o' the bow hand," a term which signified a good deal to the left of the mark.

The "clout" was the nail or pin of the target, and "from the passages," says Dyce,⁷⁶⁷"which I happen to recollect in our early writers, I should say that the clout, or pin, stood in the centre of the inner circle of the butts, which circle, being painted white, was called the white; that, to 'hit the white' was a considerable feat, but that to 'hit or cleave the clout or pin' was a much greater one,—though, no doubt, the expressions were occasionally used to signify the same thing, viz., to hit the mark." In "Love's Labour's Lost" (iv. 1), Costard says of Boyet, - "Indeed, a' must shoot nearer, or he'll ne'er hit the clout"; and in "2 Henry IV." (iii. 2), Shallow says of old Double, - "A' would have clapped i' the clout at twelve score,"—that is, he would have hit the clout at twelve score yards. And King Lear (iv. 6), employs the phrase "i' the clout, i' the clout: hewgh!"

In "Romeo and Juliet" (ii. 4), where Mercutio relates how Romeo is "shot through the ear with a love song; the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft," the metaphor of course is from archery.

The term "loose" was the technical one for the discharging of an arrow, and occurs in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2).

According to Capell,⁷⁶⁸the words of Bottom, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (i. 2), "hold or cut bow-strings," were a proverbial phrase, and alluded to archery. "When a party was made at butts, assurance of meeting was given in the words of that phrase, the sense of the person using them being that he would 'hold' or keep promise, or they might 'cut his bow-strings,'—demolish him for an archer." Whether, adds Dyce, "this be the true explanation of the phrase, I am unable to determine."

⁷⁶⁵ See Drake's "Shakspeare and His Times," ii. pp. 178–181.

⁷⁶⁶ Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1870, ii. p. 290.

⁷⁶⁷ "Glossary," p. 84.

⁷⁶⁸ "Glossary," p. 210.

All hid, all hid.—Biron, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3), no doubt means the game well known as hide-and-peek, - “All hid, all hid; an old infant play.” The following note, however, in Cotgrave’s “French and English Dictionary,” has been adduced to show that he may possibly mean blind man’s buff; “Clignemasset.—The childish play called Hod-man-blind [*i.e.*, blind-man’s-buff], Harrie-racket, or are you all hid.”

Backgammon.—The old name for this game was “Tables,” as in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2),—

“This is the ape of form, monsieur the nice
That, when he plays at tables, chides the dice.”

An interesting history of this game will be found in Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes” (1876, pp. 419–421).

Barley-break.—This game, called also the “Last Couple in Hell,” which is alluded to in the “Two Noble Kinsmen,” (iv. 3), was played by six people—three of each sex,—who were coupled by lot.⁷⁶⁹ A piece of ground was then chosen, and divided into three compartments, of which the middle one was called hell. It was the object of the couple condemned to this division to catch the others, who advanced from the two extremities; in which case a change of situation took place, and hell was filled by the couple who were excluded by preoccupation from the other places. This catching, however, was not so easy, as by the rules of the game, the middle couple were not to separate before they had succeeded, while the others might break hands whenever they found themselves hard pressed. When all had been taken in turn, the last couple were said “to be in hell,” and the game ended.

The game is frequently mentioned by old writers, and appears to have been very popular. From Herrick’s Poems, it is seen that the couples in their confinement occasionally solaced themselves by kisses,—

“Barley-break; or, Last in Hell.
We two are last in hell: what may we fear
To be tormented, or kept pris’ners here:
Alas, if kissing be of plagues the worst,
We’ll wish in hell we had been last and first.”

In Scotland it was called *barla-breikis*, and was, says Jamieson, “generally played by young people in a corn-yard, hence its name *barla-bracks*, about the stacks.”⁷⁷⁰ The term “hell,” says Nares,⁷⁷¹ “was indiscreet, and must have produced many profane allusions, besides familiarising what ought always to preserve its due effect of awe upon the mind.” Both its names are alluded to in the following passage in Shirley’s “Bird in a Cage”—

“Shall’s to *barlibreak*?
I was in hell last; ‘tis little less to be in a petticoat sometimes.”

Base.—This was a rustic game, known also as “Prison base” or “Prison bars.” It is mentioned in “Cymbeline” (v. 3) by Posthumus—

”Lads more like to run
The country base than to commit such slaughter.”

And in “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (i. 2) by Lucetta—

⁷⁶⁹ From Gifford’s Note on Massinger’s Works, 1813, i. p. 204.

⁷⁷⁰ See Jamieson’s “Scottish Dictionary,” 2899, i. p. 122.

⁷⁷¹ “Glossary,” i. p. 57.

“Indeed, I bid the base for Proteus.”⁷⁷²

The success of this pastime depended upon the agility of the candidates, and their skill in running. Early in the reign of Edward III. it is spoken of as a childish amusement, and was prohibited to be played in the avenues of the palace at Westminster during the session of Parliament, because of the interruption it occasioned to the members and others in passing to and fro as their business required. It was also played by men, and especially in Cheshire and other adjoining counties, where it seems to have been in high repute among all classes. Strutt thus describes the game:⁷⁷³ - “The performance of this pastime requires two parties of equal number, each of them having a base or home to themselves, at the distance of about twenty or thirty yards. The players then on either side taking hold of hands extend themselves in length, and opposite to each other, as far as they conveniently can, always remembering that one of them must touch the base. When any one of them quits the hand of his fellow and runs into the field, which is called giving the chase, he is immediately followed by one of his opponents. He is again followed by a second from the former side, and he by a second opponent, and so on alternately until as many are out as choose to run, every one pursuing the man he first followed and no other; and if he overtake him near enough to touch him, his party claims one towards their game and both return home. They then run forth again and again in like manner until the number is completed that decides the victory. This number is optional, and rarely exceeds twenty.”

The phrase to “bid the base,” means to run fast, challenging another to pursue. It occurs again in “Venus and Adonis”—

“To bid the wind a base he now prepares.”

In Spenser’s “Faerie Queene” (bk. v., canto 8), we read—

“So ran they all as they had been at base,
They being chased that did others chase.”

Bat-fowling.—This sport, which is noticed in the “Tempest” (ii. 1) by Sebastian, was common in days gone by. It is minutely described in Markham’s “Hunger’s Prevention” (1600), which is quoted by Dyce (“Glossary,” pp. 29, 30). The term “bat-fowling,” however, had another signification, says Mr Harting,⁷⁷⁴ in Shakespeare’s day, and it may have been in this secondary sense that it is used in the “Tempest,” being a slang word for a particular mode of cheating. “Bat-fowling” was practised about dusk, when the rogue pretended to have dropped a ring or a jewel at the door of some well furnished shop, and going in asked the apprentice of the house to light his candle to look for it. After some peering about, the bat-fowler would drop the candle as if by accident. “Now, I pray you, good young man,” he would say, “do so much as light the candle again.” While the boy was away the rogue plundered the shop, and having stolen everything he could find stole himself away.

Billiards.—Shakespeare is guilty of an anachronism in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 5), where he makes Cleopatra say—

⁷⁷² See Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 58.

⁷⁷³ “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 243.

⁷⁷⁴ See Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” p. 156; Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 98. A simple mode of bat-fowling, by means of a large clap-net and a lantern, and called bird-batting, is alluded to in Fielding’s “Joseph Andrews” (bk. ii. chap. x.). Drake thinks that it is to a stratagem of this kind Shakespeare alludes when he paints Buckingham exclaiming (“Henry VIII.” i. 1)—

“The net has fall’n upon me; I shall perish
Under device and practice.”

“Let’s to billiards”

—the game being unknown to the ancients. The modern manner of playing at billiards differs from that formerly in use. At the commencement of the last century,⁷⁷⁵the billiard-table was square, having only three pockets for the balls to run in, situated on one of the sides—that is, at each corner, and the third between them. About the middle of the table, a small arch of iron was placed, and at a little distance from it an upright cone called a king. At certain periods of the game, it was necessary for the balls to be driven through the one and round the other, without knocking either of them down, which was not easily effected, because they were not fastened to the table.

Bone-ace.—This old game, popularly called “One-and-Thirty,” is alluded to by Grumio in “Taming of the Shrew” (i. 2): - “Well, was it fit for a servant to use his master so; being, perhaps, for aught I see, two-and-thirty—a pip out.”⁷⁷⁶It was very like the French game of “Vingt-un,” only a longer reckoning. Strutt⁷⁷⁷says, that “perhaps Bone-Ace is the same as the game called Ace of Hearts, prohibited with all lotteries by cards and dice, An. 12 Geor. II., Cap. 38 sect. 2.” It is mentioned in Massinger’s “Fatal Dowry” (ii. 2): - “You think, because you served my lady’s mother [you] are thirty-two years old, which is a pip out, you know.”

The phrase “to be two-and-thirty,” a pip out, was an old cant term applied to a person who was intoxicated.

Bo-peep.—This nursery amusement, which consisted in peeping from behind something, and crying “Bo!” is referred to by the Fool in “King Lear” (i. 4): - “That such a king should play bo-peep.” In Sherwood’s “Dictionary” it is defined, “Jeu d’enfant; ou (plustost) des nourrices aux petits enfans; se cachans le visage et puis se monstrant.” Minsheu’s derivation of “bo-peep,” from the noise which chickens make when they come out of the shell, is, says Douce (“Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 405) more whimsical than just.”

Bowls.—Frequent allusions occur to this game, which seems to have been a popular pastime in olden times. The small ball, now called the jack, at which the players aim, was sometimes termed the “mistress.” In “Troilus and Cressida” (iii. 2), Pandarus says: “So, so; rub⁷⁷⁸on, and kiss the mistress.” A bowl that kisses the jack or mistress, is in the most advantageous position; hence “to kiss the jack” served to denote a state of great advantage. Thus, in “Cymbeline” (ii. 1), Cloten exclaims, “Was there ever man that had such luck! when I kissed the jack, upon an up-cast to be hit away! I had a hundred pound on’t.” There is another allusion to this game, according to Staunton, in “King John” (ii. 1): - “On the outward eye of fickle France” the aperture on one side which contains the bias or weight that inclines the bowl in running from a direct course, being sometimes called the eye.

A further reference to this game occurs in the following dialogue in “Richard II.” (iii. 4):—

“*Queen.* What sport shall we devise here in this garden,
To drive away the heavy thought of care?

1 *Lady.* Madam, we’ll play at bowls.

Queen. ‘Twill make me think the world is full of rubs,
And that my fortune runs ‘gainst the bias.”

⁷⁷⁵ Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 396.

⁷⁷⁶ A pip is a spot upon a card.

⁷⁷⁷ “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 436.

⁷⁷⁸ Rub is still a term at the game, expressive of the movement of the balls. Cf. “King Lear,” (ii. 2), “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 1), where Bozet speaking of the game, says;—“I fear too much rubbing.”

—the *bias*, as stated above, being a weight inserted in one side of a bowl, in order to give it a particular inclination in bowling. “To run against the bias,” therefore, became a proverb. Thus, to quote another instance, in the “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. 5), Petruchio says—

“Well, forward, forward! thus the bowl should run,
And not unluckily against the bias.”

And in “Troilus and Cressida,” (iv. 5), the term “bias-cheek” is used to denote a cheek swelling out like the bias of a bowl.⁷⁷⁹

Cards.—Some of the old terms connected with card-playing are curious, a few of which are alluded to by Shakespeare. Thus, in “King Lear” (v. 1), Edmund says,—

“And hardly shall I carry out my side”

alluding to the card table, where to carry out a side meant to carry out the game with your partner successfully. So, “to set up a side” was to become partners in the game; “to pull or pluck down a side” was to lose it.⁷⁸⁰

A lurch at cards denoted an easy victory. So, in “Coriolanus” (ii. 2), Cominius says, - “He lurch’d all swords of the garland,” meaning, as Malone says, that Coriolanus gained from all other warriors the wreath of victory, with ease, and incontestable superiority.

A pack of cards was formerly termed “a deck of cards,” as in “3 Henry VI.” (v. 1), - “The king was slily finger’d from the deck.”

Again, “to vie” was also a term at cards, and meant particularly to increase the stakes, and generally to challenge anyone to a contention, bet, wager, &c. So, Cleopatra (v. 2), says,—

”Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy.”

Cherry Pit.—This consisted in throwing cherry stones into a little hole,—a game, says Nares, still practised with dumps or money.⁷⁸¹ In “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), Sir Toby alludes to it, - “What, man! ‘tis not for gravity to play at cherry-pit with Satan.” Nash, in his “Pierce Penilesse,” speaking of the disfigurement of ladies’ faces by painting, says, - “You may play at cherry-pit in the dint of their cheeks.”

Chess.—As might be expected, several allusions occur in Shakespeare’s plays to this popular game. In the “Tempest,” (v. 1), Ferdinand and Miranda are represented playing at it; and in “King John” (ii. 1), Elinor says:—

“That thou mayst be a queen, and check the world!”

In the “Taming of the Shrew” (i. 1), Katharina asks,—

“I pray you, sir, is it your will
To make a stale⁷⁸² of me amongst these mates?”

alluding, as Douce⁷⁸³ suggests, to the chess term of stale mate which is used when the game is ended by the king being alone and unchecked, and then forced into a situation from which he is unable to move without going into check. This is a dishonourable termination to the

⁷⁷⁹ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 43.

⁷⁸⁰ Staunton’s “Shakespeare,” iii. p. 592.

⁷⁸¹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” ii. p. 409.

⁷⁸² She means, “Do you intend to make a mockery of me among the Companions?”

⁷⁸³ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 20.

adversary, who thereby loses the game. Thus, in Bacon's Twelfth essay, "They stand still like a stale at chess, where it is no mate, but yet the game cannot stir."

Dice.—Amongst the notices of this game, may be quoted "Henry V." (iv. prologue),

"The confident and over lusty French
Do the low-rated English play at dice."

Edgar, in "King Lear" (iii. 4), says, - "Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly." Pistol, in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (i. 3), gives a double allusion,—

"Let vultures gripe thy guts!—for gourd and fullam holds,
And high and low beguiles the rich and poor."

"Gourds" were false dice, with a secret cavity scooped out like a gourd. "Fullams" were also false dice, "loaded with metal on one side, so as better to produce high throws, or to turn up low numbers, as was required, and were hence named 'high men' or 'low men,' also 'high fullams' and low fullams."⁷⁸⁴ It has been suggested that dice were termed *fullams* either because Fulham was the resort of sharpers, or because they were principally manufactured there.

Dun is in the mire.—This is a Christmas sport, which Gifford⁷⁸⁵ describes as follows, - "A log of wood is brought into the midst of the room; this is *Dun* (the cart-horse), and a cry is raised that he is stuck in the mire. Two of the company advance, either with or without ropes, to draw him out. After repeated attempts, they find themselves unable to do it, and call for more assistance. The game continues till all the company take part in it, when *Dun* is extricated. Much merriment is occasioned from the awkward efforts of the rustics to lift the log, and from sundry arch contrivances to let the ends of it fall on one another's toes. Thus, in "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 4), Mercutio says,—

"If thou art *dun*, we'll draw thee from the mire."

Beaumont and Fletcher, also, in the "Woman Hater" (iv. 3), allude to this game,—

"*Dun's* in the mire, get out again how he can."

Fast and Loose.—This was a cheating game, much practised in Shakespeare's day, whereby gipsies and other vagrants beguiled the common people of their money; and hence was very often to be seen at fairs. Its other name was "pricking at the belt or girdle"; and it is thus described by Sir J. Hawkins, - "A leathern belt was made up into a number of intricate folds, and placed edgewise upon a table. One of the folds was made to resemble the middle of the girdle, so that whoever could thrust a skewer into it would think he held it fast to the table; whereas, when he has so done, the person with whom he plays may take hold of both ends, and draw it away." In "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 12), the former says,—

"Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
Beguil'd me to be the very heart of loss."

The drift of this game seems to have been to encourage wagers whether the belt was fast or loose, which the juggler could easily make it at his option. It is constantly alluded to by old writers, and is thus described in Drayton's "Moon-calf,"

"He like a gypsy oftentimes would go,
All kinds of gibberish he hath learn'd to know,

⁷⁸⁴ Gifford's Note on Jonson's Works, ii. p. 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Note on Jonson's Works, vii. p. 283.

And with a stick, a short string, and a noose,
Would show the people tricks at fast and loose.”

Fencing.—In years gone by, there were three degrees in fencing, a master’s, a provost’s, and a scholar’s.⁷⁸⁶To each of these a prize was played with various weapons in some open place or square. In “Titus Andronicus” (i. 1), this practice is alluded to by Saturninus:—

“So Bassianus, you have play’d your prize.”

In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), Slender says, “I bruised my shin th’ other day with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence,” *i.e.*, with one who had taken his master’s degree in the science.

Amongst the numerous allusions to fencing quoted by Shakespeare may be mentioned the following: - “Venue or veney” was a fencing term, meaning an attack or hit. It is used in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), by Slender, who relates how he bruised his shin “with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence; three veneyes for a dish of stewed prunes.” It is used metaphorically in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 1), for a brisk attack, by Armado: - “A sweet touch, a quick venue of wit! snip, snap, quick and home!”⁷⁸⁷The Italian term “Stoccado” or “Stoccata,” abbreviated also into “Stock,” seems to have had a similar signification. In “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 1), Mercutio drawing his sword says

“Alla stoccata carries it away.”

In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 1), it is used by Shallow: - “In these times you stand on distance, your passes, stoccadoes, and I know not what.” Again, “Montant,” an abbreviation of Montanto, denoted an upright blow or thrust, and occurs also in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 3), where the host tells Caius that she with the others has come; “to see thee pass thy ponto, thy stock, thy reverse, thy distance, thy montant.” Hence in “Much Ado about Nothing” (i. 1), Beatrice jocularly calls Benedick “Signior Mountanto,” meaning to imply that he was a great fencer. Of the other old fencing terms quoted in the passage above, it appears that “passado” implied a pass or motion forwards. It occurs in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 4), where Mercutio speaks of the “immortal pasado! the punto reverso!” Again in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (i. 2), Armado says of Cupid that

“The passado he respects not, the duello he regards not.”

The “punto reverso” was a backhanded thrust or stroke, and the term “distance” was the space between the antagonists.

Shakespeare has also alluded to other fencing terms, such as the “foin,” a thrust, which is used by the host in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 2), and in “Much Ado about Nothing” (v. 1), where Antonio says in his heated conversation with Leonato:—

“Sir boy! I’ll whip you from your foining fence;
Nay, as I am a gentleman, I will.”

The term “traverse” denoted a posture of opposition, and is used by the host in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 3) A “bout,” too, is another fencing term to which the king refers in “Hamlet” (iv. 7)

“When in your motion you are hot and dry—
As makes your bouts more violent to that end.”

⁷⁸⁶ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 35.

⁷⁸⁷ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 919.

Filliping the Toad—This is a common and cruel diversion of boys. They lay a board two or three feet long, at right angles over a transverse piece two or three inches thick, then placing the toad at one end of the board, the other end is struck by a bat or large stick, which throws the poor toad forty or fifty feet perpendicularly from the earth; and the fall generally kills it. In “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2), Falstaff says:—

“If I do, fillip me with a three-man beetle.”⁷⁸⁸

Flap-dragon.—This pastime, popularly called flap-dragon ⁷⁸⁹was much in use in days gone by. A small combustible body was set on fire, and put afloat in a glass of liquor. The courage of the toper was tried in the attempt to toss off the glass in such a manner as to prevent the flap-dragon doing mischief—raisins in hot brandy being the usual flap-dragons. Shakespeare several times mentions this custom, as in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 1) where Costard says, “Thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon.” And in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), he makes Falstaff say, “And drinks off candles’ ends for flap-dragons.”⁷⁹⁰

It appears that formerly gallants used to vie with each other in drinking off flap-dragons to the health of their mistresses—which were sometimes even candles’ ends, swimming in brandy or other strong spirits, whence, when on fire, they were snatched by the mouth and swallowed;⁷⁹¹ an allusion to which occurs in the passage above. As candles’ ends made the most formidable flap-dragon, the greatest merit was ascribed to the heroism of swallowing them. Ben Jonson, in “The Masque of the Moon” (1838, p. 616, ed. Gifford), says, “But none that will hang themselves for love, or eat candles ends &c., as the sublunary lovers do.”

Football.—An allusion to this once highly popular game occurs in “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 1). Dromio of Ephesus asks—

“Am I so round with you as you with me,
That like a football you do spurn me thus?
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.”

In “King Lear” (i. 4), Kent calls Oswald “a base football player.”

According to Strutt,⁷⁹² it does not appear among the popular exercises before the reign of Edward III.; and then, in 1349, it was prohibited by a public edict because it impeded the progress of archery. The danger, however, attending this pastime occasioned James I. to say, “From this Court I debarre all rough and violent exercises, as the football, meeter for laming than making able the users thereof.”

Occasionally the rustic boys made use of a blown bladder, without the covering of leather, by way of a football, putting beans and horse beans inside, which made a rattling noise as it was kicked about. Barclay, in his “Ship of Fools” (1508) thus graphically describes it—

“Howe in the winter, when men kill the fat swine,
They get the bladder and blow it great and thin,
With many beans or peason put within:

⁷⁸⁸ A three-man beetle is a heavy implement, with three handles, used in driving piles, etc., which required three men to lift it.

⁷⁸⁹ A correspondent of *Notes and Queries* (2 S. vii. p. 277) suggests as a derivation the German *schnapps*, spirit, and *drache*, dragon, and that it is equivalent to spirit-fire.

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. “Winter’s Tale” (iii. 3), “But to make an end of the ship, to see how the sea flap-dragoned it.”

⁷⁹¹ See Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 131.

⁷⁹² “Sports and Pastimes,” pp. 168, 169.

It ratleth, soundeth, and shineth clere and fayre,
 While it is thrown and caste up in the ayre,
 Eche one contendeth and hath a great delite
 With foote and with hande the bladder for to smite;
 If it fall to grounde, they lifte it up agayne,
 This wise to labour they count it for no payne.”

Shrovetide was the great season for football matches;⁷⁹³ and at a comparatively recent period it was played in Derby, Nottingham, Kingston-upon-Thames, etc.

Gleek.—According to Drake,⁷⁹⁴ this game is alluded to twice by Shakespeare—in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (iii. 1)—

“Nay, I can gleek upon occasion.”

And in “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 5)—

“*Mus*. What will you give us?

Peter. No money, on my faith, but the gleek.”

Douce, however, considers that the word *gleek* was simply used to express a stronger sort of joke, a scoffing; and that the phrase “to give the gleek” merely denoted to pass a jest upon, or to make a person appear ridiculous.

Handy Dandy.—A very old game among children. A child hides something in his hand, and makes his playfellow guess in which hand it is. If the latter guess rightly, he wins the article, if wrongly, he loses an equivalent.⁷⁹⁵ Sometimes, says Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, “the game is played by a sort of sleight of hand, changing the article rapidly from one hand into the other, so that the looker on is often deceived, and induced to name the hand into which it is apparently thrown.” This is what Shakespeare alludes to by changing places in “King Lear” (iv. 6), “See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places; and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?”⁷⁹⁶

Hide fox and all after.—A children’s game, considered by many to be identical with hide-and-seek. It is mentioned by Hamlet (iv. 2). Some commentators think that the term “kid-fox” in “Much Ado about Nothing” (ii. 3), may have been a technical term in the game of “hide-fox.” Some editions have printed it “hid-fox.” Claudio says—

“O, very well, my lord: the music ended,
 We’ll fit the kid-fox with a pennyworth.”

Hoodman-blind.—The childish sport now called blind-man’s buff was known by various names, such as hood-wink, blind-hob, etc. It was termed “hoodman-blind,” because the players formerly were blinded with their hoods,⁷⁹⁷ and under this designation it is mentioned by Hamlet (iii. 4)—

“What devil was’t
 That thus hath cozen’d you at hoodman-blind?”

In Scotland this game was called “belly-blind;” and Gay, in his “Shepherd’s Week” (i. 96), says concerning it

⁷⁹³ See “British Popular Customs,” 1876, pp. 78, 83, 87, 401.

⁷⁹⁴ “Shakspeare and his Times,” ii. 170. See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” pp. 118, 435.

⁷⁹⁵ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 199.

⁷⁹⁶ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. p. 420.

⁷⁹⁷ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” pp. 499, 500; Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, i. pp. 397, 398.

“As once I play’d at blindman’s buff; it hapt
About my eyes the towel thick was wrapt
I miss’d the swains, and seiz’d on Blouzelind.
True speaks that ancient proverb, ‘Love is blind.’”

The term “hoodman” occurs in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (iv. 3), the first lord says, “Hoodman comes!” and no doubt there is an allusion to the game in the same play (iii. 6), “We will bind and hoodwink him;” and in “Macbeth” (iv. 3) Macduff says, “The time you may so hoodwink.” There may also have been a reference to falconry—the hawks being hooded in the intervals of sport. Thus, in Latham’s “Falconry” (1615), “to hood” is the term used for the blinding, “to unhood” for the unblinding.

Horse Racing.—That this diversion was in Shakespeare’s day occasionally practised in the spirit of the modern turf is evident from “Cymbeline” (iii. 2)—

“I have heard of riding wagers,
Where horses have been nimbler than the sands
That run i’ the clock’s behalf.”

Burton,⁷⁹⁸ too, who wrote at the close of the Shakespearian era, mentions the ruinous consequences of this recreation: - “Horse races are desports of great men, and good in themselves, though many gentlemen by such means gallop quite out of their fortunes.”

Leap-frog.—One boy stoops down with his hands upon his knees and others leap over him, every one of them running forward and stooping in his turn. It is mentioned by Shakespeare in “Henry V.” (v. 2), where he makes the king say, “If I could win a lady at leap-frog, or by vaulting into my saddle with my armour on my back, I should quickly leap into a wife.” Ben Jonson, in his comedy of “Bartholomew Fair,” speaks of “a leappe frogge chance note.”

Laugh-and-lie-down (more properly laugh-and-lay-down), was a game at cards, to which there is an allusion in the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (ii. 1)—

“I could laugh now.
Wait. W. I could lie down, I’m sure.”

Loggat.—The game so called resembles bowls, but with notable differences.⁷⁹⁹ First, it is played, not on a green, but on a floor strewed with ashes. The jack is a wheel of *lignum vitæ*, or other hard wood, 9 inches in diameter, and 3 or 4 inches thick. The loggat, made of apple wood, is a truncated cone, 26 or 27 inches in length, tapering from a girth of 82 to 9 inches at one end to 32 or 4 inches at the other. Each player has three loggats, which he throws, holding lightly the thin end. The object is to lie as near the jack as possible. Hamlet speaks of this game (v. 1), “Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at loggats with ‘em?” comparing perhaps the skull to the jack at which the bones were thrown. In Ben Jonson’s “Tale of a Tub” (iv. 5) we read—

“Now are they tossing of his legs and arms,
Like loggets at a pear-tree.”

Sir Thomas Hanmer makes the game the same as ninepins, or skittles. He says: - “It is one of the unlawful games enumerated in the Thirty-third statute of Henry VIII.,⁸⁰⁰ it is the same

⁷⁹⁸ “Anatomy of Melancholy;” Drake’s “Shakspeare and His Times,” 298.

⁷⁹⁹ Clark and Wright’s Notes to “Hamlet.” 1876, pp. 212, 213.

⁸⁰⁰ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” p. 365; Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 522.

which is now called kittle-pins, in which the boys often make use of bones instead of wooden pins, throwing at them with another bone instead of bowling.”

Marbles.—It has been suggested that there is an allusion to this pastime in “Measure for Measure” (i. 3)—

“Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom.”

—dribbling being a term used in the game of marbles, for shooting slowly along the ground, in contradistinction to *plumping*; which is elevating the hand so that the marble does not touch the ground till it reaches the object of its aim.⁸⁰¹ According to others, a dribbler was a term in archery expressive of contempt.⁸⁰²

Muss.—This was a phrase for a scramble, when any small objects were thrown down, to be taken by those who could seize them. In “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 13), the former says—
“Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth.”

The word is used by Dryden in the Prologue to the “Widow Ranter”—

“Bauble and cap no sooner are thrown down
But there’s a muss of more than half the town.”

Nine-Men’s-Morris.—This rustic game, which is still extant in some parts of England, was sometimes called “the nine men’s merrils,” from *merelles*, or *mereaux*, an ancient French word for the jettons or counters with which it was played.⁸⁰³ The other term *morris* is probably a corruption suggested by the sort of dance, which in the progress of the game the counters performed. Some consider⁸⁰⁴ that it was identical with the game known as “Nine-holes,”⁸⁰⁵ mentioned by Herrick in his “Hesperides”—

“Raspe playes at nine-holes, and ‘tis known he gets
Many a tester by his game, and bets.”

Cotgrave speaks of “Le jeu des merelles,” the boyish game called merills, or “five pennie morris,” played here most commonly with stones, but in France with pawns or men made of purpose, and termed merelles. It was also called “Peg Morris,” as is evidenced by Clare, who, in his “Rural Muse,” speaking of the shepherd boy, says—

“Oft we may track his haunts, where he hath been
To spend the leisure which his toils bestow,
By nine-peg morris nicked upon the green.”

The game is fully described by James in the “Variorum Shakespeare” as follows: - “In that part of Warwickshire where Shakespeare was educated, and the neighbouring parts of Northamptonshire, the shepherds and other boys dig up the turf with their knives to represent a sort of imperfect chessboard. It consists of a square, sometimes only a foot diameter, sometimes three or four yards. Within this is another square, every side of which is parallel to the external square; and these squares are joined by lines drawn from each corner of both squares, and the middle of each line. One party or player has wooden pegs, the other stones, which they move in such a manner as to take up each other’s men, as they are called, and the

⁸⁰¹ Baker’s “Northamptonshire Glossary,” 1854, i. p. 198.

⁸⁰² See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 334.

⁸⁰³ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” P. 144.

⁸⁰⁴ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 605.

⁸⁰⁵ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, pp. 368, 369.

area of the inner square is called the pound, in which the men taken up are impounded. These figures are by the country people called nine men's morris, or merrils; and are so called because each party has nine men. These figures are always cut upon the green turf or leys, as they are called, or upon the grass at the end of ploughed lands, and in rainy seasons never fail to be choked up with mud." This verifies the allusion made by Shakespeare in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1)—

"The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable."

This game was also transferred to a board, and continues a fire-side recreation of the agricultural labourer. It is often called by the name of "Mill," or "Shepherd's Mill."⁸⁰⁶

Noddy.—Some doubt exists as to what game at cards was signified in this term. It has been suggested that cribbage is meant. Mr Singer thinks it bore some resemblance to the more recent game of "Beat the knave out of doors," which is mentioned together with "Ruff and new coat" in Heywood's play of "A Woman killed with kindness." The game is probably alluded to in "Troilus and Cressida" (i. 2), in the following dialogue:—

"*Pandarus*. When comes Troilus? I'll show you Troilus anon: if he see me, you shall see him nod at me.

Cres. Will he give you the nod?

Pan. You shall see.

Cres. If he do, the rich shall have more."⁸⁰⁷

The term "Noddy" was also applied to a fool, because, says Minsheu, he nods when he should speak. In this sense it occurs in "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (i. 1):—

"*Speed*. You mistook, sir; I say, she did nod: and you ask me if she did nod; and I say, 'Ay.'

Proteus. And that set together is noddy."

Novem Quinque.—A game of dice, so called from its principal throws being five and nine. It is alluded to in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2) by Biron who speaks of it simply as "Novem."

Parish-top.—Formerly a top was kept for public exercise in a parish—a custom to which the old writers often refer. Thus in "Twelfth Night" (i. 3), Sir Toby Belch says: "He's a coward and a coyrill that will not drink to my niece till his brains turn o' the toe like a parish-top." On which passage Mr Steevens says: - "A large top was kept in every village, to be whipped in frosty weather, that the peasants might be kept warm by exercise and out of mischief while they could not work." Beaumont and Fletcher, in "Thierry and Theodoret" (ii. 3), speak of the practice:—

"I'll hazard

My life upon it, that a body of twelve
Should scourge him hither like a parish top,
And make him dance before you."

And in their "Night Walker" (i. 3) they mention the "town-top." Evelyn, enumerating the uses of willow-wood speaks of "great town-tops." Mr Knight ⁸⁰⁸remarks that the custom which existed in the time of Elizabeth, and probably long before, of a large top being

⁸⁰⁶ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq." 1849, ii. pp. 429, 432.

⁸⁰⁷ See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 606.

⁸⁰⁸ "Pictorial Shakespeare," ii. p. 145.

provided for the amusement of the peasants in frosty weather, presents a curious illustration of the mitigating influences of social kindness in an age of penal legislation.

Primero.—In Shakespeare's time this was a very fashionable game at cards; and hence is frequently alluded to by him. It was known under the various designations of *Primero*, *Prime*, and *Primavista*; and, according to Strutt,⁸⁰⁹ has been reckoned among the most ancient games of cards known to have been played in England. Shakespeare speaks of Henry VIII. (v. 1), playing at *Primero* with the Duke of Suffolk; and makes Falstaff exclaim in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 5), "I never prospered since I foreswore myself at *primero*." That it was the Court game is shewn in a very curious picture described by Mr Barrington in the "Archæologia" (viii. 132), which represents Lord Burleigh playing at this pastime with three other noblemen. *Primero* continued to be the most fashionable game throughout the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, Elizabeth, and James I. In the Earl of Northumberland's letters about the Gunpowder-plot, we find that Josceline Percy was playing at *Primero* on Sunday, when his Uncle the Conspirator called on him at Essex House: and in the Sydney Papers, there is an account of a quarrel between Lord Southampton and one Ambrose Willoughby, on account of the former persisting to play at *primero* in the presence chamber, after the queen had retired to rest. The manner of playing was thus:—⁸¹⁰Each player had four cards dealt to him one by one; the seven was the highest card in point of number that he could avail himself of, which counted for twenty-one; the six counted for sixteen, the five for fifteen, and the ace for the same; but the two, the three, and the four, for their respective points only.

There may be further allusions to this game in "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1), where Tranio says—

"A vengeance on your crafty wither'd hide!
Yet I have faced it with a card of ten."

—the phrase, "to face it with a card of ten," being derived, as some suggest, possibly from *primero*, wherein the standing boldly on a ten was often successful. "To face," meant, as it still does, to attack by impudence of face. In "1 Henry VI." (v. 3), Suffolk speaks of a "cooling card," which Nares considers is borrowed from *primero*, a card so decisive as to cool the courage of the adversary. Gifford objects to this explanation, and says a "cooling-card" is literally a *bolus*. There can be no doubt, however, that, metaphorically, the term was used to denote something which damped or overwhelmed the hopes of an expectant. Thus, in Fletcher's "Island Princess" (i. 3), Piniero says—

"These hot youths
I fear will find a cooling-card."

Push pin was a foolish sport, consisting in nothing more than pushing one pin across another. Biron in "Love's Labour's Lost" (iv. 3) speaks of Nestor playing "at pushpin with the boys."

Quintain.—This was a figure set up for tilers to run at, in mock resemblance of a tournament; and is alluded to in "As You Like It" (i. 2), by Orlando, who says—

"My better parts
Are all thrown down, and that which here stands up
Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block."

⁸⁰⁹ "Sports and Pastimes."

⁸¹⁰ Smith's "Festivals, Games, and Amusements," 1831, p. 320.

It cannot be better or more minutely described than in the words of Mr Strutt ⁸¹¹ - "Tilting or combating at the quintain is a military exercise of high antiquity, and antecedent, I doubt not, to the jousts and tournaments. The quintain originally was nothing more than the trunk of a tree or post set up for the practice of the tyros in chivalry. Afterwards a staff or spear was fixed in the earth, and a shield being hung upon it, was the mark to strike at. The dexterity of the performer consisted in smiting the shield in such a manner as to break the ligatures and bear it to the ground. In process of time this diversion was improved, and instead of a staff and the shield, the resemblance of a human figure carved in wood was introduced. To render the appearance of this figure more formidable, it was generally made in the likeness of a Turk or a Saracen armed at all points, bearing a shield upon his left arm, and brandishing a club or a sabre with his right. The quintain thus fashioned was placed upon a pivot, and so contrived as to move round with facility. In running at this figure, it was necessary for the horseman to direct his lance with great adroitness, and make his stroke upon the forehead between the eyes or upon the nose; for if he struck wide of those parts, especially upon the shield, the quintain turned about with much velocity, and, in case he was not exceedingly careful, would give him a severe blow upon the back with the wooden sabre held in the right hand, which was considered as highly disgraceful to the performer, while it excited the laughter and ridicule of the spectators."⁸¹²In Ben Jonson's "Underwoods" it is thus humorously mentioned—

"Go, Captain Stub, lead on, and show
 What horse you come on, by the blow
 You give Sir Quintain, and the cuff
 You 'scape o' the sandbags counterbuff."

Quoits.—This game derived its origin, according to Strutt,⁸¹³ from the ancient Discus, and with us, at the present day, it is a circular plate of iron perforated in the middle, not always of one size, but larger or smaller to suit the strength or conveniency of the several candidates. It is referred to in "2 Henry IV." (ii. 4), by Falstaff, who assigns as one of the reasons why Prince Henry loves Poin - "Because their legs are both of a bigness, and a' plays at quoits well," &c.

Formerly in the country, the rustics not having the round perforated quoits to play with, used horse shoes; and in many places the quoit itself, to this day, is called a shoe.

Running for the ring.—This, according to Staunton, was the name of a sport; a ring having been one of the prizes formerly given in wrestling and running matches. Thus, in the "Taming of the Shrew" (i. 1), Hortensio says - "He that runs fastest gets the ring."

Running the figure of eight.—Steevens says that this game is alluded to by Shakespeare in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1), where Titania speaks of the "quaint mazes in the wanton green." Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in referring to this passage says - "Several mazes of the kind here alluded to are still preserved, having been kept up from time immemorial. On the top of Catherine Hill, Winchester, the usual play-place of the school was a very perplexed and winding path, running in a very small space over a great deal of ground, called a Miz-Maze. The senior boys obliged the juniors to tread it, to prevent the figure from being lost, and I believe it is still retained."⁸¹⁴

⁸¹¹ "Sports and Pastimes," 1876, p. 182.

⁸¹² See Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 713.

⁸¹³ "Sports and Pastimes," p. 141.

⁸¹⁴ See Milner's "History of Winchester," ii. p. 155.

See-Saw.—Another name for this childish sport is that given by Falstaff, in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), where he calls it “riding the wild mare.” Gay thus describes this well-known game—

“Across the fallen oak the plank I laid
And myself pois’d against the tott’ring maid;
High leap’d the plank, adown Buxonia fell,” &c.

Shove-Groat.—The object of this game was to shake or push pieces of money on a board to reach certain marks. It is alluded to in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), where Falstaff says - “Quoit him down, Bardolph, like a shove-groat shilling;” or, in other words, Bardolph was to quoit Pistol down stairs as quickly as the smooth shilling—the shove-groat—flies along the board. In a statute of 33 Henry VIII., shove-groat is called a new game, and was probably originally played with the silver-groat. The broad shilling of Edward VI. came afterwards to be used in this game, which was no doubt the same as shovel-board, with the exception that the latter was on a larger scale. Master Slender, in “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), had his pocket picked of “two Edward shovel-boards, that cost him two shilling and two pence a-piece.” Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in describing the game in his “Archaic Dictionary,” says, that “a shilling or other smooth coin was placed on the extreme edge of the shovel-board, and propelled towards a mark by a smart stroke with the palm of the hand. It is mentioned under various names, according to the coin employed, as shove-groat,⁸¹⁵&c. The game of shove-halfpenny is mentioned in the “Times” of April 25, 1845, as then played by the lower orders. According to Strutt it “was analogous to the modern pastime called Justice Jervis, or Jarvis, which is confined to common pot-houses.”

Snow-Balls.—These are alluded to in “Pericles” (iv. 6), and in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 5).

Span-Counter.—In this boyish game one throws a counter, or piece of money, which the other wins, if he can throw another so as to hit it, or lie within a span of it. In “2 Henry VI.” (iv. 2), Cade says - “Tell the king from me, that, for his father’s sake, Henry V., in whose time boys went to span-counter for French crowns, I am content he shall reign.” It is called in France “tapper;” and in Swift’s time was played with farthings, as he calls it “span-farthing.”⁸¹⁶

Stool-Ball.—This game, alluded to in the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (v. 2), was formerly popular among young women; and occasionally was played by persons of both sexes indiscriminately, as the following lines, from a song written by Dufey for his play of “Don Quixote,” acted at Dorset Gardens, in 1694, show⁸¹⁷—

“Down in a vale on a summer’s day,
All the lads and lasses met to be merry;
A match for kisses at stool-ball to play,
And for cakes, and ale, and sider, and perry.

Chorus—Come all, great small, short tall, away to stool-ball.”

Strutt informs us that this game, as played in the north, “consists in simply setting a stool upon the ground, and one of the players takes his place before it, while his antagonist, standing at a distance, tosses a ball with the intention of striking the stool; and this is the

⁸¹⁵ According to Douce, “Illustrations of Shakspeare” (1839, p. 280), it was known as “slide-groat,” “slide-board,” “slide-thrift,” and “slip-thrift.” See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, pp. 16, 394, 398. Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 791. Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, ii. p. 441.

⁸¹⁶ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, p. 491.

⁸¹⁷ Quoted by Strutt, “Sports and Pastimes,” p. 166.

business of the former to prevent by beating it away with the hand, reckoning one to the game for every stroke of the ball; if, on the contrary, it should be missed by the hand and touch the stool, the players change places. The conqueror is he who strikes the ball most times before it touches the stool.”

Tennis.—According to a story told by the old annalists, one of the most interesting historical events in connection with this game happened when Henry V. was meditating war against France. “The Dolphin,” says Hall in his “Chronicle,” “thynkyng King Henry to be given still to such plaies and lyght folies as he exercised and used before the tyme that he was exalted to the Croune, sent to hym a tunne of tennis balles to plaie with, as who saied that he had better skill of tennis than of warre.” On the foundation of this incident, as told by Holingshed, Shakespeare has constructed his fine scene of the French Ambassador’s Audience in “King Henry V.” (i. 2). As soon as the first Ambassador has given the Dauphin’s message and insulting gift, the English King speaks thus:—

“We are glad the Dauphin is so pleasant with us;
His present and your pains we thank you for:
When we have match’d our rackets to these balls,
We will, in France, by God’s grace, play a set
Shall strike his father’s crown into the hazard.
Tell him he hath made a match with such wrangler
That all the courts of France will be disturb’d
With chaces.”

In “Hamlet” (ii. 1), Polonius speaks of this pastime, and alludes to “falling out at tennis.” In the sixteenth century tennis-courts were common in England, and the establishment of such places was countenanced by the example of royalty. It is evident that Henry VII. was a tennis-player. In a MS. register of his expenditures, made in the thirteenth year of his reign, this entry occurs: - “Item, for the king’s loss at tennis, twelvecence; for the loss of balls, threepence.” Stowe, in his “Survey of London,” tells us that among the additions that King Henry VIII. made to Whitehall, were “divers fair tennis courts, bowling-allies and a cock-pit.” Charles II. frequently diverted himself with playing at tennis, and had a particular kind of dress made for that purpose. Pericles, when he is shipwrecked and cast upon the coast of Pentapolis, addresses himself and the three fishermen whom he chances to meet thus (ii. 1):—

“A man whom both the waters and the wind,
In that vast tennis-court, have made the ball
For them to play upon, entreats you pity him.”

In “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 2), Claudio referring to Benedick says “that the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis-balls;”⁸¹⁸ and in “King Henry V.” (iii. 7), the Dauphin says his horse “bounds from the earth as if his entrails were hairs.” Again, “Bandy” was originally a term at tennis, to which Juliet refers in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 5), when speaking of her Nurse:—

“Had she affections and warm youthful blood
She would be as swift in motion as a ball;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me.”

⁸¹⁸ In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), the Princess speaks of “a set of wit well play’d;” upon which Mr Singer (ii. 263) adds that “a set is a term at tennis for a game.”

Also, King Lear (i. 4), says to Oswald, "Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?"

Tick-Tack.—This was a sort of back gammon, and is alluded to by Lucio in "Measure for Measure" (i. 2) who, referring to Claudio's unpleasant predicament, says "I would be sorry should be thus foolishly lost at a game of tick-tack." In Weaver's "Lusty Juventus," Hipocrisy, seeing Lusty Juventus kiss Abhominable Lyuing, says:—

"What a hurly burly is here!
Smicke smacke, and all thys gere!
You well [will] to *tycke take*,
I fere, If thou had tyme."⁸¹⁹

"Jouer au tric-trac" is used, too, in France in a wanton sense.

Trap-trip.—This was probably a game at cards, played with dice as well as with cards, the success in which chiefly depended upon the throwing of treys. Thus in a satire called "Machivell's Dog" (1617):—

"But, leaving cardes, let's go to dice a while,
To passage, treitrippe, hazarde, or mumchance."

In "Twelfth Night" (ii. 5), Sir Toby Belch asks, "Shall I play my freedom at tray-trip, and become thy bond-slave?" It may be remembered, too, that in "The Scornful Lady" of Beaumont and Fletcher (ii. 1), the Chaplain complains that the Butler had broken his head, and being asked the reason, says for—

"Reproving him at tra-trip, sir, for swearing."

Some are of opinion that it resembled the game of hopscotch, or Scotch-hop; but this, says Nares,⁸²⁰ "seems to rest merely upon unauthorised conjecture."

Troll-my-dame.—The game of Troll-madam, still familiar as Bagatelle, was borrowed from the French (Trou-madame). One of its names was Pigeon-holes, because played on a board, at one end of which were a number of arches, like pigeon-holes, into which small balls had to be bowled. In "Winter's Tale" (iv. 2), it is mentioned by Autolycus who, in answer to the Clown, says that the manner of fellow that robbed him was one that he had "known to go about with troll-my-dames." Cotgrave declares it as "the game called Trunkes or the Hole."

Trump.—This was probably the triumpho of the Italians, and the triomphe of the French—being perhaps of equal antiquity in England with primero. At the latter end of the sixteenth century, it was very common among the inferior classes. There is, no doubt, a particular allusion to this game in "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 14), where Antony says:—

"The queen,—
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine;
Which whilst it was mine had annex'd unto't
A million more, now lost,—she, Eros, has
Pack'd cards with Cæsar, and false-play'd my glory
Unto an enemy's triumph."

The poet meant to say, that Cleopatra, by collusion, played the great game they were engaged in falsely, so as to sacrifice Antony's fame to that of his enemy. There is an equivoque between *trump* and *triumph*. The game in question bore a very strong resemblance to our

⁸¹⁹ Quoted by Dyce's "Glossary," p. 449; see Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, ii, p. 445.

⁸²⁰ "Glossary," ii. p. 896.

modern whist—the only points of dissimilarity being that more or less than four persons might play at trump; that all the cards were not dealt out; and that the dealer had the privilege of discarding some, and taking others in from the stock. In Eliot's "Fruits for the French," 1593, it is called "a very common ale-house game in England."

Wrestling.—Of the many allusions that are given by Shakespeare to this pastime, we may quote the phrase "to catch on the hip," made use of by Shylock in the "Merchant of Venice" (i. 3), who, speaking of Antonio, says,—

"If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him."

—the meaning being, "to have at an entire advantage."⁸²¹The expression occurs again in "Othello" (ii. 1), where Iago says—

"I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip."

Nares,⁸²² however, considers the phrase was derived from hunting; because, "when the animal pursued is seized upon the hip, it is finally disabled from flight."

In "As You Like It" (ii. 3), where Adam speaks of the "bonny priser of the humorous duke," Singer considers that a *priser* was the phrase for a wrestler, a *prise* being a term in that sport for a grappling or hold taken."

⁸²¹ Dyce's "Glossary," p. 208.

⁸²² "Glossary," i. p. 421.

17. Dances

We are indebted to Shakespeare for having bequeathed to us many interesting allusions to some of the old dances in use in his day, but which have long ago passed into oblivion. As will be seen, these were of a very diverse character, but, as has been remarked, were well suited to the merry-doings of our forefathers; and although in some cases they justly merited censure for their extravagant nature, yet the greater part of these sources of diversion were harmless. Indeed, no more pleasing picture can be imagined than that of a rustic sheep-shearing gathering in the olden times, when, the work over, the peasantry joined together in some simple dance, each one vying with his neighbour to perform his part with as much grace as possible.

Antic.—This was a grotesque dance. In “Macbeth” (iv. i), the witch, perceiving how Macbeth is affected by the horrible apparitions which he has seen, says to her sisters—

“Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,
And show the best of our delights.
I’ll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antic round.”

To quote another instance, Armado, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 1), says,—

“We will have, if this fadge not, an antique.”

Bergomask Dance.—According to Sir Thomas Hanmer, this was a dance after the manner of the peasants of Bergomasco, a county in Italy belonging to the Venetians. All the buffoons in Italy affected to imitate the ridiculous jargon of that people, and from thence it became customary to mimic also their manner of dancing. In the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), Bottom asks Theseus whether he would like “to hear a Bergomask dance,” between two of their company.

Brawl.—This was a kind of dance. It appears that several persons united hands in a circle, and gave one another continual shakes, the steps changing with the tune. With this dance balls were usually opened.⁸²³ Kissing was occasionally introduced. In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iii. 1), Moth asks his master,—

“Will you win your love with a French brawl.”

Canary.—This was the name of a sprightly dance, the music to which consisted of two strains with eight bars in each; an allusion to which is made by Moth in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iii. i), who speaks of jiggling off a tune at the tongue’s end, and canarying to it with the feet: And in “All’s Well that End’s Well” (ii. 1), Lafeu tells the king that he has seen a medicine,—

“That’s able to breathe life into a stone,
Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary
With spritely fire and motion.”

This dance is said to have originated in the Canary Islands, an opinion, however, which has, says Dyce, been disputed.⁸²⁴

⁸²³ Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 134.

⁸²⁴ See Chappell’s “Popular Music of the Olden Time,” 2d edition, i. p. 368; Dyce’s “Glossary,” i. 63.

Cinque-Pace.—This was so named from its steps being regulated by the number five—

“Five was the number of the music’s feet,
Which still the dance did with five paces meet.”⁸²⁵

In “*Much Ado About Nothing*” (ii. 1), Shakespeare makes Beatrice make a quibble upon the term; for after comparing wooing, wedding, and replating to a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace, she says - “Then comes repentance, and, with his bad legs, falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.” A further reference occurs in “*Twelfth Night*” (i. 3), by Sir Toby Belch, who calls it a “sink-a-pace.”

Coranto.—An allusion to this dance, which appears to have been of a very lively and rapid character, is made in “*Henry V.*” (iii. 5), where the Duke of Bourbon describes it as the “swift coranto;” and in “*All’s Well That Ends Well*” (ii. 3), Lafeu refers to it. A further notice of it occurs in “*Twelfth Night*” (i. 3), in the passage where Sir Toby Belch speaks of “coming home in a coranto.”

Fading.—Malone quotes a passage from “*Sportive Wit*,” 1666, which implies that this was a rustic dance—

“The courtiers scorn us country clowns,
We country clowns do scorn the court;
We can be merry upon the downs
As you at midnight with all your sport,
With a *fading*, with a fading.”

It would appear, also, from a letter appended to Boswell’s edition of “*Malone*,” that it was an Irish dance, and that it was practised upon rejoicings as recently as 1803, the date of the letter—

“This dance is practised on rejoicing occasions in many parts of Ireland; a king and queen are chosen from amongst the young persons who are the best dancers; the queen carries a garland composed of two hoops placed at right angles, and fastened to a handle; the hoops are covered with flowers and ribbons; you have seen it, I dare say, with the May-maids. Frequently in the course of the dance the king and queen lift up their joined hands as high as they can, she still holding the garland in the other. The most remote couple from the king and queen first pass under; all the rest of the line linked together follow in succession. When the last has passed, the king and queen suddenly face about and front their companions; this is often repeated during the dance, and the various undulations are pretty enough, resembling the movements of a serpent. The dancers on the first of May visit such newly married pairs of a certain rank as have been married since last May-day in the neighbourhood, who commonly bestow on them a stuffed ball richly decked with gold and silver lace, and accompanied with a present in money, to regale themselves after the dance. This dance is practised when the bonfires are lighted up, the queen hailing the return of summer in a popular Irish song beginning:—

“We lead on summer—see! she follows in our train.”

In the “*Winter’s Tale*” (iv. 4), Shakespeare seems to allude to this dance where he makes the servant speaking of the pedlar say - “He has the prettiest love songs for maids; so without

⁸²⁵ Quoted by Nares from Sir John Davies on “*Dancing*.” Mr Dyce, “*Glossary*,” p. 81, says that Nares wrongly confounded this with the “gallard.”

bawdry, which is strange; with such delicate burthens of *dildos* and fadings, &c.” Some commentators,⁸²⁶ however, consider that only the song is meant.

Hay.—Douce,⁸²⁷ says, this dance was borrowed by us from the French, and is classed among the “brawls” in Thoinot Arbeau’s “Orchesographie (1588.) In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 1), Dull says:—

”I will play
On the tabor to the Worthies, and let them dance the hay.”

Jig.—Besides meaning a merry sprightly dance, a jig also implied a coarse sort of comic entertainment, in which sense it is probably used by Hamlet (ii. 2); “He’s for a jig or a tale of bawdry.” “It seems,” says Mr Collier,⁸²⁸ “to have been a ludicrous composition in rhyme, sung, or said, by the clown, and accompanied by dancing and playing upon the pipe and tabor,”⁸²⁹ an instance of which perhaps occurs in the clown’s song at the close of “Twelfth Night”—

“When that I was and a little tiny boy,” etc.

Fletcher in the Prologue to the “Fair Maid of the Inn,” says:—

“A jig should be clapt at, and every rhyme
Praised and applauded by a clamorous chime.”

Amongst the allusions to this dance, we may quote one in “Much Ado About Nothing” (ii. 1), where Beatrice compares wooing to a Scotch jig, and another in “Twelfth Night” (i. 3), where Sir Toby Belch says, his “very walk should be a jig.”

Lavolta.—According to Florio the lavolta is a kind of turning French dance, in which the man turns the woman round several times, and then assists her in making a high spring or cabriole. It is thus described by Sir John Davies:—

“Yet is there one the most delightfull kind,
A loftie jumping, or a leaping round,
Where arme in arme two dauncers are entwined,
And whine themselves, with strict embracements bound;
And still their feet an anapest do sound,
An anapest is all their musicks song,
Whose first two feet are short, and third is long.”

Douce,⁸³⁰ however, considers it to be of Italian origin, and says, “it passed from Italy into Provence and the rest of France, and thence into England.” Scot, too, in his “Discovery of Witchcraft,” thus speaks of it: - “He saith, that these night walking or rather night dancing witches, brought out of Italie into France that dance which is called *la Volta*. Shakespeare in his “Henry V.” (iii. 5), makes the Duke of Bourbon allude to it:—

“They bid us to the English dancing-schools,
And teach lavoltas high and swift corantos.”

⁸²⁶ See Knight’s “Pictorial Shakespeare,” ii. 383; Dyce’s “Glossary,” 1836, p. 152; “British Popular Customs,” 1876, pp. 276–7. See also Chappell’s “Popular Music of the Olden Time,” 2nd edit., i. p. 235 Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 292.

⁸²⁷ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 146.

⁸²⁸ “History of English Dramatic Poetry,” iii. p. 380; see Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 229, and Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 450. [Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ix. pp. 198, 219.

⁸²⁹ “Hamlet” (iii. 2), “Your only jig-maker.”

⁸³⁰ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 301; see Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 498.

Again in “Troilus and Cressida” (iv. 4), Troilus says—

“I cannot sing,
Nor heel the high lavolt.”

Light o’ Love.—This was an old tune of a dance, and was a proverbial expression for levity especially in love matters.⁸³¹In “Much Ado About Nothing” (iii. 4), Margaret says: “Clap’s into ‘light o’ love’; that goes without a burden; do you sing it, and I’ll dance it,” to which Beatrice answers, “Ye light o’ love, with your heels.”

In “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (i. 2), it is alluded to:—

Julia - “Best sing it to the tune of ‘Light o’ love.’
Lucetta - “It is too heavy for so light a tune.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (v. 2), we read:—

“He’ll dance the Indins twenty mile an hour,
And gallops to the tune of Light o’ love.”

And in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Chances” (i. 3), Frederic says, “Sure he has encounter’d some light-o’-love or other.”

Pavan.—This was a grave and majestic dance in which the gentlemen wore their caps, swords, and mantles, and the ladies their long robes and twains. The dancers stepped round the room and then crossed in the middle, trailing their garments on the ground, “the motion whereof,” says Sir J. Hawkins, “resembled that of a peacock’s tail.” It is alluded to in “Twelfth Night” (v. 1) by Sir Toby: - “A passy measures pavin,” although the reading of this passage is uncertain, the editors of the “Globe” edition substituting *panyn*.

It has been conjectured that the “passy measure galliard,” and the “passy measure pavan” were only two different measures of the same dance, from the Italian *passarezzo*.⁸³²

Roundel.—This also called the “round,” a dance of a circular kind, and is probably referred to by Titania in the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 3), where she says to her twain:—⁸³³

“Come now, a roundel and a fairy song.”

Ben Jonson, in the “Tale of a Tub,”⁸³⁴ seems to call the rings, which such fairy dances are supposed to make in the dance, *roundels*.

“I’ll have no roundels, I in the queen’s paths.”

Satyr’s Dance.—A dance of Satyrs was a not uncommon entertainment in Shakespeare’s day, or even at an earlier period.⁸³⁵It was not confined to England, and has been rendered memorable by the fearful accident with which it was accompanied at the Court of France in 1392, a graphic description of which has been recorded by Froissart. In the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 4), the Satyr’s dance is alluded to by the Servant, who says: - “Master, there is three carters, three shepherds, three neat-herds, three swine-herds, that have made themselves all men of hair; they call themselves Saltiers: and they have a dance which the wenches say is a gallimaufry of gambols, because they are not in’t.” In a book of songs, composed by Thomas

⁸³¹ Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 510.

⁸³² See Dyce, iii. p. 412.—*Note* 121.

⁸³³ Roundel also meant a song. Mr Dyce considers the dance is here meant.

⁸³⁴ See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ii. p. 333.

⁸³⁵ See Knight’s “Pictorial Shakespeare,” ii. p. 384; Singer’s “Shakespeare,” iv. p. 85; Boswell’s “Shakespeare,” xiv. p. 371.

Ravenscroft and others, in the time of Shakespeare, we find one ⁸³⁶called the “Satyres’ daunce.” It is for four voices, and as follows:—

“Round a round, a rounda, keepe your ring
To the glorious sunne we sing.
Hoe, hoe!

He that weares the flaming rayes,
And the imperiall crowne of bayes,
Him, with him, with shoutes and songs we praise.
Hoe, hoe!

That in his bountee would vouchsafe to grace
The humble sylvanes and their shaggy race.”

Sword-Dance.—In olden times there were several kinds of sword-dances, most of which afforded opportunities for the display of skill. In “Antony and Cleopatra” (iii. 4), there seems to be an allusion to this custom, where Antony, speaking of Cæsar, says:—⁸³⁷

“He at Philippi kept
His sword e’en like a dancer.”

And in “All’s Well that ends Well” (ii. 1), where Bertram, lamenting that he is kept from the wars, adds:—

“I shall stay here the forehorse to a smock,
Creaking my shoes on the plain masonry,
]Till honour be bought up and no sword worn
But one to dance with.”

In “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 1), too, Demetrius says to Chiron:—

“Why, boy, although your mother, unadvised
Gave you a dancing rapier by your side.”

Tread a Measure, to which the King refers in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2), when he tells Boyet to tell Rosaline—

“We have measured many miles,
To tread a measure with her on this grass,”

was a grave solemn dance, with slow and measured steps like the minuet. As it was of so solemn a nature it was performed ⁸³⁸at public entertainments in the Inns of Court, and it was “not unusual, nor thought inconsistent, for the first characters in the law to bear a part in treading a measure.”

Trip and Go was the name of a favourite Morris dance, and appears, says Mr Chappell, in his “Popular Music of the Olden Times, &c.” (2nd edition, i. p. 131), to have become a proverbial expression. It is used in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 2).

Up-spring.—From the following passage, in Chapman’s “Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany,” it would seem that this was a German dance:—

⁸³⁶ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 222.

⁸³⁷ See Strutt’s “Sports and Pastimes,” 1876, pp. 300–1; Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 193.

⁸³⁸ Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ii. p. 269; Sir Christopher Hatton was famous for it.

“We Germans have no changes in our dances;
An almain and an up-spring, that is all.”

Karl Elze,⁸³⁹ who, a few years ago, reprinted Chapman’s “Alphonsus” at Leipzig, says that the word “up-spring” “is the ‘Hüpfauft,’ the last and wildest dance at the old German merry-makings. No epithet could there be more appropriate to this drunken dance than Shakespeare’s *swaggering*” in “Hamlet” (i. 4):—

“The King doth wake to-night, and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels.”

⁸³⁹ Quoted in Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 476.

18. Punishments

Shakespeare has not omitted to notice many of the punishments which were in use in years gone by; the scattered allusions to these being interesting in so far as they serve to illustrate the domestic manners and customs of our forefathers. Happily, however, these cruel tortures, which darken the pages of history, have long ago passed into oblivion; and at the present day it is difficult to believe that such barbarous practices could ever have been tolerated in any civilized country. The horrible punishment of "boiling to death," is mentioned in "Twelfth Night" (ii. 5), where Fabian says - "If I lose a scruple of this sport, let me be boiled to death with melancholy." In "Winter's Tale" (iii. 2), Paulina inquires:—

"What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?
What wheels! racks? fires? What flaying? boiling?
In leads or oils? What old or newer torture
Must I receive?"

There seems to be an indirect allusion to this punishment in "The Two Noble Kinsmen" (iv. 3), where the gaoler's daughter in her madness speaks of those who "are mad, or hang, or drown themselves, being put into a cauldron of lead and usurer's grease, and there boiling like a gammon of bacon that will never be enough."

The practice of holding burning basons before the eyes of captives to destroy their eyesight, is probably alluded to by Macbeth (iv. 1), in the passage where the apparitions are presented to him by the witches—

"Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo; down!
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs."⁸⁴⁰

In "Antony and Cleopatra" (ii. 4), soaking in brine as a punishment, is referred to by Cleopatra, who says to the messenger—

"Thou shall be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,
Smarting in lingering pickle."

Drowning by the tide, a method of punishing criminals, is probably noticed in the "Tempest" (i. 1), by Antonio—

"We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards:
This wide-chapp'd rascal—would thou mightst lie drowning
The washing of ten tides."

Baffle.—This was formerly a punishment of infamy inflicted on recreant knights, one part of which consisted in hanging them up by the heels, to which Falstaff probably refers in "1 Henry IV." (i. 2), where he says to the Prince, "Call me villain, and baffle me." And further on (ii. 4) - "If thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulter's hare."⁸⁴¹In "2 Henry IV." (i. 2), the Chief-Justice tells Falstaff that "to punish him by the heels would amend the attention of his ears." And in "All's Well that Ends Well" (iv. 3), where the lord relates how Parolles has "sat in the stocks all night," Bertram says—

⁸⁴⁰ "Index to Shakespeare," Halliwell-Phillipps, p. 36.

⁸⁴¹ See Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 46.

“His heels hath deserved it, in usurping his spurs so long.”

Spenser in his “*Faerie Queene*” (vi. 7), thus describes this mode of punishment—

“And after all for greater infamie
He by the heels him hung upon a tree,
And baffl’d so, that all which passed by
The picture of his punishment might see.”

The appropriate term, too, for chopping off the spurs of a knight when he was to be degraded, was “hack”—a custom to which it has been suggested, Mrs Page alludes in the “*Merry Wives of Windsor*” (ii. 1)⁸⁴² - “What—Sir Alice Ford! these knights will hack, and so thou should’st not alter the article of thy gentry.”⁸⁴³

Mr Dyce,⁸⁴⁴ however, says the most probable meaning of this obscure passage is that, “there is an allusion to the extravagant number of knights created by King James, and that hack is equivalent to “become cheap or vulgar.”

It appears, too, that in days gone by, the arms, etc., of traitors and rebels might be defaced. Thus, in “*King Richard II.*” (ii. 3), Berkeley tells Bolingbroke—

“Mistake me not, my lord; ‘tis not my meaning
To raze one title of your honour out.”

Upon which passage we may quote from Camden’s “*Remains*” (1605, p. 186) - “How the names of them, which for capital crimes against majestie, were erased out of the public records, tables, and registers or forbidden to be borne by their posteritie, when their memory was damned, I could show at large.” In the following Act (iii. 1), Bolingbroke further relates how his enemies had—

“Dispark’d my parks and fell’d my forest woods,
From my own windows torn my household coat,
Razed out my impress, leaving me no sign.”

Bilboes.—These were a kind of stocks or fetters used at sea to confine prisoners, of which Hamlet speaks to Horatio (v. 2):—

“Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,
That would not let me sleep: methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes.”

This punishment is thus described by Steevens: “The *bilboes* is a bar of iron with fetters annexed to it, by which mutinous or disorderly sailors were anciently linked together. The word is derived from Bilboa, a place in Spain where instruments of steel were fabricated in the utmost perfection. To understand Shakespeare’s allusion completely, it should be known that, as these fetters connect the legs of the offenders very close together, their attempts to rest must be as fruitless as those of Hamlet, in whose mind ‘there was a kind of fighting that would not let him sleep.’ Every motion of one must disturb his partner in confinement. The

⁸⁴² Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in his “*Handbook Index to the Works of Shakespeare*” (1866, p. 231), suggests this meaning.

⁸⁴³ See Nares’ “*Glossary*,” i., p. 397.

⁸⁴⁴ Dyce’s “*Glossary*,” p. 197.

bilboes are still shown in the Tower of London, among the other spoils of the Spanish Armada.”⁸⁴⁵

Brand—The branding of criminals is indirectly alluded to in “2 Henry VI.,” (v. 2), by young Clifford who calls the Duke of Richmond “a foul stigmatick,” which properly meant “a person who had been branded with a hot iron for some crime, one notably defamed for naughtiness.” The practice was abolished by law in the year 1822.

The practice, too, of making persons convicted of perjury wear papers while undergoing punishment, descriptive of their offence, is spoken of in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3), where Biron says of Longaville:—

“Why, he comes in like a perjure, wearing papers.”

Holingshed relates how Wolsey “so punished a perjure with open punishment, and open paper wearing, that in his time it was disused.”

Breech.—This old term to whip or punish as a school-boy is noticed in the “Taming of the Shrew” (iii. 1):—

“I am no breeching scholar in the schools,
I’ll not be tied to hours nor ‘pointed times.”

breeching being equivalent to “liable to be whipped.”

In “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 1), Sir Hugh Evans tells the boy page: - “If you forget your ‘quies,’ your ‘quæs,’ and your ‘quods,’ you must be preeches” (breeched).

Crown.—A burning crown, as the punishment of regicides, or other criminals, is probably alluded to by Anne in “Richard III.,” (iv. 1):—

“I would to God that the inclusive verge
Of golden metal that must round my brow!
Were red-hot steel, to sear me to the brain.”

Mr Singer,⁸⁴⁶ in a note on this passage quotes from Chettle’s “Tragedy of Hoffman” (1631), where this punishment is introduced:—

“Fix on thy master’s head my burning crown.”

And again—

“Was adjudg’d
To have his head sear’d with a burning crown.”

The Earl of Athol, who was executed for the murder of James I. of Scotland, was before his death crowned with a hot iron. In some of the monkish accounts of a place of future torments, a burning crown is appropriated to those who deprived any lawful monarch of his kingdom.

Pillory.—This old mode of punishment is referred to by Launce in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iv. 4), where he speaks of having “stood on the pillory.” In “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1), Hortensio, when he tells Baptista how he had been struck by Katharina because “I did but tell her she mistook her pets,” adds:—

⁸⁴⁵ Bilbo was also a rapier or sword; thus in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 5), Falstaff says to Ford:—“I suffered the pangs of three several deaths; first, an intolerable fright, to be detected . . . next, to be compassed, like a good bilbo . . . hilt to point,” &c.

⁸⁴⁶ “Shakespeare,” vi. p. 485. See “Boswell’s Life of Johnson,” ii. p. 6.

"She struck me on the head,
And through the instrument my pate made way;
And there I stood amazed for awhile,
As on a pillory, looking through the lute."

It has been suggested that there may be an allusion to the pillory in "Measure for Measure" (v. 1), where Lucio says to the duke disguised in his friar's hood: "You must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! "The alleged crime was not capital, and suspension in the pillory for an hour was all that the speaker intended."⁸⁴⁷

Press.—Several allusions occur to this species of torture applied to contumacious felons. It was also, says Malone, "formerly inflicted on those persons, who, being indicted, refused to plead. In consequence of their silence, they were pressed to death by a heavy weight laid upon the stomach." In "Much Ado about Nothing" (iii. 1), Hero says of Beatrice—

"She would laugh me
Out of myself, press me to death with wit."

In "Richard II." (iii. 4), the Queen exclaims—

"O, I am press'd to death through want of speaking."

And in "Measure for Measure" (v. 1), Lucio tells the Duke that - "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging."

In the "Perfect Account of the Daily Intelligence" (April 16th, 1651), we find it recorded - "Mond., April 14th. This Session, at the Old Bailey, were four men pressed to death that were all in one robbery, and, out of obstinacy and contempt of the Court, stood mute and refused to plead." This punishment was not abolished until by Statute 12 Geo. III. c. 20.

Rack.—According to Mr Blackstone, this "was utterly unknown to the law of England; though once, when the Duke of Exeter and Suffolk, and other ministers of Henry VI., had laid a design to introduce the civil law into this kingdom as a rule of government, for the beginning thereof they erected a rack of torture, which was called, in derision, the Duke of Exeter's daughter; and still remains in the Tower of London, where it was occasionally used as an engine of state, not of law, more than once in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. But when upon the assassination of Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, it was proposed, in the Privy Council, to put the assassin to the rack, in order to discover his accomplices, the judges (being consulted) declared unanimously, to their own honour and the honour of the English law, that no such proceeding was allowable by the law of England." Mr Hallam observes, that though the English law never recognized the use of torture, yet there were many instances of its employment in the reign of Elizabeth and James; and among others, in the case of the Gunpowder Plot. He further adds, in the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth "the rack seldom stood idle in the Tower." Of the many allusions to this torture, may be mentioned Sebastian's word in "Twelfth Night" (v. 1)

"Antonio! O my dear Antonio!
How have the hours rack'd and tortured me,
Since I have lost thee."

⁸⁴⁷ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 661; see Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare," 1839, pp. 90, 91, 109; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," iii. p. 111.

In “Measure for Measure” (v. 1), Escalus orders the “unreverend and unhallow’d friar” (the Duke disguised) to be taken to the rack—

“Take him hence; to the rack with him! we’ll touse you
Joint by joint.”

The engine, which sometimes meant the rack, is spoken of in “King Lear” (i. 4)—

“That, like an engine, wrench’d my frame of nature
From the fix’d place.”⁸⁴⁸

So in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Night Walker” (iv. 5)—

“Their souls shot through with adders, torn on engines.”

Once more in “Measure for Measure” (ii. 1), where Escalus tells how

“Some run from brakes of ice, and answer none.”

—a passage which Mr Dyce would thus read—

“Some run from brakes of vice.”

It has been suggested that there is an allusion to “engines of torture,” although owing to the many significations of the word “brake,” its meaning here has been much disputed.⁸⁴⁹

Stocks.—This old-fashioned mode of punishment is the subject of frequent allusion by Shakespeare. Thus, Launce in “The Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iv. 4), says - “I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath stolen.” In “All’s Well that Ends Well” (iv. 3), Bertram says - “Come, bring forth this counterfeit module, has deceived me, like a double-meaning prophesier.” Whereupon one of the French lords adds - “Bring him forth: has sat i’ the stocks all night, poor gallant knave.” Volumnia says of Coriolanus (v. 3)—

”There’s no man in the world
More bound to’s mother; yet here he lets me prate
Like one i’ the stocks.”

Again, in “Comedy of Errors” (iii. 1), Luce speaks of “a pair of stocks in the town,” and in “King Lear” (ii. 2), Cornwall, referring to Kent, says—

“Fetch forth the stocks!
You stubborn ancient knave.”

It would seem that formerly in great houses, as in some colleges, there were moveable stocks for the correction of the servants. Putting a person in the stocks, too, was an exhibition familiar to the ancient stage. In “Hick Scorer,”⁸⁵⁰ printed in the reign of Henry VIII., Pity is placed into the stocks, and left there until he is freed “by Perseverance and Contemplacyon.”

Strappado.—This was a military punishment by which the unfortunate sufferer was cruelly tortured in the following way:—A rope being fastened under his arms, he was drawn up by a pulley to the top of a high beam, and then suddenly let down with a jerk. The result, usually, was a dislocation of the shoulder blade. In “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), it is referred to by Falstaff, who tells Poins: - “Were I at the strappado, or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you

⁸⁴⁸ It also meant a warlike engine, as in “Coriolanus” (v. 4)—”When he walks, he moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before his treading;” so also in “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 3.)

⁸⁴⁹ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 49; Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 56; Nares’ “Glossary,” i, p. 104.

⁸⁵⁰ It is reprinted in Hawkins’ “English Drama,” 1773.

on compulsion." At Paris, says Douce,⁸⁵¹ "there was a spot called *l'estrapade*, in the Fauxbourg St. Jacques, where soldiers received this punishment. The machine, whence the place took its name, remained fixed like a perpetual gallows." The term is probably derived from the Italian *strappare*, to pull or draw with violence.

Toss in a Sieve.—This punishment, according to Cotgrave, was inflicted "on such as committed gross absurdities." In "1 King Henry VI." (i. 3), Gloster says to the Bishop of Winchester:—

"I'll canvass thee in thy broad Cardinal's hat,
If thou proceed in this thy insolence."

It is alluded to in Davenant's "Cruel Brother" (1630):—

"I'll sift and winow him in an old hat."

Wheel.—The punishment of the wheel was not known at Rome, but we read of Mettius Tuffetius being torn asunder by quadrigæ driven in opposite directions. As Shakespeare, remarks Malone, "has coupled this species of punishment with another that certainly was unknown to ancient Rome, it is highly probable that he was not apprized of the story of Mettius Tuffetius, and that in this, as in various other instances, the practice of his own times was in his thoughts, for in 1594 John Chastel had been thus executed in France for attempting to assassinate Henry IV."

Coriolanus (iii. 2) says—

"Let them put all about mine ears, present me
Death on the wheel, or at wild horses' heels."

Whipping.—Three centuries ago this mode of punishment was carried to a cruel extent. By an Act passed in "2 Henry VIII." vagrants were to be carried to some market-town, or other place, and there tied to the end of a cart, naked, and beaten with whips throughout such market-town, or other place, till the body should be bloody by reason of such whipping." The punishment was afterwards slightly mitigated, for by a statute passed in 39th of Elizabeth's reign, vagrants "were only to be stripped naked from the middle upwards, and whipped till the body should be bloody." The stocks were often so constructed as to serve both for stocks and whipping posts.⁸⁵² Amongst the numerous references to this punishment by Shakespeare, we may quote "2 Henry IV." (v. 4), where the beadle says of Hostess Quickly: - "The constables have delivered her over to me, and she shall have whipping—cheer enough, I warrant her." In "The Taming of the Shrew" (i. 1), Gremio says, speaking of Katharina, "I had as lief take her dowry with this condition, to be whipped at the high cross every morning," in allusion to what Hortensio had just said, "Why, man, there be good fellows in the world, an a man could light on them, would take her with all faults, and money enough." In "2 Henry VI." (ii. 1), Gloucester orders Simpcox and his wife to "be whipped through every market-town, till they come to Berwick, from whence they came."

Wisp.—This was a punishment for a scold.⁸⁵³ It appears that "a wisp, or small twist of straw or hay, was often applied as a mark of opprobrium to an immodest woman, a scold, or similar offender; even, therefore, the showing it to a woman, was considered a grievous affront." In "3 Henry VI." (ii. 2), Edward says of Queen Margaret:—

⁸⁵¹ "Illustrations of Shakspeare," pp. 263, 264; see Dyce's "Glossary," p. 423.

⁸⁵² See "Book of Days," i. pp. 598, 599.

⁸⁵³ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 965.

“A wisp of straw were worth a thousand crowns,
To make this shameless callet⁸⁵⁴ know herself.”

A wisp, adds Nares, seems to have been the badge of the scolding woman in the ceremony of Skimmington;⁸⁵⁵ an allusion to which is given in a “Dialogue between John and Jone, striving who shall wear the breeches,” in the “Pleasures of Poetry,” cited by Malone:—

“Good, gentle Jone, with-holde thy handes,
This once let me entreat thee,
And make me promise never more,
That thou shalt mind to beat me:
For fear thou wear the wispe, good wife,
And make our neighbours ride.”

In Nash’s “Pierce Pennilesse” (1593), there is also an amusing allusion to it, “Why, thou errant butter-whore, thou cotquean and scratop of scolds, wilt thou never leave afflicting a dead carcasse? continually read the rhetorick lecture of Ramme-alley? a wispe, a wispe, you kitchen-stuffe wrangler.”

⁸⁵⁴ “Callat,” an immodest woman, also applied to a scold. Cf. “Winter’s Tale” (ii. 3):—

”A callat
Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband
And now baits me.”

⁸⁵⁵ Skimmington was a burlesque ceremony in ridicule of a man beaten by his wife. See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” ii. pp. 191, 192.

19. Proverbs

In the present chapter are collected together the chief proverbs either quoted or alluded to by Shakespeare. Many of these are familiar to most readers, but have gained an additional interest by reason of their connection with the poet's writings. At the same time, it may be noted, that very many of Shakespeare's pithy sayings have since his day passed into proverbs, and have taken their place in this class of literature. It is curious to notice, as Mrs Cowden Clarke remarks,⁸⁵⁶ how "Shakespeare has paraphrased some of our commonest proverbs in his own choice and elegant diction." Thus, "make hay while the sun shines," becomes—

"The sun shines hot; and if we use delay,
Cold biting winter mars our hoped-for hay,"

a statement which applies to numerous other proverbial sayings.

"A black man is a jewel in a fair woman's eyes."—In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (v. 2), the following passage is an amusing illustration of the above:—

"*Thurio*. What says she to my face?
Proteus. She says it is a fair one.
Thurio. Nay then, the wanton lies; my face is black.
Proteus. But pearls are fair; and the old saying is,
Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies' eyes."

In "Titus Andronicus" (v. 1), there is a further allusion to this proverb where Lucius says of Aaron:—

"This is the pearl that pleased your empress' eye."

"A beggar marries a wife and lice."—So in "King Lear" (iii. 2), song—

"The cod-piece that will house,
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many."

Thus it is also said - "A beggar payeth a benefit with a louse."

"A cunning knave needs no broker."—This old proverb is quoted by Hume in "2 Henry VI." (i. 2):—

"A crafty knave does need no broker."

"A curs't cur must be tied short."—With this proverb we may compare what Sir Toby says in "Twelfth Night" (iii. 2) to Sir Andrew:—

"Go, write it in a martial hand; be curst and brief."

"A drop hollows the stone," or "many drops pierce the stone."—We may compare "3 Henry VI." (iii. 2), "much rain wears the marble," and also the messenger's words (ii. 1), when he relates how "the noble Duke of York was slain"—

"Environed he was with many foes,
And stood against them, as the hope of Troy

⁸⁵⁶ "Shakspeare Proverbs," 1858.

Against the Greeks that would have enter'd Troy.
But Hercules himself must yield to odds;
And many strokes, though with a little axe,
Hew down and fell the hardest timber'd oak."

"A finger in every pie."—So in "Henry VIII." (i. 1), Buckingham says of Wolsey:—

"No man's pie is freed
From his ambitious finger."

To the same purport is the following proverb ⁸⁵⁷ - "He had I a finger in the pie when he burnt his nail off."

"A fool's bolt is soon shot."—Quoted by Duke of Orleans in "Henry V." (iii. 7), With this we may compare the French - "De fol juge breve sentence."⁸⁵⁸

"A friend at court is as good as a penny in the purse."—So in "2 Henry IV." (v. 1), Shallow says—

"A friend i' the court is better than a penny in purse."

The French equivalent of this saying is - "Bon fait avoir ami en cour, car le procès en est plus court."

"A little pot's soon hot."—Grumio in "Taming of the Shrew" (iv. 1), uses this familiar proverb - "Were not I a little pot and soon hot, my very lips might freeze to my teeth," &c.

"A pox of the devil." - "Henry V." (ii. 1.)

"A smoky chimney and a scolding wife are two bad companions."—There are various versions of this proverb—Ray gives the following: - "Smoke, raining into the house, and a scolding wife, will make a man run out of doors."

Hotspur, in "1 Henry IV." (iii. 1), says of his father,—

"O, he is as tedious
As a tired horse, a railing wife;
Worse than a smoky house."

"A snake lies hidden in the grass."—This, as Mr Green ⁸⁵⁹remarks, is no unfrequent proverb, and the idea is often made use of by Shakespeare. Thus in "2 Henry VI." (iii. 1), Margaret declares to the attendant nobles—

"Henry my lord is cold in great affairs,
Too full of foolish pity: 1 and Gloucester's show
Beguiles him as the mournful crocodile
With sorrow snares relenting passengers,
Or as the snake, roll'd in a flowering bank,
With shining checker'd slough, doth sting a child,
That for the beauty thinks it excellent."

Lady Macbeth (i. 5), tells her husband,—

"Look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't."

⁸⁵⁷ Bohn's "Handbook of Proverbs," p. 159.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 94.

⁸⁵⁹ "Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers," 1870, p. 341.

Juliet (“Romeo and Juliet,” iii. 2), speaks of

“Serpent heart, hid with a flowering face.”

“A staff is quickly found to beat a dog.”—Other versions of this proverb are,—

“It is easy to find a stick to beat a dog.”

“It is easy to find a stone to throw at a dog.”⁸⁶⁰

So in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 1), Gloucester says,—

“I shall not want false witness to condemn me,
Nor store of treasons to augment my guilt;
The ancient proverb will be well effected:
’A staff is quickly found to beat a dog.’”

“A wise man may live anywhere.”—In “Richard II.” (i. 3), John of Gaunt says,—

“All places that the eye of heaven visits,
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.”

“A woman conceals what she does not know.”—Hence Hotspur says to his wife in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 3),—

”Constant you are,
But yet a woman: and for secrecy,
No lady closer; for I well believe
Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know,
And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate.”

“All men are not alike.” - “Much Ado about Nothing” (iii. 5).⁸⁶¹

“All’s Well that Ends well.”

“As lean as a rake.”—So in “Coriolanus” (i. 1), one of the citizens says, - “Let us revenge this with our pikes, ere we become rakes.”—So Spenser in his “Faerie Queene” (bk. ii. can. it),—

“His body leane and meagre as a rake.”

This proverb is found in Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales” (i. 289),—

“Al so lene was his hors as is a rake.”

“As thin as a whipping post” is another proverb of the same kind.

“As mad as a march hare.” - “The Two Noble Kinsmen” (iii. 5). We may compare the expression “hare-brained,” - “1 King Henry IV.” (v. 2).

“As sound as a bell.”—So in “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 2), Don Pedro says of Benedick, - “He hath a heart as sound as a bell.”

“As the bell clinketh, so the fool thinketh.”—This proverb is indirectly alluded to in “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 1), in the previous passage, where Don Pedro says of Benedick that “he hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper, for what his heart thinks his tongue speaks.”

Another form of the same proverb is - “As the fool thinks, the bell tink.”⁸⁶²

⁸⁶⁰ See Kelly’s “Proverbs of All Nations,” 1870, p. 157.

⁸⁶¹ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 390, under Proverbs.

⁸⁶² See Kelly’s “Proverbs of All Nations,” p. 92.

“As true as steel.”—This popular adage is quoted in “Troilus and Cressida” (iii. 2)—

“As true as steel, as plantage to the moon.”

We may also compare the proverb: - “As true as the dial to the sun.”

“At hand, quoth pickpurse,” “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1).—This proverbial saying arose, says Malone, from the pickpurse, always seizing the prey nearest him.

“Ay, tell me that and unyoke” (“Hamlet,” v. I).—This was a common adage for giving over or ceasing to do a thing; a metaphor derived from the unyoking of oxen at the end of their labour.

“Baccare, quoth Mortimer to his sow.”—With this Mr Halliwell-Phillipps compares Gremio’s words in “The Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1)—

“Saving your tale, Petruchio, I pray,
Let us, that are poor petitioners, speak too:
Baccare! you are marvellous forward.”

Mr Dyce (Glossary, p. 23) says the word signifies “go back,” and cites one of John Heywood’s epigrams upon it:—

“Backare, quoth Mortimer to his sow;
Went that sowe backe at that bidding, trow you.”

“Barnes are blessings.” - “All’s Well that Ends Well” (i. 3).

“Base is the slave that pays,” “Henry V.” (ii. 1).⁸⁶³

“Bastards are born lucky.”—This proverb is alluded to in “King John” (i. 1), by the bastard, who says:—

“Brother, adieu; good fortune come to thee!
For thou wast got i’ the way of honesty.”

Philip wishes his brother good fortune, because Robert was not a bastard.

“Beggars mounted run their horses to death.”⁸⁶⁴ —Quoted by York in “3 Henry VI.” (i. 4). We may also compare the proverb: - “Set a beggar on horseback, he’ll ride to the devil.”

“Begone when the sport is at the best.”—Mr Halliwell-Phillipps quotes Benvolio’s words in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 5). —

“Away, begone; the sport is at the best.”

To the same effect are Romeo’s words (i. 4):—

“The game was ne’er so fair, and I am done.”

“Be off while your shoes are good.”—This popular phrase still in use, seems alluded to by Katharine in “Taming of the Shrew” (iii. 2), who says to Petruchio:—

“You may be jogging whiles your boots are green.”

“Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.”—Quoted by the clown in “Twelfth Night” (i. 5).

⁸⁶³ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 391

⁸⁶⁴ See Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverbs,” p. 326.

“Better fed than taught.”—This old saying may be alluded to in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (ii. 2) by the clown, “I will show myself highly fed and lowly taught;” and again (ii. 4) by Parolles:—

“A good knave, i’ faith, and well fed.”

“Blessing of your heart, you brew good ale.”—Quoted by Launce as a proverb in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iii. 1).

“Blush like a black dog.”—This saying is referred to in “Titus Andronicus” (v. 1)

“*First Goth.* What, canst you say all this, and never blush?
Aaron. Ay, like a black dog, as the saying is.”

“Bought and sold,” “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. x).—A proverbial phrase applied to anyone entrapped or made a victim by treachery or mismanagement. It is found again in the “Comedy of Errors” (iii. 1); in “King John” (v. 4); and in “Richard III.” (v. 3).

“Bring your hand to the buttery-bar and let it drink.” “Twelfth Night” (i. 3), Mr Dyce quotes the following explanation of this passage, although he does not answer for its correctness: - “This is a proverbial phrase among forward Abigails, to ask at once for a kiss and a present. Sir Andrew’s slowness of comprehension in this particular gave her a just suspicion at once, of his frigidity and avarice.” The buttery-bar means the place in palaces and in great houses whence provisions were dispensed; and it is still to be seen in most of our Colleges.

“Brag’s a good dog, but Hold-fast is a better.”—This proverb is alluded to in “Henry V.” (ii. 3), by Pistol:—

“Hold-fast is the only dog, my duck.”⁸⁶⁵

“Bush natural, more hair than wit.”—Ray’s Proverbs—So in “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iii. 1), it is said, “She hath more hair than wit.”

“By chance but not by truth.”⁸⁶⁶ “King John” (i. 1).

“Care will kill a cat; yet there’s no living without it.” So in “Much ado about Nothing” (v. 1), Claudio says to Don Pedro: - “What though care killed a cat, thou hast mettle enough in thee to kill care.”

“Come cut and long tail,” “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iii. 4).—This proverb means, “Let any come that may, good or bad”; and was, no doubt, says Staunton, originally applied to dogs or horses.”

“Comparisons are odious.”—So in “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 5), Dogberry tells Verges:—

“Comparisons are odorous.”

“Confess and be hanged.”—This well known proverb is probably alluded to in the “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 2):—

Bassanio. “Promise me life, and I’ll confess the truth.”

Portia. “Well then, confess and live.”

We may also refer to what Othello says (iv. 1): - “To confess, and to be hanged for his labour; first, to be hanged, and then to confess. I tremble at it.”

⁸⁶⁵ See Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverbs,” p. 333; Kelly’s “Proverbs of all Nations,” 1870, p. 173.

⁸⁶⁶ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 391.

In "Timon of Athens" (i. 2), Apemantus says: - "Ho, ho, confess'd it! hang'd it, have you not?"

"Cry him, and have him." So Rosalind says in "As You Like It" (i. 3), "If I could try 'hem' and have him."

"Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool." "King Lear" (iii. 5). It is given by Ray in his "Proverbs" (1768); see also "Taming of the Shrew" (ii. 1).

"Cucullus non facit monachum."—So in "Henry VIII." (iii. 1), Queen Katharine says:—

"All hoods make not monks."

Chaucer thus alludes to this proverb:—

"Habite ne maketh monk ne feere;
But a clean life and devotion
Maketh gode men of religion."

"Dead as a door nail."—So in "2 Henry VI." (iv. 10), Cade says to Iden: - "I have eat no meat these five days; yet, come thou and thy five men, and if I do not leave you all as dead as a door-nail, I pray God I may never eat grass more."

We may compare the term, "dead as a herring," which Caius uses in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (ii. 3), "By gar, de herring is no dead so as I vill kill him."

"Death will have his day." "Richard II." (iii. 2).

"Delays are dangerous."—In "1 Henry VI." (iii. 2), Reignier says—

"Defer no time, delays have dangerous ends."

"Diluculo surgere," &c. "Twelfth Night" (ii. 3).

"Dogs must eat."—This with several other proverbs is quoted by Agrippa in "Coriolanus" (i. 1).

"Dun's the mouse," "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 4).—This was a proverbial saying, of which no satisfactory explanation has yet been given. Nares thinks it was "frequently employed with no other intent than that of quibbling on the word done." Ray has, "as dun as a mouse." Mercutio says - "Tut, dun's the mouse, the constable's own word."

"Empty vessels give the greatest sound."—Quoted in "Henry V." (iv. 4).

"Every dog hath his day, and every man his hour."—This old adage seems alluded to by the Queen in "Hamlet" (v. 1).⁸⁶⁷

"The cat will mew and dog will have his day."

"Every man at forty is either a fool or a physician."⁸⁶⁸—This popular proverb is probably referred to in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iii. 4), by Mistress Quickly, who tells Fenton how she had recommended him as a suitor for Mr Page's daughter instead of Doctor Caius: -

"This is my doing now: 'nay,' said I, 'will you cast away your child on a fool, and a physician? Look on Master Fenton: this is my doing.'"

⁸⁶⁷ Bohn's "Handbook of Proverbs," p. 86.

⁸⁶⁸ Ray gives another form:—Every man is either a fool or a physician after thirty years of age; see Bohn's "Handbook of Proverbs," 1857, p. 27.

“Familiarity breeds contempt.”—So in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), Slender says, “I hope, upon familiarity will grow more contempt.”

“Fast bind, fast find.”—In “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 5), Shylock says—

“Well, Jessica, go in:
Perhaps I will return immediately:
Do as I bid you; shut doors after you:
Fast bind, fast find;
A proverb never stale in thrifty mind.”

“Finis coronat opus.”—A translation of this Latin proverb is given by Helena in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (iv. 4):—

“Still the fine’s the crown.”

In “2 Henry VI.” (v. 2), too, Clifford’s expiring words are - “La fin couronne les œuvres.” We still have the expression to crown, in the sense of *to finish* or *make perfect*. Mr Douce ⁸⁶⁹remarks that “coronidem imponere is a metaphor well known to the ancients, and supposed to have originated from the practice of finishing buildings by placing a crown at the top as an ornament; and for this reason the words crown, top and head, are become synonymous in most languages. There is reason for believing that the ancients placed a crescent at the beginning, and a crown, or some ornament that resembled it, at the end of their books.” In “Troilus and Cressida” (iv. 5), Hector says

“The fall of every Phrygian stone will cost
A drop of Grecian blood: the end crowns all,
And that old common arbitrator, Time,
Will one day end it.”

Prince Henry (“2 Henry IV.,” ii. 2) in reply to Poins, gives another turn to the proverb: - “By this hand, thou thinkest me as far in the devil’s book as thou and Falstaff for obduracy and persistency: let the end try the man.”⁸⁷⁰

“Fly pride, says the peacock.”—This is quoted by Dromio of Syracuse in “The Comedy of Errors” (iv. 3) ⁸⁷¹—

“Friends may meet, but mountains never greet.”—This is ironically alluded to in “As You Like It” (iii. 2), by Celia - “It is a hard matter for friends to meet; but mountains may be removed with earthquakes and so encounter.”

“Give the devil his due.”—In “Henry V.” (iii. 7) it is quoted by the Duke of Orleans.

“God sends fools fortune.”—It is to this version of the Latin adage, “Fortuna favet fatuis” (“Fortune favours fools”), that Touchstone alludes in his reply to Jaques, in “As You Like It” (ii. 7)—

“No, sir, quoth he;
Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune.”

⁸⁶⁹ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 199.

⁸⁷⁰ See Green’s “Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers,” 1870, pp. 319, 323.

⁸⁷¹ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 391.

Under different forms the same proverb is found on the Continent. The Spanish say, "The mother of God appears to fools;" and the German one is this, "Fortune and women are fond of fools."⁸⁷²

"God sends not corn for the rich only."—This is quoted by Marcius in *Coriolanus* (i. 1).

"Good goose, do not bite."—This proverb is used in "*Romeo and Juliet*" (ii. 4)—

"*Mercutio*. I will bite thee by the ear for that jest.

Romeo. Nay, good goose, bite not."

"Good liquor will make a cat speak."—So in the "*Tempest*" (ii. 2) Stephano says - "Come on your ways: open your mouth; here is that which will give language to you, cat; open your mouth."

"Good wine needs no bush."—This old proverb, which is quoted by Shakespeare in "*As You Like It*" (v. 4, "Epilogue") - "If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue"—refers to the custom of hanging up a bunch of twigs, or a wisp of hay at a roadside inn, as a sign that drink may be had within. This practice, "which still lingers in the cider-making counties of the west of England, and prevails more generally in France, is derived from the Romans, among whom a bunch of ivy was used as the sign of a wine shop." They were, also, in the habit of saying, "Vendible wine needs no ivy hung up." The Spanish have a proverb - "Good wine needs no crier."⁸⁷³

"Greatest clerks not the wisest men."—Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in his "*Handbook Index to Shakespeare*" (391), quotes the following passage in "*Twelfth Night*" (iv. 2), where Maria tells the Clown to personate Sir Topas the curate - "I am not tall enough to become the function well, nor lean enough to be thought a good student; but to be said an honest man and a good housekeeper goes as fairly as to say a careful man and a great scholar."

"Happy man be his dole."—("Taming of the Shrew," i. 1; "1 Henry IV." ii. 2). Ray has it, "Happy man, happy dole;" or, "Happy man by his dole."

"Happy the bride on whom the sun shines."—Mr Halliwell-Phillipps, in his "*Handbook Index to Shakespeare*" (p. 392), quotes as an illustration of this popular proverb, the following passage in the "*Twelfth Night*" (iv. 3), where Olivia and Sebastian having made "a contract of eternal bond of love," the former says—

"—And heavens so shine,
That they may fairly note this act of mine."

"Happy the child whose father went to the devil."⁸⁷⁴ —So, in "*3 King Henry VI.*" (ii. 2), the King asks interrogatively—

"And happy always was it for that son,
Whose father for his hoarding went to hell?"

The Portuguese say, "Alas, for the son whose father goes to heaven."

"Hares pull dead lions by the beard."—In "*King John*" (ii. 1), the bastard says to Austria—

"You are the hare of whom the proverb goes,
Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard."

⁸⁷² Kelly's "*Proverbs of All Nations*," 1872, p. 52.

⁸⁷³ Kelly's "*Proverbs of All Nations*," 1870, pp. 175, 176.

⁸⁷⁴ See Bohn's "*Handbook of Proverbs*," p. 100; Kelly's "*Proverbs of All Nations*," p. 187.

“Have is have, however men do catch.”—Quoted by the bastard in “King John” (i. 1).

“Heaven’s above all.”—In “Richard II.” (iii. 3). York tells Bolingbroke—

“Take not, good cousin, further than you should,
Lest you mistake the heavens are o’er our heads.”

So, too, in “Othello” (ii. 3), Cassio says—

“God’s above all.”⁸⁷⁵

“He is a poor cook who cannot lick his own fingers.”—Under a variety of forms, this proverb is found in different countries. The Italians say, “He who manages other people’s wealth does not go supperless to bed.” The Dutch, too, say, “All officers are greasy,” that is, something sticks to them.⁸⁷⁶In “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 2), the saying is thus alluded to—

“*Capulet*. Sirrah, go hire me twenty cunning cooks.

Sec. Ser. You shall have none ill, sir; for I’ll try if they can lick their fingers.

Cap. How canst thou try them so?

Sec. Ser. Marry, sir, ‘tis an ill cook that cannot lick his own fingers: therefore he that cannot lick his fingers goes not with me.”

“He’s mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse’s health, a boy’s love, or a whore’s oath.” - “King Lear” (iii. 6).⁸⁷⁷

“*Heroum filii noxæ*.”—It is a common notion that a father above the common rate of men, has usually a son below it. Hence in the “*Tempest*” (i. 2), Shakespeare probably alludes to this Latin proverb—

“My trust,
Like a good parent, did beget of him
A falsehood, in its contrary as great
As my trust was.”

“He knows not a hawk from a handsaw.”—Hamlet says (ii. 2) - “When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.”

“He may hang himself in his own garters.”—So, Falstaff, (“1 Henry IV.” 2), says - “Go hang thyself in thy own heir-apparent’s garters.”

“He that is born to be hanged will never be drowned.”—In the “*Tempest*” (i. 1), Gonzalo says of the boatswain: - “I have great comfort from this fellow: methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging: make the rope of his destiny our cable, for our own doth little advantage. If he be not born to be hanged, our case is miserable.”

The Italians say, “He that is to die by the gallows, may dance on the river.”

“He that dies pays all debts.” - “*Tempest*” (iii. 2.)

“He who eats with the devil hath need of a long spoon.”—This is referred to by Stephano in the “*Tempest*” (ii. 2), “This is a devil, and no monster: I will leave him; I have no long spoon.” Again, in the “*Comedy of Errors*” (iv. 2), Dromio of Syracuse says, “He must have a long spoon that must eat with the devil.”

⁸⁷⁵ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 392.

⁸⁷⁶ See Kelly’s “Proverbs of All Nations,” 1870, pp. 196–7.

⁸⁷⁷ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 392.

The old adage which tells how:—

“He who will not when he may,
When he wills he shall have nay,”

is quoted in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 7), by Menas—

“Who seeks, and will not take when once ‘tis offer’d,
Shall never find it more.”

“Hold hook and line.” - “2 King Henry IV.” (ii. 4). This, says Dyce, is a sort of cant proverbial expression which sometimes occurs in our early writers (“Glossary,” p. 210).

“Hold, or cut bow-strings.” - “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (i. 2).

“Honest as the skin between his brows.” - “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 5).⁸⁷⁸

“Hunger will break through stone walls.”—This is quoted by Marcius in “Coriolanus” (i. 1), who, in reply to Agrippa’s question, “What says the other troop?” replies—

“They are dissolved: hang ‘em!
They said they were an-hungry; sigh’d forth proverbs,
That hunger broke stone walls,” etc.

According to an old Suffolk proverb,⁸⁷⁹“Hunger will break through stone walls, or anything, except Suffolk cheese.”

“I scorn that with my heels.” - “Much ado about Nothing” (iii. 4). A not uncommon proverbial expression. It is again referred to in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 2), by Launcelot, “Do not run; scorn running with thy heels.” Dyce thinks it is alluded to in “Venus and Adonis,”—

“Beating his kind embracements with her heels.”

“If you are wise, keep yourself warm.”—This proverb is probably alluded to in the “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1)—

“*Petruchio*. Am I not wise?
Katharine. Yes; keep you warm.”

So, in “Much ado about Nothing” (i. 1)—

“That if he has wit enough to keep himself warm.”

“I fear no colours.” - “Twelfth Night” (i. 5).

“Ill gotten goods never prosper.”—This proverb is referred to by the King (“3 Henry VI.,” ii. 2)—

“Clifford, tell me, didst thou never hear
That things ill got had ever bad success.”

“*Illotis manibus tractare sacra.*”—Falstaff, in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3), says, “Rob me the exchequer the first thing thou doest, and do it with unwashed hands too.”

“Ill will never said well.”—This is quoted by Duke of Orleans in “Henry V.” (iii. 7).

“In at the window, or else o’er the hatch.”—(“King John” (i. 1). Applied to illegitimate children. Staunton has this note: “Woe worth the time that ever a gave suck to a child that

⁸⁷⁸ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 392.

⁸⁷⁹ Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverb,” 1857, p. 409.

came in at the window!" ("The Family of Love," 1608). So also in "The Witches of Lancashire," by Heywood and Broome, 1634, "It appears you came in at the window." "I would not have you think I scorn my grannam's cat to leap over the hatch."

"It is a foul bird which defiles its own nest."—This seems alluded to in "As You Like it" (iv. 1), where Celia says to Rosalind, "You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate: we must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest."

"It is a poor dog that is not worth the whistling."—So Goneril in "King Lear" (iv. 2), "I have been worth the whistle."

"It is a wise child that knows its own father."—In the "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 2), Launcelot has the converse of this, "It is a wise father that knows his own child."

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good."—So, in "3 King Henry VI." (ii. 5), we read—
"Ill blows the wind that profits nobody."

And in "2 Henry IV." (v. 3), when Falstaff asks Pistol "What wind blew you hither?" the latter replies—

"Not the ill wind which blows no man to good."

"It is easy to steal a shive from a cut loaf."—In "Titus Andronicus" (ii. 1), Demetrius refers to this proverb. Ray has, "'Tis safe taking a shive out of a cut loaf."

"It's a dear collop that's cut out of my own flesh." Mr Halliwell-Phillipps thinks there may be possibly an allusion to this proverb in "1 Henry VI." (v. 4), where the shepherd says of La Pucelle:—

"God knows thou art a collop of my flesh."

"I will make a shaft or a bolt of it." In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iii. 4), this proverb is used by Slender.⁸⁸⁰ Ray gives, "to make a bolt or a shaft of a thing." This is equivalent to: - "I will. either make a good or a bad thing of it; I will take the risk."

"It is like a barber's chair." "All's Well that Ends Well" (ii. 2).

The following passage in "Midsummer Night's Dream" (iii. 2):—

"Jack shall have Jill;
Nought shall go ill;
The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well."

refers to the popular proverb of olden times, says Staunton, signifying "all ended happily." So, too, Biron says, in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2)—

"Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
Jack hath not Jill....

It occurs in Skelton's poem "Magnyfycence" (Dyce, ed. i. 234)—

"Jack shall have Gyl."

And in Heywood's "Dialogue" (Sig. F.3, 1598)—

"Come, chat at hame, all is well, Jack shall have Gill."

⁸⁸⁰ A shaft is an arrow for the longbow, a bolt is for the crossbow. Kelly's "Proverbs of All Nations," p. 155.

“Kindness will creep where it cannot go.” Thus, in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iv. 2), Proteus tells Thurio how “Love will creep in service where it cannot go.” There is a Scotch proverb, “Kindness will creep whar it mauna gang.”

“Let the world slide,” “Taming of the Shrew” (i., Induc.).

“Let them laugh that win.” Othello says (iv. 1)—

“So, so, so, so; they laugh that win.”

On the other hand the French say—

“Marchand qui perd ne peut rire.”

“Like will to like, as the devil said to the collier.” With this we may compare the following passage in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), “What, man! ‘tis not for gravity to play at cherry-pit with Satan: Hang him, foul collier!”—collier having been in Shakespeare’s day a term of the highest reproach.

“Losers have leave to talk.” Titus Andronicus (iii. 1), says—

“Then give me leave, for losers will have leave
To ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues.”

“Maids say nay, and take.” So Julia, in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (i. 2), says—

“Since maids, in modesty, say ‘no’ to that
Which they would have the profferer construe ‘ay.’”

In the “Passionate Pilgrim” we read—

“Have you not heard it said full oft,
A woman’s nay doth stand for nought.”

“Make hay while the sun shines.” King Edward, in “3 King Henry VI.” (iv. 8), alludes to this proverb—

“The sun shines hot; and, if we use delay,
Cold biting winter mars our hoped-for hay.”

The above proverb is peculiar to England, and as Trench remarks, could have its birth only under such variable skies as ours.

“Many talk of Robin Hood that never shot in his bow.” So, in “2 Henry IV.” (iii. 2), Justice Shallow, says Falstaff, “talks as familiarly of John a Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him; and I’ll be sworn a’ never saw him but once in the Tilt yard; and then he burst his head for crowding among the marshal’s men.”

“Marriage and hanging go by destiny.”—This proverb is the popular creed respecting marriage, and under a variety of forms is found in different countries. Thus, in “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 9), Nerissa says—

“The ancient saying is no heresy,
Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.”⁸⁸¹

Again in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (i. 3), the clown says—

“For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true shall find;

⁸⁸¹ “But now consider the old proverbe to be true, yt saieth that marriage is destinie.”—Hall’s “Chronicles.”

Your marriage comes by destiny,
Your cuckoo sings by kind.”

We may compare the well known proverb - “Marriages are made in heaven,” and the French version, “Les mariages sont écrits dans le ciel.”

“Marriage as bad as hanging.”—In “Twelfth Night” (i. 5), the clown says - “Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage.”

“Marry trap.” - “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), this, says Nares, “is apparently a kind of proverbial exclamation, as much as to say, ‘By Mary,’ you are caught.”

“Meat was made for mouths.”—Quoted in “Coriolanus” (i. 1).

“Misfortunes seldom come alone.”—This proverb is beautifully alluded to by the king in “Hamlet” (iv. 5.)—

“When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.”

The French say ⁸⁸² - “Malheur ne vient jamais seul.”

“More hair than wit.” - “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iii. 2), a well known old English proverb.

“Mortuo leoni et lepores insultant.”—This proverb is alluded to by the Bastard in “King John” (ii. 1), who says to the Archduke of Austria;—

“You are the hare of whom the proverb goes,
Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard.”

“Much water goes by the mill the miller knows not of.”—This adage is quoted in “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 1), by Demetrius:—

“More water glideth by the mill
Than wots the miller of.”

“My cake is dough.”—(“Taming of the Shrew,” v. I). An obsolete proverb repeated on the loss of hope or expectation: the allusion being to the old fashioned way of baking cakes at the embers, when it may have been occasionally the case for a cake to be burnt on one side and dough on the other. In a former scene (i. 2), Grumio had before said - “Our cake is dough on both sides.” Staunton quotes from “The Case is altered,” 1609—

“Steward, your cake is dough, as well as mine.”

“Murder will out.”—So in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 2),

Launcelot says - “Murder cannot be hid long; a man’s son may, but at the length truth will out.”

“Near or far off, well won is still well shot.” - “King John” (i. 1).

“Needs must when the devil drives.”—In “All’s Well that Ends Well” (i. 3), the clown tells the countess - “I am driven on by the flesh; and he must needs go that the devil drives.”

“Neither fish nor flesh, nor good red herring.” ⁸⁸³—Falstaff says of the Hostess in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3), “Why, she’s neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her.”

⁸⁸² See Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverbs,” p. 116.

⁸⁸³ See Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverbs,” pp. 160, 251.

“One nail drives out another.”—In “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 2), Benvolio says:—

“Tut, man, one fire burns out another’s burning,
One pain is lessen’d by another’s anguish;
Turn giddy, and be holp by backward turning:
One desperate grief cures with another’s languish
Take thou some new infection to thy eye,
And the rank poison of the old will die.”

The allusion, of course, is to homoeopathy. The Italians say, “Poison quells poison.”

“Old men are twice children;” or, as they say in Scotland, “Auld men are twice bairns.” We may compare the Greek Δὶς παῖδες οἱ γεροντες. The proverb occurs in “Hamlet” (ii. 2):—

“An old man is twice a child.”

“Out of God’s keeping into the warm sun.”—So Kent says in “King Lear” (ii. 2):—

“Good king, that must approve the common saw,
Thou out of heaven’s benediction comest
To the warm sun.”

“Patience perforce is a medicine for a mad dog.”—This proverb is probably alluded to by Tybalt in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 5)

“Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.”

And again in “Richard III.” (i. 1):—

“*Glo.* Meantime, have patience.
“*Clar.* I must perforce. Farewell.”

“Pitch and Pay.” “Henry V.” (ii. 3). This is a proverbial expression equivalent to “Pay down at once.”⁸⁸⁴It probably originated from pitching goods in a market, and paying immediately for their standing. Tusser, in his “Description of Norwich,” calls it—

“A city trim,
Where strangers well may seem to dwell,
That pitch and pay, or keep their day.”

“Pitchers have ears.”—Baptista quotes this proverb in “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. 4)

“Pitchers have ears, and I have many servants.”

According to another old proverb: - “Small pitchers have great ears.”

“Poor and proud! fy, fy.”—Olivia, in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 1), says:—

“O world, how apt the poor are to be proud!”

“Praise in departing.” “Tempest” (iii. 3). The meaning is: - “Do not praise your entertainment too soon, lest you should have reason to retract your commendation.” Staunton quotes from “The Paradise of Dainty Devises,” 1596:—

“A good beginning oft we see, but seldome standing at one stay.
For few do like the meane degree, then praise at parting some men say.”

⁸⁸⁴ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 323.

“Pray God my girdle break.”⁸⁸⁵1 Henry IV.” (iii. 4).

“Put your finger in the fire and say it was your fortune.”—An excellent illustration of this proverb is given by Edmund in “King Lear” (i. 2): - “This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains on necessity; fools, by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion,” etc.

“Respice finem, respice furem.”—It has been suggested that Shakespeare (“Comedy of Errors,” iv. 4) may have met with these words in a popular pamphlet of his time by George Buchanan, entitled “Chamæleon Redivivus; or, Nathaniel’s Character Reversed”—a satire against the Laird of Lidingstone, 1570, which concludes with the following words, “Respice finem, respice furem.”

“Seldom comes the better.”—In “Richard III.” (ii. 3), one of the citizens says—

“Bad news, by’r lady; seldom comes the better:
I fear, I fear ‘twill prove a troublous world.”

A proverbial saying of great antiquity. Mr Douce ⁸⁸⁶cites an account of its origin from a MS. collection of stories in Latin, compiled about the time of Henry III.

“Service is no inheritance.”—So, in “All’s Well that Ends Well” (i. 3), the Clown says - “Service is no heritage.”

“Sit thee down, sorrow.” - “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (i. 1).

“Sit at the stern.”—A proverbial phrase to have the management of public affairs. So, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 1), Winchester says—

“The king from Eltham I intend to steal,
And sit at chiefest stern of public weal.”

“She has the mends in our own hands.”—This proverbial phrase is of frequent occurrence in our old writers, and probably signifies, “it is her own fault;” or, “the remedy lies with herself.” It is used by Pandarus in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 1). Burton in his “Anatomy of Melancholy,” writes - “And if men will be jealous in such cases, the mends is in their own hands, they must thank themselves.”

“Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace.” - “Richard III.” (ii. 4).

“So wise, so young, do ne’er live long.” - “King Richard III.” (iii. 1).⁸⁸⁷

“So like you, ‘tis the worse.”—This is quoted as an old proverb by Paulina in the “Winter’s Tale” (ii. 3).

“Something about, a little from the right.” - “King John” (i. 1).

“Sowed cockle, reap no corn.” - “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3).

“Speak by the card.” - “Hamlet” (v. 1). A merchant’s expression, equivalent to “be as precise as a map or book.” The card is the document in writing containing the agreement made between a merchant and the captain of a vessel. Sometimes the owner binds himself, ship,

⁸⁸⁵ Halliwell-Phillipps’ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 393.

⁸⁸⁶ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 333.

⁸⁸⁷ See page 312.

tackle, and furniture, for due performance, and the captain is bound to declare the cargo committed to him in good condition. Hence, “to speak by the card” is to speak according to the indentures or written instructions.

“Still swine eat all the draff.” - “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 2).

Ray gives - “The still sow eats up all the draught.”

“Still waters run deep.”—So in “2 Henry VI.” (iii. 1), Suffolk says,—

“Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep.”

“Strike sail.”—A proverbial phrase to acknowledge oneself beaten. In “3 Henry VI.” (iii. 3), it occurs—

“Now Margaret
Must strike her sail and learn awhile to serve
When kings command.”

When a ship in fight, or on meeting another ship lets down her topsails at least half mast high, she is said to strike, that is, to submit or pay respect to the other.⁸⁸⁸

“Strike while the iron is hot.”—Poins probably alludes to this proverb in “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4) My lord, he will drive you out of your revenge and turn all to a merriment, if you take not the heat.”

Again, in “King Lear” (i. 1), Goneril adds—

“We must do something, and i’ the heat.”

“Take all, pay all” - “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 2). Ray gives another version of this proverb, “Take all, and pay the baker.”

“Tell the truth and shame the devil.”—In “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 1), Hotspur tells Glendower,—

“I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil
By telling truth; tell truth and shame the devil.”

“That was laid on with a trowel.”—This proverb, which is quoted by Ray, is used by Celia in “As You Like It” (i. 2). Thus we say, when anyone bespatters another with gross flattery, that he lays it on with a trowel.

“The cat loves fish, but she’s loth to wet her feet.”—It is to this proverb that Lady Macbeth alludes when she upbraids her husband for his irresolution (i. 7),—

“Letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would,’
Like the poor cat i’ the adage.”

There are various forms of this proverb.⁸⁸⁹ Thus, according to the rhyme,—

“Fain would the cat fish eat,
But she’s loth to wet her feet.”

The French version is “Le chat aime le poisson mais il n’aime pas à meuller la patte,”—so that it would seem he borrowed from the French.

“The Devil rides on a fiddlestick” - “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4).

⁸⁸⁸ Brewer’s “Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,” p. 860.

⁸⁸⁹ Ray’s “Proverbs” (Bohn’s Edition), 1859, p. 76.

“The galled jade will wince.”—So Hamlet says (iii. 2), “let the galled jade wince, our withers are unprung.”

“The grace o’ God is gear enough.”—This is the Scotch form of the proverb which Launcelot Gobbo speaks of as being well parted between Bassanio and Shylock in “The Merchant of Venice” (ii. 2), - “The old proverb is very well parted between my master Shylock and you, sir; you have the grace of God, sir, and he hath enough.”

“The Mayor of Northampton opens oysters with his dagger.” This proverb is alluded to by Pistol in “Merry Wives of Windsor,” (ii. 2), when he says—

“Why, then the world’s my oyster,
Which I with sword will open.”

Northampton being some eighty miles from the sea, oysters were so stale before they reached the town (before railroads or even coaches were known), that the “Mayor would be loath to bring them near his nose.”

“The more haste the worse speed.”—In “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 6), Friar Laurence says,—

“These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume; the sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite:
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so;
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.”

The proverb thus alluded to seems to be derived from the Latin adage, “Festinatio tarda est.” It defeats its own purpose by the blunders and imperfect work it occasions.⁸⁹⁰Hence the French say, “He that goes too hastily along often stumbles on a fair road.”

“There is flattery in friendship,”—used by the constable of France in “Henry V.” (iii. 7). The usual form of this proverb being, “There is falsehood in friendship.”

“There was but one way” - “Henry V.” (ii. 3). “This,” says Dyce, “is a kind of proverbial expression for death.” (“Glossary,” P. 494.)

“The weakest goes to the wall.”—This is quoted by Gregory in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 1), whereupon Sampson adds: - “Women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall: therefore I will push Montague’s men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.”

“There went but a pair of shears between them.” - “Measure for Measure” (i. 2), *i.e.*, “We are both of the same piece.”

“The world goes on wheels.”—This proverbial expression occurs in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 7); and Taylor, the water-poet, has made it the subject of one of his pamphlets: “The worlde runnes on wheelles, or, oddes betwixt carts and coaches.”

“Three women and a goose make a market.”—This proverb is alluded to in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iii. i):—

“Thus came your argument in;
Then the boy’s fat l’envoy, the goose that you bought;
And he ended the market.”

⁸⁹⁰ Kelly’s “Proverbs of All Nations,” p. 80.

The following lines in “1 King Henry VI.” (i. 6)

“Thy promises are like Adonis’ gardens
That one day bloom’d, and fruitful were the next,”

allude to the *Adonis horti* which were nothing but portable earthen pots, with some lettuce or fennel growing in them. On his yearly festival every woman carried one of them in honour of Adonis, because Venus had once laid him in a lettuce bed. The next day they were thrown away. The proverb seems to have been used always in a bad sense, for things which make a fair show for a few days and then wither away. The dauphin is here made to apply it as an encomium. There is a good account of it in Erasmus’s *Adagia*; but the idea may have been taken from “The Faerie Queene,” Bk. iii., cant. 6, st. 42 (Singer’s “Shakespeare,” 1875, vi. 32).

“To clip the anvil of my sword.” - “This expression in ‘Coriolanus’ (iv. 5) is very difficult,” says Mr Green, “to be explained, unless we regard it as a proverb, denoting the breaking of the weapon and the laying aside of enmity. Aufidius makes use of it in his welcome to the banished Coriolanus.”

”Here I clip
The anvil of my sword, and do contest
As hotly and as nobly with thy love
As ever in ambitious strength I did
Contend against thy valour.”

“To have a month’s mind to a thing.”—Ray’s proverbs. So in the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (i. 2) Julia says

“I see you have a month’s mind to them.”

”’Tis merry in hall when beards wag all.”⁸⁹¹—This is quoted by Silence in “2 Henry IV.” (v. 3)—

“Be merry, be merry, my wife has all;
For women are shrews, both short and tall;
’Tis merry in hall when beards wag all,
And welcome merry shrove-tide.
Be merry, be merry.”

“To have one in the wind.”—This is one of Camden’s proverbial sentences. In “All’s Well that Ends Well” (iii. 6), Bertram says—

“I spoke with her but once,
And found her wondrous cold, but I sent to her,
By this same coxcomb that we have i’ the wind,
Tokens and letters which she did re-send.”

“To hold a candle to the devil”—that is, “to aid or countenance that which is wrong.”—Thus in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 6) Jessica says

“What, must I hold a candle to my shames.”

—the allusion being to the practice of the Roman Catholics who burn candles before the image of a favourite saint, carry them in funeral processions, and place them on their altars.”

⁸⁹¹ See Bohn’s “Handbook of Proverbs,” p. 115.

“To the dark house,” “All’s Well that Ends Well” (ii. 3).—A house which is the seat of gloom and discontent.

“Truth should be silent.”—Enobarbus in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 2) says:—

“That truth should be silent I had almost forgot.”

“To take mine ease in my inn.”—A proverbial phrase used by Falstaff in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3), implying, says Mr Drake, “a degree of comfort which has always been the peculiar attribute of an English house of public entertainment.”⁸⁹²

“Twice away says stay” - “Twelfth Night” (v. 1). Malone thinks this proverb is alluded to by the clown: “Conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why, then, the worse for my friends and the better for my foes;” and quotes Marlowe’s “Last Dominion,” where the Queen says to the Moor—

“Come, let’s kisse.

Moor. Away, away.

Queen. No, no sayes I, and twice away sayes stay.”

“Trust not a horse’s heel.”—In “King Lear” (iii. 6), the fool says, “he’s mad that trusts a horse’s health.” Malone would read “heels.”

“Two may keep counsel putting one away.”—So Aaron, in “Titus Andronicus” (iv. 2), says—

“Two may keep counsel when the third’s away.”

“Ungirt, unblest.”—Falstaff alludes to the old adage in “1 Henry IV.” (iii. 3) - “I pray God my girdle break.” Malone quotes from an ancient ballad—

“Ungirt, unblest, the proverbe sayes;
And they to prove it right,

Have got a fashion now adayes,
That’s odious to the sight;
Like Frenchmen, all on points they stand,
No girdles now they wear.”

“Walls have ears.”—So in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), Thisbe is made to say—

“O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me.”

“Wedding and ill-wintering tame both man and beast.”—Thus, in “Taming of the Shrew” (iv. 1), Grumio says” Winter tames man, woman, and beast; for it hath tamed my old master, and my new mistress, and myself.” We may also compare the Spanish adage - “You will marry and grow tame.”

“We steal as in a castle.” - “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1). This, says Steevens, was once a proverbial phrase.

“What can’t be cured must be endured.”—With this popular adage may be compared the following - “Past cure is still past care,” in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2). So in “King Richard II.” (ii. 3), the Duke of York says—

“Things past redress are now with me past care.”

⁸⁹² “Shakspeare and His Times,” i. p. 216.

Again, Macbeth (iii. 2) says—

“Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what’s done is done.”

“What’s mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.” - “Measure for Measure” (v. 1).

“When things come to the worst they’ll mend.”—The truth of this popular adage is thus exemplified by Pandulph in “King John” (iii. 4)—

“Before the curing of a strong disease,
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest; evils that take leave,
On their departure most of all show evil?”

Of course it is equivalent to the proverb - “When the night’s darkest the day’s nearest.”

“When? can you tell?” - “Comedy of Errors” (iii. 1). This proverbial query, often met with in old writers, and perhaps alluded to just before in this scene, when Dromio of Syracuse says - “Right, sir; I’ll tell you when, an you’ll tell me wherefore;” occurs again in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 1) - “Ay, when? canst tell?”

“When two men ride the same horse one must ride behind.”—So in “Much Ado About Nothing” (iii. 5) Dogberry says - “An two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind.”⁸⁹³ With this may be compared the Spanish adage, “He who rides behind does not saddle when he will.”

“While the grass grows, the steed starves.”—This is alluded to by Hamlet (iii. 2) - “Ay, but sir, ‘while the grass grows,’—the proverb is something musty.”—See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 499.

“Who dares not stir by day must walk by night.” - “King John” (i. 1).

“Who goes to Westminster for a wife, to St Paul’s for a man, and to Smithfield for a horse, may meet with a queane, a knave, and a jade.”—This proverb often quoted by old writers, is alluded to in “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2):—

“*Falstaff*. Where’s Bardolph?

Page. He’s gone into Smithfield to buy your worship a horse.

Falstaff. I bought him in Paul’s, and he’ll buy me a horse in Smithfield: an I could get me but a wife in the stews, I were manned, horsed, and wived.”

“Wit, whither wilt?”—This was a proverbial expression not unfrequent in Shakespeare’s day. It is used by Orlando in “As you Like It” (iv. i) - “A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say—’Wit, whither wilt?’”

“Will you take eggs for money?”—This was a proverbial phrase, quoted by Leontes in the “Winter’s Tale” (i. 2), for putting up with an affront, or being cajoled or imposed upon.

“Words are but wind, but blows unkind.”—In “Comedy of Errors” (iii. i), Dromio of Ephesus uses the first part of this popular adage.

“Worth a Jew’s eye.”—Launcelot in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 5), says—

“There will come a Christian by,
Will be worth a Jewess’ eye.”

⁸⁹³ See Kelly’s “Proverbs of All Nations,” p. 49.

According to tradition, the proverb arose from the custom of torturing Jews to extort money from them. It is simply, however, a corruption of the Italian *gióia* (a jewel).

“You’ll never be burnt for a witch.”—This proverb which was applied to a silly person is probably referred to in “Antony and Cleopatra” (i. 1) by Charmian to the sooth-sayer—

“Out, fool; I forgive thee for a witch.”

“Young ravens must have food.” - “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 3), ⁸⁹⁴ Ray has “Small birds must have meat.”

⁸⁹⁴ “Handbook Index to Shakespeare,” p. 395.

20. Human Body

It would be difficult to enumerate the manifold forms of superstition which have, in most countries, in the course of past centuries, clustered round the human body. Many of these, too, may still be found scattered, here and there, throughout our own country. One of the most deep-rooted being palmistry, several allusions to which are made by Shakespeare.

According to a popular belief current in years past, a trembling of the body was supposed to be an indication of demoniacal possession. Thus, in the "Comedy of Errors" (iv. 4), the courtesan says of Antipholus of Ephesus—

"Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy."

and Pinch adds—

"I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers,
And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight;
I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven."

In the "Tempest" (ii. 2), Caliban says to Stephano, "Thou dost me yet but little hurt; thou wilt anon, I know it by thy trembling."

It was formerly supposed that our bodies consisted of the four elements—fire, air, earth, and water, and that all diseases arose from derangement in the due proportion of these elements. Thus in Antony's eulogium on Brutus in "Julius Cæsar" (v. 5) this theory is alluded to:—

"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'this was a man!'"

In "Twelfth Night" (ii. 3) it is also noticed:—

"*Sir Toby*. Do not our life consist of the four elements?
Sir Andrew. 'Faith, so they say; but I think it rather consists of eating and drinking.
Sir Toby. Thou art a scholar; let us therefore eat and drink. Marian, I say! a stoop of wine!"

In "Antony and Cleopatra" (v. 2), Shakespeare makes the latter say—

"I am fire and air, my other elements
I give to baser life."

This theory is the subject, too, of the 44th and 45th sonnets, and is set forth at large in its connection with physic in Sir Philip Sydney's "Arcadia":—

"O elements, by whose (men say) contention,
Our bodies be in living power maintained,
Was this man's death the fruit of your dissension?
O physic's power, which (some say) hath restrained
Approach of death, alas, thou keepest meagerly,
When once one is for Atropos distrained,
Great be physicians' brags, but aide is beggarly
When rooted moisture fails, or groweth drie
They leave off all, and say, death comes too eagerly.

They are but words therefore that men doe buy
Of any, since God Esculapius ceased.”

This notion was substantially adopted by Galen, and embraced by the physicians of the olden times.⁸⁹⁵

Blood.—In old phraseology this word was popularly used for disposition or temperament. In “Timon of Athens” (iv. 2), Flavius says: - “Strange, unusual blood, when man’s worst sin is, he does too much good!” In the opening passage of “Cymbeline” it occurs in the same sense—

“You do not meet a man but frowns: our bloods
No more obey the heavens than our courtiers
Still seem as does the king.”

the meaning evidently being that, “our dispositions no longer obey the influences of heaven; they are courtiers, and still seem to resemble the disposition the king is in.”

Again, in “Much Ado About Nothing” (ii. 3) - “Wisdom and blood combating in so tender a body, we have ten proofs to one that blood hath the victory.”

Once more, in “King Lear” (iv. 2), the Duke of Albany says to Goneril—

“Were’t my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones.”

Again, the phrase “to be in blood,” was a term of the chase, meaning to be in good condition, to be vigorous. In “1 Henry VI.” (iv. 2), Talbot exclaims—

“If we be English deer, be then in blood;
Not rascal-like, to fall down with a pinch.”

—the expression being put in opposition to “rascal,” which was the term for the deer when lean and out of condition. In “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 2), Holofernes says - “The deer was, as you know, sanguis, in blood.”

The notion that the blood may be thickened by emotional influences, is mentioned by Polixenes in the “Winter’s Tale” (i. 2), where he speaks of “thoughts that would thicken my blood.” In King John’s temptation of Hubert to murder Arthur (iii. 3), it is thus referred to—

“Or if that surly spirit, melancholy,
Had baked thy blood and made it heavy-sick,
Which else runs tickling up and down the veins,” etc.

Red blood was considered a traditional sign of courage. Hence in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. x), the Prince of Morocco, when addressing himself to Portia, and urging his claims for her hand, says—

“Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phoebus’ fire scarce thaws the icicles,
And let us make incision for your love,⁸⁹⁶
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.”

⁸⁹⁵ See Bucknill’s “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 120.

⁸⁹⁶ Mr Singer, in a note on this passage, says, “it was customary in the East, for lovers to testify the violence of their passion, by cutting themselves in the sight of their mistresses; and the fashion seems to have been adopted

Again, in the present play, cowards are said to “have livers as white as milk,” and an effeminate man is termed a “milk-sop.” Macbeth, too, (v. 3) calls one of his frightened soldiers a “lily-liver’d boy.” And in “King Lear” (ii. 2), the Earl of Kent makes use of the same phrase. In illustration of this notion Mr Douce ⁸⁹⁷quotes from Bartholomew Glantville, who says - “Reed clothes have been layed upon deed men in remembrance of theyr hardynes and boldnes, whyle they were in theyr bloudd.”

The absence of blood in the liver as the supposed property of a coward, originated, says Dr Bucknill,⁸⁹⁸in the old theory of the circulation of the blood, which explains Sir Toby’s remarks on his dupe in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 2) - “For Andrew, if he were opened, and you find so much blood in his liver as will clog the foot of a flea, I’ll eat the rest of the anatomy.”

We may quote here a notion referred to in “Lucrece” (1747–50) that, ever since the sad death of Lucrece, corrupted blood has watery particles—

“About the mourning and congealed face
Of that blood a watery rigol goes,
Which seems to weep upon the tainted place:
And ever since, as pitying Lucrece’s woes,
Corrupted blood some watery token shows;
And blood untainted still doth red abide,
Blushing at that which is so putrified.”

Brain.—By old anatomists the brain was divided into three ventricles, in the hindermost of which they placed the memory. That this division was not unknown to Shakespeare, is apparent from “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 2), where Holofernes says - “A foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: these are begot in the ventricle of memory.” Again, Lady Macbeth (i. 7), speaking of Duncan’s two chamberlains, says—

“Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only.”

The “third ventricle is the cerebellum, by which the brain is connected with the spinal marrow and the rest of the body; the memory is posted in the cerebellum like a warder or sentinel to warn the reason against attack. Thus, when the memory is converted by intoxication into a mere fume,⁸⁹⁹then it fills the brain itself—the receipt or receptacle of reason, which thus becomes like an alembic or cap of a still.”⁹⁰⁰

A popular nickname, in former times, for the skull, was “brain-pan;” to which Cade, in “2 Henry VI.” (iv. 10), refers: - “Many a time, but for a sallet, my brain-pan had been cleft with a brown bill.” The phrase “to beat out the brains” is used by Shakespeare metaphorically in

here as a mark of gallantry in Shakespeare’s time, when young men frequently stabbed their arms with daggers, and, mingling the blood with wine, drank it off to the healths of their mistresses.”—ii., p. 417.

⁸⁹⁷ Cf. “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, p. 156.

⁸⁹⁸ “Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare,” p. 124.

⁸⁹⁹ Cf. “Tempest,” (v. 1.):—

“The ignorant fumes that mantle
Their clearer reason.”

⁹⁰⁰ Clarke and Wright’s “Notes to Macbeth,” 1877, p. 101.

the sense of defeat or destroy; just as now-a-days we popularly speak of knocking a scheme on the head. In "Measure for Measure" (v. 1), the Duke addressing Isabel tells her:—

"O most kind maid,
It was the swift celerity of his death
Which I did think with slower foot came on,
That brain'd my purpose."

The expression "to bear a brain," which is used by the Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 3):—

"Nay, I do bear a brain,"

denoted "much mental capacity either of attention, ingenuity, or remembrance."⁹⁰¹ Thus in Marston's "Dutch Courtezan" (1605), we read:—

"My silly husband, alas! knows nothing of it, 'tis
I that must beare a braine for all."

The notion of the brain as the seat of the soul is mentioned by Prince Henry, who, referring to King John (v. 7), says:—

"His pure brain
Which some suppose the soul's frail dwelling-house
Doth by the idle comments that it makes
Foretell the ending of mortality."

Ear.—According to a well-known superstition, much credited in days gone by, and still extensively believed, a tingling of the right ear is considered lucky, being supposed to denote that a friend is speaking well of one, whereas a tingling of the left is said to imply the opposite. This notion, however, varies in different localities, as in some places it is the tingling of the left ear which denotes the friend, and the tingling of the right ear the enemy. In "Much ado about Nothing" (iii. 1), Beatrice asks Ursula and Hero, who had been talking of her:—

"What fire is in mine ears?"

the reference, no doubt, being to this popular fancy. Sir Thomas Browne⁹⁰² ascribes the idea to the belief in guardian angels, who touch the right or left ear according as the conversation is favourable or not to the person.

In Shakespeare's day it was customary for young gallants to wear a long lock of hair dangling by the ear, known as a "love-lock." Hence in "Much ado about Nothing" (iii. 3), the Watch identifies one of his delinquents:—

"I know him; a' wears a lock."⁹⁰³

Again, further on (v. 1), Dogberry gives another allusion to this practice: - "He wears a key in his ear, and a lock hanging by it."

An expression of endearment current in years gone by was "to bite the ear." In "Romeo and Juliet" (ii. 4), Mercutio says:—

"I will bite thee by the ear for that jest."

⁹⁰¹ Singer's "Shakespeare," viii. p. 123.

⁹⁰² "Vulgar Errors," book v., chap. 23 (Bohn's edition, 1852, ii. p. 82).

⁹⁰³ Prynne attacked the fashion in his "Unloveliness of Love-locks."

a passage which is explained in Nares' ("Glossary," i. p. 8i), by the following one from Ben Jonson's "Alchemist" (ii. 3):—

"*Mammon*. Th' hast witch'd me, rogue; take, go.

Face. Your jack, and all, sir.

Mammon. Slave, I could bite thine ear . . . Away, thou dost not care for me!"

Gifford, in his notes on Jonson's Works (ii. p. 184), says the odd mode of expressing pleasure by biting the ear seems "to be taken from the practice of animals, who, in a playful mood, bite each other's ears."

Whilst speaking of the ear, it may be noted that the so-called want of ear for music has been regarded as a sign of an austere disposition. Thus Cæsar says of Cassius (i. 2):—

"He hears no music,
Seldom he smiles."

There is too the well-known passage in the "Merchant of Venice" (v. 1):—

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils."

According to the Italian proverb: - "Whom God loves not, that man loves not music."⁹⁰⁴

Elbow.—According to a popular belief the itching of the elbow denoted an approaching change of some kind or other.⁹⁰⁵ Thus in "1 Henry IV." (v. 1), the King speaks of—

"Fickle changelings and poor discontents,
Which gape and rub the elbow at the news
Of hurlyburly innovation."

With this idea we may compare similar ones connected with other parts of the body. Thus in "Macbeth" (iv. 1), one of the Witches exclaims:—

"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes."

Again, in "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. 1), Ajax says, "My fingers itch,"⁹⁰⁶ and an itching palm was said to be an indication that the person would shortly receive money. Hence it denoted a hand ready to receive bribes. Thus in "Julius Cæsar" (iv. 3), Brutus says to Cassius:—

"Let me tell you, Cassius, you yourself
Are much condemn'd to have an itching palm;
To sell and mart your offices for gold
To undeservers."

So in "Merry Wives of Windsor" (ii. 3), Shallow says: - "If I see a sword out, my finger itches to make one."

Again, in "Othello" (iv. 3), poor Desdemona says to Emilia:—

"Mine eyes do itch;
Doth that bode weeping?"

⁹⁰⁴ See Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare," pp. 165, 166.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 273.

⁹⁰⁶ See "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 5), where Capulet says, "My fingers itch," denoting anxiety.

Grose alludes to this superstition, and says, "when the right eye itches, the party affected will shortly cry; if the left, they will laugh." The itching of the eye as an omen is spoken of by Theocritus, who says:—

"My right eye itches now, and I will see my love."

Eyes.—A good deal of curious folk-lore has, at one time or another, clustered round the eye; and the well-known superstition known as the "evil eye" has already been described in the chapter on "Birth and Baptism." Blueness above the eye was, in days gone by, considered a sign of love, and as such is alluded to by Rosalind in "As You Like It" (iii. 2), where she enumerates the marks of love to Orlando: - "A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not."

The term "baby in the eye" was sportively applied by our forefathers to the miniature reflection of himself, which a person may see in the pupil of another's eye. In "Timon of Athens" (i. 2), one of the Lords says:—

"Joy had the like conception in our eyes,
And at that instant like a babe sprung up."

—an allusion probably being made to this whimsical notion. It is often referred to by old writers, as for instance by Drayton in his "Ideas"—

"But O, see, see! we need enquire no further,
Upon your lips the scarlet drops are found,
And in your eye, the boy that did the murder."⁹⁰⁷

We may compare the expression, "to look babies in the eyes," a common amusement of lovers in days gone by. In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Loyal Subject" (iii. 2), Theodore asks—

"Can ye look babies, sisters,
In the young gallants' eyes, and twirl their band-strings?"

And once more to quote from Massinger's "Renegado" (ii. 4), where Donusa says:—

"When a young lady wrings you by the hand, thus,
Or with an amorous touch presses your foot;
Looks babies in your eyes, plays with your locks." &c.

Another old term for the eyes was "crystal," which is used by Pistol to his wife, Mrs Quickly, in "Henry V." (ii. 3):—

"Therefore Caveto be thy counsellor.
Go, clear thy crystals;"

that is, dry thine eyes.

In "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 2), the phrase is employed by Benvolio:—

"Tut! you saw her fair, none else being by,
Herself poised with herself in either eye:
But in that crystal scales let there be weigh'd
Your lady's love against some other maid," &c.

It also occurs in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Double Marriage" (v. 3), where Juliana exclaims:—

⁹⁰⁷ See Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 44.

“Sleep you, sweet glasses!
An everlasting slumber crown those crystals.”

The expression “wall-eyed” denotes, says Dyce (“Glossary,” p. 486), “eyes with a white or pale-gray iris—glaring-eyed.” It is used by Lucius in “Titus Andronicus” (v. 1):—

“Say, wall-eyed slave, whither wouldst thou convey
This growing image of thy fiend-like face?”

In “King John” (iv. 3), Salisbury speaks of “wall-eyed wrath.”

Brockett, in his “Glossary of North Country Words,” says: - “In those parts of the north with which I am best acquainted, persons are said to be *wall-eyed* when the white of the eye is very large and to one side; on the borders ‘sic folks’ are considered lucky. The term is also occasionally applied to horses with similar eyes, though its wider general acceptance seems to be when the iris of the eye is white, or of a very pale colour. A *wall-eyed* horse sees perfectly well.”

Face.—A common expression “to play the hypocrite,” or feign, was “to face.” So in “1 Henry VI.” (v. 3), Suffolk declares how—

“Fair Margaret knows
That Suffolk does not flatter, face, or feign.”

Hence the name of one of the characters in Ben Jonson’s “Alchemist.” So in the “Taming of the Shrew” (ii. 1):—

“Yet have I faced it with a card of ten.”

The phrase, also, “to face me down,” implied insisting upon anything in opposition. So in the “Comedy of Errors” (iii.), Antipholus of Ephesus says:—

“But here’s a villain that would face me down
He met me on the mart.”

Feet.—Stumbling has from the earliest period been considered ominous.⁹⁰⁸ Thus Cicero mentions it amongst the superstitions of his day; and numerous instances of this unlucky act have been handed down from bygone times. We are told by Ovid how Myrrha, on her way to Cinyra’s chamber stumbled thrice, but was not deterred by the omen from an unnatural and fatal crime; and Tibullus (Lib. I., Eleg. iii. 20), refers to it:—

“O! quoties ingressus iter, mihi tristia dixi,
Offensum in porta signa dedisse pedem.”

This superstition is alluded to by Shakespeare, who in “3 Henry VI.” (iv. 7) makes Gloucester say:—

“For many men that stumble at the threshold
Are well foretold that danger lurks within.”

In “Richard III.” (iii. 4), Hastings relates:—⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁸ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 249; Jones’ “Credulities Past and Present,” pp. 529–531; “Notes and Queries,” 5th S., viii. p. 201.

⁹⁰⁹ The following is from Holinshed, who copies Sir Thomas More:—“In riding toward the Tower the same morning in which he (Hastings) was beheaded, his horse twice or thrice stumbled with him, almost to the falling; which thing, albeit each man wot well daily happeneth to them to whome no such mischance is toward; yet hath it beene of an olde rite and custome observed as a token oftentimes notable foregoing some great misfortune.”

“Three times to-day my foot-cloth horse did stumble
And startled, when he look’d upon the Tower,
As loath to bear me to the slaughter house.”

In the same way, stumbling at a grave has been regarded as equally unlucky, and in “Romeo and Juliet” (v. 3), Friar Laurence says:—

“How oft to-night
Have my old feet stumbled at graves.”

Hair.—From time immemorial there has been a strong antipathy to red hair, which originated, according to some antiquarians, in a tradition that Judas had hair of this colour. One reason, it may be, why the dislike to it arose, was that this colour was considered ugly and unfashionable, and on this account a person with red hair would soon be regarded with contempt. It has been conjectured, too, that the odium took its rise from the aversion to the red-haired Danes. In “As You Like It” (iii. 4), Rosalind, when speaking of Orlando, refers to this notion:—⁹¹⁰

“His very hair is of the dissembling colour.”

Whereupon Celia replies:—

“Something browner than Judas’s.”

Yellow hair, too, was in years gone by regarded with ill-favour, and esteemed a deformity. In ancient pictures and tapestries both Cain and Judas are represented with yellow beards, in allusion to which Simple, in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 4), when interrogated, says of his master, “He hath but a little wee face, with a little yellow beard—a Cain coloured beard.”⁹¹¹

In speaking of beards, it may be noted that formerly they gave rise to various customs. Thus, in Shakespeare’s day, dyeing beards was a fashionable custom, and so Bottom, in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (i. 2), is perplexed as to what beard he should wear when acting before the Duke. He says, “I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.”⁹¹²

To mutilate a beard in any way was considered an irreparable outrage, a practice to which Hamlet refers (ii. 2):—

“Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?”

And in “King Lear” (iii. 7), Gloucester exclaims—

“By the kind gods, ‘tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.”

Stroking the beard before a person spoke was preparatory to favour. Hence in “Troilus and Cressida” (i. 3), Ulysses, when describing how Achilles asks Patroclus to imitate certain of their chiefs, represents him as saying:—

“Now play me Nestor; hem, and stroke thy beard,
As he being drest to some oration.”

⁹¹⁰ See Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 127; Dyce’s “Glossary,” pp. 61, 230.

⁹¹¹ The quartos of 1602 read “a kane-coloured beard.”

⁹¹² See Jaques’ Description of the Seven Ages in “As You Like It,” (ii. 6).

Again, the phrase “to beard” meant to oppose face to face in a hostile manner. Thus in “1 Henry IV.” (iv. 1), Douglas declares:—

“No man so potent breathes upon the ground
But I will beard him.”

And in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 3), the Bishop of Winchester says to Gloucester:—

“Do what thou darest; I beard thee to thy face.”

It seems also to have been customary to swear by the beard, an allusion to which is made by Touchstone in “As You Like It” (i. 2): - “Stroke your chins, and swear by your beards that I am a knave.”

We may also compare what Nestor says in “Troilus and Cressida” (iv. 5):—

“By this white beard, I’ld fight with thee to-morrow.”

Our ancestors paid great attention to the shape of their beards, certain cuts being appropriated to certain professions and ranks. In “King Henry V.” (iii. 6), Gower speaks of “a beard of the general’s cut.” As Mr Staunton remarks, “Not the least odd among the fantastic fashions of our forefathers was the custom of distinguishing certain professions and classes by the cut of the beard; thus we hear, inter alia, of the bishop’s beard, the judge’s beard, the soldier’s beard, the citizen’s beard, and even the clown’s beard.” Randle Holme tells us, “The broad or cathedral beard [is] so-called because bishops and gown-men of the church anciently did wear such beards.” By the military man, the cut adopted was known as the stiletto or spade. The beard of the citizen was usually worn round, as Mrs Quickly describes it in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 4), “like a glover’s paring knife.” The clown’s beard was left bushy or untrimmed. Malone quotes from an old ballad entitled “Le Prince d’ Amour,” 1660:—

“Next the clown doth out-rush
With the beard of the bush.”

According to an old superstition, much hair on the head has been supposed to indicate an absence of intellect, a notion referred to by Antipholus of Syracuse in the “Comedy of Errors” (ii. 2): - “There’s many a man hath more hair than wit.” In the “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iii. 1), the same proverbial sentence is mentioned by Speed. Malone quotes the following lines upon Suckling’s “Aglaura,” as an illustration of this saying⁹¹³:—

“This great voluminous pamphlet may be said
To be like one that hath more hair than head;
More excrement than body: trees which sprout
With broadest leaves have still the smallest fruit.”

Steevens gives an example from “Florio”: - “A tisty-tosty wag-feather, more haire than wit.”

Excessive fear has been said to cause the hair to stand on end; an instance of which Shakespeare records in “Hamlet” (iii. 4), in that celebrated passage where the Queen, being at a loss to understand her son’s strange appearance during his conversation with the Ghost, which is invisible to her, says:—

“And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Starts up, and stands an end.”

⁹¹³ “Parnassus Biceps,” 1656.

A further instance occurs in the "Tempest" (i. 2), where Ariel, describing the shipwreck, graphically relates how—

"All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,
Then all afire with me: the king's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up-staring—then like reeds, not hair—
Was the first man that leap'd."

Again, Macbeth says (i. 3):—

"Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair?"

And further on he says (v. 5):—

"The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir As life were in't."

In "2 Henry VI." (iii. 2), it is referred to by Suffolk as a sign of madness:—

"Mine hair be fix'd on end, as one distract."

And once more, in "King Richard III." (i. 3), Hastings declares

"Mine hair doth stand on end to hear her curses."

Another popular notion, mentioned by Shakespeare, is that sudden fright or great sorrow will cause the hair to turn white. In "1 Henry IV." (ii. 4), Falstaff, in his speech to Prince Henry, tells him:—

"Thy father's beard is turned white with the news."

Among the many instances recorded to establish the truth of this idea, it is said that the hair and beard of the Duke of Brunswick whitened in twenty-four hours, upon his hearing that his father had been mortally wounded in the battle of Auerstadt. Marie Antoinette, the unfortunate queen of Louis XVI., found her hair suddenly changed by her troubles; and a similar change happened to Charles I., when he attempted to escape from Carisbroke Castle. Mr Timbs, in his "Doctors and Patients" (1876, p. 201), says that "chemists have discovered that hair contains an oil, a mucous substance, iron, oxide of manganese, phosphate and carbonate of iron, flint, and a large proportion of sulphur. White hair contains also phosphate of magnesia, and its oil is nearly colourless. When hair becomes suddenly white from terror, it is probably owing to the sulphur absorbing the oil, as in the operation of whitening woollen cloths."

Hair was formerly used metaphorically for the colour, complexion, or nature of a thing. In "1 Henry IV." (iv. 1), Worcester says

"I would your father had been here,
The quality and hair of our attempt
Brooks no division."

In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Nice Valour," it is so used:—

"A lady of my hair cannot want pitying."

Hands.—Various superstitions have at different times clustered round the hand. Thus in palmistry a moist one is said to denote an amorous constitution. In "Othello" (iii. 4), we have the following allusion to this popular notion

Othello. Give me your hand: this hand is moist, my lady.
Desdemona. It yet have felt no age nor known no sorrow.
Othello. This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.”

Again in “Antony and Cleopatra” (i. 2), Iras says - “There’s a palm presages chastity;” whereupon Charmian adds - “If an oily palm be not a fruitful prognostication, I cannot scratch mine ear.” And in the “Comedy of Errors” (iii. 2), Dromio of Syracuse speaks of barrenness as “hard in the palm of the hand.”

A dry hand, however, has been supposed to denote age and debility. In “2 Henry IV.” (i. 2), the Lord Chief Justice enumerates this amongst the characteristics of such a constitution.⁹¹⁴

In the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 2), Launcelot, referring to the language of palmistry, calls the hand “the table,” meaning thereby the whole collection of lines on the skin, within the hand: - “Well, if any man in Italy hath a fairer table which doth offer to swear upon a book, I shall have good fortune.” He then alludes to one of the lines in the hand, known as the “line of life:” - “Go to, here’s a simple line of life.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (iii. 5), palmistry is further mentioned:—

Gaoler’s Daughter. Give me your hand.
Gerrold. Why?
Gaoler’s Daughter. I can tell your fortune.”

It was once supposed that little worms were bred in the fingers of idle servants. To this notion Mercutio refers in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 4), where, in his description of Queen Mab, he says:—

“Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,
 Not half so big as a round little worm
 Prick’d from the lazy finger of a maid.”

This notion is alluded to by John Banister, a famous surgeon in Shakespeare’s day, in his “Compendious Chyrurgerie” (1585, p. 465): - “We commonly call them worms, which many women, sitting in the sunshine, can cunningly picke out with needles, and are most common in the hands.”

A popular term formerly in use for the nails on the ten fingers was the “ten commandments,” which, says Nares,⁹¹⁵ “doubtless led to the swearing by them, as by the real commandments.” Thus, in “2 Henry VI.” (i. 3), the Duchess of Gloucester says to the Queen:—

“Could I come near your beauty with my nails
 I’ld set my ten commandments in your face.”

In the same way the fingers were also called the “ten bones,” as a little further on in the same play where Peter swears “by these ten bones.”

The phrase “of his hands” was equivalent to “of his inches, or of his size; a hand being the measure of four inches.” So in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 4), Simple says: - “Ay, forsooth: but he is as tall a man of his hands as any is between this and his head,” “the expression being used probably for the sake of a jocular equivocation in the word tall, which meant either bold or high.”⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁴ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii. p. 179.

⁹¹⁵ “Glossary,” ii. p. 871.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, i. p. 402.

Again, in the “Winter’s Tale” (v. 2), the Clown tells the Shepherd: - “I’ll swear to the prince thou art a tall fellow of thy hands and that thou wilt not be drunk; but I know thou art no tall fellow of thy hands and that thou wilt be drunk; but I’ll swear it, and I would thou wouldst be a tall fellow of thy hands.”

A proverbial phrase for being tall from necessity was “to blow the nail.” In “3 Henry VI.” (ii. 5), the King says:—

“When dying clouds contend with growing light
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day or night.”

It occurs in the song at the end of “Love’s Labour’s Lost”:—

“And Dick the shepherd blows his nails.”

“To bite the thumb” at a person implied an insult; hence in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 1), Sampson says: - “I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they hear it.”

The thumb in this action we are told “represented a fig, and the whole was equivalent to a fig for you.” Decker in his “Dead Term” (1608), speaking of the various groups that daily frequented St Pauls’ Church, says: - “What swearing is there, what shouldering, what justling, what jeering, what byting of thumbs, to beget quarrels?”

Hare-lip.—A cleft lip so called from its supposed resemblance to the upper lip of a hare. It was popularly believed to be the mischievous act of an elf or malicious fairy. So in “King Lear” (iii. 4), Edgar says of Gloucester: - “This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet:—He squints the eye and makes the hare-lip.” In the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 2), Oberon, in blessing the bridal bed of Theseus and Hippolyta, says: - “Never mole, hare lip, nor scar,” &c., “shall upon their children be.”

The expression “hang the lip” meant to drop the lip in sullenness or contempt. Thus in “Troilus and Cressida” (iii. 1), Helen explains why her brother Troilus is not abroad by saying: - “He hangs the lip at something.” We may compare, too, the words in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4): - “A foolish hanging of thy nether lip.”

Head—According to the old writers on physiognomy, a round head denoted foolishness, a notion to which reference is made by “Cleopatra” (iii. 3), in the following dialogue, who enquiring about Octavia, says to the messenger—

“Bear’st thou her face in mind? Is’t long or round?”

Messenger. Round even to faultiness.

Cleopatra. For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so.”

In Hill’s “Pleasant History,” etc. (1613) we read: - “The head very round, to be forgetful and foolish.” Again - “The head long, to be prudent and wary.”

Heart.—The term “broken heart” as commonly applied to death from excessive grief, is not a vulgar error, but may arise from violent muscular exertion, or strong mental emotions. In “Macbeth” (iv. 3) Malcolm says:—

”The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o’er fraught heart and bids it break.”

We may compare, too, Queen Margaret’s words to Buckingham in “King Richard III.” (i. 3) where she prophesies how Gloucester—

“Shall split thy very heart with sorrow.”

Mr Timbs, in his “Mysteries of Life, Death, and Futurity” (1861, p. 149), has given the following note on the subject “This affection was, it is believed, first described by Harvey; but since his day several cases have been observed. Morgagni has recorded a few examples: amongst them, that of George II., who died suddenly of this disease in 1760; and, what is very curious, Morgagni himself fell a victim to the same malady. Dr Elliotson, in his Lumleyan Lectures on Diseases of the Heart in 1839, stated that he had only seen one instance; but in the ‘Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine,’ Dr Townsend gives a table of twenty-five cases, collected from various authors.”

In olden times the heart was esteemed the seat of the understanding. Hence in “Coriolanus” (i. 1) the Citizen speaks of “the counsellor heart.” With the ancients, also, the heart was considered the seat of courage, to which Shakespeare refers in “Julius Cæsar” (iii 2):—

“*Ser.* Plucking the entrails of an offering forth
They could not find a heart within the beast.
Cæs. The gods do this in shame of cowardice:
Cæsar should be a beast without a heart,
If he should stay at home to-day for fear.”

Liver.—By a popular notion the liver was anciently supposed to be the seat of love, a superstition to which Shakespeare frequently alludes. Thus, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 3), Biron, after listening to Longaville’s sonnet, remarks:—

“This is the liver-vein, which makes flesh a deity,
A green goose a goddess; pure, pure idolatry.”

In “Much ado about Nothing” (iv. 1), Friar Francis says:—

“If ever love had interest in his liver.”

Again, in “As You Like It” (iii. 2), Rosalind professing to be able to cure love, which, he says, is “merely a madness,” says to Orlando, “I will take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep’s heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in’t.” In “Twelfth Night” (ii. 4), the Duke, speaking of women’s love, says:—

“Their love may be call’d appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,” &c.

And Fabian (ii. 5), alluding to Olivia’s supposed letter to Malvolio, says:—

“This wins him, liver and all.”

Once more, in “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 1), Pistol alludes to the liver as being the inspirer of amorous passions, for, speaking of Falstaff, he refers to his loving Ford’s wife “with liver burning hot.”⁹¹⁷ Douce says,⁹¹⁸ “there is some reason for thinking that this superstition was borrowed from the Arabian physicians, or at least adopted by them; for in the Turkish tales, an amorous tailor is made to address his wife by the titles of ‘thou corner of my liver, and soul of my love;’ and in another place the King of Syria, who had sustained a temporary privation of his mistress, is said to have had ‘his liver, which had been burnt up by the loss of her, cooled and refreshed at the sight of her.’” According to an old Latin distich—

⁹¹⁷ Cf. “Antony and Cleopatra” (i. 2)—

“Soothsayer. You shall be more loving than beloved.

Charmian. I had rather heat my liver with drinking.”

⁹¹⁸ “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” 1839, pp. 38, 39.

“Cor sapit, pulmo loquitur, fel commoret iras
Splen ridere facit, cogit amare jecur.”

Bartholomæus in his “De Proprietatibus Rerum” (lib. v. 39), informs us that “the liver is the place of voluptuousness and lyking of the flesh.”

Moles.—These have from time immemorial been regarded as ominous, and special attention has been paid by the superstitious to their position on the body.⁹¹⁹In “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1), a mole on a child is spoken of by Oberon as a bad omen, who, speaking of the three who had lately been married, says:—

“And the blots of Nature’s hand
Shall not in their issue stand;
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despised in nativity,
Shall upon their children be.”

Iachimo (“Cymbeline,” ii. 2) represents Imogene as having—

“On her left breast
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
I’ the bottom of a cowslip.”

And we may also compare the words of Cymbeline (v. 5)—

“Guiderius had
Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star;
It was a mark of wonder.”

Spleen.—This was once supposed to be the cause of laughter, a notion probably referred to by Isabella in “Measure for Measure” (ii. 2), where, telling how the angels weep over the follies of men she adds—

“Who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.”

In “Taming of the Shrew” (Induction, sc. i.), the lord says:—

”Haply my presence
May well abate the over-merry spleen
Which otherwise would grow into extremes.”

And Maria says to Sir Toby in “Twelfth Night” (iii. 2): - “If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourselves into stitches, follow me.”

Wits.—With our early writers, the five senses were usually called the “five wits.” So, in “Much ado about Nothing” (i. 1), Beatrice says: - “In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one.” In his 141st Sonnet, Shakespeare makes a distinction between wits and senses—

“But my five wits nor my five senses can
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee.”

⁹¹⁹ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.” 1849, iii. pp. 252–5.

The five wits, says Staunton, being “common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation, memory.” Johnson says the “wits seem to have been reckoned five, by analogy to the five senses, or the five inlets of ideas.” In “King Lear” (iii. 4), we find the expression, “Bless thy five wits.”

According to a curious fancy, eating beef was supposed to impair the intellect, to which notion Shakespeare has several allusions. Thus, in “Twelfth Night” (i. 3), Sir Andrew says - “Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has: but I am a great eater of beef and I believe, that does harm to my wit.” In “Troilus and Cressida” (ii. 1), Thersites says to Ajax - “The plague of Greece upon thee, thou mongrel beef-witted lord!”

21. Fishes

Although it has been suggested that Shakespeare found but little recreation in fishing,⁹²⁰ rather considering, as he makes Ursula say in “Much Ado About Nothing” (iii. 1)—

“The pleasant’st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream,
And greedily devour the treacherous bait,”

and that it would be difficult to illustrate a work on angling with quotations from his writings,” the Rev. H. N. Ellacombe, in his interesting papers⁹²¹ on “Shakespeare as an Angler,” has not only shown the strong probability that he was a lover of this sport, but further adds, that “he may be claimed as the first English poet that wrote of angling with any freedom; and there can be little doubt that he would not have done so if the subject had not been very familiar to him—so familiar, that he could scarcely write without dropping the little hints and unconscious expressions which prove that the subject was not only familiar, but full of pleasant memories to him.” His allusions, however, to the folk-lore associated with fishes are very few; but the two or three popular notions and proverbial sayings which he has quoted in connection with them, help to embellish this part of our subject.

Carp.—This fish was proverbially the most cunning of fishes, and so “Polonius’s comparison of his own worldly-wise deceit to the craft required for catching a carp,” is most apt (“Hamlet,” ii. I)⁹²²—

“See you now;
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth.”

This notion is founded on fact, the brain of the carp being six times as large as the average brain of other fishes.

Cockle.—The badge of a pilgrim was formerly a cockleshell, which was worn usually in the front of the hat. “The habit,” we are told,⁹²³ “being sacred, this served as a protection, and therefore was often assumed as a disguise.” The escalop was sometimes used, and either of them was considered as an emblem of the pilgrim’s intention to go beyond the sea. Thus in Ophelia’s Ballad (“Hamlet,” iv. 5, song), the lover is to be known:—

“By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.”

In Peele’s “Old Wives’ Tale,” 1595, we read, “I will give thee a palmer’s staff of ivory, and a scallop shell of beaten gold.” Nares, too, quotes from Green’s “Never too Late,” an account of the pilgrim’s dress:—

“A hat of straw, like to a swain,
Shelter for the sun and rain,
With a scallop shell before.”

⁹²⁰ See Harting’s “Ornithology of Shakespeare,” 1871, p. 3.

⁹²¹ “The Antiquary,” 1881, iv. p. 193.

⁹²² “Antiquary,” iv. pp. 193.

⁹²³ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 175.

Cuttle.—A foul-mouthed fellow was so called, says Mr Halliwell-Phillipps,⁹²⁴ because this fish is said to throw out of its mouth, upon certain occasions, an inky and black juice that fouls the water; and as an illustration of its use in this sense, he quotes Doll Tearsheet's words to Pistol, "2 Henry IV." (ii. 4): - "By this wine, I'll thrust my knife in your mouldy chaps, an you play the saucy cuttle with me." Dyce says that the context would seem to imply that the term is equivalent to "culter, swaggerer, bully."⁹²⁵

Gudgeon.—This being the bait for many of the larger fish, "to swallow a gudgeon," was sometimes used for to be caught or deceived. More commonly, however, the allusion is to the easiness with which the gudgeon itself is caught, as in the "Merchant of Venice" (i. 1), where Gratiano says:—

"But fish not, with this melancholy bait,
For this fool gudgeon."

Gurnet.—The phrase "soused gurnet" was formerly a well-known term of approach, in allusion to which Falstaff, in "1 Henry IV." (iv. 2), says, "If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a soured gurnet." The gurnet, of which there are several species, was probably thought a very bad and vulgar dish when soured or pickled.

Loach.—A small fish, known also as "the groundling." The allusion to it by one of the Carriers, in "1 Henry IV." (ii. 1), who says, "Your chamber-lie breeds fleas like a Loach," has much puzzled the commentators. It appears, however, from a passage in Holland's translation of Pliny's "Natural History" (B. ix. c. xlvii), that anciently fishes were supposed to be infested with fleas: - "Last of all some fishes there be which of themselves are given to breed fleas and lice; among which the chalcis, a kind of turgot, is one." Malone suggests that the passage may mean, "breeds fleas as fast as a Loach breeds loaches;" this fish being reckoned a peculiarly prolific fish. It seems probable, however, that the Carrier alludes to one of those fanciful notions as make up a great part of the natural history among the common people.⁹²⁶ At the present day there is a fisherman's fancy on the Norfolk coast that fish and fleas come together. "Lawk, sir!" said an old fellow, near Cromer, to a correspondent of "Notes and Queries" (Oct. 7th, 1865), "times is as you may look in my flannel-shirt, and scarce see a flea, and then there ain't but a very few herrins; but times that 'll be right alive with 'em, and then there's sartin to be a sight o' fish."

Mr Houghton, writing in the "Academy" (May 27th, 1882), thinks that in the above passage the small river Loach (*cobitis barbatula*), is the fish intended. He says, "at certain times of the year, chiefly during the summer months, almost all fresh-water fish are liable to be infested with some kind of Epizoa. There are two kinds of parasitic creatures which are most commonly seen on various fish caught in the rivers and ponds of this country; and these are the "Argulus foliaceus," a crustacean, and the "Piscicola piscium," a small cylindrical kind of leech."

Mermaids.—From the earliest ages mermaids have had a legendary existence—the syrens of the ancients evidently belonging to the same remarkable family. The orthodox mermaid is half woman half fish—the fishy half being sometimes depicted as doubly-tailed. Shakespeare frequently makes his characters talk about mermaids, as in the "Comedy of Errors" (iii. 2), where Antipholus of Syracuse says—

⁹²⁴ "A Handbook Index to the Works of Shakespeare," 1866, p. 119.

⁹²⁵ See a Note in Dyce's "Glossary," p. 112.

⁹²⁶ Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 518.

“O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
 To drown me in thy sister’s flood of tears;
 Sing, siren, for thyself and I will dote.
 Spread o’er the silver waves thy golden hairs,
 And as a bed I’ll take them and there lie,
 And in that glorious supposition think
 He gains by death that hath such means to die.”

And again, further on he adds—

“I’ll stop my ears against the mermaid’s song.”

Staunton considers that in these passages the allusion is obviously to the long-current opinion that the syren, or mermaid, decoyed mortals to destruction by the witchery of her songs. This superstition has been charmingly illustrated by Leyden, in his poem, “The Mermaid” (see Scott’s “Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,” iv. 294)—

“Thus, all to soothe the chieftain’s woe,
 Far from the maid he loved so dear,
 The song arose, so soft and slow,
 He seem’d her prating sigh to hear.

* * * * *

That sea-maid’s form of pearly light,
 Was whiter than the downy spray,
 And round her bosom, heaving bright,
 Her glossy, yellow ringlets play.

Borne on a foaming crested wave
 She reached amain the bounding prow,
 Then clasping fast the chieftain brave,
 She, plunging, sought the deep below.”

This tradition gave rise to a curious custom in the Isle of Man, which, in Waldron’s time, was observed on the 24th December, though afterwards on St Stephen’s Day. It is said that, once upon a time, a fairy of uncommon beauty exerted such undue influence over the male population that she induced, by the enchantment of her sweet voice, numbers to follow her footsteps, till by degrees she led them into the sea, where they perished. This barbarous exercise of power had continued for a great length of time, till it was apprehended that the island would be exhausted of its defenders. Fortunately, however, a knight-errant sprang up, who discovered a means of counteracting the charms used by this syren—even laying a plot for her destruction, which she only escaped by taking the form of a wren. Although she evaded instant annihilation, a spell was cast upon her, by which she was condemned, on every succeeding New Year’s Day, to reanimate the same form, with the definite sentence that she must ultimately perish by human hand. Hence, on the specified anniversary, every effort was made to extirpate the fairy; and the poor wrens were pursued, pelted, fired at, and destroyed without mercy, their feathers being preserved as a charm against shipwreck for one year. At the present day there is no particular time for pursuing the wren; it is captured by boys alone, who keep up the old custom chiefly for amusement. On St Stephen’s Day, a band of boys go from door to door with a wren suspended by the legs, in the centre of two hoops

crossing each other at right angles, decorated with evergreens and ribbons, singing lines called "Hunt the Wren."⁹²⁷

In the "Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. 1), Oberon speaks of heaving "a mermaid on a dolphin's back;" and in "Hamlet," the queen referring to Ophelia's death, says (iv. 7)—

"Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up."

In two other passages Shakespeare alludes to this legendary creature. Thus in "3 Henry VI." (iii. 2) Gloucester boasts that he will "drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;" and in "Antony and Cleopatra" (ii. 2) Enobarbus relates how—

"Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
And made their bends adornings: at the helm
A seeming mermaid steers."

In all these cases Shakespeare,⁹²⁸ as was his wont, made his characters say what they were likely to think, in their several positions and periods of life. It has been suggested,⁹²⁹ however, that the idea of the mermaid, in some of the passages just quoted, seems more applicable to the syren, especially in the "Midsummer's Night's Dream," where the "mermaid on a dolphin's back" could not easily have been so placed, had she had a fish-like tail instead of legs.

Notices of mermaids are scattered abundantly in books of bygone times. Mermen and mermaids, men of the sea, and women of the sea, having been as "stoutly believed in as the great sea-serpent, and on very much the same kind of evidence." Holinshed gives a detailed account of a merman caught at Oxford, in Suffolk, in the reign of King John. He was kept alive on raw meal and fish for six months, but at last "gledde secretelye to the sea, and was neuer after seene nor heard off." Even in modern times we are told how every now and then a mermaid has made her appearance. Thus, in the "General Magazine" (Jan. 1747), we read - "It is reported from the north of Scotland that some time this month a sea creature, known by the name of mermaid, which has the shape of a human body from the trunk upwards, but below is wholly fish, was carried some miles up the water of Devron." In 1824,⁹³⁰ a mermaid or merman made its appearance, when, as the papers of that day inform us, "upwards of 150 distinguished fashionables" went to see it.

The sign of the "Mermaid" was a famous tavern, situated in Bread Street. As early as the fifteenth century, we are told, it was one of the haunts of the pleasure-seeking Sir John Howard, whose trusty steward records, anno 1464: - "Paid for wyn at the Mermayd in Bred Street, for my mastyr and Syr Nicholas Latimer, xd. ob." In 2603 Sir Walter Raleigh established a Literary Club in this house, amongst its members being Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Selden, Carew, Martin, Doune, &c. It is often alluded to by Beaumont and Fletcher.

Minnow.—This little fish, from its insignificant character, is used by "Coriolanus" (iii. 1), as a term of contempt, "Hear you this Triton of the minnows?" and again in "Love's Labour's Lost" (i. 1, letter), it occurs, "that base minnow of thy mirth."

⁹²⁷ See "British Popular Customs," pp. 494, 495.

⁹²⁸ See "Book of Days," ii. pp. 612-614.

⁹²⁹ Nares' "Glossary," ii. 565; see Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 411-414.

⁹³⁰ "History of Sign Boards," 1866, p. 226.

Pike.—An old name for this fish was *luce*. In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 1), we are told that—

“The luce is the fresh fish.”

There can be no doubt, too, that there is in this passage an allusion to the armorial bearings of Shakespeare’s old enemy, Sir Thomas Lucy. Amongst the various instances of the use of this term we may quote Isaac Walton, who says” The mighty luce or pike is taken to be the tyrant, as the salmon is the king of the fresh waters.” Stow, in his “Survey of London,” describes a procession of the Fishmongers’ Company in 1298, as having horses painted like *sea-luce* - “Then four salmons of silver on foure horses, and after them sixe and fortie armed knightes riding on horses made like *lucis of the sea*.”

Porpoise.—According to sailors the playing of porpoises round a ship is a certain prognostic of a violent gale of wind; hence the allusion in “Pericles” (ii. 1), where one of the fishermen says, speaking of the storm - “Nay, master, said not I as much when I saw the porpus how he bounced and tumbled?” Thus, too, in the “Canterbury Guests, or a Bargain Broken,” by Ravenscroft, we read - “My heart begins to leap and play, like a porpice before a storm.” And a further reference occurs in Wilsford’s “Nature’s Secrets” - “Porpoises, or sea-hogs, when observed to sport and chase one another about ships, expect then some stormy weather.”

Sea-monster.—The reference in “King Lear” (i. 4), to the “sea-monster:”—

“Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show’st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster”—

is generally supposed to be the hippopotamus, which, according to Upton, was the hieroglyphical symbol of impiety and ingratitude.⁹³¹ Sandys⁹³² gives a picture said to be portrayed in the porch of the temple of Minerva at Sais, in which is the figure of a river horse, denoting “murder, impudence, violence, and injustice; for they say that he killeth his sire and ravisheth his own dam.” His account is no doubt taken from Plutarch’s “Isis and Osiris;” and Shakespeare may have read it in Holland’s translation (p. 1300),⁹³³ but why he should call the river horse a “sea-monster” is not very clear. It is more likely, however, that the whale is meant.

⁹³¹ Wright’s Notes to “King Lear,” 1877, p. 133.

⁹³² “Travels,” 1673, p. 305.

⁹³³ Cf. “King Lear,” iv. 2, 48, 49; “Troilus and Cressida,” v. 5; “All’s Well that Ends Well,” iv. 3.

22. Sundry Superstitions

Almanacs.—In Shakespeare's day these were published under this title: - "An Almanack and Prognostication made for the year of our Lord God, 1595." So in the "Winter's Tale" (iv. 3), Autolycus says - "the hottest day prognostication proclaims; "that is, the hottest day foretold in the almanac. In the xivth sonnet the prognostications in almanacs are also noticed:—

"Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or season's quality:
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain, and wind;
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By oft predict that I in heaven find."

In "Antony and Cleopatra" (i. 2) Enobarbus says - "They are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report;" and in "2 Henry IV." (ii. 4), Prince Henry says - "Saturn and Venus this year in conjunction! what says the almanac to that?"

Amulets.—A belief in the efficacy of an amulet or charm to ward off diseases and to avert contagion has prevailed from a very early period. The use of amulets was common among the Greeks and Romans, whose amulets were principally formed of gems, crowns of pearls, necklaces of coral, shells, &c. The amulet of modern times has been of the most varied kinds; objects being selected either from the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdom, pieces of old rags or garments, scraps of writing in legible or illegible characters in fact, of anything to which any superstitious property has been considered to belong."⁹³⁴This form of superstition is noticed in I Henry VI. (v. 3) in the scene laid at Angiers where La Pucelle exclaims—

"The regent conquers, and the Frenchmen fly.
Now help, ye charming spells and periapts."

—periapts being charms which were worn as preservatives against diseases or mischief. Thus Cotgrave ⁹³⁵explains the word as "a medicine hanged about any part of the bodie."

Ceremonies.—These, says Malone, were "omens or signs deduced from sacrifices or other ceremonial rites." Thus, in "Julius Cæsar" (ii. 1), Cassius says of Cæsar, that—

"He is superstitious grown of late,
Quite from the main opinion he held once
Of fantasy, of dreams, and ceremonies," &c.

And in the next scene Calpurnia adds—

"Cæsar, I never stood on ceremonies,
Yet now they fright me."

⁹³⁴ Pettigrew's "Medical Superstitions," p. 48.

⁹³⁵ "French and English Dictionary;" see Dyce's "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 316; Nares describes it as "a bandage, tied on for magical purposes, from περιάπτω;" see Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 324–326; Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare," 1839, pp. 305–307.

Charms.—These, as Mr Pettigrew ⁹³⁶has pointed out, differ little from amulets, the difference consisting in the manner in which they are used rather than in their nature. Thus, whereas the amulet was to be suspended on the person when employed, the charm was not necessarily subjected to such a method of application. In days gone by, and even at the present day, in country districts, so universal has been the use of this source of supposed magical power that there is scarcely a disease for which a charm has not been given. It is not only, also, to diseases of body and mind that the superstitious practice has been directed; having been in popular request to avert evil, and to counteract supposed malignant influences. As might be expected, Shakespeare has given various allusions to this usage, as, for example, in “Cymbeline” (v. 3), where Posthumus says—

“To day how many would have given their honours
To have saved their carcasses! took heel to do’t,
And yet died too! I, in my own woe charm’d,
Could not find death where I did hear him groan,
Nor feel him where he struck.”

this passage referring to the notion of certain charms being powerful enough to keep men unhurt in battle.

Othello (iii. 4), speaking of the handkerchief which he had given to Desdemona, relates:—

“That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
She was a charmer, and almost could read
The thoughts of people.”

And in the same play (i. 1), Brabantio asks—

”Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused?”

Again, in “Much Ado About Nothing” (iii. 2), Benedick, who is represented as having the toothache, after listening to the banter of his comrades, replies, “Yet is this no charm for the toothache.”

Perfect silence seems to have been regarded as indispensable for the success of any charm; and Pliny informs us that “favete linguis” was the usual exclamation employed on such an occasion. From this circumstance it has been suggested that the well-known phrase “to charm a tongue” may have originated. Thus we have the following dialogue in “Othello” (v. 2):—

“*Iago.* Go to, charm your tongue.
Emilia. I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak.”

Thus, on the appearance amidst thunder of the first apparition to Macbeth, after the witches have performed certain charms (iv. i), Shakespeare introduces the following dialogue—

“*Macbeth.* Tell me thou unknown power.
First Witch. He knows thy thoughts:
Hear his speech, but say thou nought.”

Again in the “Tempest” (iv. 1), Prospero says—

⁹³⁶ “Medical Superstitions,” p. 55.

"Hush, and be mute,
Or else our spell is marr'd."

Metrical Charms.—There was a superstition long prevalent that life might be taken away by metrical charms. Reginald Scot, in his "Discovery of Witchcraft" (1584), says - "The Irishmen addict themselves, &c.; yea, they will not sticke to affirme that they can *rime* a man to death."⁹³⁷In "1 Henry VI." (i. 1), the Duke of Exeter, referring to the lamented death of Henry V., says—

"Shall we think the subtle-witted French
Conjurers and sorcerers, that afraid of him,
By magic verses have contrived his end."

These "magic verses," to which the death of Henry V. is here attributed, were not required to be uttered in his presence; their deadly energy existing solely in the words of the imprecation and the malevolence of the reciter, which were supposed to render them effectual at any distance.

Again, the alphabet was called the Christ-cross-row; either because a cross was prefixed to the alphabet in the old primers, or more probably from a superstitious custom of writing the alphabet in the form of a cross by way of a charm. In "Richard III." (i. 1), Clarence relates how the king—

"Hearkens after prophecies and dreams;
And from the cross-row plucks the letter G."

Dreams.—These, considered as prognostics of good or evil, are frequently introduced by Shakespeare. In "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 3), Andromache exclaims—

"My dreams will, sure, prove ominous to the day."

While Romeo (v. 1), declares—

"My dreams presage some joyful news at hand."

It is chiefly as precursors of misfortune that the poet has availed himself of their supposed influence as omens of future fate. Thus, there are few passages in his dramas more terrific than the dreams of Richard the Third and Clarence; the latter especially, as Mr Drake says,⁹³⁸"is replete with the most fearful imagery, and makes the blood run chill with horror."

Dreaming of certain things has generally been supposed to be ominous either of good or ill-luck;⁹³⁹and at the present day the credulous pay oftentimes no small attention to their dreams, should these happen to have referred to what they consider unlucky things. In the same way Shylock, in the "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 5), is a victim to much superstitious dread—

"Jessica, my girl,
Look to my house. I am right loath to go:
There is some ill a brewing towards my rest,
For I did dream of money-bags to-night."

In "Julius Cæsar" dreaming of banquet is supposed to presage misfortune.

⁹³⁷ See under *rat* a similar superstition noticed.

⁹³⁸ "Shakspeare and his Times," p. 355.

⁹³⁹ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 127-141.

It was also supposed that malicious spirits took advantage of sleep to torment their victims;⁹⁴⁰ hence Macbeth (ii. 1), exclaims—

“Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!”⁹⁴¹

Duels.—The death of the vanquished person was always considered a certain evidence of his guilt. Thus in “2 Henry VI.” (ii. 3), King Henry speaking of the death of Horner in the duel with Peter, says—⁹⁴²

“Go, take hence that traitor from our sight;
For by his death we do perceive his guilt:
And God in justice hath reveal’d to us
The truth and innocence of this poor fellow,
Which he hath thought to have murder’d wrongfully,
Come, fellow, follow us for thy reward.”

We may also compare what Arcite says to Palamon in the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (iii. 6)—

“If I fall, curse me, and say I was a coward;
For none but such dare die in these just trials.”

Among the customs connected with duelling, it appears that, according to an old law, knights were to fight with the lance and the sword, as those of inferior rank fought with an ebon staff or baton, to the farther end of which was fixed a bag crammed hard with sand. Thus Shakespeare, in “2 Henry VI.” (ii. 3), represents Horner entering “bearing his staff with a sand-bag fastened to it.”⁹⁴³ Butler, in his “Hudibras,” alludes to this custom—

“Engag’d with money bags, as bold
As men with sand-bags did of old.”

Steevens adds that “a passage in St Chrysostom very clearly proves the great antiquity of this practice.”

Fortune-tellers.—A common method of fortune-tellers in pretending to tell future events, was by means of a beryl or glass. In an extract from the “Penal Laws against Witches,” it is said, “they do answer either by voice, or else set before their eyes in glasses, chrystal stones, etc., the pictures or images of the persons or things sought for.” It is to this kind of juggling prophecy that Angelo in “Measure for Measure” (ii. 2), refers, when he tells how the law—

”Like a prophet,
Looks in a glass, that shows what future evils,
Either new, or by remissness new-conceived,” etc.

Again, Macbeth (iv. f), when “a show of eight kings” is presented to him, exclaims after witnessing the seventh—

“I’ll see no more:
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more.”

⁹⁴⁰ See p. 266.

⁹⁴¹ See Malone’s “Variorum Shakespeare,” 1821, ii. p. 90.

⁹⁴² See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” vi. p. 167.

⁹⁴³ See Nares’ “Glossary,” ii., p. 765.

Spenser ⁹⁴⁴has given a circumstantial account of the glass which Merlin made for King Ryence. A mirror of the same kind was presented to Cambuslan, in the “Squire’s Tale” of Chaucer; and we are also told how “a certain philosopher did the like to Pompey, the which showed him in a glass the order of his enemies’ march.”⁹⁴⁵Brand, in his “Popular Antiquities,”⁹⁴⁶gives several interesting accounts of this method of fortune-telling; and quotes the following from Vallancey’s “Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis:” - “In the Highlands of Scotland, a large chrystal, of a figure somewhat oval was kept by the priests to work charms by; water poured upon it at this day is given to cattle against diseases; these stones are now preserved by the oldest and most superstitious in the country; they were once common in Ireland.”

Further allusions to fortune-tellers occur in “Comedy of Errors” (v. 1), and “Merry Wives of Windsor” (iv. 2).

It appears, too, that the trade of fortune-telling was in Shakespeare’s day, as now, exercised by the wandering hordes of gipsies. In “Antony and Cleopatra” (iv. 12), the Roman complains that Cleopatra—

“Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.”

Giants.—The belief in giants and other monsters was much credited in olden times, and, “amongst the legends of nearly every race or tribe, few are more universal than those relating to giants or men of colossal size and superhuman power.”⁹⁴⁷That such stories were current in Shakespeare’s day, is attested by the fact that the poet makes Othello (i. 3), in his eloquent defence before the Senate of Venice, when explaining his method of courtship, allude to—

“—The Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.”

In the “Tempest” (iii. 3), Gonzalo relates how—

“When we were boys,
Who would believe that there were mountaineers
Dew-lapp’d like bulls, whose throats had hanging at ‘em
Wallets of flesh? or that there were such men,
Whose heads stood in their breasts?”

And after the appearance of Prospero’s magic repast, Sebastian says—

”Now I will believe
That there are unicorns, that in Arabia
There is one tree, the phœnix’s throne, one phœnix
At this hour reigning there.”

Amongst the numerous references to giants by Shakespeare, we may quote the following. In “2 Henry VI.” (ii. 3), Horner says - “Peter, have at thee with a downright blow, [as Bevis of Southampton fell upon Ascapart].”⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁴ “Faerie Queene,” bk. iii., c. 2; See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ix. p. 82

⁹⁴⁵ Boisteau’s “Theatrum Mundi,” translated by John Alday (1574).

⁹⁴⁶ 1849, iii., pp. 60, 61.

⁹⁴⁷ See Hardwick’s “Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-Lore,” 1872, pp. 197, 224.

⁹⁴⁸ The addition in brackets is rejected by the Editors of the Globe Edition.

Ascapart, according to the legend, was “ful thyrt y fote longe,” and was conquered by Sir Bevis of Southampton.

In “Cymbeline” (iii. 3), Belarius says—

”The gates of monarchs
Are arch’d so high, that giants may jet through
And keep their impious turbans on, without
Good morrow to the sun.”

In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (ii. 1), Mrs Page says—

“I had rather be a giantess, and lie under Mount Pelion.”⁹⁴⁹

Lucky Days.—From the most remote period certain days have been supposed to be just as lucky as others are the reverse, a notion which is not confined to any one country. In Shakespeare’s day great attention was paid to this superstitious fancy, which is probably alluded to in the “Winter’s Tale” (iii. 3), where the shepherd says to the clown, “‘Tis a lucky day, boy; and we’ll do good deeds on’t.”

In “King John” (iii. 1) Constance exclaims—

“What hath this day deserved? what hath it done,
That it in golden letters should be set
Among the high tides in the calendar?
Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,
This day of shame, oppression, perjury.
Or, if it must stand still, let wives with child
Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,
Lest that their hopes prodigiously be cross’d:
But on this day let seamen fear no wreck;
No bargains break that are not this day made:
This day, all things begun come to ill end,
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change!”

Again, Macbeth (iv. 1) says—

”Let this pernicious hour
Stand aye accursed in the calendar!”

In the old almanacs the days supposed to be favourable or unfavourable are enumerated, allusion to which occurs in Webster’s “Duchess of Malfy,” 1623—

“By the almanack, I think,
To choose good days and shun the critical.”

At the present day this superstition still retains its hold on the popular mind, and in the transactions of life exerts an important influence.⁹⁵⁰

Magic.—The system of magic which holds such a prominent place in the “Tempest” was formerly an article in the popular creed, and as such is frequently noticed by the writers of Shakespeare’s time. Thus, in describing Prospero, Shakespeare has given him several of the

⁹⁴⁹ Cf. “Measure for Measure,” ii. 2, iii. 1; “Much Ado About Nothing,” v. 1; “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” iii. 1.

⁹⁵⁰ See Brand’s “Popular Antiquities,” 1879, i. pp. 44–51; Jones’s “Credulities Past and Present,” pp. 493–507; Hampson’s “Evi Medii Kalendarium,” i. p. 210; see an Article on “Day Fatality” in John Aubrey’s “Miscellanies.”

adjuncts, beside the costume, of the popular magician, much virtue being inherent in his very garments. So Prospero, when addressing his daughter (i. 2), says—

”Lend thy hand,
And pluck my magic garment from me.—So;
Lie there, my art.”

A similar importance is assigned to his staff, for he tells Ferdinand (i. 2)—

“I can here disarm thee with this stick,
And make thy weapon drop.”

And when he abjures the practice of magic, one of the requisites is “to break his staff,” and to (v. 1)—

“Bury it certain fathoms in the earth.”

The more immediate instruments of power were books, by means of which spells were usually performed. Hence, in the old romances the sorcerer is always furnished with a book, by reading certain parts of which he is enabled to summon to his aid what demons or spirits he has occasion to employ. When he is deprived of his book his power ceases. Malone quotes in illustration of this notion Caliban’s words in the “*Tempest*” (iii. 2)—

“Remember,
First to possess his books; for without them,
He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command.”

Prospero, too, declares (iii. 1)—

”I’ll to my book,
For yet ere supper time must I perform
Much business appertaining.”

And on his relinquishing his art he says that—

“Deeper than did ever plummet sound
I’ll drown my book.”

Those who practice nocturnal sorcery are styled in “*Troilus and Cressida*” (iv. 2), “Venomous wights.”

Merlin’s Prophecies.—In Shakespeare’s day there was an extensive belief in strange and absurd prophecies, which were eagerly caught up and repeated by one person to another. This form of superstition is alluded to in “*1 King Henry IV.*” (iii. 1), where, after Owen Glendower has been descanting on the “omens and portents dire” which heralded his nativity, and Hotspur’s unbelieving and taunting replies to the chieftain’s assertions, the poet makes Hotspur, on Mortimer’s saying, “Fye, cousin Percy! how you cross my father!” thus reply—

“I cannot choose: sometime he angers me,
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies;
And of a dragon and a finless fish,” etc.

In “*King Lear*” (iii. 2) the fool says—

“I’ll speak a prophecy ere I go;
When priests are more in word than matter;
When brewers mar their malt with water;

When nobles are their tailors' tutors;
 No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;
 When every case in law is right;
 No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;
 When slanders do not live in tongues:
 Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
 When usurers tell their gold i' the field;
 And bawds and whores do churches build;—
 Then shall the realm of Albion
 Come to great confusion:
 Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
 That going shall be used with feet.
 This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time."

This witty satire was probably against the prophecies attributed to Merlin, which were then prevalent among the people.⁹⁵¹

Formerly, too, prophecies of apparent impossibilities were common in Scotland; such as the removal of one place to another. So in "Macbeth" (iv. i), the apparition says:—

"Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
 Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
 Shall come against him."

Portents and Prodigies.—In years gone the belief in supernatural occurrences was a common article of faith; and our ancestors made use of every opportunity to prove the truth of this superstitious belief. The most usual monitions of this kind were, "lamentings heard in the air; shakings and tremblings of the earth; sudden gloom at noon-day; the appearance of meteors; the shooting of stars; eclipses of the sun and moon; the moon of a bloody hue; the shrieking of owls; the croaking of ravens; the shrillings of crickets; night-howlings of dogs; the death-watch; the chattering of pies; wild neighing of horses; blood dropping from the nose; winding sheets; strange and fearful noises, &c.," many of which Shakespeare has used, introducing them as the precursors of murder, sudden death, disasters, and superhuman events.⁹⁵² Thus in "King Richard II." (ii. 4), the following prodigies are selected as the forerunners of the death or fall of kings

"'Tis thought the king is dead: we will not stay.
 The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd,
 And meteors fright the fix'd stars of heaven;
 The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth,
 And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change;
 Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap,
 The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
 The other to enjoy by rage and war:
 These signs forerun the death or fall of kings."

Previous to the assassination of Julius Cæsar we are told in "Hamlet" (i. 1) how—

"In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
 A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
 The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead

⁹⁵¹ See Kelly's "Notices illustrative of the Drama and other Amusements at Leicester," 1865, pp. 116, 118.

⁹⁵² Drake's "Shakspeare and his Times," p. 352.

Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
 As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
 Disasters in the sun, and the moist star;
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse."

More appalling still are the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the murder of Duncan ("Macbeth," ii. 3). We may also compare the omens which marked the births of Owen Glendower and Richard III. Indeed, the supposed sympathy of the elements with human joy or sorrow or suffering is evidently a very ancient superstition; and this presumed sensitiveness, not only of the elements, but of animated nature to the perpetration of deeds of darkness and blood by perverted nature, has in all ages been extensively believed. It is again beautifully illustrated in the lines, where Shakespeare makes Lennox, on the morning following the murder of Duncan, by his host, "Macbeth," (ii. 3), give the following narrative:—

"The night has been unruly: where we lay,
 Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
 Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
 And prophesyings with accents terrible
 Of dire combustion and confused events
 New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird
 Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
 Was feverous and did shake."

This idea is further illustrated in the dialogue, which follows, between Ross and an old man:—

"*Old Man.* Threescore and ten I can remember well:
 Within the volume of which time I have seen
 Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night
 Hath trifled former knowings."

"*Ross.* Ah, good father,
 Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
 Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock, 'tis day,

And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
 Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
 That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
 When living light should kiss it?"

Supernatural authority of Kings.—The belief in the supernatural authority of monarchs is but a remnant of the long supposed "divine right" of kings to govern, which resulted from a conviction that they could trace their pedigrees back to the deities themselves.⁹⁵³ Thus Shakespeare even puts into the mouth of the murderer and usurper Claudius, King of Denmark, the following sentence:—

"Let him go, Gertrude: do not fear our person:
 There's such a divinity doth hedge a king,
 That treason can but peep to what it would,
 Acts little of his will."

⁹⁵³ "Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-Lore," p. 81.

This notion is by no means confined to either civilized or semi-civilized nations. It is, says Mr Hardwick, "a universal feeling among savage tribes." The ignorant serf of Russia believed, and indeed yet believes, that if the deity were to die the Emperor would succeed to his power and authority.

Sympathetic Indications.—According to a very old tradition, the wounds of a murdered person were supposed to bleed afresh at the approach or touch of the murderer. This effect, though impossible, remarks Nares,⁹⁵⁴ except it were by miracle, was firmly believed, and almost universally, for a very long period. Poets, therefore, were fully justified in their use of it. Thus Shakespeare in "King Richard III." (i. 2) makes Lady Anne, speaking of Richard Duke of Gloster, say—

"O, gentlemen, see, see! dear Henry's wounds
Open their congeal'd mouths and bleed afresh!
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity;
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins, where no blood dwells;
Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural."

Stow alludes to this circumstance in his "Annals" (424). He says the king's body "was brought to St Paul's in an open coffin, barefaced, where he bled; thence he was carried to the Blackfriars, and there bled." Matthew Paris also states that after Henry the Second's death his son Richard came to view the body - "Quo superveniente, confestim erupit sanguis ex naribus regis mortui; ac si indignaretur spiritus in adventu ejus, qui ejusdem mortis causa esse credebatur, ut videretur sanguis clamare ad Deum."⁹⁵⁵ In the "Athenian Oracle" (i. 106), this supposed phenomenon is thus accounted for - "The blood is congealed in the body for two or three days, and then becomes liquid again, in its tendency to corruption. The air being heated by many persons coming about the body, is the same thing to it as motion is. 'Tis observed that dead bodies will bleed in a concourse of people when murderers are absent, as well as present, yet legislators have thought fit to authorise it, and use this trial as an argument, at least to frighten, though 'tis no conclusive one to condemn them." Among other allusions to this superstition may be mentioned one by King James in his "Dæmonology," where we read - "In a secret murder, if the dead carkasse be at any time thereafter handled by the murderer, it will gush out of blood, as if the blood were crying to heaven for revenge of the murderer." It is spoken of also in a note to Chap. V. of the "Fair Maid of Perth," that this bleeding of a corpse was urged as an evidence of guilt in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh as late as the year 1668. An interesting survival of this curious notion exists in Durham, where, says Mr Henderson,⁹⁵⁶ "touching of the corpse by those who come to look at it is still expected by the poor on the part of those who come to their house while a dead body is lying in it, in token that they wished no ill to the departed, and were in peace and amity with him."

We may also compare the following passage, where Macbeth (iii. 4), speaking of the Ghost, says—

"It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood;
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
Augures and understood relations have

⁹⁵⁴ "Glossary," ii. p. 974.

⁹⁵⁵ See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, iii. pp. 229–231.

⁹⁵⁶ "Folk-Lore of Northern Counties," 2849, p. 57.

By magot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood."

Shakespeare perhaps alludes to some story in which the stones covering the corpse of a murdered man were said to have moved of themselves, and so revealed the secret. The idea of trees speaking probably refers to the story of the tree which revealed to Æneas the murder of Polydorus (Virg. "Æneid," iii. 22, 599). Indeed, in days gone by, this superstition was carried to such an extent that we are told, in D'Israeli's "Curiosities Of Literature," "by the side of the bier, if the slightest change was observable in the eyes, the mouth, feet, or hands of the corpse, the murderer was conjectured to be present, and many an innocent spectator must have suffered death. This practice forms a rich picture in the imagination of our old writers; and their histories and ballads are laboured into pathos by dwelling on this phenomenon."

23. Miscellaneous Customs, Etc

Badge of Poverty.—In the reign of William III., those who received parish relief had to wear a badge. It was the letter P, with the initial of the parish to which they belonged, in red or blue cloth, on the shoulder of the right sleeve. In “2 Henry VI.” (v. 1), Clifford says—

“Might I but know thee by thy household badge.”

Bedfellow.—A proof of the simplicity of manners in olden times is evidenced by the fact, that it was customary for men, even of the highest rank, to sleep together. In “Henry V.” (ii. 2), Exeter says—

“Nay, but the man that was his bedfellow,
Whom he hath dull’d and cloy’d with gracious favours.”

“This unseemly custom,” says Malone, “continued common till the middle of the last century, if not later.” Beaumont and Fletcher, in the “Coxcomb” (i. 1), thus refer to it—

“Must we that have so long time been as one,
Seen cities, countries, kingdoms, and their wonders,
Been bedfellows, and in our various journey
Mixt all our observations,” &c.

In the same way letters from noblemen to each other often began with the appellation *bedfellow*.⁹⁵⁷

The Curfew Bell, which is generally supposed to be of Norman origin, is still rung in some of our old country villages, although it has long lost its significance. It seems to have been as important to ghosts as to living men; it being their signal for walking, a licence which apparently lasted till the first cock. Fairies, too, and other spirits were under the same regulations; and hence Prospero, in the “Tempest” (v. 1), says of his elves, that they

”Rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew.”

In “King Lear” (iii. 4), we find the fiend Flibbertigibbet obeying the same rule, for Edgar says - “This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet; he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock.”

In “Measure for Measure” (iv. 2), we find another allusion—

“*Duke.* The best and wholesomest spirits of the night
Envelope you, good Provost! who call’d here of late?
Prov. None, since the curfew rung.”

And once more in “Romeo and Juliet” (iv. 4), Capulet says—

“Come, stir, stir, stir! the second cock hath crow’d,
The curfew bell hath rung, ‘tis three o’clock.”⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁷ Nares’ “Glossary,” i. p. 68.

⁹⁵⁸ See Brand’s “Pop. Antiq.,” 1849, iii., pp. 220–5; also Harland and Wilkinson’s “Lancashire Folk-Lore,” 1867, p. 44.

Sacring Bell.—This was a bell which rang for processions and other holy ceremonies.⁹⁵⁹ It is mentioned in “Henry VIII.” (iii. 2), by the Earl of Surrey—

”I’ll startle you
Worse than the sacring bell.”

It is rung in the Romish Church to give notice that the “Host” is approaching, and is now called “Sanctus bell,” from the words “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus, Deus, Sabaoth,” pronounced by the priest.

On the graphic passage (ii. 1), where Macbeth says—

“The bell invites me,
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.”

Malone has this note - “Thus Raleigh speaking of love, in England’s ‘Helicon’ (1600)—

“It is perhaps that sauncing bell,
That toules all into heaven or hell.’

Sauncing being probably a mistake for sacring or saint’s bell, originally, perhaps, written saintis bell.” In “Hudibras” we find—

“The old saintis bell that rings all in.”

Carpet-knights.—These were knights dubbed at court by mere favour, and not on the field of battle for their military exploits. In “Twelfth Night” (iii. 4), Sir Toby defines one of them thus - “He is knight, dubbed with unhatched rapier and on carpet consideration.”

A “trencher knight” was probably synonymous, as in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (v. 2)—

“Some mumbles-news, some trencher-knight, some Dick.”

These carpet-knights were sometimes called “knights of the green cloth.”⁹⁶⁰

Chair Days.—Days of old age and infirmity. So, in “2 Henry VI.” (v. 2), young Clifford, on seeing his dead father, says—

”Wast thou ordain’d, dear father,
To close thy youth in peace, and to achieve
The silver livery of advised age,
And in thy reverence, and thy chair days, thus
To die in ruffian battle.”

Chivalry.—The expression “sworn brothers,” which Shakespeare several times employs, refers to the “fratres jurati,” who in the days of chivalry mutually bound themselves by oath to share each other’s fortune. Thus, Falstaff says of Shallow in “2 Henry IV.” (iii. 2) - “He talks as familiarly of John a Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him.” In “Henry V.” (ii. 1), Bardolph says, “We’ll be all three sworn brothers to France.” In course of time it was used in a laxer sense to denote intimacy, as in “Much Ado About Nothing” (i. 1), where Beatrice says of Benedick, that “he hath every month a new sworn brother.”⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁹ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 379.

⁹⁶⁰ See Douce’s “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” pp. 65, 66.

⁹⁶¹ We may compare, too, what Coriolanus says (ii. 3)—“I will, sir flatter my sworn brother, the people.”

According to the laws of chivalry, a person of superior birth might not be challenged by an inferior, or if challenged might refuse combat, a reference to which seems to be made by Cleopatra (“Antony and Cleopatra,” ii. 5)—

“I will not hurt him.
These hands do lack nobility, that they strike
A meaner than myself.”

Again, in “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 5), the same practice is alluded to by Hector, who asks Thersites—

“What art thou, Greek? art thou for Hector’s match?
Art thou of blood and honour?”

Singer quotes from “Melville’s Memoirs” (1735, p. 165): - “The laird of Grange offered to fight Bothwell, who answered that he was not his equal. The like answer made he to Tullibardine. Then my lord Lindsay offered to fight him, which he could not well refuse; but his heart failed him, and he grew cold on the business.”⁹⁶²

Clubs.—According to Malone, it was once a common custom, on the breaking out of a fray, to call out “Clubs, clubs!” to part the combatants. Thus, in “1 Henry VI.” (i. 3), the Mayor declares—

“I’ll call for clubs, if you will not away.”

In “Titus Andronicus” (ii. 1), Aaron says—

“Clubs, clubs! these lovers will not keep the peace.”

“Clubs,” too, “was originally the popular cry to call forth the London apprentices, who employed their clubs for the preservation of the public peace. Sometimes, however, they used those weapons to raise a disturbance, as they are described doing in the following passage in “Henry VIII.” (v. 4), “I missed the meteor once, and hit that woman; who cried out ‘Clubs!’ when I might see from far some forty truncheoners draw to her succour, which were the hope o’ the Strand, where she was quartered.”

Colour-Lore.—Green eyes have been praised by poets of nearly every land,⁹⁶³ and according to Armado, in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (i. 2), “Green indeed is the colour of lovers.”

In “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (v. 1). Thisbe laments:—

“Lovers, make moan:
His eyes were green as leeks.”

The Nurse, in her description of Romeo’s rival (“Romeo and Juliet,” iii. 5), says:—

”An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath.”

In the “Two Noble Kinsmen” (v. 1), Emilia, praying to Diana, says:—

“O vouchsafe,
With that thy rare green eye, which never yet
Beheld things maculate—look on thy virgin.”

⁹⁶² Cf. “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 1); “As You Like It” (v. 2).

⁹⁶³ See Singer’s “Shakespeare,” viii. p. 204.

The words of Armado have been variously explained as alluding to green eyes—Spanish writers being peculiarly enthusiastic in this praise—to the willow worn by unsuccessful lovers, and to their melancholy.⁹⁶⁴ It has also been suggested⁹⁶⁵ that as green is the colour most suggestive of freshness and spring-time, it may have been considered the most appropriate lover's badge. At the same time, however, it is curious, that as green has been regarded as an ominous colour it should be connected with lovers for, as an old couplet remarks:—

“Those dressed in blue
Have lovers true;
In green and white,
Forsaken quite.”⁹⁶⁶

In “Merchant of Venice” (iii. 2), “Green-eyed jealousy;” and in “Othello” (iii. 3), its equivalent “Green-eyed monster;” are expressions used by Shakespeare.

Yellow is an epithet often, too, applied to jealousy by the old writers. In the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (i. 3), Nym says he will possess Ford “with yellowness.” In “Much ado about Nothing” (ii. 1), Beatrice describes the Count as “Civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.” In “Twelfth Night” (ii. 4), Violet tells the Duke how her father's daughter loved a man, but never told her love:—

”She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument.”

Dinner Customs.—In days gone there was but one saltcellar on the dinner table, which was a large piece of plate generally much ornamented. The tables being long, the salt was commonly placed about the middle, and served as a kind of boundary to the different quality of the guests invited. Those of distinction were ranked above; the space below being assigned to the dependents, inferior relations of the master of the house, etc.⁹⁶⁷ Shakespeare would seem to allude to this custom in the “Winter's Tale” (i. 2), where Leontes says:—

“Lower messes
Perchance are to this business purblind?”

Upon which passage Steevens adds, “Leontes comprehends inferiority of understanding in the idea of inferiority of rank.” Ben Jonson, speaking of the characteristics of an insolent coxcomb, remarks; - “His fashion is not to take knowledge of him that is beneath him in clothes. He never drinks below the salt.”

Ordinary.—This was a public dinner, where each paid his share, an allusion to which custom is made by Enobarbus in “Antony and Cleopatra” (ii. 2), who speaking of Antony says:—

“Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
And for his ordinary pays his heart
For what his eyes eat only.”

Again, in “All's Well that ends Well” (ii. 3), Lafeu says: - “I did think thee, for two ordinaries, to be a pretty wise fellow; thou did'st make tolerable vent of thy travel.”

⁹⁶⁴ See Douce's “Illustrations of Shakspeare,” p. 133.

⁹⁶⁵ See an Article by Mr. Black in “Antiquary,” 1881, iii.

⁹⁶⁶ See Henderson's “Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties,” pp. 34, 35.

⁹⁶⁷ Gifford's Note on “Massinger's Works,” 1813, i. p. 170; see Dyce's “Glossary to Shakespeare,” pp. 269, 380.

The "ordinary" also denoted the lounging place of the men of the town, and the fantastic gallants who herded together. They were, says the author of "Curiosities of Literature" (iii. p. 82), "the exchange for news, the echoing places for all sorts of town talk; there they might hear of the last new play and poem, and the last fresh widow sighing for some knight to make her a lady; these resorts were attended also to save charges of house-keeping."

Drinking Customs.—Shakespeare has given several allusions to the old customs associated with drinking, which have always varied in different countries. At the present day many of the drinking customs still observed are very curious, especially those kept up at the Universities and Inns of Court.⁹⁶⁸

Alms-drink was a phrase in use, says Warburton, amongst good fellows, to signify that liquor of another's share which his companion drank to ease him. So in "Antony and Cleopatra" (ii. 7), one of the servants of Lepidus says: - "They have made him drink alms-drink."

By-drinkings.—This was a phrase for drinkings between meals; and is used by the Hostess in "1 Henry IV." (iii. 3), who says to Falstaff: - "You owe money here besides, Sir John, for your diet and by-drinkings."

Hooped Pots.—In olden times drinking pots were made with hoops, so that when two or more drank from the same tankard, no one should drink more than his share. There were generally three hoops to the pots, hence, in "2 King Henry VI." (iv. 2), Cade says - "The three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops." In Nash's "Pierce Penniless" we read: - "I believe hoopoes on quart pots were invented that every man should take his hoope, and no more."

The phrases "to do a man right," and "to do him reason," were in years gone by the common expressions in pledging healths; he who drank a bumper, expected that a bumper should be drunk to his toast. To this practice alludes the scrap of a song which Silence sings in "2 Henry IV." (v. 3)—

"Do me right,
And dub me knight:
Samingo."

He who drank, too, a bumper on his knee to the health of his mistress, was dubbed a knight for the evening. The word Samingo is either a corruption of, or an intended blunder for San Domingo, but why this saint should be the patron of toppers is uncertain.

Rouse.—According to Gifford,⁹⁶⁹ a rouse was a large glass in which a health was given, the drinking of which, by the rest of the company, formed a carouse. Hamlet (i. 4) says—

"The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse."

The word occurs again in the following Act (i.), where Polonius uses the phrase, "o'ertook in's rouse;" and in the sense of a bumper, or glass of liquor in "Othello" (ii. 3), "they have given me a rouse already."

Sheer Ale.—This term which occurs in the "Taming of the Shrew" (Ind. 2) by Sly: - "Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale wife of Wincot, if she know me not: if she say I am not fourteen-pence on the score for sheer ale," etc.; according to some expositors, means "ale alone, nothing but ale," rather than "unmixed ale."

Sneak Cup.—This phrase, which is used by Falstaff in "1 Henry IV." (iii. 3):—

⁹⁶⁸ See Dyce's "Glossary," p. 381; Nares' "Glossary," ii., p. 764.

⁹⁶⁹ See Dyce, iv., p. 395.

“The prince is a jack, a sneak-cup,”

was used to denote one who balked his glass.

Earnest Money.—It was in olden times customary to ratify an agreement by a bent coin. In “Henry VIII.” (ii. 3), the old lady remarks:—

‘Tis strange: a three-pence bow’d would hire me,
Old as I am, to queen it.”

There were, however, no threepences so early as the reign of Henry VIII.

Exclamations. - “Charity for the Lord’s sake,” was the form of ejaculatory supplication used by imprisoned debtors to the passers by.⁹⁷⁰ So, in Davies’ “Epigrams” (1611):—

“Good, gentle writers, ‘for the Lord’s sake, for the Lord’s sake,’
Like Ludgate prisoner, lo, I begging make
My mone.”

In “Measure for Measure” (iv. 3), the phrase is alluded to by Pompey. “All great doers in our trade, and are now for the Lord’s sake.”

“Cry Budget.”—A watchword. Thus Slender says to Shallow in the “Merry Wives of Windsor” (v. 2): - “We have a nay-word how to know one another: I come to her in white, and cry ‘mum;’ she cries ‘budget;’ and by that we know one another.”

“God save the mark.” - “Romeo and Juliet” (iii. 2). This exclamation has hitherto baffled the research of every commentator. It occurs again in “1 Henry IV.” (i. 3); and in the “Merchant of Venice” (ii. 2); and in “Othello” (i. 1), we have “God help the mark.” In the quarto, 1597, instead of “God save the mark” in the first passage quoted, we have “God save the sample,” an expression equally obscure.⁹⁷¹

Halidom.—This exclamation was used, says Minsheu,⁹⁷² by old countrymen, by manner of swearing. In “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (iv. 2), the hostess says:—

“By my halidom, I was fast asleep.”

the probable derivation being *holy*, with the termination *dome*.

Hall! Hall!—An exclamation formerly used, to make a clear space in a crowd for any particular purpose, was “a hall, a hall.” So in “Romeo and Juliet” (i. 5), Capulet says:—

”Come, musicians, play,
A hall, a hall! give room! and foot it, girls.”

Hay.—This is equivalent to “you have it,” an exclamation in fencing, when a thrust or hit is received by the antagonist. In “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 4), Mercutio speaks of “the punto reverso! the hai!”

Hold—To cry *hold!* when persons were fighting, was an authoritative way of separating them according to the old military law. So Macbeth in his struggle with Macduff:—

“And damn’d be him that first cries, Hold, enough!”

We may compare Lady Macbeth’s words (i. 5):—

⁹⁷⁰ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 402.

⁹⁷¹ Staunton’s “Shakespeare,” i. p. 257.

⁹⁷² “Guide into Tongues,” ed. 1607.

“Nor heaven peeps through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, Hold, hold!”

“I’ the name of evil.”—A vulgar exclamation formerly in use. So in the “Winter’s Tale” (iv. 2), it is used by the Clown.

“*O ho, o ho!*”—This savage exclamation was, says Steevens, constantly appropriated by the writers of our ancient mysteries and moralities to the devil. In the “Tempest” (i. 2), Caliban, when rebuked by Prospero for seeking “to violate the honour of my child,” replies:—

“O ho, O ho! would’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.”

Push.—A exclamation equivalent to *pish*.⁹⁷³ It is used by Leonato in “Much ado about Nothing” (v. 1): - “And made a push at chance and sufferance;” and again in “Timon of Athens” (iii. 6), where one of the Lords says: - “Push! did you see my cap?”

Rivo was an exclamation often used in Bacchanalian revels, but its origin is uncertain. It occurs in “1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4)

“‘Rivo!’ says the drunkard.”

Gifford suggests that it is “corrupted, perhaps, from the Spanish *rio*, which is figuratively used for a large quantity of liquor,” a derivation, however, which Mr Dyce does not think probable.

Snick-up.—This was an exclamation of contempt, equivalent to “go and hang yourself.”⁹⁷⁴ It is used by Sir Toby in “Twelfth Night” (ii. 3), in reply to Malvolio’s rebuke:—

“We did keep time, sir, in our catches, sneck up!”

So-ho.—This is the cry of sportsmen when the hare is found in her seat.

Spy. - “I spy,” is the usual exclamation at a well-known childish game called “Hie spy, hie?”⁹⁷⁵

Tailor.—Johnson explains the following words of Puck in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (ii. 1), thus:—

“The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And ‘tailor’ cries, and falls into a cough.”

“The custom of crying tailor at a sudden fall backwards, I think I remember to have observed. He that slips beside his chair, falls as a tailor squats upon his board.” Mr Dyce,⁹⁷⁶ however, adds, “it may be doubted if this explains the text.”

Tilly-vally.—An exclamation of contempt, the etymology of which is uncertain. According to Douce it is a hunting phrase borrowed from the French. Singer says it is equivalent to *fiddle-faddle*. It occurs in “Twelfth Night” (ii. 3), being used by Sir Toby: - “Am not I consanguineous? am I not of her blood? Tilly vally, Lady!”

⁹⁷³ See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 343.

⁹⁷⁴ Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 402.

⁹⁷⁵ Dyce, vi. p. 45.

⁹⁷⁶ “Glossary,” p. 43

In “2 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), the hostess corrupts it to *tilly-fally*: - “Tilly-fally, Sir John, ne’er tell me: your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors.”

As a further illustration of the use of this word, Singer quotes a conversation between Sir Thomas More and his wife, given in Roper’s *Life*: - “Is not this house, quoth he, as nigh heaven as my own? To whom she, after her accustomed homely fashion, not liking such talk, answered, Tylle-valle, Tylle-valle.”

Westward-ho.—This was one of the exclamations of the watermen who plied on the Thames, and is used by Viola in “*Twelfth Night*” (iii. 1). Dyce⁹⁷⁷ quotes from Peel’s “*Edward I.*,” to illustrate the use of this word:—

“*Q. Elinor*. Ay, good woman, conduct me to the court,
That there I may bewail my sinful life,
And call to God to save my wretched soul.

A cry of ‘Westward, ho!’

Woman, what noise is this I hear?

Potter’s Wife. An like your grace, it is the watermen that call for passengers to go westward now.”

Decker took the exclamation, “Westward, ho!” for the title of a comedy; and Jonson, Chapman, and Marston adopted that of “Eastward, ho!” for one jointly written by them a few years afterwards.

Fools.—Mr Douce in his essay “On the Clowns and Fools of Shakespeare,” has made a ninefold division of English fools, according to quality or place of employment, as the domestic fool, the city or corporation fool, the tavern fool, the fool of the mysteries and moralities. The last is generally called the “vice,” and is the original of the stage clowns so common among the dramatists of the time of Elizabeth, and who embody so much of the wit of Shakespeare.

A very palpable distinction is that which distinguishes between such creatures as were chosen to excite to laughter from some deformity of mind or body, and such as were chosen for a certain alertness of mind and power of repartee—or briefly, butts and wits. The dress of the regular court fool of the middle ages was not altogether a rigid uniform, but seems to have changed from time to time. The head was shaved, the coat was motley, and the breeches tight, with, generally, one leg different in colour from the other. The head was covered with a garment resembling a monk’s cowl, which fell over the breast and shoulders, and often bore asses’ ears, and was crested with a coxcomb, while bells hung from various parts of the attire. The fool’s bauble was a short staff bearing a ridiculous head, to which was sometimes attached an inflated bladder, by which sham castigations were inflicted; a long petticoat was also occasionally worn, but seems to have belonged rather to the idiots than the wits. The fool’s business was to amuse his master, to excite his laughter by sharp contrast, to prevent the over oppression of state affairs, and, in harmony with a well-known physiological precept, by his liveliness at meals to assist his lord’s digestion.⁹⁷⁸

The custom of shaving and nicking the head of a fool is very old. There is a penalty of ten shillings, in one of Alfred’s Ecclesiastical Laws, if one opprobriously shave a common man like a fool; and Malone cites a passage from “*The Choice of Change*,” &c., by S. R. Gent,

⁹⁷⁷ “Glossary,” p. 497; see Nares’ “Glossary,” ii. p. 952

⁹⁷⁸ “Encyclopædia Britannica,” 1879, ix., p. 366; see Doran’s “History of Court Fools,” 1858.

4to, 1598 - "Three things used by monks, which provoke other men to laugh at their follies:
1. They are shaven and notched on the head like fooles." ⁹⁷⁹

In the "Comedy of Errors" (v. 1), the servants says:—

"My master preaches patience to him and the while
His man, with scissors nicks him like a fool," &c.

Forfeits.—In order to enforce some kind of regularity in barbers' shops, which were once places of great resort for the idle, certain laws were usually made, the breaking of which was to be punished by forfeits. Rules of this kind, however, were as often laughed at as obeyed. So in "Measure for Measure" (ii. 2):—

"Laws for all faults,
But calls so countenanc'd, that the strong statutes
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,
As much in mock and mark.

Gambling.—It was once customary for a person when going abroad "to put out" a sum of money on condition of receiving good interest for it on his return home; if he never returned the deposit was forfeited. Hence such a one was called "a putter out." It is to this practice that reference is made in the following passage ("Tempest," iii. 3):—

"Or that there were such men
Whose heads stood in their breasts? which now we find
Each putter out of five for one will bring us
God warrant of."

Malone quotes from Moryson's "Itinerary" (1617, pt. i. 198), who says: - "This custom of giving out money upon these adventures was first used in court and noblemen;" a practice which "bankerouts, stage-players, and men of base condition had drawn into contempt," by undertaking journeys merely for gain upon their return. In Ben Jonson's "Every Man Out of his Humour" (ii. 3), the custom is thus alluded to: - "I do intend, this year of jubilee coming on, to travel; and because I will not altogether go upon expence, I am determined to put forth some five thousand pound, to be paid me *fivefor one*, upon the return of my wife, myself, and my dog, from the Turk's court at Constantinople. If all, or either of us, miscarry in the journey, 'tis gone; if we be successful, why then there will be five and twenty thousand pound to entertain time with."

Garters.—It was the regular amorous etiquette in the reign of Elizabeth, ⁹⁸⁰"for a man, professing himself deeply in love, to assume certain outward marks of negligence in his dress, as if too much occupied by his passion to attend to such trifles, or driven by despondency to a forgetfulness of all outward appearance." His "garters, in particular, were not to be tied up." In "As You Like It" (iii. 2), this custom is described by Rosalind, who tells Orlando: - "There is none of my uncle's marks upon you; he taught me how to know a man in love; . . . your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation." Another fashion which seems to have been common among the beaux of Queen Elizabeth's reign, was that of wearing garters across about the knees, an allusion to which we find in "Twelfth Night" (ii. 5), in the letter which Malvolio reads: - "Remember who commended thy yellow

⁹⁷⁹ See Dyce's "Glossary," p. 345; see Nares' "Glossary," ii. p. 702, where various references are given to this custom.

⁹⁸⁰ Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 350.

stockings, and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered." Douce quotes from the old comedy of "The Two Angrie Women of Abingdon" (1599), where a servingman is thus described:—

"Hee's a fine neate fellow,
A spruce slave, I warrant ye, he'ele have
His cruell garters crosse about the knee."

In days gone by, when garters were worn in sight, the upper classes wore very expensive ones, but the lower orders worsted galloon ones. Prince Henry calls Poins ("1 Henry IV.," ii. 4), a "caddice garter," meaning a man of mean rank.

Gaudy Days.—Feast-days in the Colleges of our Universities are so called, as they were formerly at the Inns of Court. In "Antony and Cleopatra" (iii. i3), Antony says:—

"Come,
Let's have one other gaudy night, call to me,
All my sad captains; fill our bowls once more;
Let's mock the midnight bell."

They were so called, says Blount, "from *gaudium*, because, to say truth, they are days of joy, as bringing good cheer to the hungry students."

Glove.—As an article of dress the glove held a conspicuous place in many of our old customs and ceremonies. Thus, it was often worn in the hat as a favour and as a mark to be challenged by an enemy, as is illustrated by the following dialogue in "Henry V." (iv. 1):—

"*King Henry.* Give me any gage of thine, and I will wear it in my bonnet: then, if thou darest acknowledge it, I will make it my quarrel.

Will. Here's my glove, give me another of thine.

K. H. There.

Will. This will I also wear in my cap; if ever thou come to me and say, after to-morrow, 'This is my glove,' by this hand I will take thee a box on the ear.

K. H. If ever I live to see it, I will challenge it.

Will. Thou darest well be hanged."

Again, in "Troilus and Cressida" (v. 2), Diomede, taking the glove from Cressida, says:—

"To-morrow will I wear it on my helm,
And grieve his spirit that dares not challenge it."

And in "Richard II." (v. 3), Percy narrates how Prince Henry boasted that—

"He would unto the stews,
And from the common'st creature pluck a glove,
And wear it as a favour; and with that
He would unhorse the lustiest challenger."

The glove was also worn in the hat as the memorial of a friend, and in the "Merchant of Venice" (iv. 1), Portia, in her assumed character, asks Bassanio for his gloves, which she says she will wear for his sake:—

"Give me your gloves, I'll wear them for your sake."

When the fashion of thus wearing gloves declined, "it fell into the hands of coxcombical and dissolute servants."⁹⁸¹ Thus Edgar, in "King Lear" (iii. 4), being asked by Lear what he had

⁹⁸¹ Nares' "Glossary," i. p. 371.

been, replies: - "A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap," &c.

To throw the glove, as the signal of a challenge, is alluded to by Troilus (iv. 4), who tells Cressida:—

"For I will throw my glove to Death himself,
That's there's no maculation in thy heart,"

—the meaning being, says Johnson: - "I will challenge Death himself in defence of thy fidelity."

The glove then thrown down was popularly called "a gage,"⁹⁸²from the French, signifying a pledge, and in "Richard II." (iv. 1), it is so termed by Aumerle:—

"There is my gage, the manual seal of death,
That marks thee out for hell."

In the same play it is also called "honour's pawn." Thus Bolingbroke (i. 1), says to Mowbray—

"Pale trembling coward, there I throw my gage,
Disclaiming here the kindred of the king,
And lay aside my high blood's royalty,
Which fear, not reverence, make thee to except.
If guilty dread hath left thee so much strength
As to take up my honour's pawn, then stoop."

And further on (iv. 1), one of the Lords employs the same phrase

"There is my honour's pawn;
Engage to the trial, if thou darest."

It is difficult to discover why the glove was recognised as the sign of defiance. Brand⁹⁸³suggests that the custom of dropping or sending the glove, "as the signal of a challenge, may have been derived from the circumstance of its being the cover of the hand, and therefore put for the hand itself. The giving of the hand is well known to intimate that the person who does so will not deceive, but stand to his agreement. *To shake hands upon it* would not be very delicate in an agreement to fight, and, therefore gloves may possibly have been deputed as substitutes."

Again, the glove was often thrown down as a pledge, as in "Timon of Athens" (v. 4), where the senator says to Alcibiades:—

"Throw thy glove,
Or any token of thine honour else,
That thou wilt use the wars as thy redress
And not as our confusion."

⁹⁸² The verb "to gage," or "to pledge," occurs in "Merchant of Venice" (i. 1):—

"But my chief care
Is to come fairly off from the great debts
Wherein my time something too prodigal
Hath left me gaged."

Cf. "1 Henry IV." i. 3.

⁹⁸³ "Pop. Antiq.," ii. p. 127.

Whereupon Alcibiades answers - "Then, there's my glove." In "King Lear" (v. 2), Albany thus speaks:—

"Thou art arm'd, Gloucester: let the trumpet sound:
If none appear to prove upon thy head
Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,
There is my pledge [throwing down a glove.] I'll prove it on thy heart."

In "Troilus and Cressida" (iv. 5), Hector further alludes to this practice:—

"Your quondam wife swears still by Venus' glove:
She's well, but made me not commend her to you."

Scented gloves were formerly given away as presents. In "Winter's Tale," the custom is referred to by Mopsa, who says to the Clown (iv. 4): - "Come, you promised me a tawdry lace, and a pair of sweet gloves;" and Autolycus is introduced singing:—

"Gloves as sweet as damask roses."

In "Much ado about Nothing" (iii. 4), Hero says: - "These-gloves the Count sent me; they are an excellent perfume." Trinity College, Oxford, not ungrateful to its founder and his spouse, has many entries, after the date of 1556, in the Bursar's books, "pro fumigatis chirothecis," for perfumed gloves.

Kiss.—In years past, a kiss was the recognised fee of a lady's partner, and as such is noticed in "Henry VIII." (i.4):—

"I were unmannerly, to take you out,
And not kiss you."

In the "Tempest" (i. 2), it is alluded to in Ariel's song:—

"Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands:

Courtsied when you have and kiss'd,
The wild waves whist,
Foot it featly here and there,
And sweet sprites, the burthen bear."

There is probably a veiled allusion to the same ceremony in "Winter's Tale" (iv. 4), where, at the dance of Shepherds and Shepherdesses, the following dialogue occurs:—

"*Clown.* Come on, strike up!
Dorcas. Mopsa must be your mistress: marry, garlic,
To mend her kissing with!
Mopsa. Now, in good time!
Clown. Not a word, a word; we stand upon our manners.
Come, strike up!"

In an old treatise, entitled the "Use and Abuse of Dancing and Minstrelsie," we read:—

"But some reply, what fools will daunce,
If that when daunce is doon,
He may not have at ladyes lips,
That which in daunce he doon."

The practice of saluting ladies with a kiss was once very general, and in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," to kiss the hostess is indirectly spoken of as a common courtesy of the day.

In "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 5), a further instance occurs, where Romeo kisses Juliet at Capulet's entertainment; and in "Henry VIII." (i. 4), Lord Sands is represented as kissing Anne Bullen, next whom he sits at supper.

The celebrated "kissing comfits" were sugar plums, once extensively used by fashionable persons to make the breath sweet. Falstaff, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (v. 5), when embracing Mrs Ford, says: - "Let it thunder to the tune of Green Sleeves, hail kissing comfits, and snow erringoes."

In "Measure for Measure" (iv. i., song) kisses are referred to as "seals of love." A Judas kiss was a kiss of treachery. Thus in "3 Henry VI." (v. 7), Gloucester says:—

"So Judas kiss'd his Master,
And cried 'all hail!' when as he meant all harm."

Lace Songs.—These were jingling rhymes, sung by young girls while engaged at their lace-pillows. A practice alluded to by the Duke in "Twelfth Night" (ii. 4):—

"O fellow, come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones
Do use to chant it."

Miss Baker, in her "Northamptonshire Glossary" (1854, i. 378), says, "the movement of the bobbins is timed by the modulation of the tune, which excites them to regularity and cheerfulness; and it is a pleasing sight to see them in warm sunny weather, seated outside their cottage doors, or seeking the shade of a neighbouring tree; where, in cheerful groups, they unite in singing their rude and simple rhymes. The following is a specimen of one of these ditties, most descriptive of the occupation:—

"Nineteen long lines, bring over my down,
The faster I work it, I'll shorten my score,
But if I do play, it 'll stick to a stay,
So high ho! little fingers, and twank it away."

Letters.—The word Emmanuel was formerly prefixed, probably from feelings of piety, to letters and public deeds. So in "2 Henry VI." (iv. 2), there is the following allusion to it:—

"*Cade.* What is thy name?
Clerk. Emmanuel.
Dick. They use to write it on the top of letters."

Staunton says: "We can refer to one MS. alone, in the British Museum (Ad. MSS. 19, 400), which contain no less than fourteen private epistles headed 'Emanewell,' or 'Jesus Immanuel.'"

Another superscription of a letter in years gone by was "to the bosom" of a lady. Thus Hamlet says to Ophelia (ii. 2):—

"In her excellent white bosom, these."

And in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (iii. 2), Proteus says:—

"Thy letters may be here, though thou art hence;
Which, being writ to me, shall be deliver'd
Even in the milk white bosom of thy love."

This custom seems to have originated in the circumstance of women having a pocket in the forepart of their stays, in which, according to Steevens, “they carried not only love-letters and love-tokens, but even their money and materials for needlework.”

Livery.—The phrase, “sue my livery,” which occurs in the following speech of Bolingbroke (“King Richard II.” ii. 3):—

“I am denied to sue my livery here,
And yet my letters-patents give me leave;
My father’s goods are all distrain’d and sold,
And these and all are all amiss employ’d.”

is thus explained by Malone: - “On the death of every person who held by knight’s service, the escheator of the court in which he died summoned a jury, who enquired what estate he died seized of, and of what age his next heir was. If he was under age, he became a ward of the king’s; but if he was found to be of full age, he then had a right to sue out a writ of *ouster le main*, that is, his livery, that the king’s hand might be taken off, and the land delivered to him.” York (ii. 1), also says:—

“If you do wrongfully seize Hereford’s right,
Call in the letters patent that he hath,
By his attorneys-general to sue
His livery.”

Love-Day.—This denoted a day of amity or reconciliation; an expression which is used by Saturnius in “Titus Andronicus” (i. 1):—

“You are my guest, Lavinia, and your friends,
This day shall be a love-day, Tamora.”

Military Lore—Fleshment.—This is a military term;—a young soldier being said to *flesh* his sword the first time he draws blood with it. In “King Lear” (ii. 2), Oswald relates how Kent:—

”In the fleshment of this dread exploit,
Drew on me here again,”

upon which passage, Singer (ix. 377) has this note: - “Fleshment, therefore, is here metaphorically applied to the first act, which Kent, in his new capacity, had performed for his master; and at the same time, in a sarcastic sense, although he had esteemed it an heroic exploit to trip a man behind, who was actually falling.” The phrase occurs again in “1 Henry IV.” (v. 4), where Prince Henry tells his brother:—

“Come, brother John, full bravely hast thou flesh’d
Thy maiden sword.”

Swearing by the Sword.—According to Nares,⁹⁸⁴ “the singular mixture of religious and military fanaticism which arose from the Crusades, gave rise to the custom of taking a solemn oath upon a sword. In a plain unenriched sword, the separation between the blade and the hilt was usually a straight transverse bar, which, suggesting the idea of a cross, added to the devotion which every true knight felt for his favourite weapon, and evidently led to this practice.” Hamlet makes Horatio swear that he will never divulge having seen the ghost (i. 5):—

⁹⁸⁴ “Glossary,” ii. p. 858; see Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 431.

“Never to speak of this that you have seen,
Swear by my sword.”

In the “Winter’s Tale” (ii. 3), Leonato says:—

”Swear by this sword
Thou wilt perform my bidding.”

The cross of the sword is also mentioned to illustrate the true bearing of the oath. Hence, in 1 Henry IV.” (ii. 4), Falstaff says jestingly of Glendower, that he “swore the devil his true liegeman upon the cross of a Welsh hook.”⁹⁸⁵

On account of the practice of swearing by a sword, or rather by the cross or upper end of it, the name of *Jesus* was sometimes inscribed on the handle or some other part.

Mining Terms.—According to Mr Collier, the phrase “true-penny” is a mining term current in the north of England, signifying a particular indication in the soil, of the direction in which ore is to be found. Thus, Hamlet says (i. 5):—

“Ah, ha, boy! say’st thou so? art thou there, truepenny?”

when making Horatio and Marcellus again swear that they will not divulge having seen the ghost.

Patrons.—The custom of clergymen praying for their patrons, in what is called the bidding prayer, seems alluded to by Kent in “King Lear” (i. 1):—

“Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour’d as my king,
Loved as my father, as my master follow’d,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers.”

Sagittary.—This was a monster, half man, half beast, described as a terrible archer; neighing like a horse, and with its eyes of fire striking men dead like lightning. In “Troilus and Cressida” (v. 5), Agamemnon says:—

“The dreadful sagittary
Appals our numbers.”

Hence any deadly shot was called a sagittary. In “Othello” (i. 1) the barrack is so named from the figure of an archer over the door.

Salad Days.—Days of green youth and inexperience. Cleopatra says (I. v):—

”My salad days,
When I was green in judgement: cold in blood.”

Salt.—The salt of youth is that vigour and strong passion which then predominates. The term is several times used by Shakespeare for strong amorous passion. Iago, in “Othello” (iii. 3), refers to it as “hot as monkeys, as salt as wolves in pride.” In “Measure for Measure” (v. 1), the Duke calls Angelo’s base passion, his “salt imagination,” because he supposed his victim to be Isabella, and not his betrothed wife, whom he was forced by the Duke to marry.⁹⁸⁶

Salutations.—God-den was used by our forefathers as soon as noon was past, after which time “good morrow” or “good-day” was esteemed improper; the phrase “God ye good den,”

⁹⁸⁵ A Welsh hook was a sort of bill, hooked at the end, and with a long handle. See Dyce’s “Glossary,” p. 497; and Singer’s “Shakespeare,” ix. p. 168.

⁹⁸⁶ Brewer’s “Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,” p. 782.

being a contraction of “God give you a good evening.” This fully appears from the following passage in “Romeo and Juliet” (ii. 4):—

“*Nurse*. God ye good morrow, gentlemen.
Mercutio. God ye good den, fair gentlewoman.”

Upon being thus corrected, the Nurse asks, “Is it good den?” to which Mercutio replies, “‘Tis no less, I tell you, for the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon.”

A further corruption of the same phrase was “God-dig you den,” as used by Costard in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (iv. 1): - “God-dig-you-den all!” Shakespeare uses it several times, as in “Titus Andronicus” (iv. 4), where the Clown says: - “God and Saint Stephen give you good den;” and in “King John” (i. 1), the King says: “Good-den, Sir Richard!”

Another old popular salutation was “good even and twenty” (“Merry Wives of Windsor,” ii. I), equivalent to “twenty good evenings.” Mr Halliwell-Phillipps quotes a similar phrase from Elliot’s “Fruits of the French” (1593), “God night, and a thousand to everybody.”

We may also compare the phrase “good-deed” in “Winter’s Tale” (i. 2.); a species of asseveration, as “in very deed.”

Servants’ Customs.—The old custom of the servants of great families taking an oath of fidelity on their entrance into office—as is still the case with those of the sovereign—is alluded to by Posthumus in “Cymbeline” (ii. 4), where, speaking of Imogen’s servants, he says:—

”Her attendants are
 All sworn and honourable.”⁹⁸⁷

Gold chains were formerly worn by persons of rank and dignity, and by rich merchants—a fashion which descended to upper servants in great houses, and by stewards as badges of office. These chains were usually cleaned by being rubbed with crumbs. Hence, in “Twelfth Night” (ii. 3), Sir Toby says to the Clown:—

“Go, sir, rub your chain with crumbs.”

In days gone by, too, it was customary for the servants of the nobility, particularly the gentleman-usher, to attend bare-headed. In the procession to the trial in “Henry VIII.” (ii. 4), one of the persons enumerated is a gentleman—usher “bare-headed.” On grand occasions, coachmen, also, drove bare-headed, a practice alluded to in Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Woman Hater” (iii. 2):—

“Or a pleated lock, or a bareheaded coachman,
 This sits like a sign where great ladies are
 To be sold within.”

Sheriff’s Post.—At the doors of sheriffs were usually set up ornamental posts, on which royal and civic proclamations were fixed. So, in “Twelfth Night” (i. 5), Malvolia says - “He’ll stand at your door like a sheriff’s post.” “A pair of mayor’s posts,” says Staunton, “are still standing in Norwich, which from the initials T. P., and the date 159—, are conjectured to have belonged to Thomas Pettys, who was mayor of that city in 1592.”

Shoeing-Horn.—This, from its convenient use in drawing on a tight shoe, was applied in a jocular metaphor to other subservient and tractable assistants. Thus Thersites, in “Troilus and

⁹⁸⁷ See Percy’s “Northumberland Household Book,” p. 49.

Cressida" (v. 1), in his railing mood gives this name to Menelaus, whom he calls "a thrifty shoeing-horn in a chain, hanging at his brother's (Agamemnon) leg."

It was also employed as a contemptuous name for dangles on young women.

In the same way "shoe-tye" became a characteristic name for a traveller, a term used by Shakespeare in "Measure for Measure" (iv. 3), "Master Forthlight the tilter, and brave Master Shooty, the great traveller."

A Solemn Supper.—In Shakespeare's day this was a phrase for a feast or banquet given on any important occasion, such as a birth, marriage, &c. Macbeth says (iii. 1)—

"To-night we hold a solemn supper, sir,
And I'll request your presence."

Howel, in a letter to Sir T. Hawke, 1636, says - "I was invited yesternight to a *solemne supper* by B. J. [Ben Jonson], where you were deeply remembered."

So in "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 5), Tybalt says—

"What dares the slave
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,
To flear and scorn at our solemnity?"

And in "All's Well That Ends Well" (ii. 3), the King, on the conclusion of the contract between Helena and Bertram, says

"The solemn feast
Shall more attend upon the coming space,
Expecting absent friends."

Statute Caps.—These were woollen caps enforced by Statute 13 Elizabeth, which, says Strype, in his "Annals" (ii. 74), was "for continuance of making and wearing woollen caps in behalf of the trade of cappers; providing that all above the age of six years (excepting the nobility and some others) should on Sabbath-days and holy-days wear caps of wool, knit thicked, and drest in England, upon penalty of ten groats." Thus, in "Love's Labour's Lost" (v. 2), Rosalind says—

"Well, better wits have worn plain statute-caps."

Johnson considered that the statute caps alluded to were those worn by the members of the universities.

Theatrical Lore.—At the conclusion of a play, or of the epilogue, it was formerly customary for the actors to kneel down on the stage, and pray for the sovereign, nobility, clergy, and sometimes for the commons. So in the epilogue to "2 Henry IV." the dancer says - "My tongue is weary; when my legs are too, I will bid you good night; and so kneel down before you; but, indeed, to pray for the queen." Collier, in his "History of English Dramatic Poetry" (iii. 445), tells us that this practice continued in the commencement of the 17th century.

Tournaments.—In "Coriolanus" (ii. 1) Shakespeare attributes some of the customs of his own times to a people who were wholly unacquainted with them. In the following passage we have an exact description of what occurred at tiltings and tournaments when a combatant had distinguished himself:—

"Matrons flung gloves,
Ladies and maids their scarfs and handkerchers,
Upon him as he pass'd: the nobles bended,

As to Jove's statue; and the commons made
A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts:
I never saw the like."⁹⁸⁸

An allusion to the mock tournaments, in which the combatants were armed with rushes in place of spears, is used by Othello (v. 2)—

"Man but a rush against Othello's breast."

Trumpet.—In olden times it was the fashion for persons of distinction, when visiting, to be accompanied by a trumpeter, who announced their approach by a flourish of his trumpet. It is to this custom, Staunton ⁹⁸⁹thinks, that Lorenzo refers in the "Merchant of Venice" (v. 1), where he tells Portia—

"Your husband is at hand; I hear his trumpet."

War-Cry. - "*God, and Saint George!*"—the common cry of the English soldier when he charged the enemy - "King Richard III." (v. 3). The author of the "Old Arte of Warre," printed in the latter end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, formally enjoins the use of this cry among his military laws (p. 84): - "Item.—That all souldiers entring into battaile, assaulte, skirmishe, or other faction of armes, shall have for their common cry-word, 'Saint George, forward, or upon them, Saint George!' whereby the souldier is much comforted to minde the ancient valour of England, which with that name has been so often victorious; and therefore he who upon any sinister zeale shall maliciously omit so fortunate a name, shall be severely punished for his obstinate, erroneous heart and perverse mind."

"*Havoc!*"—To cry "havoc" appears to have been a signal for indiscriminate slaughter. The expression occurs in "King John" (ii. 1)—

"Cry havoc, kings!"

In "Coriolanus" Menenius says (iii. i)—

"Do not cry havoc, when you should but hunt
With modest warrant."

And in "Julius Cæsar" (iii. 1)—

"Cry 'havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war."

"*Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!*"—This was the ancient cry of the English troops when they charged the enemy. It occurs where the conspirators kill Coriolanus (v. 6).

Leet-Ale.—This was the dinner provided for the jury and customary tenants at the court-leet of a manor, or "view of frank pledge," formerly held once or twice a year, before the steward of the leet. To this court Shakespeare alludes in the "Taming of the Shrew" (i. 2), where the servant tells Sly that in his dream he would "rail upon the hostess of the house," and threaten to

"Present her at the leet."

Aubrey, in his MS. history of Wiltshire, 1678, tells us, too, how "in the Easter holidays was the Clerk's ale for his private benefit, and the solace of the neighbourhood."

THE END

⁹⁸⁸ See Singer's "Shakespeare," vii. p. 350.

⁹⁸⁹ "Shakespeare" 1864, i. p. 61.

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