# DYER THOMAS THISELTON

## FOLK-LORE OF SHAKESPEARE

Thomas Dyer

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*Folk-lore of Shakespeare:*

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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.*

# CHAPTER I
# 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 realization of the fairy kingdom. Mr. Dowden, in his "Shakspere 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 Shakspere. 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 uncomely; their lives are gay with fine frolic and delicate revelry." Puck, the jester of fairyland, stands apart from the rest, the recognizable "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," etc.,

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-Phillipps[1] 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

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

his own exuberant fancy." Referring to the fairy mythology in the "Midsummer-Night's Dream," it is described by Mr. Keightley[2] 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 forests wild." Like earthly monarchs, he has his jester, "that shrewd and knavish sprite called Robin Goodfellow."

Of the fairy characters treated 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. 1):

> "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;

[2] "Fairy Mythology," p. 325.

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," etc.

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 Otuit 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 tenth canto of the same book (stanza 75) he is the allegorical representative of Henry VIII. The wise Elficleos 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. Ritson[4] 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]

In "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 4) she is known by the more familiar appellation, Queen Mab. "I dream'd a dream to-night," 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[7] thinks that the origin of

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[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 Shakspeare," p. 23.

[5] "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 325.

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

[7] "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," pp. 100-107.

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.

Among 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 as "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 characterized by a satyr.

> "This is Mab, the mistress fairy,
> That doth nightly rob the dairy,
> And can help or hurt the cherning
> As she please, without discerning," etc.

Like Puck, Shakespeare has invested Queen Mab with mischievous properties, which "identify her with the night 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:

> “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 sometime 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 not you 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 Plowman:”

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

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. Keightley[9] 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

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[8] See Croker's "Fairy Legends of South of Ireland," 1862, p. 135.

[9] "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 316.

[10] Wirt Sikes's "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. 173.

[12] "Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of the Midsummer-Night's Dream," printed for the Shakespeare Society, p. viii.

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; 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 forever 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," etc.,

"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

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[13] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. pp. 508-512.

[14] Thoms's "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," p. 88.

with us hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows, that would, in superstitious times, grinde corne 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." Grimm[17] mentions a spirit, named the "Good Lubber," to whom the bones of animals used to be offered at Manseld, 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:

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[15] See Nares's Glossary, vol. 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.

> “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 Lyly (1600), we find fairies, elves, and urchins separately accommodated with dances for their use. The following is the *urchin’s* dance:

> “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 "The 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, as of Celtic origin, with which view Mr. Thoms[19] 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 *ulf* with *alp*, and with our English *elf*, from a Swedish song published by Asdwiddson, 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 *ulf*. "Fairies and elvs," says Tollet,

[19] "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," pp. 79-82.

"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 were a fairy."[20]

And he then adds:

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

> “By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not,
> An earthly paragon! behold divineness
> 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 Scott,[21] 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 splendor which the proudest kings of the earth dared not aspire to, and the hall of their dancers echoed to the most exquisite music.”

Mr. Douce[22] 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 Bretaigne, et savoient la force et la vertu des paroles, des pierres, et des herbes, parquoy elles estoient tenues et jeunesse et en beaulte, et en grandes

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

[22] “Illustrations of Shakespeare,” p. 115.

richesses comme elles devisoient."

"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 moonshine, 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 e’er we grow.
> 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

[23] “Elizabethan Demonology,” p. 50.

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;
> Sometimes 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 shown 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 stone
> On the fore-finger of an alderman."[24]

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[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

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. 3) 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,
> 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

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Nothing” (iii. 1) Hero speaks of a man as being “low, an agate very vilely cut.”

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, ouphes, 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

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[25] See Grimm's "Deutsche Mythologie."

Denmark,[26] for in the ballad of "Eline of Villenskov" we read:

"Out then spake the smallest Trold;
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 haunt 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):[28]

"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 some time of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;
And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in."

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

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

[28] See also Thorpe's "Northern Mythology," 1852, vol. iii. p. 32, etc.

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 favorite abode was in the interior of conical green hills, on the slopes of which they danced by moonlight. 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, while 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 pastures[30]– little circles of a brighter green, within which it was supposed the fairies dance by night – are now known to result from the out-spreading 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 fairies.[31] In "The Tempest" (v. 1) Prospero invokes the fairies as the "demy-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:

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[29] Gunyon's "Illustrations of Scottish History, Life, and Superstitions," p. 299.

[30] Chambers's "Book of Days," vol. i. p. 671.

[31] Among 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," vol. i. p. 218; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. pp. 480-483; and also the "Phytologist," 1862, pp. 236-238.

> "I do wander everywhere,
> Swifter than the moon's sphere;
> And I serve the fairy queen,
> To dew her orbs upon the green."

Again, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (v. 5), Anne Page 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.

Among 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. In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 4) they are spoken of as —

"Urchins, ouphes, and fairies, green and white."

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[32] Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 112.

And further on (v. 4):

> "Fairies, black, grey, green, and white."

The fairies of the moors were often clad in heath-brown or lichen-dyed garments, whence the epithet of "Elfin-grey."[33]

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:

> "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,

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[33] Ritson's "Fairy Mythology," 1878, pp. 26, 27.

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"[34] tells 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 Lyly, 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," etc.

As Mr. Thoms says, in his "Three Notelets on Shakespeare" (1865, pp. 40, 41), "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

[34] Quoted by Brand, "Pop. Antiq.," vol. ii. p. 481.

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.[35] Thus, in "A Midsummer-Night's Dream" (v. 1), 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:

> "Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery;"

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[35] Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. p. 483.

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:

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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 cloth 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!"

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[36] Halliwell-Phillipps's "Illustrations of Fairy Mythology," p. 167; see Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," pp. 122, 123.

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 sweet peace;

And the owner of it blest,
Ever shall in safety rest" —

the object of their blessing being to bring peace upon the house of Theseus. Mr. Douce[37] 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:

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[37] "Illustrations of Shakespeare," pp. 126, 127.

“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 “Fairy Queen” (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 in “A Midsummer-Night’s Dream” he answers Oberon, 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 wand’ring 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," etc.

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 favorites; and in "A Winter's Tale" (iii. 3) the shepherd says: "It was told me I should be rich by the fairies;"[38] and in "Cymbeline" (v. 4), Posthumus, on waking and finding the mysterious paper, exclaims:

> "What fairies haunt this ground? A book? O rare one!
> Be not, as is our fangled world, a garment
> Nobler than that it covers," etc.

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,"

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[38] See Croker's "Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland," p. 316.

1632 (iv. 1),[39] where Romont says:

> "But not a word o' it; 'tis fairies' treasure,
> Which, but reveal'd, brings on the blabber's ruin."

Among the many other good qualities belonging to the fairy tribe, we are told that they were humanely attentive to the youthful dead.[40] Thus 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

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[39] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," vol. ii. p. 493.

[40] Ritson's "Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare," 1875, p. 29.

[41] Some copies read *them*.

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, it must have been, says Mr. Ritson,[42] the *incubus* she was so afraid of.

> "From fairies and the tempters of the night,
> Guard me, beseech ye,"[43]

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

> "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-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,

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[42] "Fairy Mythology," pp. 27, 28.

[43] We may compare Banquo's words in "Macbeth" (ii. 1):"Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature Gives way to in repose."

[44] "Comedy of Errors" (iv. 2) some critics read:"A fiend, a fairy, pitiless and rough."

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,

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Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?"

We have already mentioned how Queen Mab had the same mischievous humor 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-Phillipps, "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."

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[45] This superstition is fully described in chapter on *Birth*.

# CHAPTER II
# 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[46] points 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

[46] "Superstitions of Witchcraft," 1865, p. 220.

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[47] is 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,[48] too, regards the conception of Joan of Arc given in "1 Henry VI." as "the darkest blot upon the poet's genius," but it must be remembered that we have only 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,

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47 "Shakspere Primer," 1877, p. 63.

48 "Rationalism in Europe," 1870, vol. i. p. 106.

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."

But she adds:

> "See, they forsake me! Now the time is come
> That France must vail 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 burned. Her death, however, Sir Walter Scott[49] says, "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 stigmatize her memory

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[49] "Demonology and Witchcraft," 1881, pp. 192, 193.

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 immortalized 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.[51] One of the characters in Dekker and Webster's "Westward Ho"[52] says, "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,

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[50] "Shakespeare," 1864, vol 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.

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 materializing 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."[54] Thus, a writer in the *Academy* (Feb. 8, 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 Norns. "The third," it is said, "is the special prophetess, while 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

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[54] Spalding's "Elizabethan Demonology," 1880, p. 86.

the time: 'When the battle's lost and won.' The third the future prophesies: 'That will be ere the set of sun.' The first again asks, 'Where?' The second decides: 'Upon the heath.' The third the future prophesies: '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 "Discovery 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, p. 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 recognized 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 her muffler."

It seems probable, then, that witches are alluded to by Shakespeare in "Macbeth," the contemporary literature on the subject fully supporting this theory. Again, by his 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

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[55] "Notes to Macbeth" (Clark and Wright), 1877, p. 137.

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 mistress of witches, "Our dame Hecate." While speaking of the witches in "Macbeth," it may be pointed out that[57] "the full meaning of the first 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 fourth 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[58] describes 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," etc. It was supposed

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

[57] "Elizabethan Demonology," pp. 102, 103. See Conway's "Demonology and Devil-lore," vol. ii. p. 253.

[58] "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 8.

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 were-wolf, 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. 1), "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

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[59] Graymalkin – a gray cat.

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 Maid of Orleans:

> "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 neighbors 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 curtail-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,

[60] Henderson's "Folk-Lore of Northern Counties," p. 181.

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. 1):

"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 germins 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 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-toss'd."

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 among 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),

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[61] Olaus Magnus's "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.

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 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," burned 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:

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[63] In Greek, ἐπι ῥιπους πλειν, "to go to sea in a sieve," was a proverbial expression for an enterprise of extreme hazard or impossible of achievement. – Clark and Wright's "Notes to Macbeth," 1877, p. 82.

> "Thus time we waste, and longest leagues make short;
> Sail seas in cockles, have, and 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 antic 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, fifth scene, 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[64] says: "The devil teacheth them to make

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[64] "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, book iii. chap. i. p. 40; see Spalding's "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 103.

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 caldron 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, wolf bane, 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] etc. These witch recipes, which are very numerous, are well illustrated in Shakespeare's grim caldron 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:

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[65] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," vol. 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, thus 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 be 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 sev'n-nights, 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 them 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 vigor 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:

> "Look 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

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[67] See Henderson's "Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties," 1879, p. 181.

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, etc., arraigned at Chelmisforde, 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 neighbors, 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 neighbors’ 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 this being the witches’ way of saying four times.

> “Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined,”

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[68] See *Pig*, chap. vi.

[69] “Notes to Macbeth,” by Clark 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 sumtis flumine crinem
> Irroravit aquis; ternis ululatibus ora
> Solvit."

Vergil, 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]

Among 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."

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[70] See Jones's "Credulities, Past and Present," 1880, pp. 256-289.

Familiar spirits[71] 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:

> "*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 handsomely, 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. stanza 32):

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

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[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.

[73] Sec Dyce's "Glossary," pp. 18, 19.

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

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.[74]

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[74] "Notes to Macbeth" (Clark and Wright), pp. 81, 82.

# CHAPTER III
# 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," says (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 Bernardo were on their watch (i. 2),

"A figure like your father,
Arm'd at point, exactly, cap-a-pe,
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slow 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 conjurer. 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?"

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,

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

> Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purg'd 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 "Fairy Queen" (book i. canto 2):

> "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," etc.[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."

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[76] Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," pp. 450, 451.

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 disturbed with prodigies on earth."

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[77] of 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 —

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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

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[77] Vast, *i. e.*, space of night. So in "Hamlet" (i. 2):"In the dead waste and middle of the night."

of day; their signal being the cock-crow.[78] 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:

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[78] See p. 104.

> “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 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, gray, 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 gray;
> Mingle, mingle, mingle,
> You that mingle may.”

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 forbode misfortune of some kind.

This popular piece of folk-lore exists in the north of England under a variety of forms among our peasantry, who tenaciously cling to the traditions which have been handed down to them.[79] 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,[80] "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

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[79] See Hardwick's "Traditions, Superstitions, and Folk-lore," 1872, pp. 153-176.

[80] "Shakespeare and His Times," vol. i. p. 378.

Than pard or cat o’ mountain.

*Ariel.* Hark, 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,
> 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."[81]

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 among civilized nations, yet it still retains an important place in the religious beliefs of savage and uncivilized communities.

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[81] "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 49.

# CHAPTER IV
# 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. Among 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 moe 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 are 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 tupping 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 as 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 Blanch 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.

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[81] "Elizabethan Demonology," p. 49.

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 whelk'd and wav'd like the enridged 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 examinate'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 favorite 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 Marcus, being rebuked by Titus for having killed

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

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 Loudun, 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,
> Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
> Be thy intents wicked, or charitable,
> Thou com'st 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 other 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. E.* There is my hand, and let it feel your ear.
*Pinch.* I charge thee, Satan, hous'd 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 says (v. 2):

"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."

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[83] "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. pp. 517-519.

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, etc.[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 reference 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."

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[84] Ibid. vol. 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, vol. ii. p. 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 Arioch, 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 steeples, 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, etc., were guarded by evil spirits. Thus Falstaff, in "2 Henry IV." (iv. 3), speaks of learning as "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 neighboring 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,”

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

because it announced the hour of their freedom.

Among 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 prayer."

Of the devils mentioned by Shakespeare may be noted 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 Amaimon 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[87] informs us, "is a great president, and appeareth in the forme of a mightie lion; but at the

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[86] See Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, p. 393; Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 264.

[87] Ibid. p. 378.

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).

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

*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 dumbness" (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. 1) 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 yet, for good manners' 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 spelled 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 – while enlivening his audience – to convince them of the utter absurdity of this degraded form of superstition.

# CHAPTER V
# 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 uprise" ("Titus Andronicus," iii. 1), etc. Then, again, how often we come across passages replete with pathos, such as "thy 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), etc. 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

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[88] Singer's "Shakespeare," vol. x. p. 292.

motion of a solid sphere, in which it was fixed. In "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 13), Cleopatra exclaims:

> "O sun,
> Burn the great sphere thou mov'st 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. Douce[89] considered the allusion was to "The Voyage of the Wandering Knight," by Jean de Cathenay, of which the translation, by W. Goodyeare, 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:"

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

"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."

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."

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[90] Singer's "Shakespeare," vol. viii. p. 208.

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." Vergil, too, in his first Georgic (441-449), considers it a sign of stormy weather:[93]

> "Ille ubi nascentem maculis variaverit ortum

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[91] See Knight's "Life of Shakespeare," 1843, p. 63.

[92] "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 241.

[93] See Swainson's "Weather-Lore," 1873, p. 176, for popular adages on the Continent.

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, aut ubi pallida surget,
Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile,
Heu, male tum mitis 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 to-day, for the sky is red and lowring." Shakespeare, in his "Venus and Adonis," thus describes it:

"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[94] shows that this notion is common on the

[94] "Weather-Lore," pp. 175, 176.

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:

> "Thy 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

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[95] Napier's "Folk-Lore of West of Scotland," 1879, p. 141.

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[96] says 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,

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[96] Quoted in Southey's "Commonplace Book," 1849, 2d series, p. 462.

and that the eclipse would shake the foundations of nature."[97]

In "3 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:

> "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 "Mémoires de l'Académie Celtique" (iii. 447), it is stated that "Le jour de la fête de la Trinité, 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

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[97] See Tylor's "Primitive Culture," 1871, vol. i. pp. 261, 296, 297, 321.

[98] In "3 Henry VI." (ii. 1), Edward says:"henceforward will I bearUpon my target three fair shining suns."

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,
> Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st
> 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;

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[99] "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 283.

> 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 word "sunburned" in the sense of uncomely, ill-favored. In "Much Ado" (ii. 1), Beatrice says, "I am sunburnt;" and in "Troilus and Cressida" (i. 3), Æneas remarks:

> "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,[101] with 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.

[100] Ray gives the Latin equivalent "Ab equis ad asinos."

[101] Baring-Gould's "Curious Myths of the Middle Ages," 1877, p. 190.

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 dropped 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;[102] this thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog."

Ordinarily,[103] however, 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 forever in the moon, with

[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.

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[104] says 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 honored by various acts of adoration. In Europe,[106] in 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 this form of superstition. To quote one or two out of many instances, Enobarbus, in "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 9), says:

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[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, vol. i. pp. 288, 354-356; vol. ii. pp. 70, 202, 203.

"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:

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[107] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," vol. iii. pp. 142, 143.

[108] See "English Folk-lore," pp. 43, 44.

"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 "The Merchant of Venice" (v. 1), where Gratiano exclaims:

"By yonder moon I swear you do me wrong."

We may note here that the inconstancy[109] 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 Romans[111] 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.

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[109] "Primitive Culture," 1873, vol. 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.

Juvenal alludes to this practice in his sixth Satire (441), 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 civilization, regarded as "the very embodiment of miraculous disaster." Thus, the Chinese believed that during eclipses of the sun and moon 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 mettle; you would lift the moon out

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[112] Tylor's "Primitive Culture," vol. i. p. 329.

of her sphere." Douce[113] 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 inchantment."[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" (bk. xii. 263), says:

> "Mater erat Mycale; quam deduxisse canendo
> Sæpe reluctanti constabat cornua lunæ."

Horace, in his fifth Epode (45), tells us:

> "Quæ sidera excantata voce Thessala,
> Lunamque cælo 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 caldron, says:

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[113] "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 16.

[114] See Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584, pp. 174, 226, 227, 250.

[115] For further examples, see Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," p. 17.

> “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. 597), 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:

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

Its sanguine color 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,
> And 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" (2d series, 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."[116] In Lydgate's prologue to his "Story of Thebes" there are two lines not unlike those in "A 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.[117] In "1 Henry IV." (i. 2) Falstaff alludes to the sea being governed "by our

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[116] See Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 116.

[117] See Swainson's "Weather-Lore," 1873, pp. 182-192.

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,
> That they with the planet may rest and arise,

And flourish, with bearing most plentifull 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 "Discovery 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

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[118] See Tylor's "Primitive Culture," 1873, vol. i. p. 130; "English Folk-Lore," 1878, pp. 41, 42.

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 hornes 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 phenomenon.[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

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[119] See Swainson's "Weather-Lore," pp. 182, 183.

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 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 Douce[121] 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

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[120] See Williams's "Superstitions of Witchcraft," pp. 123-125; Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," bk. iv. p. 145.

[121] "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 405.

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

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[122] Nares's "Glossary," 1872, vol. ii. p. 580.

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:

> "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 proceeding."

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-viced 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 lisping 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 honor of Charlemagne; or, according to some, it is a corruption of chorles or churl's, *i. e.*, rustic's, wain. Chorl 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 siren sits on each planet, who carols a most sweet song, agreeing to the motion of her own particular planet, but harmonizing with the other seven. Hence Milton, in his "Arcades," speaks of the "celestial Sirens' harmony, that sit 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 Shakespeare," 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

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[123] "Primitive Culture," vol. i. p. 131.

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 realized 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

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[124] Cf. "Richard III." (iv. 4); "1 Henry IV." (i. 1, iii. 1); "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," vol. i. p. 131; see Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1849, vol. iii. pp. 341-348.

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 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 banish'd by thy breath!"

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

Heroes were in ancient times immortalized 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."

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[127] Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 397.

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. Douce[128] 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 Goddes," 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 foreshippe." He adds that if the first light appears in the stem or foreship and ascends upwards, it is a sign of good luck; if "either lights begin at the topmast, bowsprit," or foreship, and descends towards the sea, it is a sign of a 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,

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[128] Ibid. p. 3.

[129] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 400.

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 aboord 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, p. 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)

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[130] Purchas, "His Pilgrimes" (1625, pt. i. lib. iii. p. 133), quoted by Mr. Aldis Wright in his "Notes to The Tempest," 1875, p. 86.

[131] See Puck as Will-o'-the-Wisp; chapter on "Fairy-Lore."

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 præcipitia." 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 taill."[133] White, however, in his "Peripateticall Institutions" (p. 156), calls the fiery-dragon or fire-drake, "a weaker kind of lightning. Its livid colors, 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. Hunter[134] notices one in "King Lear" (iii. 4), where Gloster's

[132] See "Notes and Queries," 5th series, vol. x. p. 499; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 410; Nares's "Glossary," vol. 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" (1607):"But, 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.

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 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 of “How Robin Goodfellow lead a company of fellows out of their way:” “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.’”

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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 "A 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-

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[135] See Thoms's "Notelets on Shakespeare," p. 59.

[136] "Fairy Mythology," edited by Hazlitt, 1875, 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," etc. A correspondent of "Notes and Queries" (5th series, vol. x. p. 499) says: "The wandering meteor of the moss or fell appears to have been personified as Jack, Gill,

the-candlestick.'" Milton, in "Paradise Lost" (book 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]

This appearance has given rise to a most extensive folk-lore, 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 neighborhood of

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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-lanthorn," and "Hobany's" or "Hobnedy's Lanthorn."

[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."

[139] Thorpe, "Northern Mythology," 1852, vol. iii. pp. 85, 158, 220.

Magdeburg, they are known as "Lüchtemannekens;" and to cause them to appear, it is sufficient to call out "Ninove, Ninove." In the South Altmark they are termed "Dickepôten;" 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 "Huckepôten," and "Tuckbolde." The Jack-o'-lanterns of Denmark[140] 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

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

[141] Ibid.

"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 Vergil, 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:

> "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" (iii. 2), too, 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.”[142]

*Dew.* Among 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. 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 harbor:

> “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!”

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

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.”

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” (1586-89):

> “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.”[144] In “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):

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[143] See Patterson’s “Insects Mentioned by Shakespeare,” 1841, p. 145.

[144] “Letters,” vol. i. p. 310; vol. vi. pp. 1, 187. – Ed. Cunningham.

> "*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.

A superstitious notion prevailed among the ancients that those who were stricken with lightning were honored 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]

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

The bodies of such were supposed not to putrefy; 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. l. 27) says:

> "Triste jaces lucis evitandumque bidental."

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

Among the many other items of folk-lore associated with thunder is a curious one referred to in "Pericles" (iv. 3): "Thunder shall not so awake the bed 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 winds 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 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,
Shakes the old beldam earth, and topples down
Steeples, and moss-grown towers.”

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[146] See Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” vol. i. pp. 364-367.

*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 reflection 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[147] has 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 every-day 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):

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[147] See Swainson's "Weather-Lore."

> “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 vapors, 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,[148] too, 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:

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[148] Batman upon Bartholomæus – “De Proprietatibus Rerum,” lib. xi. c. 3.

> "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 vapors 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 those sudden and impetuous gusts of wind which were called 'flaws.'" Thus he comments on the following passage in "2 Henry IV." (iv. 4):

> "As humorous 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 vapor, 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:

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[149] Polwhele's "Cornish Vocabulary."

[150] Cf. "Macbeth," iii. 4, "O, these flaws and starts."

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

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.

# CHAPTER VI
# 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. While 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 Shakespeare, to the folk-lore of bygone days, while 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 (*Lepas anatifera*), a shell-fish, growing on a flexible stem, and adhering to loose timber, bottoms of ships, etc., a metamorphosis to which Shakespeare alludes in "The Tempest" (iv. 1), 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 sometime 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, l. 1190). As early

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[151] See Harland and Wilkinson's "Lancashire Folk-Lore," 1867, pp. 116-121; "Notes and Queries," 1st series, vol. viii. p. 224; "Penny Cyclopædia," vol. vii. p. 206, article "Cirripeda."

[152] Nares's "Glossary," 1872, vol. i. p. 56.

as the 12th century this idea[153] was promulgated by Giraldus Cambrensis in his "Topographia Hiberniæ." Gerarde, who in the year 1597 published his "Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes," 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 color, 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 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 color: 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,

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[153] See Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," 1871, pp. 246-257.

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:

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[154] "Ornithology of Shakespeare," 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," 1st series, vol. viii. p. 223; Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1849, vol. iii. pp. 361, 362; Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 14.

> "The Scottish barnacle, if I might choose,
> That of a worme doth waxe a winged goose."

Butler, too, in his "Hudibras" (III. ii. l. 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 favorite is called, in the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" (iii. 1) an ousel (old French, *oisel*), a term still used in the neighborhood of Leeds:

> "The ousel cock, so black of hue,
> With orange-tawny bill."

In "2 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" (l. 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

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[156] See Yarrell's "History of British Birds," 2d edition, vol. 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.

words, and that in the second line "buzzard" means a beetle, from its peculiar buzzing noise:

> "*Pet.* O slow-wing'd turtle! shall a buzzard take thee?
>
> *Kath.* Ay, for a turtle, as he takes a buzzard."

The beetle was formerly called a buzzard; and in Staffordshire, a cockchafer 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 favorite cage-bird with the lower classes.[158] In "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 as equivalent to coxcomb.

*Chough.* In using this word Shakespeare probably, in most cases, meant the jackdaw;[159] for in "A Midsummer-Night's Dream" (iii. 2) he says:

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[157] Miss Baker's "Northamptonshire Glossary," 1854, vol. i. p. 94. See Nares's "Glossary," 1872, vol. i. p. 124; and "Richard III.," i. 1.

[158] Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 144; Halliwell-Phillipps's "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 edition, vol. ii. p. 58.

"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.[160] Such 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. Cotgrave[161] describes 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

[160] Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 156; Singer's "Shakespeare," 1875, vol. 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 pewit. Some consider the magpie is meant. See Halliwell-Phillipps's "Handbook Index to Shakespeare," 1866, p. 83. Professor Newton would read "russet-patted," or "red-legged," thinking that Shakespeare meant the chough.

strutting about with much noise. Nares,[162] too, 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. Gifford[163] affirms 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.[164] In Northamptonshire,[165] we 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."

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 as of much value; for in "All's Well That Ends Well" (iv. 1), he says: "Choughs' language, gabble enough, and good enough." And in "The 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

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[162] "Glossary," vol. i. p. 162; Singer's "Notes to Shakespeare," 1875, vol. v. p. 42.

[163] Massinger's Works, 1813, vol. i. p. 281.

[164] "Handbook Index to Shakespeare," 1866, p. 86.

[165] Miss Baker's "Northamptonshire Glossary," 1854, vol. i. p. 116.

> As this Gonzalo; I myself could make
> A chough of as deep chat."

Shakespeare always refers to the jackdaw as the "daw."[166] The 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 folk-lore, and there is a Norwich rhyme to the following effect:[167]

> "When three daws are seen on St. Peter's vane together,
> Then we're sure to have bad weather."

In the north of England,[168] too, the 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[169] and evil influence is graphically mentioned in "Hamlet" (i. 1), where Marcellus,

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[166] "Coriolanus," iv. 5; "Troilus and Cressida," i. 2; "Much Ado About Nothing," ii. 3; "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.

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 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,

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[170] See Ibid.

> 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 vanished 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 neighbor to be present on the occasion of the flaying. On the death of Mr. N. this man went, in a state

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[171] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. pp. 51-57; Hampson's "Medii Œvi Kalendarium," vol. i. p. 84.

[172] 1st series, vol. iii. p. 404.

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."

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[173] "Medii Œvi Kalendarium," vol. i. p. 85.

And again Hamlet says (v. 2):

> "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 cock-fights. 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 cock-fight 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, nowadays, cock-fighting is, by law, a misdemeanor, 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):

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[174] Roberts's "Social History of Southern Counties of England," 1856, p. 421; see "British Popular Customs," 1876, p. 65.

"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. Singer[176] says the term may be satisfactorily traced from *crant*, *creant*, 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 Cœur 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 times[177] in Heywood's "Edward the Fourth," where one passage is,

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[175] Nares's "Glossary," 1872, vol. i. p. 203.

[176] Singer's "Shakespeare," 1875, vol. ix. p. 256; Halliwell-Phillipps's "Handbook Index to Shakespeare," p. 112.

[177] Dyce's "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 85.

"*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. 1): "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's[178] 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 "Soliman and Perseda" (1599): "By cock and pye and mousefoot." Mr. Harting[179] says 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"[180]– which occurs in "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 5),

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[178] "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 290.

[179] "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 171.

[180] It is also an ale-house sign.

"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 reformations 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[181] refers 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]

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[181] See Dyce's "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 85.

[182] See "Book of Days," 1863, vol. i. p. 157.

[183] In "King Lear" (iv. 6), where Edgar says:"Yond tall anchoring bark,Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoyAlmost too small for sight."the word "cock" is an

*Cormorant.* The proverbial voracity of this bird[184] gave 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."

Allusions to the same superstition occur in "Troilus and

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abbreviation for cock-boat.

[184] For superstitions associated with this bird, see Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 218.

[185] "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 260.

Cressida" (i. 2); "King John" (v. 2), etc. Vergil ("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, nowadays, 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 made by Shakespeare 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 *scarecrow*, was also called a crow-keeper, as in "King Lear" (iv. 6): "That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper."

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[186] See "Folk-Lore Record," 1879, vol. i. p. 52; Henderson's "Folk-Lore of Northern Counties," 1879, pp. 25, 126, 277.

[187] Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 208.

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 scarecrow 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 scarecrow 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,

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[188] Cf. "Henry IV.," iv. 2.

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):

> "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:[191] O word of fear,
> Unpleasing to a married ear."

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[189] Miss Baker's "Northamptonshire Glossary," vol. ii. p. 161; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 393.

[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's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 212.

And again, in “A 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 any one, 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 (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,

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[192] Engel’s “Musical Myths and Facts,” 1876, vol. i. p. 9.

[193] See Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk-Lore,” 1863, p. 99; “English Folk-Lore,” 1879, pp. 55-62.

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 had its head bit off by its 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;
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 may'st."

It has been remarked,[194] however, in reference to the common idea that the young cuckoo ill-treats 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 notion[195] "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):

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[194] See Mary Howitt's "Pictorial Calendar of the Seasons," p. 155; Knight's "Pictorial Shakespeare," vol. i. pp. 225, 226.

[195] Chambers's "Book of Days," vol. i. p. 531.

"For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true shall 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 Gloucester 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), the king, 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 Plautus[197] has introduced it on more than

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[196] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. p. 201.

[197] "Asinaria," v. 1.

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, 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: "My Ariel; chick," etc.; 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

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[198] Nares, in his "Glossary" (vol. 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, vol. ix. p. 294.

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.”

Its love, too, is several times referred to, as in “Romeo and Juliet” (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 Gloster 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 favor with Bassanio, in "Merchant of Venice" (ii. 2), he began by saying, "I have here a dish of doves, that I would bestow upon your worship." Shakespeare alludes in several places to the "doves of Venus," as in "Venus and Adonis:"

> "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

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[200] "Ornithology of Shakespeare," pp. 190, 191.

"Pericles" (iv. Introd.). The towns of Old and New Paphos are situated on the southwest 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[202] it was necessary 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):

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[201] Sir W. Raleigh's "History of the World," bk. i. pt. i. ch. 6.

[202] Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes," 1876, p. 329.

"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: "Swam 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 Shakespeare. 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 his brother

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[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.

Edward:

> "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

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[205] Quoted by Harting, in "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 24.

[206] Kelly's "Indo-European Folk-Lore," pp. 75, 79.

of Athens," (i. 1):

> "an eagle flight, bold, and forth on,
> Leaving no tract 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 when thou point'st out?"

Turbervile, in his "Booke of Falconrie," 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,

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[207] Cf. "Antony and Cleopatra," ii. 2: "This was but as a fly by an eagle."

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 show'd me a vision,
… thus: —
I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, wing'd
From the spungy south to this part of the west,
There vanish'd in the sunbeams: which portends
(Unless my sins abuse my divination),
Success to the Roman host."

The conscious superiority[209] of 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."

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[208] Josephus, "De Bello Judico," iii. 5.

[209] Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 33.

*Goose.* This bird was the subject[210] of 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-goose chase," which is mentioned in "Romeo and Juliet" (ii. 4) – "Nay, if thy wits run the wild-goose 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 mentioned 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 Gloster 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:

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[210] Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 378.

"Some galled goose of Winchester would hiss."

Ben Jonson[211] calls 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 bear the shapes of men, how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat!"

*Goldfinch.* The Warwickshire name[213] for 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

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[211] "Execration against Vulcan," 1640, p. 37.

[212] Singer's "Notes," 1875, vol. i. p. 283.

[213] See "Archæologia," vol. iii. p. 33.

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."[214] Singer,[215] however, 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."

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[214] Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 693. Some think that the bullfinch is meant.

[215] Singer's "Notes," 1875, vol. v. p. 82; see Dyce's "Glossary," p. 433.

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[217] were known in Shakespeare's time.[218] The "gull-catcher" was generally an old usurer, who lent money to a gallant at an ordinary, who had been unfortunate in play.[219] Decker 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 follyes 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

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[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," vol. iii. p. 84.

[218] See Thornbury's "Shakespeare's England," vol. i. pp. 311-322.

[219] Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 394.

Young scamels from the rock."

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" (vol. 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. Dyce[222] 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 stannyel 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

[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," vol. i. p. 245.

[223] See Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes," 1876, pp. 60-97, and "Book of Days," 1863, vol. ii. pp. 211-213; Smith's "Festivals, Games, and Amusements," 1831, p. 174.

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, whence he was with some difficulty rescued by one of his followers. Sir Thomas More, 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.
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" (iii. 1), Hero, speaking of Beatrice, says that:

"her spirits are as coy and wild

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[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."

[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," etc., 1658.

As haggards of the rock."

And Othello (iii. 3), mistrusting Desdemona, and likening her to a hawk, exclaims:

"if I do prove her haggard, —
I'd 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

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[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 and Wright, 1876, p. 205.

> "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[229] towers."

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 enclosure (*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'd make a quarry
> With thousands of these quarter'd slaves."

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[229] See Dyce's "Glossary," p. 456; Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 39; Tuberville's "Booke of Falconrie," 1611, p. 53.

In "Macbeth" (iv. 3)[230] we read "the quarry of these murder'd deer;" and in "Hamlet" (v. 2), "This quarry cries on havock."

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" (iv. 3), too, 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."

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[230] Also in i. 2 we read:"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's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 206.

[231] See Spenser's "Fairy Queen," book i. canto xi. l. 18:"Low stooping with unwieldy sway."

[232] Ed. Dyce, 1857, p. 5.

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 hawk consisted of a close-fitting hood of leather or velvet, enriched with needlework, and surmounted with a tuft of colored 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 valor of the Dauphin, says, "'Tis a hooded valour; and when it appears, it will bate."[234] And again, in "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 2), Juliet says:

> "Hood my unmann'd[235] blood, bating in my cheeks."

The "jesses" were two short straps of leather or silk, which

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[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. "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 Bated, like eagles having lately bathed.'"– Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 60.

[235] "Unmann'd" was applied to a hawk not tamed.

were fastened to each leg of a hawk, to which was attached a swivel, from which depended the leash or strap which the falconer[236] 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.[237] 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:

> "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 everything 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, the allusion is, says Staunton, to this method employed to tame

[236] See Singer's "Notes to Shakespeare," 1875, vol. x. p. 86; Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 448.

[237] See passage in "Taming of the Shrew," iv. 1, already referred to, p. 122.

or “reclaim” hawks.

> “Nay, do not fly: I think we have watch’d you now,”

Again, in “Othello” (iii. 3),[238] Iago 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 her eyelids, by running a fine thread through them, in order to make her tractable and endure the hood of which we have already spoken.[239] King Henry (“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.”

In Spenser’s “Fairy Queen” (I. vii. 23), we read:

> “Mine eyes no more on vanity shall feed,
> But sealed up with death, shall have their deadly meed.”

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[238] Also in same play, i. 3.

[239] Turbervile, in his “Booke 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.

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.[240]

In "Cymbeline" (iii. 4), Imogen, referring to Posthumus, says:

> "I grieve myself
> To think, when thou shalt be disedged by her
> That now thou tir'st 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."

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,

[240] Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. pp. 777, 778; cf. Beaumont and Fletcher, "Philaster," v. 1.

Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh, and bone," etc.

Among other allusions to the hawk may be mentioned one in "Measure for Measure" (iii. 1):

> "This outward-sainted deputy,
> Whose settled visage and deliberate word
> Nips youth i' the 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's mew'd up to her heaviness;"

and in "Taming of the 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[241] a hawk." Thus, in "Richard II." (ii. 1), Northumberland says:

> "If, then, we shall shake off our slavish yoke,

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[241] Imp, from Anglo-Saxon, *impan*, to graft. Turbervile has a whole chapter on "The way and manner how to ympe a hawke's feather, howsoever it be broken or bruised."

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.[242] In 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 Sir John." The word hawk, says Mr. Harting, is invariably used by Shakespeare in its generic sense; and in only two instances does he allude to a particular species. These are the kestrel and sparrow-hawk. 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[243] checks at it"

– staniel being a corruption of stangdall, a name for the kestrel

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[242] Harting's "Ornithology of Shakspeare," p. 72.

[243] 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," vol. ii. p. 832.

hawk.[244] "Gouts" is the technical term for the spots on some parts of the plumage of a hawk, and perhaps Shakespeare 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."

*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.[245] Shakespeare here alludes to a proverbial saying, "He knows not a hawk from a handsaw."[246] Mr. J. C. Heath[247] 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

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[244] See kestrel and sparrow-hawk.

[245] "Notes to Hamlet," Clark and Wright, 1876, p. 159.

[246] Ray's "Proverbs," 1768, p. 196.

[247] Quoted in "Notes to Hamlet," by Clark and Wright, p. 159; see Nares's "Glossary," vol. i. p. 416.

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,[248] hath betray'd him."

*Kestrel.* A hawk of a base, unserviceable breed,[249] and therefore used by Spenser, in his "Fairy 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 some[250] it is derived from "coystril," a knave or peasant,

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[248] That is, made by art: the creature not of nature, but of painting; cf. "Taming of the Shrew," iv. 3; "The Tempest," ii. 2.

[249] Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 482.

[250] Harting's "Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 74.

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,[251] 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. Holinshed[252] classes coisterels with lackeys and women, the unwarlike attendants on an army. The term was also given as a nickname to the emissaries employed by the kings of England in their French wars. Dyce[253] 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):

> "Expect Saint 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."

[251] "Notes," vol. iii. pp. 357, 358.

[252] "Description of England," vol. i. p. 162.

[253] "Glossary to Shakespeare," p. 88.

Another superstition connected with this bird occurs in “King Lear” (ii. 2), 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. Marlowe, 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.[254]

*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” (i. 2), too, Imogen says,

> “I chose an eagle,

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[254] Sir Thomas Browne’s “Vulgar Errors,” bk. iii. chap. 10.

And did avoid a puttock,"

puttock, here, being a synonym sometimes applied to the kite.[255] 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.[256] Mr. Dyce[257] quotes 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 any one 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

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[255] Also to the buzzard, which see, p. 100.

[256] Singer's "Shakespeare," vol. iv. p. 67.

[257] "Glossary," p. 243.

possible to move the pity of the first comer, to cut the thread and ease them of their misery."

*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,[258] in the "White Devil" (1857, p. 13), says:

> "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,

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[258] "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 495; see Yarrell's "History of British Birds," 2d edition, vol. ii. p. 482.

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."[259]

*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,

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[259] Ray's "Proverbs," 1768, p. 199.

And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty."[260]

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."

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

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[260] Cf. "Midsummer-Night's Dream" (iv. 1). "the morning lark;" "Romeo and Juliet" (iii. 5), "the lark, the herald of the morn."

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-lirra" ("Winter's Tale," iv. 3) are a fanciful combination of sounds,[261] 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 sheppards I sawe a syght,
> And all aboute there fold a stare shone bright,
> They sang terli terlow,

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[261] Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 886; Douce's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," 1839, p. 217.

So mereli the sheppards their pipes can blow."

In Scotland[262] 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 with superstitious awe as a mysterious bird,[263] 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."

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[262] Chambers's "Popular Rhymes of Scotland," 1870, p. 192.

[263] See "English Folk-Lore," p. 81.

There are numerous rhymes[264] 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 Sweden[265] 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

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[264] Henderson's "Folk-Lore of Northern Counties," p. 127.

[265] Thorpe's "Northern Mythology," vol. ii. p. 34; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, pp. 215, 216; see also Harland and Wilkinson's "Lancashire Folk-Lore," 1867, pp. 143, 145.

“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.”

Forster[266] 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.”

*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:

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[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[267] asks "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?"[268] In 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:

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[267] Sir Thomas Browne's Works, 1852, vol. i. p. 378.

[268] See "Book of Days," vol. i. p. 515.

"I think,
The nightingale, if she should 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[269] that the nightingale sings all night, to keep itself awake, lest the glow-worm should devour her. The classical fable[270] of 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 pierc'd 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 in our sweet lullaby."

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[269] Southey's "Commonplace Book." 5th series. 1851, p. 305.

[270] Ovid's "Metamorphoses," bk. vi. ll. 455-676; "Titus Andronicus," iv. 1.

[271] Cf. "Lucrece," ll. 1079, 1127.

*Osprey.* This bird,[272] also 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):

> "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[273] is said to be shown by its swallowing iron and other hard substances.[274] In "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

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[272] See Yarrell's "History of British Birds," 1856, vol. i. p. 30; Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 620; also Pennant's "British Zoology;" see Peele's Play of the "Battle of Alcazar" (ii. 3), 1861, p. 28.

[273] Called *estridge* in "1 Henry IV." iv. 1.

[274] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 365.

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 stigmatized as "the vile owl," in "Troilus and Cressida" (ii. I); 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

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[275] "Animal Kingdom," 1829, vol. viii. p. 427.

[276] See Sir Thomas Browne's Works, 1852, vol. i. pp. 334-337.

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. Vergil[277] describes 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:

> "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?"

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277 "Æneid," bk. iv. l. 462.

278 "Metamorphoses," bk. v. l. 550; bk. vi. l. 432; bk. x. l. 453; bk. xv. l. 791.

279 "2 Henry VI." iii. 2; iv. 1.

280 "Titus Andronicus," ii. 3.

281 Cf. "Lucrece," l. 165; see Yarrell's "History of British Birds," vol. i. p. 122.

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 Gloster, refers:

> "The owl shriek'd at thy birth, an evil sign."

Its cries[282] have been supposed to presage death, and, to quote the words of the *Spectator*, "a screech-owl at midnight 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 owl of death." Again, in "Richard III." (iv. 4), where Richard is exasperated by the bad news, he interrupts the third messenger by saying:

> "Out on ye, owls! nothing but songs of death?"

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[282] See Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. iii. p. 209.

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 caldron 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!

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[283] The spelling of the folios is "howlets." In Holland's translation of Pliny (chap. xvii. book x.), we read "of owlls or howlets." Cotgrave gives "Hulotte."

[284] Halliwell-Phillipps's, "Handbook Index," 1866, p. 354.

We talk with goblins, owls, and elvish sprites.
If we obey them not, this will ensue,
They'll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue!"

Singer, in his Notes on this passage (vol. 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."[285] In "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,[286] who 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

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[285] See Dyce's "Glossary," p. 302.

[286] See Singer's "Notes to The Tempest," 1875, vol. i. p. 82.

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[287] says 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

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[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.

was formerly customary to teach the parrot unlucky words, with which, when any one 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;
> 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,

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[289] "Hudibras," pt. i. ch. i.

[290] In "Much Ado About Nothing" (i. 1), Benedick likens Beatrice to a "parrot-teacher," from her talkative powers.

This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very – peacock."[291]

The third and fourth folios read *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 peajock. 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:

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[291] This is the reading adopted by Singer.

[292] "Notes to Hamlet," Clark and Wright, 1876, pp. 179, 180.

[293] See Nares's "Glossary," vol. ii. p. 645; Singer's "Notes," vol. ix. p. 228.

[294] Cf. "Troilus and Cressida," iii. 3.

> “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?

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