

# CONTENTS

## Milestones

One Dab at a Time	1
Birthday Buoys	3
A Christmas White Out	17
The Bottomless Graveyard	19
Bet Your Bottom Dollar	22
Getting Over It	37
In Treachery We Trust	40
Ripples	43
Saving Kai	45
Guard Duty	55

## Intimacies

Distracting Anthony	57
End Game	61
Eggs and Egos	64
Dealing with Delilah	76
The Virgin and ‘The Dud’	94
The Watched	98
Orcastration	101
Lorraine’s Cross Purpose	103
The Infernal Triangle	106
Pillow Slips	113
Out of Toner	117
Blessed by Bliss	119

## Spain

Flamenco Football	126
Bar Garazi, Pamplona	135
Culinary Capers	142
Tricky Business	148
Seeds of Gold	152

**Redfern**

Redfern, <i>My</i> Redfern	188
So Much Pleasure	193
A Momentary Passing	202
All That Matters	208
Waiting for Crumbs	213

**Travelling**

Good Vibrations	224
Unsprung	227
The Road to Riches	230
Anemotion	257
Out of Order	260
The Wrong Way	263
Furnace	266
My Island Realm	269
Flighty Connections	274

**Difficulties**

The End of Colour	277
School's In	280
A Certain Sanctuary	283
The Sun Also Sets	292
His Secret Sanctuary	295
Love Mars	299
Man Oh Man!	302
Flicks	305
A Brooch of Trust	308
The Lost Hour	311
The Ninth Time	314

**Endtimes**

Afterglow	317
Caved In	323
Toeing the Line	326
But a Whimper	329
Continental Capers	351
Fitting in the Fittest	362
The Winning Party	365
Home and Hosed	381

# One Dab at a Time

I looked at the grass passing below me. A scruffy affair, parched by the droughty summer, struggling manfully in its inhospitable home, half gravel, half dust, yet surviving on this tenacious verge of life's interminable bustle, an endless ribbon of hope.

Life sucks, I thought as I trudged. Like a lemon, it needs a dash of vodka to make it palatable. You want to dive into it but all you achieve is a belly buster. It's like a big new jar of Vegemite. You bring it home all shiny and pristine, open it up with a placental pop and marvel at its smooth, glossy virginal surface, pure coal-black.

I took a deep breath. Partly to brace myself for the shock I could hear approaching, and partly to get some fresh air before the onslaught of exhaust fumes that would inevitably follow. I scrambled down the embankment to escape the worst. Nobody would stop for me here. Even if they felt guilt-ridden by their callousness, or felt charitable, or felt like some company, stopping and getting going again was not worth the gain, whatever that might turn out to be, if any. And it required a decision to be made quickly when decisions were the last thing on the mind of someone in various states of forced meditation or chosen distractions.

When you push your knife tentatively into that silken black sheen for the first time you never wonder just how it might end.

That defloration leaves its pitted mark and makes it easy for the next assault, and the one that follows even more so, and so it goes. Such petty picking at the initial layer leads eventually to depths where chipping away becomes inconsequential and mindless. Each day just a smidgeon more, each day a taste of what life has to offer, just much of the same. All those breakfasts, lunches and dinners. But like any icon it is really a fraud, a crutch, a diversion. Something to get us through. They had to add the vitamins to Vegemite, the ones they claimed were there naturally, once it was discovered they weren't in it at all. Life needs its additives too, to stay bearable.

Then one day your knife suddenly is scraping the glass at the bottom. You see light coming through all those commingled pigments which make up the blackness that has been sucking out your life for so long. It's the first glimmer of the end, the realisation that the Vegemite will not last forever. And so you begin to scrape, and scrape. What had been so abundant and without any hint of running out, though on reflection that should have seemed inevitable being as it was contained in a solid glass jar, was now clearly coming to an end. More and more light appears, knife tinkles on glass. A last swipe with your finger, an apron of smudge as legacy of what once was, and it's over.

The onslaught passed, I regained my composure and my footing, scrambled back up the embankment, prepared for the next one, and continued to push the world back behind me as I plodded, one step at a time.

# Birthday Buoys

*Warning: Brush up your Shakespeare!*

Henry Kingsman could not recall exactly when he had first realised that his birthday was the same as William Shakespeare's, though it was definitely when he was still a mere boy. He had certainly been introduced to Shakespeare, the author, well before that and had already been won over as an incipient devotee. So, when he did make the connection between a private passion and sharing something very intimate and unique with the most brilliant exponent of the English language who had ever scribbled on a scroll, he was thoroughly and immediately bedazzled. This appreciation of genius grew into an adulation over the years and formed the underpinning of Henry Kingsman's whole existence.

He had very fuzzy first memories of participating in an end-of-year school play, at age around nine he thought. It was *Romeo and Juliet*, appropriately expurgated he imagined, looking back from the perspective of his adult insights into its steamy sexual allusions, and he may have even been cast as *Romeo*. He remembered feeling totally silly in his period thespian outfit and being in a constant state of fear of having to deal with those strange human creatures known as girls. They were so unlike his own kind, especially as his background was as an only-child, and hence lacking female siblings. Nevertheless, there was a

strange excitement involved in it all: the make-believe aspects, some powerful mystique in the uttering and re-uttering of those magical sounds called words, and the fact that certain of those girl creatures looked and acted in such a way that aroused anxious but pleasant feelings in him, feelings that he was quite unfamiliar with till then.

Once into secondary school, and with Shakespeare on the syllabus, Henry found he was more in his element. Unlike for most in his cohort, the plays and the poetry struck some special chord with him and he threw himself into the rapture of their world. English became his favourite subject and his favourite class, and he became their star student as he gradually comprehended and memorised more and more of the wondrous ideas and lines he was discovering. He found the library to be an especially agreeable ambience and enjoyed spending time there amongst a universe of words. He suffered some bullying for his behaviour and beliefs, being what these days would be referred to as a nerd, but he was always capable of defending himself above the punching weight of his puny physical form, using those very same words he had come to cherish, to devastating effect. While he remained the object of much derision through the years, the power of those words he commanded continued to ensure he was always treated with respectful caution by enemies, real and potential.

One day in his youth, perhaps when he was around 14, after lengthy consideration of the financial burden it would entail, he purchased a second-hand copy of the *Complete Works* which he had been sizing up in a second-hand bookshop, another one of his favourite milieu. After he had nervously handed over the hard-won and laboriously accumulated cash, all in the smallest denomination note of the time so it looked impressively bulky, and with the thick one-volume hardcover held tightly in his grasp, he raced home filled with excitement over simply possessing such a treasure, and for the endless hours of pleasure it promised. He shut himself up in his bedroom, sat at his little

desk, pricked his finger tips one by one with a needle and, dipping a nib into the droplets of blood, scrawled his name and his *ex libris* painstakingly onto the front flyleaf, letter by letter, finger by finger. He learnt from this exercise that self-sacrifice for one's passion was paradoxically highly satisfying, but also that there were more suitable, and less debilitating, places to prick on the body in order to extract one's own blood.

This ardent identification early on with his hero deepened even further in a very personal way through his reading of that *Complete Works* once Henry discovered that a large number of the plays actually bore his name; seven in fact, out of the thirty-seven or so that constituted the oeuvre. It became such a close and special bonding that he felt at times that he might well be William Shakespeare reincarnated. At school, at that certain age and being boys, he enjoyed the kudos that came his way from his fellows when he explained the lewd pieces: the “die” and “nothing” metaphors, or heads-in-laps moments, and puns about essential bodily functions. Later, as he grew into adulthood, he took every chance to go and see productions of any of the plays, he read as much as he could about Shakespeare and his work by the legion of critics and academics that had already amassed and was still proliferating as time went by, loved reciting the sonnets to himself and learnt most of the best lines off by heart.

On his first trip overseas, to England naturally, he made sure he tracked down all the landmarks from the vicarious explorations of his youth. In London, following, he hoped, the footsteps of the Master through the city, he floated from Blackfriars to Bishopsgate Street to Cripplegate and by ferry across the Thames to Southbank, entranced all the while by the ambience and what his imagination was doing with it. The Globe not as yet having been reconstructed, he took in as many of the revered dramatist's plays he could find, wherever he could find them, feeling that seeing them there in that authentic setting was as close as he could get to the real thing.

He ensured that a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon was a highlight, making the journey through what he considered an unsettlingly unnatural spring countryside on the day the Bard's, and of course his own, birthday was celebrated. A journalist from *The Times*, there to report on the festivities, interviewed him by sheer coincidence - or perhaps not, as it later occurred to him when in a more spiritual frame of mind - and asked for his favourite play. He answered firmly and without hesitation *Macbeth*, although he knew it was not the popular choice, quoting from it some lines he had long rote, the most despairing words ever penned about life and the unmitigated pointlessness of it. "It may appear in tomorrow's edition," she told him, and he had chuckled at the irony, but did not bother to try to explain it to her. Nor was it in there on the morrow.

At an early stage it seemed obvious to him and to others, especially his long-time friends who knew and understood his obsession, both indulging him and ribbing him for it, that he would choose something like librarianship as his career path, and he did. The profession provided him with everything he needed in a working life to suit his personality and interests: its surroundings, security, serenity, income, steady progression in seniority and status, access to increasingly sophisticated technology for researching and enjoying his favourite author, not to mention that most of his colleagues were women and there was a regular progression of often starry-eyed female clients seeking intellectual awakening, which Henry was always more than willing to help provide. He augmented what he considered to be his innate appeal by beginning to take on some of Shakespeare's assumed looks and manners. He adopted a slightly foppish style, an affected accent, grew his hair long and pulled back in an effort to simulate William's frontal dome and for a time tried a trimmed goatee with moustache. Fortunately this period did not last long, partly because he was not balding and partly because he realised he was making a bit of an idiot of himself. In any case he decided



the important connections were internal and naturally endowed so there was no need to pursue the superficial.

He did often consider taking up acting so that he would have the opportunity to declaim those wonderful words publicly and be applauded for it, but he was not an extrovert and was never able to make the commitment, even as an amateur. On the other hand, he made sure he acquired any new film versions of the plays and built up a considerable library of, first videotapes, and then DVD copies - there were hundreds of them to seek out. He loved popular adaptations of them as well, especially musicals like *West Side Story* and Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*, and the songs they produced - *Brush Up Your Shakespeare* stood out, as bawdy and ingenious as the Bard's own work. And who could not be tickled by the contorted rhyming of 'Cleopatra' with 'flatter 'er'. He immediately recognised the Shakespearian association with *My Private Idaho* when he first saw it. Being based as it was on the *Henrys*, Henry especially identified with it and though he was not quite so keen on how the director had handled the main character, whose sexual proclivity he certainly could not identify with, this did not undermine its appeal as a further example of due homage.

There was one particular film, however, that he detested and would not watch, let alone have in his collection. *Anonymous* it was and in anonymity, or in ignominy, he believed is where it should ever have remained, or something along those lines. The contention that the works of Shakespeare had been authored by others, or another, was anathema to him, an abomination, and he would brook no discussion on the subject. Friends in his salad days of university would taunt him about it. They compared the authorship of the canon to Henry's well-known views on the nature of God. He believed that it did not really matter to define what God was, that God could simply be an amalgam of all and any of the concepts available to explain the mystery; the main thing was what followed. He was vaguely disturbed by a certain logical process in the

argument that connected Shakespeare and such a composite God, but nevertheless found comfort in the comparison.

The main contender in this charade of spin and fable was the wastrel Edward de Vere, an Earl of Oxford and arch-villain, whose name he refused to even speak and which he made every effort to expunge from his memory. It seemed to him to be just so much a product of the fashionable tall-poppy syndrome that pervaded contemporary life, the fascination of shallow minds with conspiracy theories which had burgeoned in the fertile soil of the ten-second grab and equally superficial social media, and the fraudulent nature of popular culture generally that had usurped a much more solid and stable world. He was, after all, like Will, a Taurean.

Almost nothing would shake the unwavering loyalty he had to his co-mate. Even when he learnt about Baret's *Alvearie* and the allegations of a minor plagiarism by his idol - no more than a mere dipping into the lexical honeypot - he remained faithful. Why would a writer not resort to any available resource to achieve their artistic goals, and in this case such glorious ones, just as they do today with infinitely greater means? Still, Henry's image of the poet sitting by candlelight dashing off with his quill pen all those extraordinary lines of native wit straight from his head was smudged a smidgen. Even then, though, it managed to bring him closer to William by giving him a human profile, with flaws along with all that emotion, behaviour and ability, just like every mortal, including him, Henry.

He had begun writing just for his own amusement quite early on, and often tried to parrot the master's style. He signed some of his lesser, whimsical works as 'Will-I-Am', with perhaps an undercurrent of Freudian slippage. When he experienced his first serious adolescent romantic murmuring of the heart he presented to the object of his fond desire an example of his early sonnet insinuations, this one being a reply to the questionable acuity of the inner eyesight of both Romeo and Juliet. He was

very proud of it. It is preserved as part of his opus which he, eventually, placed on the internet for all to freely access, and reproduced here from that source. It was titled 'To a Noble Brow' and went:

*No, love's not blind  
 Yet others cannot see  
 What lovers' eyes behold: each other.  
 Sweet lips, bright eyes,  
 What features come to mind  
 When you're not near? None!  
 Still, a silent face may smile  
 And I see you once again  
 Through love's eyes.  
 Lovers hear,  
 But hear beyond the senses of the ear;  
 Sweet words, heard with the heart  
 Felt by every bone and nerve  
 Then sent back, in imitation, with love's voice.*

While its meter was reasonably sound, and it included a tenable conceit and some acceptable if overblown poetic devices, his mastery of the sonnet form was still critically lacking. But, ever more sadly for Henry, it did not have the effect he had hoped for, though it did have a very Elizabethan one: that of the unrequited, courtly-love variety. He relied on more conventional and urbane methods of allurement henceforth, including genuine poetic references, with greater success. When he finally married it was with some mixed feelings, as she was not an Anne, nor pregnant, nor considerably older, though his dedication to his birthdaysake was not so compelling as to overwhelm him in all regards, not at that stage anyway.

He was pleased when each of his girls came along and he was able to sneak naming them Katherina, Beatrice and Miranda past his wife's defences, or so she let him believe. These were the

female characters he admired most for their undaunted mettle and hot-blooded intelligence and whose names he hoped might transfer those qualities to his own progeny. He preferred this to calling them after Will's two daughters, Susanna and Judith, on the grounds that they were a little mundane, little was known of them as people and, well, this copycat business could perhaps be taken too far. He was, nonetheless, disappointed not to manage a Cordelia or Portia, two more of his favourites, or have a pretext to be father to a Hamnet, despite its poor prognosis, and so the latter probably for the best.

Over time he extended his writing from poems and theatrical drama pieces, a mix of comedies and tragedies, often based on historical figures - he had many more tragic subjects to draw upon than Shakespeare had - into rap and hip-hop music and scripts for television series and full-length films. He considered that, had Shakespeare lived in the present day, any and all these might be the style of work he could well have been creating, along with serious theatre, and would be the way for him to make his mark and his fortune in the modern world.

Though he tentatively circulated some of his work, mainly but not only amongst friends, nothing of Henry's efforts was ever picked up by producers or publishers. The truth was in reality he lacked any vaulting ambition and was a little loath to expose his output for fear of rejection. This would in turn have ruined the notion he had of the tenuous association, given Shakespeare's unbridled contemporary success. Not that this analysis of his reluctance crossed his mind. However, he wasn't so backward in his various private circles, and at any opportunity, especially around the annual time of his birthday, he would loudly and widely proclaim the significance of the date. Though this never seemed to make much impact on his friends in the way of flattering comparisons, which was a disappointment to him, it continued to provide great sustenance for his otherwise rather inconsequential existence.

At one point he plunged into studying astrology and numerology and was always keen to unearth which characteristics of Taurus he might share with his fellow bull. This proved to be not at all difficult. If he had searched further he would just as assuredly have found similarities in most astrological directions, it being of infinite flexibility, not unlike the heavens themselves. So he was well satisfied with what he found. He was mildly chuffed when the contemporary Prince of Denmark married an Australian. There was both affinity and affirmation in that for him.

His love of language had caused him to study Latin at school which later devolved into an affection for Spanish. Through this he found to his amazement that the illustrious Spanish writer, Miguel de Cervantes, had also died on the very same date as Shakespeare had died. When that day, April the 23rd, was promoted, first by the Spanish and then by UNESCO, as World Book Day, he felt he owned some complicity in its conception. Curious it was though that the British did not follow suit, they believing that the Easter holiday period might clash with it. Such a pedestrian approach to what was their true glory, he thought. No such slight however could blight his vision of this global and spiritual poetic harmony to which he believed he was in many ways central.

One day, when he was well past his middle age and life had moved into the internet and iPhone era, he was doing some casual surfing on the web as a diversion from his workaday world and came across a brief reference to calendars, Julian and Gregorian. There were vague echoes channelling down his recollection tunnel of the words, probably no more than a conflation with famous names, past and present, or with chanting. In any case he was always easily seduced by history and science of all types, so he dallied. And while the basics of the story were clear enough to him, they only lodged in his memory bank as seeds in hibernation ready to burst forth at some later propitious, or

possibly inopportune, occasion, and did not germinate then. As he newly understood the position, calendars were not rigid things, but errant and constructed to purpose, whereas he had always assumed they were born of some natural law. The original flawed calendar, which had operated since Roman times, since Julius Caesar in fact hence the name Julian, had turned slowly awry, placing the seasons out of joint with the dates. These were slipping behind, or more accurately, linguistically speaking, leaping backwards, since the cause of it was those leap years. Easter was sliding towards winter, heatwaves might strike during northern Christmas. It was creeping artificial climate change, medieval style. The Church could not allow it. So the Church, as Pope Gregory, set it right, as a Pope could, hence the name Gregorian, more than just a chant. Leaping years were reined in, still restricted to one in four, but with the proviso and exception of any round centuries, like 1700, unless it could be divided by four hundred, a proviso and exception to the exception. The year 1600, for example, and then again 2000, both of which took the great leap forward. It meant re-setting the calendar when the change was implemented, just as with the summer time change each year when we lose, or gain, an hour. In the Gregorian case at that time, however, it was a loss of a full ten days, never to be regained. The new date was dubbed 'New Style', or 'N.S.', as opposed to 'Old Style', or 'O.S.', but these tags faded out of common use quite quickly as the distinction was lost in the steamy haze of evaporating months and years.

These were all concepts that Henry had difficulty digesting fully, but there was also an element of denial in his reaction. It seemed that this restructuring was taking place manifestly during Shakespeare's lifetime so there may have been implications in his case, but the matter was never pursued, either by Henry nor apparently by anyone else. In truth it was even more complicated than Henry realised. The reforms were brought in piecemeal, indeed during William's lifetime, first in Catholic Europe, and

therefore applying to Cervantes in Spain, but not in Protestant Elizabethan England. That had to wait another one hundred and seventy years, by which time it required eleven days to plug the gap, there being no stopping the inexorable march of time.

The years continued to turn over at their petty, though seemingly quickening, pace. One birthday followed another until Henry found himself increasingly confronted by his mortality as an inevitability, rather than as a youthful speculation, or as a middle-aged elusion. His lifelong affiliation with Shakespeare's life and the presumed parallelism with his own led him to at first suspect, then fear, then desire, then crave that he, Henry, too might die on the same day as he was born, as he knew William had, and likewise on the same date as William had. As each year rolled around with that looming date these emotions became more and more entangled in his mind so that his anxiety over his actions on the day, as each one approached, became increasingly intense.

His original thinking that he would simply be struck down by natural causes as a fitting finale, though highly unlikely unless there were truly some cosmic connection, shifted into more manipulable territory whereby he would arrange and therefore ensure his correct departure. Of course he had no need to research the possibilities: his knowledge of Shakespearean drama was by then as complete as necessary. This was straightforward statistics. He typically knew such key facts as how many words William had used, how many he had used only once, which ones he had concocted, the longest play, the dates of first productions, the *dramatis personae*, even trivia like his not using any words beginning with an 'x'.

So Henry certainly was aware that there had been seventy-four scripted deaths, mostly stabbings, and including suicides. He became progressively obsessed by this notion, contemplating whether he would be capable of stabbing himself to death - could he take such a hell of pain? Or of swallowing poison - one without

too much agony associated with it. Or hanging, or drowning himself. He shuddered at the thought of being bitten by a snake, though there were more than sufficient numbers of them in his homeland to do that job sublimely well, and beheading was quite obviously out. So too was one sure-fire method, that of gunshot. He would never contemplate such an un-Shakespearean practice. Though it had become a common technique in the modernised adaptations of so many of the plays, and he admired the imaginative creativity otherwise involved in them, he frowned upon its deviation from authenticity. Likewise, arranging to have himself murdered, though murder or assassination might seem to be very appropriate given its involvement in so many of the plays, would unfairly involve another otherwise innocent party in a seriously illegal act.

He did, however, warm to the idea that the hubris which was gradually enveloping him in this planning might be the cause of his death, along the lines of Enobarbus dying of shame in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or King Lear from grief. But what of the crucial timing? That was the rub. In a similar manner, attempting to sleep-no-more yourself to death, the curse of Macbeth and his Lady, might prove a relatively painless method if successful, at least physically, but it would be drawn-out and might miss the all-important birthday cue. In any respect, its direction and consequences were too uncertain. No, any planned final exit would have to be exceptionally disciplined and carefully programmed.

The four-hundredth anniversary of the renowned wordsmith's death was approaching, as was Henry's sixty-sixth birthday. He concluded that this should be the occasion of his grand conclusion. He secretly made the necessary preparations and put all his affairs in order. He left more than sufficient funds to provide against what he considered the inherent frailty of his four dearest, and to set up a scholarship for budding young playwrights. In a moment of quirky sentimentality he considered specifically bequeathing the conjugal



bed to his wife, as William had done, but given the eccentricity of such a deed and the mysterious nature of the original act, he did not go through with it.

He finalised uploading his own complete works to an internet site. He sent out invitations to all his friends and to a select few of his relatives, booked a large room at the nearby Tudor Hotel, and ordered the catering for a banquet. He carefully planned the affair, and particularly his finale. Everything went smoothly: the night was boisterous, with lots of cheer, and was well fuelled and lubricated by beer and wine. As the large birthday cake, adorned with its centrepiece of four mock-quill rockets spinning a catherine wheel surrounded by sixty-six candles each encircled by six sparklers, was trundled in to much singing, stomping and best-wishing, Henry, fairly tipsy, leapt up, reversed his chair, stepped up onto its seat and put one foot upon its back in oratorical style. Waving his arms around above his head he launched into the great Hamlet soliloquy.

Almost immediately, just as the “not” issued from his mouth and became an elongated “ahhhh”, the chair teetered and he toppled forward, kicking the bucket of ice and champagne off the end of the table with his splaying legs as he splattered face-first into the birthday cake, the carving knife which was resting next to it and tilted upwards on the plate somehow piercing him straight through the heart, killing him instantly. It was not as he had planned, but it was effective, and dramatic, and as everyone repeated over and over, so tragic, while all were privately unable to resist a guilty giggle at its histrionic, comedic touch.

So, alas, a few days later, poor Henry joined Yorick in silent subterranean rest, with a headstone marked as he always dreamt it would be: ‘Born 23rd April - Died 23rd April’. The famous inscription followed: ‘Blessed be those that spare these stones, And cursed be any that move my bones’.

But what Henry did not live long enough to shockingly reveal to himself, had he delved further, was that while Miguel de

Cervantes did indeed die on his birthday and now deathday, the twenty-third day of well-apparelled April, Catholic Spain having converted by then, William Shakespeare did not. He died eleven days later, on the fourth day of the merry month of May, England having maintained the Julian faith. Nor was it the same day as the day he had been born on. He died in 1616, and 1600 had been a special leap year adding another day to the hypothetical switchover. So his official birthday in 1564 was our third day of that same month of pride and pomp, May, these days and dates floating around at the mercy of some tide of time, like buoys, tethered to a solid foundation, but still permitted a certain fluid freedom.

The best that could be claimed by Henry is that they shared an astrological home. But most happily for Henry, surely the bardolater without peer, what he never discovered was that when he, Henry Kingsman, was opening his eyes to the light of an early day for the first time that twenty-third of April N.S. in the wandering antipodes, at the very same moment, though late at night the previous day, north of London on the other side of a slowly rotating world, Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, clandestine pretender to the Shakespearean domain, was also just coming into the same world, exactly four hundred years before: the very span of time the new-fangled Gregorian calendar had instigated as its o'erleaping exception to its exceptional proviso.

Whether dead Henry will ever find such historically disturbing cause to turn in that antipodean grave beneath the headstone of local Triassic Yellowblock, with its neat verbal and numeric bookends and intimidating Shakespearian inscriptions, and thereby move his own bones, must forever remain a matter for conjecture, or of time to tell.