

Shakespeare's Insomnia, and the Causes Thereof eBook

Shakespeare's Insomnia, and the Causes Thereof

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I.

Insomnia, the lack of “tired Nature’s sweet restorer,” is rapidly becoming the chronic terror of all men of active life who have passed the age of thirty-five or forty years. In early life, while yet he “wears the rose of youth upon him,” man rarely, except in sickness, knows the want of sound, undreaming sleep. But as early manhood is left behind and the cares and perplexities of life weigh upon him, making far more needful than ever the rest which comes only through unbroken sleep, this remedial agent cannot longer be wooed and won. Youth would “fain encounter darkness as a bride and hug it in his arms.” To those of riper years the “blanket of the dark” often ushers in a season of terrors,—a time of fitful snatches of broken sleep and of tormenting dreams; of long stretches of wakefulness; of hours when all things perplexing and troublesome in one’s affairs march before him in sombre procession: in endless disorder, in labyrinths of confusion, in countless new phases of disagreeableness; and at length the morning summons him to labor, far more racked and weary than when he sought repose.

It has been of late years much the fashion in the literature of this subject to attribute sleeplessness to the rapid growth of facilities for activities of every kind. The practical annihilation of time and space by our telegraphs and railroads, the compressing thereby of the labors of months into hours or even minutes, the terrific competition in all kinds of business thereby made possible and inevitable, the intense mental activity engendered in the mad race for fame or wealth, where the nervous and mental force of man is measured against steam and lightning,—these are usually credited with having developed what is considered a modern and even an almost distinctively American disease.

As the maxim, “There is nothing new under the sun,” is of general application, it may be of interest to investigate if an exception occurs in the case of sleeplessness; if it be true that among our ancestors, before the days of working steam and electricity, the glorious sleep of youth was prolonged through all one’s three or four score years.

Medical books and literature throw no light upon this subject three hundred years ago. We must therefore turn to Shakespeare—human nature’s universal solvent—for light on this as we would on any other question of his time. Was he troubled with insomnia, then, is the first problem to be solved.

Dr. Holmes, our genial and many-sided poet-laureate, who is also a philosopher, in his “Life of Emerson,” has finely worked out the theory that no man writes other than his own experience: that consciously or otherwise an author describes himself in the characters he draws; that when he loves the character he delineates, it is in some measure his own, or at least one of which he feels its tendencies and possibilities belong to himself. Emerson, too, says of Shakespeare, that all his poetry was first experience.

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When we seek to analyze what we mean by the term Shakespeare, to endeavor to define wherein he was distinct from all others and easily pre-eminent, to know why to us he ever grows wiser as we grow wise, we find that his especial characteristic was an unequalled power of observation and an ability accurately to chronicle his impressions. He was the only man ever born who lived and wrote absolutely without bias or prejudice. Emerson says of him that “he reported all things with impartiality; that he tells the great greatly, the small subordinately,—he is strong as Nature is strong, who lifts the land into mountain slopes without effort, and by the same rule as she floats a bubble in the air, and likes as well to do the one as the other.” Says he, further: “Give a man of talents a story to tell, and his partiality will presently appear: he has certain opinions which he disposes other things to bring into prominence; he crams this part and starves the other part, consulting not the fitness of the thing but his fitness and strength.” But Shakespeare has no peculiarity; all is duly given.

Thus it is that his dramas are the book of human life. He was an accurate observer of Nature: he notes the markings of the violet and the daisy; the haunts of the honeysuckle, the mistletoe, and the woodbine. He marks the fealty of the marigold to its god the sun, and even touches the freaks of fashion, condemning in some woman of his time an usage, long obsolete, in accordance with which she adorned her head with “the golden tresses of the dead.” But it was as an observer and a delineator of man in all his moods that he was the bright, consummate flower of humanity. His experiences were wide and varied. He had absorbed into himself and made his own the pith and wisdom of his day. As the fittest survives, each age embodies in itself all worthy of preservation in the ages gone before. In Shakespeare’s pages we find a reflection, perfect and absolute, of the age of Elizabeth, and therefore of all not transient in the foregone times,—of all which is fixed and permanent in our own. He “held the mirror up to Nature.” So “his eternal summer shall not fade,” because

“He sang of the earth as it will be
When the years have passed away.”

If, therefore, insomnia had prevailed in or before his time, in his pages shall we find it duly set forth. If he had suffered, if the “fringed curtains of his eyes were all the night undrawn,” we shall find his dreary experiences—his hours of pathetic misery, his nights of desolation—voiced by the tongues of his men and women.

Shakespeare speaks often of the time in life when men have left behind them the dreamless sleep of youth. Friar Laurence says:—

“Care keeps his watch in every old man’s eye,
And where care lodges, sleep can never lie;
But where unbruised youth with unstuffed brain
Doth couch his limbs, there golden sleep doth reign.”



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Shakespeare describes, too, with lifelike fidelity, the causes of insomnia, which are not weariness or physical pain, but undue mental anxiety. He constantly contrasts the troubled sleep of those burdened with anxieties and cares, with the happy lot of the laborer whose physical weariness insures him a tranquil night's repose. Henry VI. says:

“And to conclude, the shepherd's homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Are far beyond a prince's delicates.”

And Henry V. says:—

“’Tis not the balm, the sceptre and the ball,
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,
The farced title running ’fore the king,
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
That beats upon the high shore of this world,—
No, not all these, thrice gorgeous ceremony,
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,
Who, with a body filled and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest, crammed with distressful bread;
Never sees horrid night, that child of hell,
But, like a lackey, from the rise to set,
Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium....
And, but for ceremony, such a wretch,
Winding up days with toil and nights with sleep,
Hath the forehand and vantage of a king.”

Prince Henry says, in “Henry IV.”:—

“O polished perturbation! Golden care!
That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide
To many a watchful night, sleep with it now!
Yet not so sound and half so deeply sweet
As he whose brow with homely biggin bound
Snores out the watch of night.”

In this same play, too, is found the familiar and marvellous soliloquy of Henry IV.:—



“How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep! O Sleep, O gentle Sleep,
Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
Why rather, Sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lulled with sounds of sweetest melody?
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile
In loathsome beds, and leav’st the kingly couch
A watch-case, or a common ’larum-bell?
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,
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafening clamor in the slippery

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shrouds,

That with the hurly, death itself awakes?
Canst thou, O partial Sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then, happy low, lie down!
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

Caesar, whom Shakespeare characterizes as "the foremost man of all this world," says:

"Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights."

And again, it is not an "old man broken with the storms of state" whom he describes when he says:—

"Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies
Which busy care draws in the brains of men;
Therefore thou sleep'st so sound."

The poet also in various passages expresses his emphatic belief as to what is the brightest blessing or the deadliest calamity which can be laid upon our frail humanity. Rarely is a blessing invoked which does not include the wish for tranquil sleep; and this, too, as the best and greatest boon of all. His gracious benediction may compass honors and wealth and happiness and fame,—that one's "name may dwell forever in the mouths of men;" but

"The earth hath bubbles as the water hath,
And these are of them,"

as compared with the royal benison, "Sleep give thee all his rest."

The spectres of the princes and Queen Anne, in "Richard III.," invoking every good upon Richmond, say:—

"Sleep, Richmond, sleep in peace and wake in joy."

And again:—

"Thou quiet soul, sleep thou a quiet sleep."

Romeo's dearest wish to Juliet is,—

“Sleep dwell upon thine eyes; peace in thy breast.”

The crowning promise of Lady Mortimer, in “Henry IV.,” is that

“She will sing the song that pleaseth thee,
And on thy eyelids crown the god of sleep.”

Titania promises her fantastic lover,—

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

Titus, welcoming again to Rome the victorious legions, says of the heroes who have fallen:

“There greet in silence, as the dead are wont,
And sleep in peace, slain in your country's wars,”

promising them that in the land of the blest

“are no storms,
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep.”

Constantly also in anathemas throughout the plays are invoked, as the deadliest of curses, broken rest and its usual accompaniment of troublous dreams. Thus note the climax in Queen Margaret's curse upon the traitorous Gloster:—

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"If Heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
Oh, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace!
The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends!
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils!"

The witch, in "Macbeth," cataloguing the calamities in store for the ambitious Thane, says:

"Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid."

It is curious also to remark, in the various lists of griefs which make life a burden and a sorrow, how often the climax of these woes is the lack of sleep, or the troubled dreams bearing their train of "gorgons, hydras, and chimeras dire," which come with broken rest. Lady Percy says to Hotspur:—

"Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks,
And given my treasures and my rights of thee
To thick-eyed musing and curst melancholy?
Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee
Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?"

Macbeth says:—

"But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly; better be with the dead."

In "Othello" is a striking picture of the sudden change, in the direction we are considering, which comes over a tranquil mind from the commission of a great crime. Iago says to Othello, after he has wrought "the deed without a name":—

"Not poppy nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,

Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou own'dst yesterday."

The greatest punishment which comes to Macbeth after the murder of Duncan is lack of sleep. Nowhere in the language, in the same space, can be found so many pictures of the blessedness of repose as in the familiar lines:—

"Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep;
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast."

And the principal reason which deters Hamlet from suicide is the fear that even if he does sleep well "after life's fitful fever is over," still, that sleep may be full of troubled dreams.

"To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause."

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Richard III. says, when the catalogue of his crimes is full, and when he “sees as in a map the end of all”:—

“The sons of Edward sleep in Abraham’s bosom,
And Anne, my queen, hath bid the world good night.”

In addition to the fuller phrases wherein are shown the blessedness of sleep, or the remediless nature of its loss, many brief sentences occur scattered throughout the plays, and emphasizing the same great lesson. For instance:—

“Now o’er one half the world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep.”

“With Him above
To ratify our work, we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights.”

“You lack the season of all natures, sleep.”

“My soul is heavy, and I fain would sleep.”

“For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoyed the golden dew of sleep.”

“For some must watch and some must sleep,
So runs the world away.”

“How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon that bank.”

“The best of rest is sleep.”

“Our little lives are rounded with a sleep.”

The various passages cited above prove and illustrate that no author has written so feelingly, so appreciatingly, as Shakespeare on the subject of sleep and its loss.

The diligent commentators on his works have investigated laboriously the sources from which he drew his plots and many of the very lines of his poems. He was a great borrower; absorbing, digesting, and making his own much of the material of his predecessors. But it is a noteworthy fact, that none of the exquisite lines in praise of sleep—that gift which the Psalmist says the Lord giveth to his beloved—can be traced to other source than the master. These are jewels of his own; transcripts from his own mournful experience. In middle life he remembered hopelessly the tranquil sleep of his lost youth, as

“He that is stricken blind cannot forget
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost.”

He had suffered from insomnia, and he writes of this, not “as imagination bodies forth the forms of things *unknown*,” but as one who, in words burning with indestructible life, lays open to us the sombre record of what was experience before it was song; who makes us the sharers of his griefs; who would awaken in the similarly afflicted of all time that compassionate sympathy which goes out to those whose burdens are almost greater than they can bear.

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The meagre information we have as to the life and habits of Shakespeare would seem to make it an almost hopeless task now to discover the causes of his insomnia. He wrote a marvellous body of literature, and it might be thought this labor itself would suffice as an explanation: that the furnace heat in which the conceptions of Hamlet and Macbeth and Lear were wrought in the crucible of his brain would be fatal to repose. But his contemporaries speak of him as an easy and rapid writer; one whose imagination is only paralleled by the ease, the force and beauty of the phrase in which it is embodied. We are told, too, by Dr. H.A. Johnson, an eminent medical authority, in the second volume of his treatise on the pathology of the optic nerve, that it is not work, even heavy and continuous, but worry over this work, which drives away repose and shortens life.

I had observed, in collating the many passages in Shakespeare concerning sleep, that the greater number, and those bearing evidence of deepest earnestness, occurred in six plays: "Richard III.," "Macbeth," "1 Henry IV.," "Hamlet," "2 Henry IV.," and "Henry V." The chronology of Shakespeare's plays seems almost hopeless, scarcely any two writers agreeing as to the order of the plays or the years in which they were written. Several of the most critical authorities, however,—Dyce, White, Furnival, and Halliwell-Phillipps,—are agreed that two of the plays above named were written in 1593, three in 1602, and one in 1609. This would seem to indicate that during these three years unusual perplexities or anxieties had surrounded our author; and on noting this, it occurred to me that on these points the series of papers recently discovered and called the Southampton manuscripts, which are not yet published, might give light. I accordingly addressed a letter to the Director of the British Museum, where the manuscripts are placed for safe keeping, and received the following reply:—

*British museum, office of chief curator, department of manuscripts,
London, Feb. 14, 1886.*

Sir,—I am directed by the Curator to acknowledge the receipt of your valued favor of February 1, transmitting for preservation and reference in the library of this institution—

1. The manuscript of the farewell address of Dr. Charles Gilman Smith, on his retirement to private life from the presidency of the Chicago Literary Club;
2. The manuscript of the inaugural address of his successor in the office,—which is a public trust,—James S. Norton, Esq.;
3. An affidavit of Dr. W.F. Poole, that both manuscripts are originals, and in the handwriting of their eminent authors.

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The Curator further instructs me to convey to you the thanks of the Board of Governors for these highly important papers, and to state to you that they may be found on file in sub-compartment No. 113,280 of Contemporary Documents. I am further instructed by the Curator to inform you that compliance with your request that this institution reciprocate your kindness by loaning to you all papers from the recently discovered Southampton Shakespeare Collection, bearing date in the years 1593, 1602, and 1609, is contrary to the regulations of this institution. If you cannot visit London to examine these interesting manuscripts, copies will be made and transmitted you for three halfpence per folio, payment by our rules invariably in advance. I note that you are evidently in error upon one point. The collection contains no letters or manuscripts of Shakespeare. It is composed principally of letters written to Shakespeare by various people, and which, after his death, in some way came into the possession of the Earl of Southampton. His death, so soon after that of Shakespeare, doubtless caused these letters to be lost sight of, and they were but last year discovered in the donjon of the castle. I have examined the letters for the years you name, and find that copies of the same can be made for L3 3s., exclusive of postage.

Very respectfully yours,

John Barnacle,

10th Ass't Sub-Secretary.

The money having been forwarded, I received in due time the copies. At the first date, 1593, Shakespeare was a young dramatist and actor struggling for recognition, poor and almost unknown; in 1602 he had won an assured position among his fellows, and, with the thrift which characterized him, had secured an interest in the Globe Theatre, where his plays were performed; in 1609 he was in the fulness of his contemporary fame, had bought valuable property in Stratford, and was contemplating retirement to his country home.

The following are the letters from the Southampton collection which serve to throw light upon the insomnia of Shakespeare. They are given in their chronological order, and verbatim, but not literatim, the orthography having been modernized. The first of the letters, dated in 1593, is from a firm of lawyers, Messrs. Shallow & Slender, and is as follows:—

Inner Temple, London, Feb. 15, 1593.

To William Shakespeare:

Mr. Moses Solomons, an honored client of our firm, has placed with us, that payment may be straightway enforced, a bill drawn by John Heminge, for L10, due in two months from the date thereof, and the payment of which was assured by you in writing. This bill

has been for some days overdue, and Mr. Solomons is constrained to call upon you for payment at once. Your prompt attention to this will save the costs and annoyance of an arrest.

The second letter is from the same parties, and bears date four days later than the first.

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Inner Temple, Feb. 19, 1593. Mr. William Shakespeare:

Recurring to certain statements made by yourself at our chambers yesterday, we have considered the same, and have likewise the opinion thereon of our client, Mr. Solomons. As we do now recall them, you nominated three principal grounds why you should not be pressed to pay the bill drawn by Mr. Heminge. First, that you received no value therefor, having put your name to the bill upon the assurance that it was a matter of form, and to oblige a friend.

To this we rejoin, that by the law of estoppel you are precluded to deny the consideration after the bill hath passed into the holding of a discounter unnotified of the facts.

Second, That, as our client paid but L1 for the bill, he should not exact L10 thereon. To the which we reply, that, so a valuable consideration was passed for the bill, the law looketh not to its exact amount. It is also asserted by our client that, beyond actual coin given for the bill, he did further release to John Heminge certain tinsel crowns, swords, and apparel appurtenant to the representation of royalty, which had before then—to wit, two weeks before—been pledged to him for the sum of 8 shillings, borrowed by the said Heminge. Third, That it was impossible for you to pay the bill, you having no money, and receiving no greater income than 22 shillings per week, all of which was necessary to the maintenance of yourself and family. We regret again to call to your notice the Statute of 16 Eliz., entitled, “Concerning the Imprisonment of Insolvent Debtors,” which we trust you will not oblige us to invoke in aid of our suffering client’s rights. To be lenient and merciful is his inclination, and we are happy to communicate to you this most favorable tender for an acquittance of his claim. You shall render to us an order on the Steward of the Globe Theatre for 20 shillings per week of your stipend therein. This will leave to you yet 2 shillings per week, which, with prudence, will yield to you the comforts, if not the luxuries, of subsistence. In ten weeks the face of the bill will be thus repaid. For his forbearance in the matter of time, which hath most seriously inconvenienced him, he requires that you shall pay him the further sum of L2 as usury, and likewise that you do liquidate and save him harmless from the charges of us, his solicitors, which charges, from the number of grave and complicated questions which have become a part of this case and demanded solution, we are unable to make less than L4. We should say guineas, but your evident distress hath moved us to gentleness and mercy. These added sums are to be likewise embraced in the Steward’s order, and paid at the same rate as the substance of the bill, and should you embrace this compassionate tender, in the brief period of sixteen weeks you will be at the end of this indebtedness.

The next letter is dated the following month, and is from Henry Howard, an apparent pawnbroker.

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Queer Street, London, 10 March, 1593.

To William Shakespeare, Actor:

These presents are to warn you that the time has six days since passed in which you were to repay me 8 shillings, and thereby redeem the property in pledge to me; namely, one Henry VIII. shirt of mail and visor, and Portia's law book, and the green bag therefor. Be warned that unless the 8 shillings and the usance thereof be forthcoming, the town-crier shall notify the sale of the sundry articles named.

The next letter, and the last in this period of the poet's career (1593), is from Mordecai Shylock.

Fleet Street, Near the sign of the hog in Armor, Nov. 22, 1593.

To William Shakespeare:

I have been active in the way you some days since besought me; namely, the procuring for you of a loan of L5, that you might retire a bill upon which you were a guarantor. As I then told you, I have no money myself, being very poor; but I have a friend who has money with which I can persuade him to relieve your wants. Had I myself the money, I should gladly meet your needs at a moderate usance, not more than twenty-five in the hundred; but my friend is a hard man, who exacts large returns for his means, and will be very urgent that repayment be made on the day named in the bill. He hath empowered me to take your bill at two months,—for him, mind you,—for L10, the payment to be assured, as you wished, by the pledge of your two new plays in manuscript,—“*Midsummer Night's Dream*” and “*Romeo and Juliet*,”—for which bill he will at my strong instance, and because you are a friend to me, give L5. My charge for services in this behalf, which hath consumed much time, will be L1, which I shall straightway pay out in the purchase of a new gown, much needed by my little daughter Jessica, who loves you and recalls often the pleasant tales you do repeat for her diversion.

The letters in the second period (1602) are nine years later than those just read. The first is from the same Mordecai Shylock, who, with the poet, seems to have prospered in worldly affairs, as his letters are dated in a more reputable portion of the city.

Threadneedle Street, London, April 17, 1602.

To William Shakespeare:

In January last past you purchased of Richard Burbage four shares of the stock of the Globe Theatre for L100, and inasmuch as you had not available the whole means to pay therefor, borrowed from me the L60 wanting, paying yourself L40 of such purchase price, and giving me in pledge for my L60 such four shares of stock. Owing to special



attractions at Blackfriars' Theatre, the stock of the Globe hath greatly declined in value, and I fear these four shares may not longer be salable at the price of even L60, and I therefore must importune that you forthwith do make a payment of L20 on your said bill, or the four shares of stock will be sold at public vendue.

The next letter is from the same writer, and is dated nine days later.

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Threadneedle Street, April 26, 1602.

To William Shakespeare:

I acknowledge to have received from you by the hand of Henry Condell L5, and two of your own shares in the stock of the Globe Theatre in further pledge of your bill of L60, as was engaged between us yesterday. It pains me to make known to you that, owing to the great demands recently made upon the goldsmiths by her sacred Majesty, money hath become very dear; and as it was not my own lent you, I have been obliged to pay above the usance expected a further premium of seventeen in the hundred, which I pray you to presently repay me. I am told that shares in the Globe can now be bought at L15; and inasmuch as yours were bought at L25, should you acquire other shares at L15, it would serve to equate your havings.

The next letter, from the same broker, is written but a few days later.

Threadneedle Street, May 12, 1602.

To William Shakespeare:

Acting as requested by you, I did one week ago buy for you three shares in the Globe Theatre for L15 each, using in such purchase the L15 given me by you, and L30, not of mine own, but which was furnished me by a goldsmith of repute. Yesterday I learned that shares were offered at L10 each, perchance from the efforts of forestallers, as also from the preaching of a dissenter, who fulminates that the end of the world is but three weeks away, which hath induced great seriousness among the people. Unless you can pay me, therefore, as much as L40, on the morrow I shall be constrained to offer such shares to the highest bidder at the meeting of the guild.

The next letter is also from the same Mordecai Shylock, and is dated four days later.

Threadneedle Street, May 16, 1602.

To William Shakespeare:

My earnest epistle to thee of four days since having elicited no response, I did on the following day offer at the meeting of the Brokers' Guild some of the shares of the stock in the Globe pledged to me, and three shares were bidden at L9 each by my brother, Nehemiah Shylock. As I offered next all the rest, one Henry Wriothsley, Earl of Southampton, did ask to whom the shares belonged, and when he was enlightened, did straightway take all the shares and pay me the whole balance owing, and called me divers opprobrious names. I answered not his railing with railing, for sufferance is the badge of all our tribe, but such slander is illy bestowed on one who has been your friend for long, and who was but striving to avert his own destruction.

The next letter in order is from one William Kempe, who would seem to be the business manager of the Globe Theatre, or the person having in charge the unskilled labor connected with the playhouse.

Globe playhouse, employment Bureau, May 25, 1602.

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William Shakespeare:

In much tribulation do I write thee as to the contention which hath arisen among our stock actors and supes of the Globe. Nicholas Bottom, whom you brought from the Parish workhouse in Stratford, is in ill humor with thee in especial. He says when he played with you in Ben Jonson's comedy, "Every Man in his Humor," he was by far the better actor and did receive the plaudits of all; despite which he now receives but 6 shillings each week, while you are become a man of great wealth, having gotten, as he verily believes, as much as L100. Vainly did I oppose to him that the reason you had money when he had none was in verity that you had labored when he was drunken, and that this was to his profit, since, had not you and the other holders of shares in the Globe saved somewhat of money, unthrifty groundlings of his ilk would starve, as there would be none to hire them at wages; but he avers that he is ground in the dust by the greed of capital, and hath so much prated of this that he hath much following, and accounteth himself a martyr. I said to him that at your especial order he was paid 6 shillings per week, which was double his worth, and that he should go elsewhere if he was not content, as I could daily get a better man for half his wages; but he will not go hence, nor will he perform, and has persuaded others to join with him, his very worthlessness having made him their leader, and they threaten, unless they may receive additional 4 shillings per week, and a groat each night for sack, they will have no plays performed, nor will they allow others to be hired in their stead. They do further demand that you shall write shorter plays; that you shall write no tragedies requiring them to labor more than three hours in the rendition; that you shall cut out as much as twelve pages each in "Richard III." and "Othello," and fifteen pages from "Hamlet," that they may not labor to weariness, and may have more hours to recreation and improvement at the alehouse. I know not what to do. If I yield them their demands, nothing will be left for the owners of shares in the Globe; and if I do not, I fear mobs and riots. Fain would I receive thy counsel, which shall have good heed.

The next letter is the last in the period under review, and bears date four days later than the one just quoted from William Kempe.

At the Elephant & magpie inn, London, May 29, 1602.

To William Shakespeare:

This is written to thee by John Lely, a clerk, in behalf of Nicholas Bottom, who useth not the pen, and who says to me to tell William Shakespeare, fie upon him that he did order the aforesaid Bottom to be locked out of the Globe Playhouse. Hath he forgotten the first play he, William Shakespeare, did ever write, to wit, "Pyramus and Thisbe," when a boy at Stratford, which was played by himself

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and Nicholas Bottom and Peter Quince and others, in a barn, for the delectation of the townsmen? And is not this same play a part of his “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” which beggarly play he did sell for L10, and hath not Nicholas Bottom first and always been an ass therein? Doth he refuse to render to Nicholas Bottom 10 shillings per week when he can get L10 or even L11 for a beggarly play, which is nought unless it be acted? Many a time hath he paid me from a sponging house; often hath he given me groats for sack, and for purges when sack hath undone me; and did I ever insult him to offer to repay him a penny? Say to him, remembereth he not when the horses ridden by Duncan and Macbeth upon the stage did break through the floor, who, affrighted, did run howling away, whereby Burbage was aroused and did pick him, William Shakespeare, from among the horses’ feet and save his life? And now, sweet Will, fie upon thee that thou didst frown upon thy townsman. Delay not to send me sundry shillings for the publican, who believes you will discharge, as often before, my reckoning. This, and much more of like tenor, saith Nicholas Bottom to William Shakespeare by your worship’s humble servant,

John Iley.

The letters in the third period bear date in 1609, seven years later than those last quoted. The first is from Rev. Walter Blaise, who appears to be the clergyman at Stratford-on-Avon.

Stratford, Feb. 23, 1609.

To William Shakespeare:

John Naps, of Greece, who did recently return to his home here from London, safely has delivered to Anne, your wife, the package entrusted to him for carriage. As your wife hath not the gift of writing, she does desire that I convey to you her thanks for the sundry contents of the hamper. She hath also confided to me as her spiritual adviser that she did diligently ply John Naps with questions as to his visit to you in London, and that said John Naps, under her interrogatories, has revealed to her much that doth make her sick at heart and weary of life.*Item.* He doth report that you do pass among men as a bachelor, and, with sundry players and men of that ilk, do frequent a house of entertainment kept by one Doll Tearsheet, and do kiss the barmaid and call her your sweetheart.*Item.* He doth also report that you did give to the daughter of the publican at whose house you do now abide, a ring of fine gold, and did also write to her a sonnet in praise of her eyebrows and her lips, and did otherwise wickedly disport with the said damsel.*Item.* He doth further report of you that you did visit, with one Ben Jonson, on the Sabbath-day, a place of disrepute, where were cock-fights and the baiting of a bear, and that with you were two brazen women, falsely called by you the wife and sister of Ben Jonson.

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These things do overmuch grieve Anne, who hath been to you a loyal wife and a true, and she desires that you do forthwith renounce your evil ways and return to the new house at Stratford, and in ashes and sackcloth repent of your wanderings from the straight and narrow way. Thus far have I spoken to you as the mouthpiece and vicegerent of Anne, your wife, who is in sore affliction and deep grief by reason of your transgressions. But, beloved lamb of my flock, I should be unworthy my high and sacred calling did I not lift up also my rebuking voice as a pelican in the wilderness, and adjure you to beware of concupiscence and fleshly lust, which unceasingly do war upon the human soul. Thinkest thou to touch pitch and remain undefiled?

The next letter is from the firm of Coke & Dogberry, lawyers in London.

Inner Temple, March 8, 1609.

To William Shakespeare:

We have been retained by Mistress Anne Page as her solicitors to bring against you an action, for that you have not fulfilled and in sooth cannot fulfil with her a contract of marriage, and to seek against you under the laws of this realm heavy damages and an imprisonment of the body, in that you have in unholy ways trifled with her affections, contrary to the statute in such cases provided. She especially avers that you did, two days before Michaelmas, swear to her on a parcel gilt goblet that you did love her alone, and did then give to her a bracelet of price. But yesterday, as she was bargaining with a yeoman named Christopher Sly, from Stratford, for the purchase of a spotted pig of his own fattening, the said Sly did reveal to her that you were his friend, and that you had wife and children in your native town where he dwelt. We beg you to straightway name to us your solicitors, that we may confer with them and attend to the issuance of the writs.

I have aimed to select from the letters sent me only those bearing on some trouble tending to cause sleeplessness on the part of the poet, but make an exception in case of a letter of Sir Walter Raleigh, next in chronological order, which refers to matters of general interest.

The Mermaid, March 20, 1609.

To William Shakespeare:

Full well do I know, my dearest Will, that often hast thou wondered of the fate of thy L50, which, with a hundred times as much of mine own, was adventured to found an empire in America. Great were our hopes, both of glory and of gold, in the kingdom of Powhatan. But it grieves me much to say that all hath resulted in infelicity, misfortune, and an unhappy end. Our ships were wrecked, or captured by the knavish Spaniards.

Our brave sailors are perished. As I was blameworthy for thy risk, I send by the messenger your L50, which you shall not lose by my over-hopeful vision. For its usance I send a package of a new herb

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from the Chesapeake, called by the natives tobacco. Make it not into tea, as did one of my kinsmen, but kindle and smoke it in the little tube the messenger will bestow. Be not deterred if thy gorge at first rises against it, for, when thou art wonted, it is a balm for all sorrows and griefs, and as a dream of Paradise. And now, my sweet Will, whom my soul loveth, why comest thou not as of yore to the "Mermaid," that I may have speech with thee? Thou knowest that from my youth up I have adventured all for the welfare and glory of our Queen Elizabeth. On sea and on land and in many climes have I fought the accursed Spaniards, and am honored recognize thy supreme merit, for daily and hourly are sung to her the praises of this loveliness until the story is as a tale that is told and a weariness to the understanding; but thy commendations of her wisdom will be as fresh and fragrant incense, nor will their truthfulness be too closely scanned. Thou knowest that I have taken all knowledge to be my province, and therefore have I oft and longingly gazed into the flowery fields of that divine art where to-day in our much-loved England thou art disporting thyself supremely and alone. But when I consider thy tragedies, throughout which is diffused the inmost soul of poesy, my crude yet labored metres seem to me as the body of a maiden, not indeed devoid of a certain comeliness and grace, yet into whose waiting bosom hath not yet been breathed the spirit of life. In thy tragedies thou hast the majestic grace which in the Attic ages belonged to Sophocles alone; thou hast the stately march and music of Aeschylus, without in thy themes his ceaseless iteration of predestined woe which ranks his heroes outside humanity; yet the sombre hand of fate hath not more inflexibly driven the gentle Iphigenia to her doom than it hath followed Macbeth to his foreshadowed crime and end. But in thy canticles it is not an o'ershadowing, mysterious, and tragic fate, but a gracious and loving Providence which, as thyself hath phrased it,

"Holds in His hands the shears of destiny,
And has commandment on the pulse of life."

In comedy, Aristophanes is not thy master, yet must I greatly choose thy tragedies as monuments of thy abiding fame. Funeral dolors rather than bridal carols inspire even the harp of David, beloved of the Lord; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost toucheth ever the shadowed phases of our earthly lives. I am minded to now advert to another topic from the tale told me by Southampton that thou wert presently to publish a volume of thy sugared sonnets. May I pray thee that this collection compass not the two sonnets written by thee for me in laud of our Queen Elizabeth, and the one of this morning? As thou knowest, these first were presented to our gracious Sovereign as mine own, and did so pleasure her as to chiefly prosper my advancement. Were the true author now

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known it might sadly mar my fortunes. In the vastness of thy riches, the absence of these gems shall not be noted. The loss of a star dims not the splendor of the constellations. The glorious sun seeks not to reclaim the lustre his rays have given to the tiny dewdrop. Withal I have rendered to thee somewhat of recompense as I have spoken at sundry times to her gracious Majesty and to our present anointed Sovereign of thy dramas, and fostered as best I might thy interests when they crossed not mine own. So I trust this boon may be awarded me, and that my borrowed splendors may not be stripped away. Thy immeasurable superiority, as again evidenced in the sonnet to the Lady Mary, has fixed anew my resolve as to my predestined field of labor. Not for my brow shall be woven the Poet's garland of bays. Yet abundant self-confidence is mine, and I augur that in the great work for which I would fain believe the ages are waiting, will be made clear my award to be the high priest of Nature. Exact sciences not yet born shall be my servitors and the augmenters of my fame. By the methods I have discerned shall mankind discover and apply those beneficent innovations which are the chiefest births of time. Yet even this hope hath its flavor of bitterness, as thus guided my pupils may far overpass me and my memory be lost. But the love of beauty and melody in poesy is of perennial life, and thy memory shall survive the mutations of time, and shall be the Nation's heritage while fancy and imagination dwell in the souls of men. Anew do I now discern that the meditation of Nature and her laws, mysterious yet exact, consorteth not with the airy fancies of the Poet's vision, and that our paths are diverse, yet each guiding to what is useful and divine.

Farewell! and until the dolours of death are mine shall I remember
thy sweet, loving kindness, and admire thy shining genius where wit
and wisdom guide the flight of a sovereign imagination.

Ever thy friend, *Francis Bacon*.

One special point is notable in this letter from Bacon. His ordinary correspondence is thickly sprinkled with quotations in the ancient tongues. As he was well acquainted with Shakespeare, this omission of his customary Latin phrases would indicate that he recognized Shakespeare's lack of a thorough classical education.

The next, and the last letter in the collection which seems to have a bearing upon the sleeplessness of Shakespeare, is also from Rev. Walter Blaise.

Stratford, April 3, 1609.

To William Shakespeare:

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Sir Thomas Lucy, who is in her Majesty's commission as a Justice of the Peace in this bailiwick, yesterday did inform me that he had been questioned from London if you were a married man, and if yes, when and to whom you were wedded. As the parish records are in my keeping, I could but bestow the information sought, although with great sinking of heart, as a well-wisher to you, who, though given overmuch to worldly frivolities and revels, yet are a worthy citizen, and a charitable and a just. Greatly did I fear this knowledge was sought to thy injury. Hast thou led a blameless life, the gates of hell shall not prevail against thee; but the wicked stand on slippery ways. Anne, thy wife, to whom I did unbosom my fears, is in much tribulation lest thou art unfaithful to thy marriage vows, and again beseeches me to urge thee to come forth from wicked Babylon and dwell in thy pleasant home in Stratford. Thou art become a man of substance; and hast moneys at usury. I have read of thy verses and plays, which, albeit somewhat given to lewdness, and addressed to gain the favor of the baser sort, yet reveal thee to be a man of understanding. I cannot, as it is rumored do some of thy town associates, award thee the title of poet, which title is reserved for the shining ones; but thou hast parts. There are many parish clerks, and even some curates in this realm, scarcely more liberally endowed in mind than thou. But greatly do I fear that thou art little better than one of the wicked. How hast thou put to use this talent entrusted thee by the Master of the vineyard? In the maintenance of the things which profit not; in seeking the applause of the unworthy; in the writing of vain plays, which, if of the follies of youth, may be forgiven and remembered not against thee, provided in riper years you put behind you these frivolities, and atone for the mischief thou hast wrought by rendering acceptable service to the Master; by coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Gladly would I take thy training in charge, and guide thy tottering feet along the flowery paths of Homiletics. Who knoweth into what vessels the All-seeing One may elect to pour his spirit? Perchance in mercy I may be spared to behold thee a faithful though humble preacher of the Word. Anne, thy wife, often hath likened me to a great light upon a high hill-top, shining in the darkness far away. I would not magnify my powers, but not to all is it given to be mighty captains of a host. Yet, according to thy gifts might thy work be, and a little candle shining in a darkened valley hath its place.

In the light of these letters, some passages in "Richard III." and the "Comedy of Errors," written in the same year (1609), have an added significance. In "Richard III.," Gloster says to Anne:—

"Your beauty was the cause of that effect:
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep,
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in thy sweet bosom."

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In the “Comedy of Errors,” the Abbess says to Adriana:—

“The venom clamors of a jealous woman
Poison more deadly than a mud dog’s tooth.
It seems his sleep was hindered by thy railing.

* * * * *

In food, in sport, and life-preserving rest
To be disturbed, would mad or man or beast.
The consequence is, then, thy jealous fits
Have scared thy husband from the use of wits.”

Note, too, the kindred thought:—

“Love hath chased sleep from my enthralled eyes.”

And again this passage, called forth possibly by the letters of the
Rev. Walter Blaise:—

“Slander,
Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
Rides on the posting winds and doth belie
All corners of the world.”

As also this:—

“Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.”

From these several letters sufficiently appear the causes for the insomnia of Shakespeare, which are some of the same causes resulting in its prevalence to-day. They illustrate anew that history repeats itself forever; that humanity is always the same; that like temptations and errors come to men with like results in all the centuries; that the sleeplessness of Shakespeare came, because, merely as a matter of form, he had indorsed for a friend,—because he had bought more stocks than he could pay for, and when his margins were absorbed, came forth a shorn and shivering lamb,—because of the turbulence of labor,—because, alas! he too had been dazzled and bewildered by

“The light that lies
In woman’s eyes.”

Marvellous as were the endowments of the master, yet was he human and as one of us.

Chicago, 1886.