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It is no wonder that when the poet obtained release from the King's Bench, his hair had

> turn'd white
> More through the Ghastly Obiects of this Night,
> Then with the Snow of age[1].

III. *His Recusancy.*

One more glimpse of Dekker's misfortunes is afforded us. In the Middlesex County Records[2], under the year 1626, is the entry:

> 1 December, 2 Charles I.—True Bill for not going to church &c. during one month beginning on the said day, against...Thomas Deckers gentleman,...all ten late of St. James's Clerkenwell; ....

A similar entry occurs under the date 1 March 1628.

Dekker's writings, especially in his later years, were very orthodox in their piety, and his recusancy cannot with any probability be put down to religious scruples. Is it possible that like John Shakespeare[3] he stayed away from church for 'fear of process for debt'?

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'CURSED HEBENON' (OR 'HEBONA').

The article 'Hebenon, Hebon, Hebona' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* requires some correction. The words are stated to be 'Names given by Shakspere and Marlowe to some substance having a poisonous juice'; and it is added that 'Commentators have variously identified the word with *ebon*, *henbane*, and Ger. *eibe*, *eibenbaum*, yew,' and that 'Gower has *hebenus* apparently in a similar sense.' Quotations are given from Gower, *Conf.* II, 103 (=Book iv, l. 3017), 'Of hebenus, that slepy tre'; from Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*, III, where 'juice of Hebon' is mentioned as one of the deadliest of poisons; from Shakespeare (the well-known passage, *Hamlet*, I, v, 62, where the Quartos read *hebona* and the Folio *Hebenon*); and from Erasmus Darwin, *Loves of the Plants*. The last of these passages, being obviously a mere echo of Shakespeare, calls for no remark.

Now the line quoted from Gower occurs in a paraphrase of Ovid, *Met.* XI, 610 ff.; and 'hebenus, that slepy tre' is not a tree having a soporific juice, but simply ebony (Latin *ebenus*), the wood used by the God of Sleep in the walls of his chamber. This would have been evident if the following line, 'The bordes al aboute be,' had been quoted. There

[1] *Dekker his Dreame* (1620), sig. F_3.
[2] Ed. J. C. Jeaffreson, III, pp. 12, 19–20.
[3] Sir Sidney Lee, *Life of William Shakespeare* (1916), p. 280.

is no reason to suppose that Gower, any more than Ovid, imagined that ebony had any soporific effect apart from that of its blackness. But it seems probable that Gower's line, remembered without its context, is the source of Marlowe's notion that the ebony tree had a narcotic juice. That this was really Marlowe's meaning need not be doubted; in the sixteenth century the English word *ebon* was often written with a prefixed *h*. The objection that a 'sleepy' juice is not necessarily a deadly poison would not trouble him, even if he had thought of it: a poet is entitled, if he so chooses, to assume that what is *ignotum* is *magnificum*.

It is hardly possible that Shakespeare's 'juice of hebona' has nothing to do with Marlowe's 'juice of hebon,' and I feel little doubt the later dramatist borrowed the word from his predecessor. But there is no foundation in Marlowe for Shakespeare's extraordinarily detailed description of the terrible toxic effects of 'hebona.' Either this is due purely to the poet's imagination, or he must have taken it from some other authority. The former alternative is, in itself, by no means inconceivable. But Sir W. Thiselton-Dyer (in *Shakespeare's England*, vol. I, p. 509) has shown that the properties ascribed to 'hebona' agree to a remarkable extent (due allowance being made for poetic heightening of the horrible details) with those commonly attributed in the sixteenth century (not altogether without justification in scientific fact) to henbane (*hyoscyamus*). It seems quite likely that Shakespeare, knowing that the juice of henbane was reputed to be one of the most baleful of poisons, and misled by the resemblance of sound, may have imagined that *hebon* and *henbane* were the same word. If so, it is easy to understand why he should have chosen to use Marlowe's poetic form rather than the form popularly current. The obvious etymology of the latter stamps it as incurably prosaic; besides, as Shakespeare's audience could not be expected to know what 'hebon' was, he would be able to give free play to his imagination in describing its effects.

Sir W. Thiselton-Dyer quotes from Lyte the unfounded statement that the juice of henbane, applied to any member of the body, causes it to mortify and turn black. It is possible that Shakespeare may have read this passage, and derived from it some hints with regard to the working of the 'leperous distilment'; the supposition, however, is not absolutely necessary. Sir William also refers to Pliny, who says (*N.H.* XXV, 4, 17) that the oil of henbane, when poured into the ear (he elsewhere tells us that it was a remedy for ear-ache), is apt to cause mental disorder (*temptat mentem*). Shakespeare *may* have seen this statement, and wrongly associated it with the notion current in his day that a sleeper could be killed

by pouring poison into his ear; but the existence of the popular belief would sufficiently account for the invention of the story of the king's murder.

We do not know why Shakespeare (or the printer) changed *hebon* into *hebona*, nor what is the origin of the form *hebenon* in the Folio. Possibly the latter may be a euphonic improvement due to Shakespeare himself; there was no reason why he should consider himself bound to adhere rigorously to Marlowe's form, if he regarded it as merely a poetic alteration of *henbane*. Another possibility is that *hebenon* is a pedantic attempt at correction by some transcriber or proof-reader, who vaguely remembered the Greek ἔβενος and thought it was neuter.

Although I think my conjecture as to the origin of Shakespeare's word is probable as the evidence stands, I do not consider it absolutely certain. The Italian play of *Gonzaga*, if it should ever be recovered, may conceivably furnish a better explanation.

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'KING LEAR' AND THE BALLAD OF 'JOHN CARELESS.'

In *King Lear* (I, iv, 168 ff.) occurs a passage that, in so far as I can discover, has never been explained. There the Fool sings:

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a King should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among.

The repetition of two of these lines in Heywood's *Rape of Lucrece*[1] has, of course, long been noted. In the *Lucrece* the passage runs:

When *Tarquin* first in Court began,
And was approved King:
Some men for sudden ioy gan weep,
But I for sorrow sing.

Here the first two lines are taken from a ballad called 'The Noble Acts of Arthur of the Round Table[2],' published in Thomas Deloney's *Garland of Goodwill* (1596), though Heywood substituted the word 'Tarquin' (whose deeds the ballad actually chronicles) for Deloney's 'Arthur.' But the source of the first two lines sung by Shakespeare's Fool and the last two sung by Heywood's Valerius has never been pointed out.

[1] *Dramatic Works*, 1874, v, 179.

[2] *Works of Deloney*, ed. F. O. Mann, p. 323. This ballad is quoted also in 2 *Henry IV*, II, iv; Marston's *Malcontent*, II, ii; Beaumont and Fletcher's *Little French Lawyer*, II, iii; and elsewhere.