A LIFE OF
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I
ANCESTRY

What's in a name? petulantly asks Juliet. The answer is, as every student of the subject knows: In some names, little or nothing, in others, possibly a great deal. The latter alternative seems to be the case with the name of our most distinguished English poet. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as to-day, the word "Shakespeare" unquestionably suggested to the mind of every one what its two syllabic elements so clearly indicate — military prowess. But the suggestion was then far more obvious than now, for the age was nearer to chivalry, and the phrase "the shaking of the spear" was a most a commonplace as expressing the doughiness of warriors. Layamon, in his Brut, represents the valiant British earls as leaping upon their horses and thus defying the Roman hosts:

Heo scaeken on heore honden speren swithe stronge.

The English rendering of Job, xli, 29, takes the form: "He laugheth at the shaking of the spear." John Marston, in Histriomastix (1598), writes humorously:

When he shakes his furious spear,
The foe in shivering, fearful sort
May lay him down in death to snort;

and John Davies of Hereford, in Humour's Heau'n on Earth (1609), exclaims:
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

No human power can their force withstand;  
They laugh to scorn the shaking of the spear.

Illustrations might be multiplied, showing that the significance of the poet’s name could not have escaped his contemporaries.

It is duly noted by the early etymologists of proper names. Thus Verstegan, writing in 1605 Of the Surnames of our Ancient Families, observes that “Breakspær, Shakspear, and the like, have been names imposed upon the first bearers of them for valour and feats of arms”;¹ and the learned William Camden, who as Clarenceux King of Arms was especially interested in such matters, makes the same statement in his Remaines (1605). Thomas Fuller, in his sketch of the poet’s life, first of all notes that he was “Martial in the Warlike sound of his Sur-name (whence some may conjecture him of a Military extraction), Histri-vibrans or Shake-speare.” Spenser, Jonson, and other poets took occasion to point out that his name did “heroically sound,” the Elizabethan printers felt impelled to emphasize its military significance by the use of a hyphen, and the officers of the College of Heralds embodied this significance in a canting design for the Shakespeare coat of arms, with a crest of the warlike falcon shaking a spear in its talons. The poet himself, no doubt, believed that military prowess was the true, as it was the apparent, origin of his patronymic; and possibly in composing his dedicatory letters to the great Earl of Southampton, whose patronage he was seeking, he felt a mild sense of pride as he signed his name in its most suggestive spelling — “Shakespeare.”

But whether some early ancestor was really distinguished by military prowess, or whether the designation

¹ Richard Verstegan, A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence, 1605, p. 294. See also John Done, Polydoron, 1631, cited in Notes and Queries, 3d Series, i, 266.
was jocularly foisted upon "the first bearers of the same," we cannot say. Nor can we say whether the name was a straightforward and simple English coinage of the twelfth or thirteenth century when such compounds were being freely created for those who had no patronymic, or whether it was a natural corruption through popular etymology of some earlier and less significant form. That the name originally bore so patent a meaning is open to doubt. Some of the early spellings may be cited as pertinent: "Saxberd," "Shagspere," "Shaxbere," "Shakespur," "Shexper," "Chacsper," "Saxper," "Shaxber," "Shaxberd." And hence some scholars have tried to find the origin of the name in such fanciful sources as "Sigisbert" and "Jacques-Pierre." Mrs. Stopes, in her admirable work, Shakespeare's Family, gives up the attempt, simply saying: "The origin of the name 'Shakespeare' is hidden in the mists of antiquity."

Yet it has often been observed that the given names of the family in England suggest a Norman origin. "Wherever Shakespeare families are found," writes one scholar, "they invariably show a very great preponderance of Christian names that are characteristically Norman." And it is quite possible that the Shakespeares came over with the throng that followed in the wake of William the Conqueror.

It may be significant, therefore, that a name like Shakespeare's occurs in the Great Rolls of Normandy for the year 1195. In a list of mainporners in the Bailiwick of Oximin, situate in the diocese of Bayeux, who were owing money to King Richard, we read:

William Sakeespee reddit computum de ij marcis pro eodem [i.e., pro plegio]. In thesauro v solidos sterlingorum. Et debet i marcam, viij solidos, iiiij denarios.¹

¹ Magni Rotuli Scaccarii Normanniae, ed. by Thomas Stapleton, 1840-44, i, 242. I have expanded the clerk's crabbed abbreviations in the manu-
Three years later a return from the same bailiwick notes that William Sakeespée had made "no further payment," and was still indebted to the crown for the sum recorded in 1195:

William Sakeespée i marcam, viij solidos, iiiij denarios ster-lingorum, pro plegio Raĝ Bladarii.¹

A careful search through the Rolls, which extend to the year 1203, yielded no other illusion to this William Sakeespée; possibly he had already left the diocese. There is, however, a reference to a Roger Sakeespée in a neighboring diocese.

In printing the Norman Rolls, Stapleton points out that their chief value will be "to enable each descendant of a family of Norman origin readily to trace out the locality or epithet from which his surname is derived." Hence the appearance in these Rolls of a William Sakeespée indicates the possibility, if not the probability, that the poet's family, like so many distinguished English families, came from across the Channel during the rule of English Kings over northern France. If this be the case, exactly when the Shakespeares settled in England is not clear. The name, however, does not appear in the Domesday Book, 1086, in which William the Conqueror listed the taxable inhabitants of each shire. Indeed, the earliest reference to the family in England which the well-nigh exhaustive search carried on through many years by hundreds of Shakespearean scholars, expert genealogists, and minute archæologists, has yet discovered, bears the date 1248. The form the name takes is "Saksper," the given appellation is "William," and the place is within

ANCESTRY

a few miles of Stratford. In 1260 we find a “Simon Shakespeye,” who seems to reappear in 1278 as “Simon Sakkesper.”¹ From this time on the name occurs with great frequency in Warwickshire and the adjacent counties. As we have seen, however, the entries in the Norman Rolls show that about fifty years before the name begins to appear in English records, a “William Sakeespée” was living under English rule in northern France. We find him registered as a debtor to King Richard for a sum which apparently he did not find it easy to pay. We cannot, of course, say that in the reign of this sovereign the Sakeespées migrated to England; but we are reminded of Christopher Sly’s humorous boast: “The Slys are no rogues. Look in the chronicles; we came in with Richard Conqueror.” And we have positive evidence that the Sakeespées did migrate from Normandy, and ultimately became transformed into an English family.² From the year 1260 on the name is not uncommon. For example, in the Calendar of the Charter Rolls, 1310, we find records of an English family with the surname variously spelled “Sakespie,” “Sakespey,” “Syakespeye,” “Saxpey,” and “Shakespeie.”

Of the early history of the Sakeespée family in Normandy I have been able to discover little. The name apparently was of rare occurrence. It was not unknown, however, in northern France, and the family was not without some distinction, at least at a later date. There is reason for believing that one of these Norman Sakeespées was endowed with “the heavenly gift of poesy.” An acrostic at the end of the better of the two extant manuscripts of the important romance Le Chate-lain de Couci, written in the latter part of the thirteenth

¹ See C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare’s Family, 1901, p. 4.
² Ernest Weekley, in his Surnames, 1916, observes that the name “Saque-spée” occurs frequently in early English records.
or the early part of the fourteenth century, seems to declare that the author is named "Jakemes Sakesep" (i.e., Jacques Sakeespée).\footnote{A second manuscript makes the acrostic read "Jakemes Makesep." See G. Paris, in *Histoire Littéraire*, xxvii, 353, and Ch.–V. Langlois, *La Société Française au xiiie Siècle*, 1911, pp. 187, 221.} "Jakemes" is a form peculiar to Normandy, and the author of the romance unquestionably spoke the Picard dialect. Again, in the year 1408 a Sakeespée was mayor of a village in the north of France—a man of some means and education. To a document, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, he signed his name clearly "Jacques Sakeespée."

If the name of the English family was originally "Saquespee," or "Sakeespée," it passed through various corruptions, such as were common to English surnames, until it emerged through folk-etymology into the thoroughly anglicized form "Shakespeare."

Probably this evolution was largely determined by the Norman pronunciation of the first syllable of the name, *sague* or *sak*, preserving the hard sound of *k*, which in England would promptly identify it with the English word *sak*, a common form of *shake* (derived from O.E. *scacan*). It was natural that, as the intrusion of the letter *h* grew more and more into usage until *shake* completely replaced the earlier forms, this letter would make its appearance in the first element of the proper name we are considering. It should not be forgotten that the earliest form of the name in England is "Saksper," and that this form long persisted. For example, the poet’s uncle was entered in the burial register of Snitterfield in 1596 as "Henry Sakspere," and his wife shortly after as "Margret Sakspere, widow, being tymes the wyff of Henry Shakspere." Since the first element of the name, both in its original form *sak* and in its later form *shake*, suggested
the idea of shaking something, the second element espée might readily suggest the modification into "Shake-a-speare," ¹ or "Shakespeare"; for in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, under the influence of the allegory and of folk-etymology, such was the general tendency of compound proper names.

Possibly, too, this slight modification in sound in order to make sense was assisted by the meaning of the name in its French form, a meaning more clearly revealed in the spelling "Saquespée." The first element, saquer, a Norman variant for sacher (derived probably from sac), means "to draw out vigorously"; the second element, espée, an earlier spelling for épée, means "a sword." Hence the name in its French form had a military significance, "to draw out the sword quickly." And that this significance was obvious to contemporaries is shown by the fact that in the Norman Rolls the name is variously written "Sake Espée," "Sake espée," and "Sakeespée." Such an obvious military significance would, in a measure at least, justify the modification, in English terms, to "Shake-speare." ²

It is further interesting to note the appearance in early English records of the surname "Drawsword." ¹²⁷³, an exact translation of the French "Sakeespée," and the curious hybrid form "Drawespée." The latter, it would seem, was an attempt in a bilingual age to prevent in the name "Sakeespée" the inevitable confusion of the French word sak, "to draw," with the common English word sak, "to shake." Still more significant is the appearance of the surname "Drawspere," which may be a corruption

¹ Cf. the early variants "Shakaspeare," "Shakyspeare," "Shakispeare." The Stratford records commonly refer to the poet's father as "John Shakyspeare."

² Cf. also the form "Shakeshaft." The poet's grandfather, Richard Shakespeare, is referred to in 1541 as "Richard Shakeschafte"; see C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Environment, p. 16.
of “Drawespée”; for although one might easily shake a spear, it is difficult to understand how one could draw a spear.

If Shakespeare was in truth of Norman origin on his father’s side, there was, of course, mingled in his veins a steady stream of Saxon blood from the middle shires of England. And thus in him were combined, in what we may suppose were ideal proportions, the two important racial elements that have gone to the making of the greatest Englishmen.¹

Whatever be the earlier history of the family, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Shakespeares, though fairly well-distributed throughout England, were especially numerous in Warwickshire and the neighboring counties. The earliest person of the name, of whom a notice has yet been discovered, lived, as has been stated, in the first half of the thirteenth century at Clopton, about seven miles from Stratford-on-Avon, and bore the given appellation “William.” He rose to doubtful fame through the commission of a robbery, for which he was duly hanged in 1248. We have no reason, however, to connect him with the antecedents of the poet. Indeed, among the host of Shakespeares that crowd the records of the fifteenth and the earlier half of the sixteenth century we are unable to trace the particular family which was destined to produce England’s greatest genius. Yet from a study of the records of these numerous Shakespeares we may feel reasonably sure that the poet’s ancestors, for several generations back at least, were plain husbandmen, engaged in tilling the soil.

Our definite knowledge of the dramatist’s family begins with his grandfather, Richard Shakespeare, a farmer

¹ Carlyle wrote of Shakespeare: “The finest figure, as I apprehend, that Nature has hitherto seen fit to make of our widely diffused Teutonic clay. Saxon, Norman, Celt, or Sarmat, I find no human soul so beautiful these fifteen hundred years — our supreme modern European man.”
ANCkSTRY

living in the small village of Snitterfield, about four miles from Stratford. Richard owned no land himself, but was a tenant on the estate of a wealthy squire, Robert Arden. The farm that he cultivated is thus described by his landlord: “All that messuage, with its appurtenances, in Snitterfield, which are in the tenure of the said Richard Shakespeare; and all those my lands, meadows, pastures, commons, with their appurtenances, in Snitterfield aforesaid, belonging and appertaining to the same messuage, which now are in the tenure of the aforesaid Richard Shakespeare.” His dwelling in Snitterfield is described as “lying between the house which was sometime the house of William Palmer on the one side, and a lane called Merrel Lane on the other, and doth abut on High Street.” No doubt it was an ordinary thatched farmhouse, not unlike that occupied by the Hathaways at Shottery.

Of such an inconspicuous person the records preserved are naturally accidental, and for the most part trivial; yet even so they are of interest to students of the poet, and deserve at least brief citation here.

In 1528 Richard was presented by John Palmer, tithingman, for owing suit of court. In 1535 he was fined 12d. for obstructing with his own stuff the village commons. In 1543 he was the recipient of a generous benefaction from Thomas Atwoode, alias Tailor, of Stratford, who mentions him in his will as follows: “Unto Richard Shakespeare, of Snitterfield, my four oxen, which are now in his keeping.” In April, 1559, he was associated with the wealthy “Mr. William Botte” in making an inventory of the goods of Roger Lyncecombe. In July, 1550, and again in May, 1560, Robert Arden, in legal documents, makes mention of the farm at Snitterfield as then

1 C. C. Stopea, Shakespeare's Environment, pp. 32, 66.
2 C. C. Stopera, Shakespeare's Environment, p. 16. There are frequent subsequent notices of him by Palmer down to 1542.
being "in the tenure of Richard Shakespeare." In October, 1560, his name appears in the proceedings of a View of Frank Pledge. But shortly after this he must have died, for on February 10, 1561, letters of administration of his goods were issued to his son John (the poet's father), who is described as a farmer (agricola) of Snitterfield. The formal inventory of his goods reckoned their value at £38 17s.; but such estimates were commonly much below the actual value of an estate; for example, the inventory of the goods of Annes Arden in 1581 appraised "five score pigges" at 13s. 4d. — a trifle over a penny and a half each. Nor was the estimated value of Richard's possessions small for a man in his position. W. Stafford, in A Compendious or Brief Examination (1581), writes: "In times past, and within the memory of man, he hath been accounted a rich and wealthy man, and well able to keep house among his neighbours, which, all things discharged, was clearly worth £30 or £40." If this be true, the inventory of Richard's goods, some twenty years earlier, at £38 17s. indicates that he was at least a well-to-do husbandman, occupying a respectable position in the little farming-community of Snitterfield.¹

Besides his son John, just mentioned, Richard left also a son named Henry, who spent all his life in or near Snitterfield, tilling a farm of considerable importance. To his neighbors he was generally known as "Harry Shakespeare"; and though our records of him are scanty, they are sufficient to show that he had a strongly-marked personality. In 1574 he engaged in a fight with Edward Cornwell (who had married his brother's wife's sister), in which "he drew blood to the injury of the said Edward

¹ Sir Sidney Lee, Life, p. 3, states that the estimated value of Richard's estate was £35 17s., and Edgar I. Fripp, Introduction to Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1921, p. xlii, gives the estimate as £38 7s. The correct sum, however, is £38 17s. [ 10 ]
Cornwell"; and was accordingly fined. In 1581 he resolutely declined to pay tithes on his farm, refused to submit to the decision of the Ecclesiastical Court, and, after being censured, was excommunicated. In 1582 he was fined "for not labouring with teams for the amending of the Queen's highway"; and the following year he was again fined because he refused to wear a cloth cap on Sundays and holidays as required by statute. Clearly he had a mind of his own.

Although he was married (his wife was named Margaret), he seems to have had no children — at least none that lived to maturity. The young William, we may suppose, was a frequent visitor in the home of his "Uncle Harry" and "Aunt Margaret," and on their farm, perhaps, acquired some of his wide knowledge of rustic types and of country life.

In his business undertakings Henry seems to have been consistently unfortunate. In 1586 he was unable to pay a certain debt for which his more prosperous Stratford brother had become surety, and the creditor was forced to bring suit against John Shakespeare for the sum.¹ In 1591 he was imprisoned for debts to Richard Ainge; and in 1596 he was again attached for debts to John Tomlyns. His very death was rendered pathetic by the clamor of creditors. John Blythe, of Allesley, it seems, had sold two oxen to "Henry Shakespeare of Snitterfield" for £6 13s. 4d., which Henry promised to pay on a certain date. He died, however, with the debt unpaid, and Blythe brought suit against one William Meades for recovery of the sum, declaring that "Shakespeare, falling extremely sick about such time as the money was due, died about the time whereon the money ought to have been paid,

¹ The documents in this case make the relationship between John, of Stratford, and Henry, of Snitterfield, perfectly clear: "Henricus Shakesper, frater dicti Johannes."
having it provided in his house against the day of pay-
ment. . . . Now so it is . . . that Shakespeare, living alone,
without any company in his house,¹ and dying without
either friends or neighbours with him or about him, one
William Meades, dwelling near unto him, having under-
standing of his death, presently entered into the house of
the said Shakespeare after that he was dead, and pretend-
ing that the said Shakespeare was indebted to him, ran-
sacked his house, broke open his coffers, and took away
divers sums of money, and other things,” including, we
are told, “all the goods and household stuff belonging to
the said Shakespeare,” a mare out of the stable, and
“the corn and hay out of the barn.” ²

The record of his troubled life is closed by a notice of
his burial in the Snitterfield churchyard on December 9,
1596. Six weeks later, “Margaret Sakspere, being tymes,
the wyff of Henry Shaksper,” was laid beside him.³

¹ William Meades replied that Henry’s wife Margaret was in the house;
but since Margaret died six weeks later she may at the time referred to have
been confined to her bed.
² C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare’s Environment, p. 69. It should be added that
William Meades denied that he ransacked the house.
³ It is barely possible, but I think quite unlikely, that there was a third
brother named Thomas. The history of Thomas is so vague, and his connec-
tion with the poet’s family so doubtful, that other than a footnote reference
to him is unjustified. For what is known of him, see Halliwell-Phillipps,
Outlines, ii, 212.
CHAPTER II

PARENTAGE

The poet's father, John, doubtless spent his youth on the parental farm at Snitterfield, and by hard labor in the fields, ploughing "with sturdy oxen," earned the designation agricola, which, as we have seen, was bestowed on him in the letters of administration of his father's estate. But at some date before 1552, prompted by vaulting ambition, he transferred his activities to the neighboring town of Stratford, a thriving place of some two thousand inhabitants. ¹ Here he engaged his energies in various enterprises. In 1556, and again in 1586, he is described in legal documents as a glover, and that seems to have been his chief business throughout life. ² Yet, like other glovers of the time, ³ he probably did not confine himself to the narrow limits of this trade. In a suit of 1573 he is referred to as a "whyttawer" (white-tawer), a tanner of white leather; and we learn, though on less authoritative evidence, ⁴ that he was "a considerable dealer in wool." Furthermore, from the nature of the lawsuits in which he became involved, it seems that he dealt also in grain, malt, and other farm-products. ⁵

¹ The estimate of Fripp, op. cit., p. xii. Fripp also gives (pp. xxxii–iii) an interesting, but problematical, account of John's apprenticeship to the glover's craft.

² It will be remembered that Sir John Mennes describes him in his old age as a glover still to be seen in his shop.

³ See Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, ii, 328, note 191.

⁴ That of Nicholas Rowe, who gathered his information largely from Betterton. Betterton made a visit to Stratford about 1690 to learn what he could of the poet and his family.

⁵ Probably he continued for a time his interest in farming at Snitterfield; as Fripp observes, "many of the Stratford tradesmen were yeomen," and "most tradesmen supplemented their earnings by farming, malting, or victualling."
Our first notice of him in Stratford is in April, 1552, when, along with two other citizens, he was fined 12d. for having allowed a pile of filth (sterquinarium) to accumulate before his house in Henley Street — the very house, it appears, in which twelve years later the poet was born. At this early date John was unmarried, and though he probably used the Henley Street house as his bachelor residence, he must have chiefly employed it as his shop, and as a warehouse for such stuff as passed through his hands.

Through industry at his chosen trade of glove-making, and good judgment in his miscellaneous speculations, he early laid the foundation of prosperity. The numerous suits he instituted in the courts against persons who owed him money, as well as the suits brought by others against him, clearly indicate the variety and extent of his activities. On June 28, 1553, Stratford received a charter of incorporation, and John, as one of the rising young business men of the town, was called upon to take a part in the municipal government; the records show that he was frequently required to serve on juries, and otherwise to perform the duties of citizenship.

By October 2, 1556, he had so prospered that he was able to buy two houses in Stratford. One of these, situated in Greenhill Street, with a garden, croft, and appurtenances, including a barn and an outhouse, was purchased, it would seem, as a speculation; no further record of it is to be discovered, and the presumption is that he shortly disposed of the property. The other, situated in Henley Street and adjoining the dwelling he already occupied there on a lease (to-day it constitutes the eastern half of the double house known as "Shakespeare's Home"), was acquired, no doubt, in order to provide increased accommodations for his growing business. Its common designation as the "Wool Shop"
PLAN OF STRATFORD-ON-AVON

Drawn by Winter about 1768. The site of the home and shop of John Shakespeare in Henley Street is indicated by the cross drawn by the present writer at the extreme right.
PARENTAGE

would indicate that it was mainly used for the storage of wool, grain, hides, and the like. At an early date the two houses were connected by inside doorways, as they are at present, and thus made into a single building. Together they must have formed one of the most pretentious business establishments in the village.

The rise of John to a place of importance in Stratford was accelerated in the autumn of the following year,

GROUND PLAN OF THE SHAKESPEARE HOUSES IN HENLEY STREET
(The "Wool Shop" at the right, the family residence at the left.)

1557, by his marriage to Mary Arden, daughter and chief heir of Robert Arden, his father's landlord. Robert Arden was a wealthy "gentleman of worship" living at Wilmecote, about three miles from Stratford. He owned two farmhouses at Snitterfield with more than a hundred acres of arable land, which he let to tenants; and at Wilmecote he owned two estates which he himself cultivated, namely, a copyhold estate of unknown extent,
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

where he seems to have resided, and — apparently the richest possession of all — a valuable estate known as Asbies, consisting of a house and approximately sixty acres of land.

But more important to us than the property he possessed was the gentle blood that flowed in his veins. For it is now virtually certain that through a younger branch he was descended, as the poet maintained, from the noble family of Ardens of Park Hall,¹ who proudly traced their line back to the Sheriff Ailwin, Great Guy of Warwick, the Saxon King Athelstan, and Alfred the Great. Robert’s father, Thomas Arden, was the second son of Walter Arden of Park Hall.² This younger branch was settled at Wilmecote as early as 1501;³ and though Thomas Arden maintained his connection with the aristocratic families of the county,⁴ his son Robert seems to have been content to lead the life of a plain husbandman, and quietly till his estates at Wilmecote. Apparently he belonged to that splendid type of English franklin described by Sir Thomas Overbury: “Though he may give arms with the best gentlemen . . . he says not to his servants ‘Go to the field,’ but ‘Let us go,’” and, happy in his own little world, remains throughout life “lord paramount within himself.”

His house in Wilmecote must have been large and well-furnished. It was adorned, we know, with no fewer than

¹ “That most ancient and worthy family,” says Dugdale, who connects its name with the great Forest of Arden.
² Mrs. Stopes has effectively presented the right of the poet to this pedigree, in her Shakespeare’s Environment, 1914, and Shakespeare’s Family, 1901.
³ Halliwell-Phillipps, in his Life of Shakespeare, 1848, p. 8, states in error that the Arden property at Snitterfield was conveyed to Thomas Arden de Wilmecote in 16 Henry VI, i.e., 1438; this would render the above pedigree impossible. He should have said 16 Henry VII, i.e., 1501. The error has created no little confusion among students of the poet’s ancestry.
eleven "painted cloths," which in middle-class homes took the place of the more expensive tapestry. There was a "hall" beautified with two of these painted cloths, a great chamber decorated with five, and other rooms of less importance in which the remaining four were distributed. An inventory of his "goods" made after his death shows that on his own farm in Wilmecote he had eight oxen for the plough, four horses, three colts, seven cows, two bulls, four calves, fifty sheep, besides swine, bees, poultry, etc. The inventory, after the usual conservative fashion, reckoned his goods at £77 11s. 10d. — as such estimates then went, a large sum. And this, of course, did not take into consideration his real property, consisting of his lands and houses.

The Shakespeares had long been tenants on one of Robert Arden's farms at Snitterfield; and through this relationship, perhaps, young John had come to know the Arden family, and had met his future wife. Mary, the youngest of eight children ¹ (all daughters), was apparently her father's favorite. When Robert Arden late in life took a second wife (by whom he had no children), he made a special settlement of his real property, in order, it may be, to placate certain of his daughters. He had already, it seems, provided for Elizabeth, who had married John Scarlet; and now, by deeds executed in 1550, he divided his Snitterfield estates into six equal parts, giving one part to each of six daughters, subject, however, to the life-interest of his wife. Mary alone is not mentioned in these deeds. Can it be that she had made no objection to his marriage, and thus had won the heart of her father? However that may be, he most bountifully cared for her upon his death in 1556. To her he left by will ten marks

¹ Sir Sidney Lee says that there were only seven children; apparently he forgot Elizabeth who married John Scarlet. Moreover, he expresses some doubt (p. 7) whether Mary was the youngest daughter; she is so described by her father in his will.
as a dowry (the conventional sum), and the freehold of his most valuable possession, the estate of Asbies, with its house, almost sixty acres of land, “and the crop upon the ground, sown and tilled as it is.” Mary was thus regarded among the yeomen of Warwickshire as an heiress of importance.

John Shakespeare married her about a year after the death of her father, and brought her to his residence in Stratford. The “Wool Shop,” or eastern half of the double house in Henley Street, he continued to use for business purposes; the western half he converted into a home. The bride, having by will received a share of her father’s goods, must have brought with her some furniture and household stuff, including we may suppose a few of the painted cloths, so often alluded to by the poet. In the home thus established, William and the other children were born and reared, and here John and Mary lived their entire lives and died. The building, therefore, is most intimately associated with the name of Shakespeare, and is now rightly preserved as a shrine for all lovers of English poetry.

Through the acquisition of his wife’s property, added to his own, John became an even more important member of the Stratford community; and this importance quickly revealed itself in various ways. In 1557 he was elected one of the ale-tasters, officers who had supervision of malt liquors and bread; and near the close of the year was chosen a burgess. In 1558 the twelve jurors elected him one of the four constables, an office of no

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1 This seems to be the correct interpretation of the clause following the bequest to Alice; but I am not absolutely sure. For the will in full see Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, ii, 53.

2 The house remained the residence of John’s descendants until 1806.

3 For a history of this office, and a statement of its precise duties, see C. I. Elton, *William Shakespeare, His Family and Friends*, 1904, p. 78.

4 The duties of a village constable are humorously described in Shakespeare’s sketch of Dogberry. As Fripp, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi, points out, John
PARENTAGE

little consideration, to which he was re-elected the following year. In 1559 he was appointed an affeeror, a person who decided the fine or other punishment to be imposed on those who had been convicted of a fault for which no express penalty had been prescribed by the statutes: In 1561 he was reappointed affeeror, and also elected one of the two chamberlains, officers who had charge of the finances of the municipality. This was a distinct recognition on the part of his fellow-tradesmen of his probity and business ability. They re-elected him to the position in 1562; and although after serving two terms he retired from the office, the municipal records show that he continued to help in managing the finances of the town. Not only did he on several occasions superintend and audit the accounts of the regular chamberlains, but when the

necessity arose he actually advanced money to the corporation out of his own pocket. Clearly he was a public-spirited citizen, deeply interested in the welfare of the village.\(^1\)

From the fact that he invariably signed documents with a mark, sometimes a plain cross, sometimes a crude representation of a pair of dividers used in the trade of glover, it may be inferred that he could not write his

found the office no sinecure, for cases of assault were numerous. A certain Welshman had to be fined not only for a fray, but also for “giving opprobrious words” to the constables. For the record of the constables see pp. 88–90, 92–95.

\(^1\) Fripp, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. i–lii (cf. pp. 120–22, 126–30), shows that as Chamberlain John was very energetic in making repairs on town property and in advancing the condition of the borough; and (pp. liii–v) that several times, “to his great credit,” he undertook the duties of Acting Chamberlain.
name.¹ This, however, carried with it no reproach in Stratford, where most of his fellow-citizens left the mystery of penmanship to learned clerks. "Dost thou use to write thy name?" asks Cade in 2 Henry VI, "or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest, plain-dealing man?" Nor does it warrant the charge of "absolute illiteracy" ² sometimes thoughtlessly brought against him by modern scholars. He may have kept his accounts with the old-fashioned tallies instead of a pen, but his stewardship of the town's finances, and the variety of his business activities, show that by the standards of his community he was far from ignorant.

And he seems to have enjoyed not only the respect of his fellows, but also their sincere liking. We have evidence that he was of a genial disposition, a quality he transmitted to his son of whom Bishop Fuller wrote, "his genius generally was jocular and inclining him to festivity." The only description we have of John dates from a later period in his life, but unquestionably reveals his innate disposition. A contemporary who once saw him "in his shop" reported that he was "a merry-cheekt old man that said, 'Will was a good honest fellow, but he darest have crackt a jest with him at any time.'" This merry disposition, combined with recognized success in business and a genuine interest in the welfare of the borough, would naturally make him popular with the townsmen. We may suppose, too, that he was kindly of heart; his frequent and generous contributions to those in distress

¹ Yet with regard to his using a mark in the various corporation records, Fripp, op. cit., p. 134, after an exhaustive study of the documents, notes that some of John's educated fellow-officers did likewise: "Quyny, we know, could write, and it is likely that others, including John Shakespeare, who used their marks, could also write. It is scarcely possible that a man of his business capacity, for three successive years acting-chamberlain, was illiterate."

² The words are those of Halliwell-Phillipps, who, in a desperate effort to avoid anything like hero-worship, goes to the opposite extreme.
PAI£NTAGE

indicate as much, and the following incident may be cited as further evidence. On February 1, 1558, he sued one, Matthew Bramley, for debt; but when the case came up again on February 15, he incurred the usual penalty of 2d. for not following his suit. "Apparently," says Fripp, "he declined to prosecute in consequence of the illness of Bramley's wife, who was buried on the 22nd."

On Saturday, April 22, or Sunday, April 23, 1564, an important event took place in the Shakespeare home in Henley Street: a son and heir was born to John and Mary.\(^1\) A few days later, on Wednesday, April 26, he was baptized with the name "William."\(^2\) The entry in the baptismal register reads: "1564, April 26, Gulielmus, filius Johannes Shakspere."

Two earlier children, both girls, had died in infancy, and probably Mary, in her determination not to lose this third child, exercised the utmost care over its health. And she had special need to do so, for early in July, 1564, there broke out in Stratford a severe epidemic of the plague that carried away approximately one out of every seven inhabitants.\(^3\) During these days of terror, when the ominous red cross, with the inscription "Lord have mercy on us," was chalked upon so many doors, John Shakespeare contributed liberally towards the relief of the sufferers — though not the largest, also not the least donations recorded. The largest sum was contributed by

\(^1\) The precise day of his birth cannot be determined; it is even possible that he was born on April 21. But he was baptized on April 26, and it was customary to perform this ceremony three days after birth. The tradition that he died on his birthday, that is April 23, is too late to carry much weight. That day, however — the day of St. George, the patron saint of England — would be especially appropriate.

\(^2\) The ancient font, said to be the one at which he was baptized, is shown at Stratford. One should not forget, however, the possibility that the ceremony was performed in the home.

\(^3\) Malone's reckoning, Variorum, ii, 68; Charles Knight says one out of six.
the wealthy owner of the fine mansion called New Place, a "Mr. William Botte, gent.," with whom the glover could hardly be expected to compete. The plague, providentially, we may believe, passed over the home in Henley Street where the "first-born" child of England lay in his cradle, and with the coming of the winter months its ravages were ended.

The following year, 1565, Mr. William Botte, the wealthy gentleman just mentioned as the owner of New Place, was expelled from the Council of Aldermen,¹ and John Shakespeare was promptly elected in his stead. Thus the prosperous glover arrived at that high dignity in the world which, according to his son, justified the wearing of a ponderous thumb ring.² In the little village of Stratford the position of alderman was indeed one of great distinction; and soon after this John begins to appear in the town records with the dignified prefix "Master." Of this prefix the Oxford Dictionary says: "Originally used only in speaking of or to a man either of high social rank, or of learning"; and by way of illustration it cites B. Discolliminium (1650): "I could wish we might be allow'd to call him Master Charles, for most men think he is a gentleman born." Sir Thomas Smith, in his Commonwealth of England (1594), writes: "Master is the title which men give to esquires and other gentlemen." It is obvious, therefore, that in bestowing on John this title his fellow-townsmen acknowledged his high standing in the business, social, and civic life of Stratford.

In 1568 he received the greatest honor in the gift of the citizens, election to the position of High Bailiff, or as we should now say, Mayor. In this capacity he presided at all meetings of the Town Council, and in his precepts he

¹ For the cause, and a general account of Botte, see Fripp, op. cit., pp. lvii-x, 144-46.
² See Romeo and Juliet, I, iv, 56; I Henry IV, II, iv, 364.
styled himself "John Shakespeare, Justice of the Peace, and Bailiff of the Town." The position carried with it unusual dignity: "The Bailiff was waited upon daily by his Sergeant, and once a week by the Town Clerk. On Leet Days, Fair Days, and certain other occasions, Aldermen and Burgesses attended in their gowns at his house to escort him to Church, or through the market, or in perambulation of the Borough boundaries." ¹ The silver mace that was borne before John while he was in office is probably among those still preserved at Stratford.²

In 1571, his term as High Bailiff having expired, he was elected Chief Alderman. In 1572 the confidence his fellow-citizens had in the value of his judgment is attested by their appointing him to assist the then High Bailiff in the settlement of certain important affairs concerning the municipality. The resolution of the Town Council reads: "At this hall it is agreed by the assent and consent of the Aldermen and Burgesses aforesaid that Mr. Adrian Quiney, now Bailiff, and Mr. John Shakespeare shall at Hillary term next ensuing deal in the affairs concerning the commonwealth of the borough according to their discretions." What these affairs were in which "Master" John Shakespeare was to assist the High Bailiff we do not know; but we learn from the Chamberlain's account that in prosecuting them he and Quiney gave a dinner in Stratford to Sir Thomas Lucy, and that subsequently Quiney was compelled to visit London, probably to seek the aid of men connected with the Court and Parliament.

In the meantime the family in Henley Street was rapidly growing. In 1566 a son, Gilbert, was born; in 1569 a daughter, Joan; in 1571 another daughter, Anne; in 1574 a son, Richard; and in 1580 a son, Edmund.

¹ Fripp, op. cit., p. xxxviii.
² For a picture of this mace see G. R. French, Shakespeareana Genealogica, 1869, p. 561.
In 1575 John Shakespeare purchased for the sum of £40 the western half of the double house in Henley Street which he had so long occupied. The eastern half, known as the "Wool Shop," he had acquired as early as 1556; the western half, apparently, he had held only on lease. Since the purchase seems to have been unwise (at least it was quickly followed by pecuniary embarrassment), we may suspect that his lease on the house had expired, and he was forced to buy the property in order to preserve his home. But that he was still in relatively easy circumstances is indicated by his contributing the following year, 1576, the generous sum of 12d. towards the salary of the beadle.

Indeed he had now reached the climax of his career. And if we can believe the statement in the two grants of 1596 relating to a Shakespeare coat of arms, he took occasion about this time to apply to the Heralds' College in London for authority to "write himself gentleman." That he was entitled to the dignity of a coat of arms cannot be doubted. Sir John Ferne, in The Glory of Generosi
tie (1586), says: "If any person be advanced into an office or dignity of public administration, be it either ecclesiastic, martial, or civil ... the Herald must not refuse to devise to such a public person, upon his instant request,

1 The legal description runs: "De duobus mesuagiis, duobus gardinis, et duobus pomariis, et pertinenciis." The exact location of these "two houses" is not stated. The chief house was unquestionably the home adjoining the Wool Shop, for in 1590 John is listed as the owner of both the Wool Shop (which we know he purchased in 1556) and also the adjoining house, and of nothing else. The second house referred to in the deed was doubtless a small tenement attached to the Henley Street home. Too much attention need not be paid to the legal phraseology; in 1579 when John mortgaged Asbies to Lambert, the property was described "de duobus mesuagis, duobus gardinis," whereas in 1589 and subsequently it is described "unum mesuagium sive tenementum" (see Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, ii, 11). Clearly the "two houses" in the case of Asbies were the main dwelling and some unimportant outhouse; and the same was probably true in the case of the Henley Street property. But the house itself might be described as two houses; see the ground plan, p. 15.
and willingness to bear the same without reproach, a coat of arms, and thenceforth to matriculate him, with his intermarriages and issues descending, in the register of the gentle and noble. . . . In the civil or political state, diverse offices of dignity and worship do merit coats of arms to the possessor of the same offices, as . . . Bailiffs of cities and ancient boroughs or incorporated towns."

Unquestionably, therefore, John had the right to apply for this honor. And there were various reasons why he might desire to do so. A number of his fellow-townsmen not more wealthy, or more prominent in the affairs of the corporation than he, enjoyed heraldic distinction; and he might well feel that he should have the same honor, for he was an ambitious man. Perhaps, too, he secretly cherished the desire to restore to his wife Mary the right to bear the arms of her Arden ancestors, which she had been obliged to forfeit through her marriage to "one who was no gentleman." ¹ But his chief reason, we may suspect, was the wish, natural to every English yeoman, to establish a gentle family. Harrison, in his Description of England (1577), observes that commonly yeomen, by honest labor and thriftiness, "come to great wealth, insomuch that many of them are able and do buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, and often setting their sons to the schools, to the universities, and to the Inns of the Court, or, otherwise, leaving them sufficient lands whereupon they may live without [manual] labour, do make them by these means to become gentlemen." John now possessed two or more houses in Stratford, the important estate of Asbies at Wilmecote, and a share of the Arden farms at Snitterfield. All this would make a creditable endowment for a future gentle family, with his eldest son

¹ The law of heraldry declared that if a woman "marry one who is no gentleman, then she is clearly exempted from" the right to the arms of her ancestors; see The Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1562, xxi, v31.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

and heir, William Shakespeare, at its head. And the dream of establishing such a gentle family may well have come to the prosperous "Bailiff and Justice of the Peace," as it certainly was later the dream of his son William.

That he actually received from the Heralds' Office a tentative sketch of a proposed coat of arms, and that he kept this sketch by him for years, is positively stated in the grant of 1596: "This John hath 1 a pattern thereof under Clarenceux Cooke's hand 2 in paper xx years past. A Justice of Peace, and was 3 Bailiff, Officer, and chief of the town of Stratford upon Avon." It is true that no record has been discovered in the archives of the College regarding John's coat of arms, but since it is not asserted that the attempt went beyond the preliminary stage of Cooke's submitting a tentative sketch, the absence of a formal record need not be regarded as invalidating the statement.

To secure a coat of arms, however, was an expensive undertaking. In The Cobler's Prophecy (about 1580), an officer of the Heralds' College is made to say:

We now are fain to wait who grows to wealth
And come to bear some office in a town;
And we, for money, help them unto arms.

Without money, of course, the honor could not be secured; and according to Sogliardo, in Every Man Out of

1 The word is not clear in the manuscript; some scholars read it as "sheweth."

2 Robert Cook, Clarenceux King of Arms in 1576. It is worth noting that Warwickshire fell in his province, and that he had his visitation commission there in 1568, the year in which John Shakespeare was High Bailiff and Justice of the Peace. It may be, therefore, that this visitation aroused John's ambitions. Cook is said to have granted no fewer than five hundred coats of arms.

3 Does this mean "had been Bailiff"? John Shakespeare was Bailiff in 1568; the pattern of his coat was said to be "in paper xx years past," i.e., 1576. It may be added that he was Justice of Peace both as High Bailiff and as Chief Alderman.

[ 26 ]
PARENTAGE

his Humor, the fees charged amounted to not less than £30. If John actually made the application in 1576, his sudden pecuniary reverses might explain the fact that he failed to carry the project through.

In 1577 he is first recorded as being absent from the meetings of the Town Council. This ominously marks the beginning of his business troubles, which rapidly passed from bad to worse. In January, 1578, at a meeting of the Council (John, as usual, being absent), a levy was made for the purchase of military equipment for the soldiers drawn from Stratford. The order of the Council reads: "At this hall it is agreed that every Alderman, except such under-written excepted, shall pay towards the furniture of three pikemen, two billmen, and one archer, vis. viid." The Aldermen who were excepted were "Mr. Plumley, vs., Mr. Shakespeare, iii. ivd." This shows that the glover's business troubles were then well known, and that his old friends sympathized with him. At a later meeting of the Council (John again being absent), the following resolution was passed: "Item, it is ordered that every Alderman shall pay weekly towards the relief of the poor ivd., saving Mr. John Shakespeare and Mr. Robert Bratt,\(^1\) who shall not be taxed to pay anything."

The ultimate cause for this reverse in fortune may have been the general decline of Stratford as a centre of the woolen trade and allied industries. In 1590 the Bailiff and Burgess wrote to Lord Burghley, the Lord High Treasurer: "The said town is now fallen much into decay for want of such trade as heretofore they had by clothing and making of yarn, employing and maintaining a number of poor people by the same, which now live in great penury and misery by reason they are not set at work as before

\(^1\) As Halliwell-Phillipps observes, Robert Bratt was one of the poorest members of the Council, "his subscriptions in the plague year of 1564, although he was an Alderman, being, with a single exception, the lowest of all in amount."
they have been." And we have much other evidence to the same effect. John Shakespeare, as a glover, tanner, and "extensive dealer in wool," would thus be directly affected. But doubtless there were more immediate causes for his sudden and we may suppose unexpected difficulties. As early as 1573 Henry Higford, gent., formerly Steward of the Court in Stratford ¹ but now resident in Solihull, Warwickshire, instituted suit ² against him for the sum of £30. If the suit ultimately went against him, the payment of the £30, together with the purchase of the Henley Street house for £40, would furnish us with an explanation of his sudden pecuniary embarrassment.

On November 14, 1578, he mortgaged his wife’s valuable estate at Wilmecote, known as Asbies, to his brother-in-law, Edmund Lambert. The mortgage, according to the usage of the time, was drawn up in the form of an absolute sale, with the proviso that if the money were repaid on or before September 29, 1580, the sale would be null and void. Asbies, to be sure, was worth more than £40; but there seemed to be no danger in this transaction, for the Lamberts were near relatives, held in great affection by John and Mary, who named a son, Edmund, and

¹ He appears in this capacity in the Stratford records of 1566, in connection with one of the lawsuits involving Richard Hathaway, for whom John Shakespeare had served as bail and perhaps security; see Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, ii, 230.

² For the details of this suit see C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare’s Environment, p. 331. The defendant is described as John Shakespeare, of Stratford on Avon, Whyttawer (i.e., tanner of white leather, such as was used in the manufacture of gloves). The only other John Shakespeare of Stratford was the shoemaker, who first arrived in the town "in or very shortly before 1584," that is more than ten years later than this suit. That glovers were often sheep-skin-dressers we know; see Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, ii, 328, note 191. As Fripp observes, op. cit., pp. xxxii–iii, John Shakespeare, in order to ply his trade, was required to become a member of the Stratford guild of "Glovers, Whittawers, and Collarmakers." It is interesting to note that Thomas Dickson, alias Waterman, of Bridge Street, Stratford, is described as a "glover and whittawer."
a daughter Joan, after them; and John, of course, would see to it that before the expiration of the time the redemption-money was duly tendered.

- The sum thus raised (was it to pay for the home in Henley Street?) did not furnish the glover relief from his difficulties. This is shown by the facts that during the years 1578 and 1579 he attended no meeting of the Town Council, and that in March of the latter year he is recorded as having failed to pay his military levy \(^1\) which the Aldermen had charitably reduced to iii. ivd.

On October 15, 1579, he sold his wife’s small share in the Snitterfield property for the sum of £4. This had probably come to her on the division of the estate of one of her sisters (Joyce?), \(^2\) and, according to the deed, was then all her holdings in her father’s valuable farms there (which, it will be remembered, had been distributed in six equal parts to six of his elder daughters). Shortly after making this sale, however, Mary seems to have received by will from another of her unmarried sisters (Alice?) a full sixth part in the Snitterfield estate. John Shakespeare promptly sold this full “sextam partem” for £40, with the specific object, we may suspect, of redeeming Asbies. \(^3\) Possibly Alice, who was closely associated with Mary as executor of her father’s estate, was aware of the

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\(^1\) Various others, including Nash and Reynolds, men of means, are also recorded as delinquent. We cannot say that John Shakespeare did not ultimately pay his assessment.

\(^2\) Elizabeth Scarlet came into possession of a small share, probably in the same way, for according to the original settlement she had no portion of the Snitterfield estate.

\(^3\) Halliwell-Phillipps, followed by Lee and others, supposes that Mary received her portions of the Snitterfield estate by some reversion provided for in the early settlement following Arden’s second marriage. There is no evidence to support this hypothesis. The above-named scholars accordingly suppose that the two sales of Mary’s property, in 1579 for £4, and in 1580 for £40, are in reality identical, and that there is an error in the first of £4 for £40. But this assumption is gratuitous. The documents are carefully drawn up, and would hardly be in error on the most important point of all.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

straitened condition of the Shakespeares, and the danger of Mary's losing Asbies, and therefore left her by will the sixth part of the Snitterfield property which she had inherited.

At any rate, on the appointed day, September 29, 1580, John Shakespeare came "to the dwelling house of the said Edmund Lambert," and tendered the £40 due for the redemption of Asbies. But Lambert flatly refused to accept it, "saying that he owed him other money, and unless that he, the said John, would pay him all together, as well the said forty pounds as the other money which he owed him over and above, he would not receive the said forty pounds." Possibly this "other money" was that referred to in a list of debts due to Roger Sadler, appended to Sadler's will (proved on January 17, 1579): "Item, of Edmund Lambert and ... Cornish, for the debt of Mr. John Shakespeare, vli." Lambert, no doubt, was forced to pay the sum, and hence his angry insistence that his brother-in-law refund that amount before redeeming the Wilmecote property. John, however, was unable to pay both sums demanded; and thus Asbies, as well as the Snitterfield properties, was lost to the Shakespeares for ever.¹

But the £40 in cash which Lambert refused to accept did not, as we should naturally expect, ease the pecuniary distress of the unfortunate glover. Possibly this was due to his being at once called upon to pay a fine of £40 imposed on him by the court at Westminster.² The Coram Rege Roll, Trinity, 22 Elizabeth (i.e., May 22–June 12, 1580), shows that "John Shakespeare, of Strat-

¹ From later suits over the property it appears that Lambert orally promised that, after the other moneys owing to him had been paid, he would at any time accept the £40, and restore Asbies to the Shakespeares. Lambert died in 1587, and his son refused to abide by his father's promise.

² For the details that have been discovered see C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Environment, pp. 41–42.
PARENTAGE

ford-super-Avon, in Co. Warr., yeoman," ¹ was fined £20 because he failed to appear before the Queen in her court at Westminster, as summoned, to be bound over to keep the peace; and his two securities, John Awdley, of Nottingham, in the neighboring county of Notts, hatmaker, and Thomas Colley, of Stoke, in the adjacent county of Stafford, were each fined £10. At the same time John was fined an additional £20 because, as one of the sureties for Awdley, he failed to bring that person before the Queen on the day specified. The nature of the indiscretion which warranted a summons to the court at Westminster is not revealed, but the records, brief as they are, suggest an important unwritten chapter in John’s life. The payment of the two fines amounting to £40 must have been a serious blow to him in his already straitened circumstances.²

We are not surprised to discover that during the next five years, from 1580 to 1585, he was absent from all meetings of the Town Council ³—with a single exception: in 1582 he attended one meeting, apparently in order to vote for his friend John Sadler,⁴ then a candidate for the office of High Bailiff. At last, in 1586, he was dropped from the list of Aldermen, and another person was elected in his place, the reason assigned being: “Mr. Shakespeare doth not come to the halls when they be warned, nor hath not done, of long time.” The kindly sympathy of his fellow Aldermen is revealed by their long sufferance in his case, and by the fact that during

¹ The shoemaker by the name of John Shakespeare did not come to Stratford until four years later; see Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, ii, 137–40.
² Possibly this is why he was not able to accept Lambert’s offer for redeeming Asbies, as explained in note 1, page 30.
³ So far as the records show, and these are almost complete. Very often John was the only Alderman absent.
⁴ The brother of Hamnet Sadler, for whom the poet named his only son. There seems to have existed the warmest friendship between the Sadlers and the Shakespeares.
all these years they had exacted from him no fine for absence.¹

John had now sunk to the very bottom of his fortunes, and we must next turn our attention to his eldest son; who was destined soon to restore the family prestige, and to make the name "Shakespeare" far more illustrious than the village glover could ever have dreamed in the palmiest days of his success as "Justice of the Peace and Bailiff of the Town" of Stratford.²

¹ Halliwell-Phillipps, followed by Lee and others, states that the John Shakespeare harassed in the courts during 1585 and 1586 by John Brown for a certain debt, was the poet’s father. There is considerable doubt about this. In 1586, after securing a writ of distraint, Brown made a return that the said John "had nothing whereon to distrain." But the poet’s father had not a little property in Stratford. In this year he was accepted in Coventry as sufficient bail for one Prysce indicted for felony; in the following year he offered to redeem Asbies with £40, and in 1590 he is listed as the owner of two houses in Henley Street. Even Halliwell-Phillipps admits that the words "are not to be taken literally." Mrs. Stopes suggests that the person was the John Shakespeare who lived at Clifford Chambers near Stratford. Furthermore the John Shakespeare mentioned in a list of recusants in 1592 as "not coming monthly to church" because of "fear of process of debt," may not be, as some scholars suppose, the poet’s father. The records of 1591 and 1592 show him not as hiding from the constable, but as conspicuous in the law courts themselves, and as serving with other well-known citizens in making the post mortem inventories of the goods of Ralph Shaw and of Henry Field. Nor is there any definite reason for believing that he had not conformed to the established religion. It was while he was Chamberlain of the town that the images in the Guild Chapel were "defaced"; when he became High Bailiff he took the oath of supremacy; and in 1571, while he was Chief Alderman, the ecclesiastical vestments were ordered to be sold. For further and convincing evidence that John was a Protestant, see Fripp, op. cit., pp. xxxi, xlvii–viii, II, 128. The recusant may have been the shoemaker, John Shakespeare, who had attained some prominence in Stratford, having been elected ale-taster in 1585, and Constable in 1586; and in the year of this return he was serving as Master of the Company of Shoemakers. His disappearance from Stratford shortly after may have been the result of this persecution. Or, as has been suggested by others, the person may have been the John Shakespeare of Clifford Chambers. In view of the doubt attaching to both of these episodes, it seems proper to treat them only in a footnote.

² Most of the documents on which this chapter is based will be found reproduced in J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps’ monumental Outlines, ii, 11–17, 173–82, 215–48; and in Richard Savage and Edgar I. Fripp, Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1921. Other documents have been referred to in the footnotes.
CHAPTER III

BOYHOOD AND EARLY ENVIRONMENT

For two and a half years William was "the only child" of John and Mary. Upon him, therefore, the fond young parents would lavish all their affection. Moreover to him, as their "first-born son and heir," they would tie their heartstrings in a way that probably set him apart from the later children. He was to inherit, so they thought, all the family property — Asbies, the gem of the Arden estate, a portion of the Snitterfield farms once tilled by his grandfather, and the valuable Stratford realties gradually being accumulated by his father. If we may believe that in 1576 the prosperous Alderman made a tentative step towards securing a coat of arms, we catch a glimpse of the secret ambition he cherished for his son. Surely it was in William, rather than in the other children, that John and Mary garnered up their hearts.

It is not difficult for us to picture the boy. We know that he had auburn hair, large hazel eyes, ruddy cheeks, a high forehead, and a gentle disposition. Perhaps this last quality came to him from his mother. "Mary Arden! the name breathes of poetry!" exclaims Knight. May we not safely add that her son's poetry breathes of her? For surely it was at his mother's knee that he acquired his conception of those gentle and noble elements of woman's character which he so effectively embodied in his plays.

His father was of a different type, frankly bourgeois, with a cheery disposition and a readiness to "crack a jest" that won him favor with his neighbors. The Plume Manuscript,¹ on the authority of Sir John Mennes, sup-

¹ Anecdotes compiled by Archdeacon Thomas Plume about 1656.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

plies us with a vivid description of him, which, though already quoted, will bear repetition:

He (Shakespeare) was a glover’s son. Sir John Mennes saw once his old father in his shop—a merry-cheeked old man that said, “Will was a good honest fellow, but he darest have crackt a jest with him at any time.”

Brief as this is, it gives us a full-length sketch of the village tradesman. And it reveals to us, too, the genial relations that must have existed between him and his little son, who, we know, inherited much of his temper. Bishop Fuller, writing of the dramatist, tells us that his “genius generally was jocular,” and we have evidence of his ability to hold his own with the best wits of the day. When, indeed, we consider the diversified characters of his mother and father we can understand the extraordinary range of his sympathies—from a Desdemona and an Imogen to a Falstaff and a Dogberry—a range unequalled by any other poet.

In the Henley Street home, among reasonably well-to-do circumstances, at least at first, young William grew up as the eldest of six children. Gilbert was two and a half years younger, Joan five years younger, Anne seven and a half years younger, Richard ten years younger, and Edmund, the baby, sixteen years younger. All lived to maturity except Anne, who died at the attractive age of eight. We may suppose that William, as the eldest brother, was required to care for the smaller children; and this, perhaps, constituted his earliest training for his

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1 Sir John Mennes could hardly have said that he himself saw John Shakespeare in his shop; but doubtless he was quoting some one who had seen him there. The error is probably due to the writer of the Plume MS.

2 The affection in which little Anne was held is indicated by the fact that her father, though at this time in very straitened circumstances, ordered at her funeral not only the bell but also the use of the pall, which was commonly dispensed with.

[ 34 ]
STRAFFORD-ON-AVON
later work as a dramatist, in that it gave him some of his remarkable insight into the elements of human nature.

On special occasions he must have made visits to the home of his Aunt Margaret (née Arden), who had married Alexander Webbe, and with six children, his first cousins, was living in his grandfather's old house at Snitterfield. Sometimes, too, he must have visited the home of his Uncle Harry Shakespeare at Snitterfield, and the more pretentious home of his Aunt Joan, who had married Edmund Lambert of Barton-on-the-Heath. But these were mere incidents in the long-drawn-out years of boyhood, and most of his early experiences were associated with the village of his birth.

At this time Stratford was a small and very quiet country town lying open to the fields, without turreted walls, or monasteries, or moated castles. It was peopled not with noble families, but with simple honest folk, who plied their trades, and rarely bothered their heads with matters that lay beyond their horizon. For the most part they were unable to read or write; yet they possessed native shrewdness, and exhibited, no doubt, strongly marked personalities, including such types as Dogberry, Sly, and Bottom the weaver. Butchers, haberdashers, grocers, woolen-drapers, givers were elected to posts of the highest honor in the civic government, and constituted the aristocracy of the village. The streets were narrow and winding, and, as the records show, often polluted with trash and standing pools of water. The houses were crazy affairs, built of stucco with timber beams showing, and covered with thatched roofs. To us they would seem picturesque, to the Elizabethans they were merely commonplace and unworthy of a second glance. The old Clopton Bridge of solid masonry with its fourteen arches, the pretentious village church with its high steeple of wood, and the fine old Guild Chapel with its curious
frescoes, were objects of special pride to the citizens. But beyond these features there was nothing to excite the interest of a sixteenth-century traveler — unless he took a second look at the shallow, slow-flowing Avon with its milldam, which added a touch of pastoral beauty to the scene.

In this quiet country town the young William probably led the typical life of a village lad. Through allusions in his plays we catch glimpses of him as he “played at push-pin with the boys,” or “ninemen’s-morris,” or “more sacks to the mill,” or “hoodman blind,” or led the game of “hide fox and after all,” “whipped top” with the most expert, and on occasions more than one “troubled with unruly” pranks the sedate citizens. In “Avon’s winding stream” he could find endless sources of pleasure. There, for instance, was the cool swimming-pool, the haunt of all the barefoot lads. We can imagine him as at first venturing on the water timidly, “like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,” later, “like an unpractis’d swimmer, plunging still with too much labour,” and at last, boldly challenging his comrades, as Cassius did Brutus, to leap in “and swim to yonder point.” In the river, too, he could discover innumerable quiet places in which to “betray the tawny-finned fishes.” Only one who had learned the sport as a boy, and had actually experienced the joy of a swift strike, could in the turmoil of a busy life in London have written: “The pleasantest angling is to see the fish cut with her golden oars the silver stream and greedily devour the bait.”

Furnivall, who is second to none in a sympathetic understanding of the poet, has attempted to characterize the youthful Shakespeare in words that are probably not far

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1 See, for example, Leland’s Itinerary, 1535-43, ed. by L. T. Smith, ii, 48-50.
2 See H. N. Ellacombe, Shakespeare as an Angler, 1883.
OLD HOUSES IN STRATFORD

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BOYHOOD AND EARLY ENVIRONMENT

from the truth: "Taking the boy to be the father of the man, I see a square-built yet lithe and active fellow, with ruddy cheeks, hazel eyes, a high forehead, and auburn hair, as full of life as an egg is full of meat, impulsive, inquiring, sympathetic; up to any fun and daring; into scrapes, and out of them with a laugh; making love to all the girls; a favorite wherever he goes — even with the prigs and fools he mocks; untroubled as yet with Hamlet doubts, but in many a quiet time communing with the beauty of earth and sky around him."

The regions about Stratford were in truth among the most beautiful in England, with dark primeval forests, "murmuring streams," and "pastures with their green mantles so embroidered with flowers that," to a contemporary observer, "it seemed another Eden." The poet's eye was surely glancing in memory over familiar scenes when in Lear he describes a midland section of England —

With shadowy forests, and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers, and wide-skirted meads.

And we cannot doubt that the developing boy, endowed with the sensitive nature of the poet, soon learned to find there "tongues in trees" and "books in the running brooks." Michael Drayton, himself a Warwickshire lad born just a year before Shakespeare, grows eloquent when he speaks of the beauty of his native county —

That shire which we the Heart of England well may call.¹

First he notes here the presence of the "ancient Forest of Arden," or "what is now the Woodland in Warwickshire"; and at great length he celebrates the "sylvan joys" of its "shady groves":

With solitude what sorts that here's not wondrous rife!

It is not astonishing that later, in the woodland scenery of As You Like It and A Midsummer Night's Dream,

¹ This and the quotations that follow are from Drayton's Poly-Olbion.
we find the influence of these sylvan joys upon Shakespeare’s boyish imagination.

As to Warwickshire’s treasury of flowers, Drayton is unable to express his emotions. His list of “unumb’rd sorts of simples” fairly exhausts his botanical vocabulary —

Which justly to set down, even Dodon short doth fall,  
Nor skilfull Gerard yet shall ever find them all.

And of “the feath’red sylvans, perched with many a speckled breast upon the highest spray of every mounting pole,” he declares that on a summer’s day they —

So strain their warbling notes  
That hills and valleys ring, and even the echoing air  
Seems all composed of sounds about them everywhere.

Among these he singles out for particular mention “the throstell with shrill sharps,” the “woosell with golden bill,” the merle that plays upon a “dulcet pipe,” the nightingale with “lamenting strains,” the linnet, “that warbling bird,” the wood-lark, the redbreast, the wren, the yellow-pate (“scarce hath any bird a finer pipe than she”), the goldfinch, the tydie, the “laughing hecco,” the “counterfeiting jay.” These, and many more, “some hid among the leaves, some in the taller trees, some in the lower greaves, thus sing away the morn.”

If the boy Drayton found so much to delight him in the natural beauties of his native Warwickshire, we may be sure that the boy Shakespeare found therein quite as much pleasure; and his verse shows that he observed these things with a clearer eye and a more understanding heart. In the noise of London theatres he wrote of blue-veined violets “that strew the green lap of the new-come spring,” of “freckled cowslips,” “ladies’-smocks all silver white,” the “throstle with his note so true,” the “lark that tirra-lyra chants,” the “wren with little quill”; and
often there flashed upon his inward eye pictures of willows growing "aslant a brook," or of orchards when the moon tips with silver all the fruit-tree tops." For such was the education of Nature by which his growing genius was being molded.

Nor was sensuous beauty all with which his native Warwickshire could endow him. The regions near Stratford were unusually rich in historic traditions and places of romantic association. Within seven miles was the quaint old town of Warwick —

Brave Warwick, that abroad so long advanced her Bear,
By her illustrious Earls renown'd everywhere.

Its "magnificent castle" — so Leland describes it — "set upon a high rock of stone" overlooking the river Avon, was one of the most splendid relics of ancient chivalry then in existence, a fortress of great strength and extraordinary delight, with its Cæsar's Tower, supposed to have been erected by Julius Cæsar, and Guy's Tower, bringing to mind the famous deeds of Great Guy of Warwick. As Drayton observed, the hoary old castle was "loaden with antique fables"; and in later times, almost within the memory of men, it had been the centre of the War of the Roses, where Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, named the King-maker and Last of the Barons, made it his pleasure "to crown and depose kings." ¹

Not far from Warwick was Guy's Cliff, a spot famous in legend, where the popular hero was supposed to have spent his last days in retirement. William Camden, who visited the place in Shakespeare's time, has preserved for us a description which shows how much it could move even an antiquarian: "Hard by the river Avon standeth Guy-Cliff. There have ye a shady little wood, clear and

¹ Shakespeare, III Henry VI, III, iii, 157, calls him the "setter up and puller down of kings."
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

crystal springs, mossy bottoms and caves, meadows always fresh and green, the river rumbling here and there among the stones, with his stream making a mild noisè and gentle whispering; and besides all this, solitary and still quietness, things most grateful to the Muses."

Within easy reach, too, was Coventry; "one of the bravest cities in England," writes William Smith in 1588; with "strong and high walls" adorned with "many beautiful gates and stately turrets," all "still remaining, and second to none in England." 1 Besides its handsome and wonderfully well-preserved walls, suggesting the days when knighthood was in flower, the city was notable for its fine monastic buildings, its beautiful spires, and its treasury of legend, including the story of Godiva.

But perhaps the place that most stirred the imagination of the youthful Shakespeare was Kenilworth, the home of the Earl of Leicester, the powerful and magnificent favorite of Queen Elizabeth. The castle, originally erected in the eleventh century, was, according to Dugdale, a fortress of "extraordinary strength and largeness," enclosing no fewer than seven acres within its walls, which were so thick, "in many places of fifteen or twenty foot thickness," that "two or three persons together may walk upon most places thereof." 2 It had played a conspicuous part in the history of England, notably when it was held by the Barons against Henry III, Elizabeth had presented it to the Earl of Leicester, who is said to have spent £60,000 (equivalent now to approximately $3,000,000) in enlarging it. "The rooms," says Dugdale, were "of great state . . . all carried upon pillars and architecture of freestone, carved and wrought, as the

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1 See Dugdale's description in his Warwickshire.

2 Dugdale saw it, of course, after further improvements had been made; but the passages quoted apply to the castle as it existed in Leicester's time.
like are not within this kingdom”; and “by the walls of
the castle” gleamed a fair lake “containing one hundred
and eleven acres.”

*In Kenilworth, Sir Walter Scott presents a vivid picture
of the castle, with its towers, and courts, and battlements, and gardens, and “immense range of kitchens.” He gives, too, a spirited account of the princely festivities
with which Leicester there entertained Queen Elizabeth
in July, 1575. The celebrations must have created great
excitement in Stratford; and it is more than likely that
William, then in his twelfth year, stood with the other
boys of the town, an admiring spectator of the open-air
pageants with which Leicester amused Her Majesty.
Could the boys have been kept away when, as we are
told, the arrival of the Queen was marked by such salvos
of cannon and great display of fireworks that “the noise and flame were heard and seen thirty miles off”? Strat-
ford was only about ten miles distant as the crow flies.
At any rate, many scholars have found in one of the
Kenilworth pageants the inspiration of Oberon’s vision
in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*

Surely all these places with their storied past would
make the youthful Shakespeare dream dreams of the glo-
rious days gone by, and with their splendid present fire
him with ambition to have a part in the activities of the
great world outside of Stratford.

But in the exuberant years of boyhood he was occupied
with other things than communing with the beauty of
ever and sky, and dreaming dreams of the glorious past.
He must have rejoiced in those village amusements com-
mon to the Merry England of Queen Bess’s time, such
as May-poles, bear-baitings, wakes, morris-dances, fairs,¹
and harvest-homes. And into those outdoor pastimes

¹ The name “Bull Ring” shows that there was in Stratford a place for
animal baiting; and the village was famous for its fairs.
which are the peculiar heritage of the country-born lad he must have thrown himself with full enthusiasm. It cannot be doubted, for example, that he was devoted to the chase, and had the hunter’s love for dogs and horses. The glowing accounts of such sport embedded in his earliest poem, *Venus and Adonis*, show this. Where can one find a more realistic and sympathetic description of the “timorous flying hare” swiftly pursued by “the hot, scent-snuffing hounds”? —

By this, poor Wat, far off upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear.

Or where a more vivid description of a pack of hounds in full cry? —

Another flap-mouth’d mourner, black and grim,
 Against the welkin volleys out his voice;
Another, and another, answer him,
Clapping their proud tails to the ground below,
Shaking their scratch’d ears, bleeding as they go.

And this keenly sympathetic interest in sport appears in many of his plays; for example, in the description of the chase in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the baying of the hounds leads Hippolyta to exclaim:

Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding: for, besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near,
Seem’d all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord.

Such discord, it may be observed, would be musical only to the enthusiastic sportsman. And the same is true of the beauty of the dogs described by Theseus:

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flew’d, so sanded, and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
Crook-knee’d, and dew-lapp’d like Thessalian bulls;
Slow in pursuit, but match’d in mouth like bells
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never holla’d to, nor cheer’d with horn.

[ 42 ]
BOYHOOD AND EARLY ENVIRONMENT

Any possessor of a hunting-dog — I speak from experience — will bear testimony to the natural and fully justified pride in the good hound Silver of The Taming of the Shrew:

Saw'st thou not, boy, how Silver made it good
At the hedge-corner in the coldest fault?
I would not lose the dog for twenty pound.

Possibly Shakespeare was here embalming the memory of a real dog, for Silver appears again in The Tempest:

Hey, Silver! There it goes, Silver!

His love for horses was not less conspicuous, and some of the most beautiful descriptions literature has of that noble animal have come from his enthusiastic pen. I have already spoken of his devotion to the quieter pastime of angling; and many writers have commented on his knowledge of hawking and deer-hunting. Not for a moment can it be doubted that he fully entered into all the outdoor sports that Warwickshire offered him.

Nor, in an age when the drama was the chief form of public amusement, were dramatic entertainments denied him. As has been suggested, he may have witnessed a part of the splendid pageants exhibited at Kenilworth in 1575. We are on surer ground, however, when we assert that he was a witness of the mystery plays annually presented at Coventry by the trade guilds on waggon moving in procession through the streets from station to station. The performance of these plays, ancestors of the modern drama, was a great event in the lives of the common people, and the citizens of the neighboring towns were especially invited to be present. The mysteries at Coventry were among the best in England, so famous indeed that in the seventeenth century mystery plays in general were vulgarly called "Coventry plays." ¹

¹ Hence Richard James, librarian to Sir Robert Cotton, when he received
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Dugdale states that "the confluence of people from far and near to see that show was extraordinary great." On more occasions than one, probably, young William, with his father or with the other boys of the town, made his way thither, and stood the better part of the day in the open, watching one waggon after another as it rolled up, presented its story, and rolled away. The play which seems to have made the deepest impression upon him was that acted by the Guild of Shearmen and Taylors, in which Herod of Jewry took the leading rôle. This vain-glorious braggart was costumed in a most astounding fashion, with red gloves and "gorgeous array" —

Brighter than the sun in the midst of the day.

At one point in the play his ravings became so violent that, according to the stage-direction, he leaped off the pageant-waggon into the crowd of spectators: "Here Herod rages in the pageant, and in the street also." To emphasize his anger he carried a large club stuffed with wool, with which he belabored all who came within range. Possibly on one occasion he bore down with all the terror of this club upon the future dramatist. At any rate Shakespeare never forgot the scene. Among the references to it in his plays we may note the following:

What a Herod of Jewry is this! (Merry Wives, II, i, 20.)
It out-herods Herod! (Hamlet, III, ii, 16.)
To whom Herod of Jewry may do homage.
(Antony and Cleopatra, I, ii, 28.)

Herod of Jewry dare not look upon you
But when you are well pleased. (Ibid., III, iii, 3.)

Another scene in the same play that deeply affected him was the slaughter of the children by Herod's cruel sol-

for cataloguing a manuscript of mysteries of unknown origin, wrote on the fly-leaf: "vulgo dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriae, sive ludus Corporis Christi." Cf. also John Heywood's Four PP.
BOYHOOD AND EARLY ENVIRONMENT

diers, when the women fought valiantly with pot-ladles and other "womanly geare." He refers to it in Henry V (III, iii, 41): "As did the wives of Jewry at Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen." Most of the Coventry mysteries have been lost, but luckily this particular play has been preserved, and from it we are able to judge how profoundly these crude representations stirred his boyish imagination.

But these amateur folk-performances, already regarded as antique and rapidly falling into decay, were not the only form of histrionic art that came to stimulate his latent dramatic genius; for in Stratford itself he was able on occasion to witness the newer drama as acted by the professional troupes before the Queen and the citizens of London. During his father's term as High Bailiff, in 1568, companies of London actors visited Stratford for the first time, the Queen's Players, the best in the kingdom, and the Earl of Worcester's Players, among the best. Upon their arrival they were offered the hospitality of the town, and allowed to play in the Guildhall. It was then customary to invite the players, thus received, to give their first performance \(^1\) before the High Bailiff, or Mayor, to which all the city officials with their families and guests, and others, \(^2\) were admitted free of charge, in return for which the actors were rewarded by the corporation. The records of Stratford show that by way of this reward John Shakespeare, as High Bailiff, presented the Queen's Players with 9s., and the Earl of Worcester's Players 1s. \(^3\) In 1573 the town was visited by the Earl of Leicester's Players, in 1576 by the Earl of Worcester's

\(^1\) They might give as many subsequent performances as they found profitable.

\(^2\) Sometimes, however, the actors were allowed to take a gathering at the door from the rabble; see J. T. Murray, "English Dramatic Companies in the Towns," Modern Philology, ii, 543.

\(^3\) The difference in the amount of the reward is to be accounted for in part by the difference in the rank of the players' patrons.
and the Earl of Warwick's Players, in 1577 by the Earl of Leicester's and the Earl of Worcester's Players, etc. On these notable occasions we may suppose that John Shakespeare, in both his official and private capacities, showed the actors such courtesies as he could, and that he took his little son William to witness their performances.

A person named Willis, born within a year of Shakespeare, has left us an account of "A stage-play which I saw when I was a child," that furnishes us with a good notion both of the type of plays then in vogue and the circumstances under which they were presented before the town officials:

In the city of Gloucester the manner is, as I think it is in other like corporations,¹ that when players of interludes come to town, they first attend the Mayor to inform him what nobleman's servants they are, and so to get license for their public playing. And if the Mayor like the actors, or would show respect to their lord and master, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the Aldermen and Common Council of the city; and that is called the Mayor's play, where every one that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit to show respect unto them. At such a play my father took me with him, and made me stand between his legs as he sat upon one of the benches, where we saw and heard very well.

The play was called The Cradle of Security, wherein was personated a King or some great Prince [named Wicked-of-the-World], with his courtiers of several kinds, amongst which three ladies [Pride, Covetousness, and Luxury] were in special grace with him; and they, keeping him in delights and pleasures, drew him from his graver counsellors, hearing of sermons, and listening to good counsel and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lie down in a cradle upon the stage, where these three ladies joining in a sweet song rocked him asleep, that he snorted again; and in the meantime closely conveyed under the cloths wherewith all he was covered a vizard

¹ That Willis is correct in this supposition is beyond doubt; see J. T. Murray, English Dramatic Companies 1558–1642, vol. ii, Provincial Companies.
like a swine’s snout upon his face, with three wire chains fastened thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally by those three ladies; who fall to singing again, and then discovered his face that the spectators might see how they had transformed him, going on with their singing.

Whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another door at the farthest end of the stage two old men, the one [End-of-the-World] in blue with a serjeant-at-arms’ mace on his shoulder, the other [Last Judgment] in red with a drawn sword in his hand and leaning with the other hand upon the other’s shoulder. And so they two went along in a soft pace round about by the skirt of the stage, till at last they came to the cradle when all the court was in greatest jollity; and then the foremost old man [End-of-the-World] with his mace struck a fearful blow upon the cradle, whereat all the courtiers, with the three ladies and the vizard, all vanished; and the desolate Prince, starting up bare-faced, and finding himself thus sent for to judgment, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case; and so was carried away by wicked spirits. . . .

* This sight took such impression in me that when I came towards man’s estate it was as fresh in my memory as if I had seen it newly acted.¹

If this crude play was still so vivid in the mind of Willis at the age of seventy-five, we may infer that the plays acted in Stratford by the best of the London companies exercised a profound influence on the sensitive mind of the youthful Shakespeare. How important this was for his later development as a dramatist can be only a matter of surmise.

¹ R. Willis, Mount Tabor. Or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner . . . Published in the year of his age 75, Anno Dom. 1639, p. 110.
CHAPTER IV
SCHOOLING

Such evidence as we possess indicates that neither John Shakespeare nor Mary his wife was able to write. Yet the new age, under the influence of the Renaissance, was setting a high value on education,\(^1\) and we may be sure that the Chief Alderman of the town saw to it that his son and heir profited by the really excellent opportunity which Stratford afforded its youth of acquiring book-learning. The local free grammar school had been in existence at least as early as 1424; in 1477 its master was able to boast the university degree of Bachelor of Arts; and in 1553, under the royal patronage of Edward VI, it was reorganized as "The King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon," with an endowment, and a special provision that its master should receive a salary of not less than £20 per annum.\(^2\) This handsome salary (it was double that paid to the Master of Eton\(^3\)) enabled the citizens of Stratford to secure the best teachers, and to build up a school that compared favorably with those of Worcester,\(^4\) Coventry, and even larger towns.

The first Stratford schoolmaster under whose tuition William may have come was Walter Roche, B.A. of Oxford, and Lancashire Fellow. In 1571 Simon Hunt, also B.A. of Oxford, and Fellow, seems to have been appointed to assist him, and probably had charge of the

\(^1\) "Every one desireth to have his child learned," writes Dr. Mulcaster, headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School.

\(^2\) That this sum was regularly paid to the schoolmasters during Shakespeare's boyhood is shown by the Stratford records.

\(^3\) The Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, asserted in 1561 that his university position had an annual value of only £12. See Bass Mullinger, Cambridge from 1535 to the Accession of Charles, i, 185.

\(^4\) The schoolmaster at Worcester received a salary of only £10.
SCHOOLING

beginners. In 1574 Roche was assigned by Elizabeth to the rectory of Clifford Chambers, near Stratford; but he continued to reside in Stratford, and thus added to the scholarly resources of the town. Simon Hunt promptly succeeded Roche as master of the school, and held the position until 1577. It was from Hunt, therefore, that Shakespeare received most of his training. Hunt was followed by Thomas Jenkins, likewise a Fellow of Oxford, who failed, however, to give satisfaction, and was supplanted in 1579 by John Cotton, B.A. of Oxford.

The school-building, adjoining the ancient Guild Chapel, is preserved to-day in much the same condition as it was when William sat on its benches and gazed at the dingy beams of the timbered oak roof with carved bosses in the middle where they joined — for the schoolrooms were on the second floor, reached by an outside tile-covered stairway of stone, now removed.1

A boy's education in the sixteenth century was begun at tender years. Charles Hoole writes: "It is usual in cities and greater towns to put children to school about four or five years of age, and in country villages, because of further distance, not till about six or seven." 2 In all

1 It has been mistakenly assumed that in Shakespeare's day the school was held in the Guild Chapel. During John Shakespeare's term as High Bailiff, 1568, the town records show the expenditure of various sums for "repairing the school," "dressing and sweeping the school-house," "ground-sell the old school, and taking down the sollar over the school." Obviously the school-house was then being put in better condition for the use of the students. It seems to have needed repairs again in 1595-6, for on February 14, 1596, the Town Council ordered that "School was not to be kept in the Chapel." The assumption that the school was regularly held in the Chapel is based solely on this last entry.

2 A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School, The Petty School, p. 1; cf. p. 23. This interesting book, though not printed until 1659 (the general title-page bears the date 1660), was written, as the title-page informs us, in 1636. The author was himself a country school-teacher, and describes the rules and the curriculum prevailing in England during the half century before he wrote. That the statements quoted from him apply to Shakespeare's day is abundantly shown by other evidence which cannot be so conveniently cited.

[ 49 ]
probability, then, at the age of six or seven, William took his place as a *petit* in the beginner's form,¹ and thus started on the weary road to learning.

As to the hours kept ² and the regulations enforced in the Stratford school we have no definite evidence, but some notion of these may be gained by a study of the customs prevailing in similar schools elsewhere. John Brinsley, in *Ludus Literarius, or The Grammar Schoole* (1612), writes: "The school-time should begin at six"; Peacham, in *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), notes the time of beginning as commonly "before six in the morning"; and Hoole likewise states: "In many schools I observe six o'clock in the morning to be the hour for children to be fast at their books." The statutes drawn up in 1561 for The Merchant Taylors' School in London, doubtless embodying the rules and regulations current in grammar schools of the day, specify that "the children shall come to the school in the morning at seven of the clock both winter and summer, and tarry there until eleven, and return again at one of the clock, and depart at five." Brinsley, who would begin school at six, tentatively suggests, as an innovation, that the pupils be allowed an intermission at nine o'clock of fifteen minutes, and, "to countervail the time of the intermission," be held until fifteen minutes after eleven. A similar brief intermission, he suggests, might be allowed at three, and the pupils held until five-thirty, "thereby in that half-hour to countervail the time at three." But the dismissal from studies was to be followed by the reading of a chapter from the Bible, the singing of a Psalm, and lastly "a

¹ "And in the first form shall be placed the young beginners, commonly called *petits*" — Statutes of the Guisborough Grammar School, Yorkshire, 1561.

² In *The Taming of the Shrew* Bianca protests:
I am no breeching scholar in the schools,
I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times.

[ 50 ]
THE STRATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

The stone tower in the centre of the picture is a part of the Guild Chapel.

INTERIOR OF THE STRATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL
prayer to be used by the master." The school hours thus devised would extend from 6 A.M. until nearly 6 P.M. Even so, Brinsley feared lest the granting of the two brief intermissions might lead to "the reproach of the school" by parents who would complain that their sons did nothing but play.

The discipline with which these seriously-minded schoolmasters governed their pupils was commonly severe if not harsh. They taught with the book of knowledge open in one hand, and the rod menacingly poised in the other: ¹

A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
Than whom no mortal so magnificent. ²

Roger Ascham, in his *Schoolmaster*, quotes the opinion of Sir William Peter, 1563, "that the rod only was the sword that must keep the school in obedience," to which Master Haddon, we are told, heartily agreed, with the observation that "the best schoolmaster of our time was the greatest beater." Beyond a doubt one of the best schoolmasters of the time was Nicholas Udall, headmaster of Eton and later of Westminster; and his reputation for using the rod was not less great than his fame as a classical scholar. Thomas Tusser records that on one occasion Udall gave him fifty-three strokes:

For fault but small, or none at all,
It came to pass that beat I was.

Henry Peacham, in *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), says: "I knew one who in winter would ordinarily on a cold morning whip his boys over, for no other purpose than to get himself a heat"; and he complains of the "immoderation, or rather plain cruelty," commonly used by school-

¹ The master is usually so represented in early woodcuts; see for example, the title-page of *Pedantius*, 1631.

² *Love's Labour's Lost*, III, i, 179-80; cf. also *I Henry VI*, I, i, 36; *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II, i, 22; *Coriolanus*, III, ii, 116.
masters, who believe that "there is no other method of
making a scholar than by beating him," with the result,
as Peacham observes, that the master's "very name is
hateful to the scholar, who trembleth at their coming in,"
and looks upon them "as his deadly enemies."

Unquestionably Shakespeare was drawing upon the
memories of his boyhood when in As You Like It he
describes —

The whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

Nor was he more enthusiastic when in The Taming of the
Shrew he wrote:

As willingly as e'er I came from school;
or in Romeo and Juliet:

Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books,
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.

And perhaps he wrote with special relish in II Henry VI:

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in
erecting a grammar school.

In view of this evidence we can hardly believe that in
leaving the school after an arduous day he was careful to
observe the instructions of the pious Francis Seager, who
in his Schoole of Virtue and Book of Good Nurture for
Chyldren (1577), urges his model pupil to walk sedately
home, soberly, "with countenance grave," taking formal
leave of his fellows, and courteously "free of cap" to all
the elders he passes —

Not running on heaps as swarms of bees,
As at this day every man it now sees;
Not using, but refusing, such foolish toys
As commonly are used in these days, of boys,
As hoop ing and hallowing as in hunting the fox.

William doubtless whooped and hallooed with the best,
SCHOOLING

for he was no prig, and his animal spirits were not to be suppressed by stupid rules of conduct drawn up by wrinkled age.

The curriculum through which he was put by his Stratford masters is reasonably well-known to us, for village grammar schools in this respect differed very little. 1 "The usual way to begin with a child," says Hoole, "when he is first brought to school is to teach him to know his letters in the horn-book." 2 This curious implement of education consisted of a single sheet of paper placed on a small wooden board, and protected by a thin sheet of transparent horn. The printed matter usually consisted of the sign of the cross (to promote piety), followed by the alphabet, first in small letters, then in capital letters; next the five vowels; next the simplest syllables; and finally (to end with piety), the Lord’s Prayer. There was a handle by which to grasp the “book,” often pierced with a hole through which a cord was run, enabling the pupil to hang it about his neck or tie it at his girdle. 3 Shakespeare’s acquaintance with the horn-book is well attested in his plays, notably in Love’s Labour’s Lost.

From the mysteries of the horn-book, the scholar proceeded to the A B C, with the catechism. “The ordinary way to teach children to read is, after they have got some knowledge of their letters, and a smattering of some syllables and words in the horn-book, to turn them into A B C, 1 On this topic consult Thomas Baynes, Shakespeare Studies, 1894; H. R. D. Anders, Shakespeare’s Books, 1904; Foster Watson, The Curriculum and Text-books of English Schools, 1903, and The English Grammar Schools to 1660, 1909; Charles Hoole, A New Discovery, 1660; John Brinsley, Ludus Literarius, 1612.
2 Op. cit., p. 4. It is not necessary to suppose, as many scholars do, that John and Mary had to employ tutors to teach their son to read before he could be admitted into the school. Of the schoolmaster in Love’s Labour’s Lost it is said “he teaches boys the horn-book.” Village schools nearly always provided for the instruction of beginners.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

or Primer."¹ Shakespeare's familiarity with the contents of the primer is revealed in King John (I, i, 195 ff.):

"I shall beseech you," — that is Question, now.
And then comes Answer, like an absey-book:
"O, sir," says Answer, "at your best command;
At your employment; at your service, sir."

And he may possibly be echoing an actual experience when in The Two Gentlemen of Verona (II, i, 23) he describes the forlorn lover as sighing "like a school boy that had lost his A B C."

At the same time he was taught to write by the use of a copy-book: "Fair as a text B in a copy-book," exclaims Katherine in Love's Labour's Lost. The style of writing employed in the Stratford school was what is now called the old English script, resembling in some respects German script. It differed in many ways from the Italian character which was then being gradually introduced into England, and which has since completely supplanted the older style. It is important to bear this difference in mind, for persons are apt to assume that because the signatures of Shakespeare are hard for them to read he must have written an illiterate hand. Quite the contrary is the case. The distinguished paleographer, Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, declares that Shakespeare wrote "the native English hand with nothing particularly characteristic in it to distinguish it," and he suggests that "Shakespeare had received a more thorough training as a scribe than has been thought probable."²

Immediately after acquiring some ability to read and write, the pupils were set to the study of Latin, for all Elizabethan schools, it should be remembered, were primarily schools for teaching Latin. The mastery of this language was accomplished with the aid of William

¹ Charles Hoole, op. cit., p. 20.
² Shakespeare's Handwriting, 1916, pp. 54-55.
SCHOOLING

Lilly's famous *Grammatica Latina* (with a woodcut on the title-page of a large tree bearing luscious fruit, and small boys climbing up to gather from its branches), a book which for several generations before, and for many generations after, supplied the first classical nourishment to English schoolboys. They were required to commit the whole of it to memory, whether they understood it or not; and as the plays of Shakespeare show, parts of this grammar he never forgot. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* a country schoolmaster, Evans, quizzes a boy out of Lilly. It is curious, and possibly significant, that the boy bears the name of "William," and if for "Evans" we substitute the name "Hunt" we have the picture complete:

*Evans.* Come hither, William. Hold up your head; come.
*Mrs. Paige.* Come on, sirrah. Hold up your head. Answer your
*master.* Be not afraid.

*Evans.* William, how many numbers is in nouns?
*William.* Two. . . .
*Evans.* What is "fair," William?
*William.* Pulcher. . . .
*Evans.* What is *lapis*, William?
*William.* A stone. . . .
*Evans.* What is he, William, that does lend articles?
*William.* Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus de-
clined: *singulariter, nominativo, hic, haec, hoc*. . . .
*Evans.* What is your genitive case plural, William?
*William.* Genitive case?
*Evans.* Ay.
*William.* Genitive, *horum, harum, horum*. *

Along with the *Grammatica Latina* went the equally fa-
mous *Sententiae Pueriles*, a collection of brief Latin sen-
tences, likewise to be committed to "the ventricle of
memory." Passages quoted in *Love's Labour's Lost* attest

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1 A reprint of this grammar will be found in the Shakespeare *Jahrbuch*, vols. xlv and xlv. As the authorized grammar its use was required.

2 For other recollections of Lilly's grammar see *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, ii, 82; V, i, 10; V, i, 84; *The Taming of the Shrew*, I, i, 167; *I Henry IV*, II, i, 104; *Much Ado*, IV, i, 22; *Twelfth Night*, II, iii, 2; *Titus Andronicus*, IV, ii, 20–23.
the poet’s intimacy with the volume. The entire instruction of the pupil, including the formal conversation with the teacher, was now conducted in the Latin tongue.

After acquiring the elements of Latin grammar and some facility in translating, the pupils were set to reading Aesop’s Fables and Cato’s Maxims, and, when somewhat more advanced, the Eclogues of Mantuanus, an Italian writer of the Renaissance whose Latin poems were greatly admired for their purity of style. Shakespeare, who refers to him as “good old Mantuan,” and who quotes from one of his eclogues —

Fauste precor, gelida quando pecus omne sub umbra
Ruminat,

seems to have had a genuine affection for him: “Old Mantuan, old Mantuan,” he exclaims, “who understandeth thee not loves thee not!” The study of Mantuanus was quickly followed by a reading of Virgil’s Eclogues. Here for the first time Shakespeare came into contact with really great poetry, and he must have been deeply stirred by the majesty of the Virgilian verse, as was his contemporary Warwickshire friend and fellow-poet, Michael Drayton. My schoolmaster, writes Drayton,—

First read to me honest Mantuan;
Then Virgil’s Eclogues; being entered thus
Methought I straight had mounted Pegasus,
And in his full career could make him stop,
And bound upon Parnassus’ by-cleft top.

Of all the Latin authors studied, however, Shakespeare seems to have acquired the deepest affection for Ovid. In

1 Its influence has also been traced in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, III, ii, 15, Coriolanus, V, iii, 141, and Cymbeline, III, v, 37.
2 Battisto Spagnuoli, of Mantua. His Eclogues have been edited by W. P. Mustard, 1911, and well repay study.
3 So likewise Drayton, in The Owl:
   O moral Mantuan! live thy verses long!
   Honour attend thee and thy reverend song!
4 To my most dearely-loved friend Henry Reynolds, Esquire, II. 36–40.
SCHOOLING

later years he was able to go back to him with pleasure, and to read him both in Latin and in Golding’s excellent translation. He refers to Ovid more often than to any other ancient writer, and on the title-page of “the first heir” of his invention, Venus and Adonis (itself based on the Metamorphoses), he placed a graceful couplet chosen from this his favorite author.¹

Nor were the Roman playwrights neglected. Terence, who, as Hoole observes, “of all the school authors we read doth deservedly challenge the first place,” he could not well have omitted. And he seems to have read also Seneca and Plautus: “Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light,” exclaims Polonius. The former probably did not much appeal to him, although Senecan influence is clearly marked in his tragedies.² Plautus must have delighted him more; the Plautine comedies gave him some of his early inspiration, and supplied him with the plot of his Comedy of Errors. Perhaps his familiarity with these authors went beyond a mere reading, for we know that in many schools the performance of a scene from Terence or Plautus was a weekly exercise.³

¹ There is preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford a copy of the 1502 Aldine edition of Ovid’s Metamorphoses in Latin, bearing on the title-page just above the Aldine anchor the abbreviated signature “Wm Shre.” Facing this title-page is the manuscript note: “This little Booke of Ovid was given to me by W. Hall, who sayd it was once Will. Shakesperes. T.N. 1682.” This identity of “T.N.” is unknown; the “W. Hall” may be the William Hall, an admirer of the poet, who visited Stratford in 1694, and wrote to a friend: “Dear Neddy, I very greedily embrace this occasion of acquainting you with something which I found at Stratford upon Avon. That place I came unto on Thursday night, and ye next day went to visit ye ashes of the Great Shakespear.” The authenticity of the signature on the title-page cannot be asserted, yet various circumstances tend to indicate that it may be genuine. And in this connection we are reminded of a line in Titus Andronicus, IV, i, 42: “‘Tis Ovid’s Metamorphoses; my mother gave it me.”

² The influence of Seneca’s philosophical works on Shakespeare has also been demonstrated.

A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Other Latin works which he was made to read — if we may judge by the curriculum of similar schools — were the poems of Horace, the letters of Cicero (upon which he was required to mold an epistolary style), the colloquies of Erasmus, and possibly Sallust.

But quite as important as the curriculum in the sixteenth-century schools was the method of study. Fortunately for us Hoole has preserved a detailed account of exactly how village schoolmasters taught their pupils; and this account relates to the generation preceding his (i.e., to the days of Shakespeare), for he gathered his information, he tells us, by careful inquiry from various men taught by his predecessors in the profession. The passages that are quoted below may be a little tiresome in reading, but will abundantly repay any one who is interested in the subject of Shakespeare’s education. Of the grammar school students of the late sixteenth century Hoole writes:

These were first put to read the Accidents [in Lilly’s Grammatica Latina], and afterwards made to commit it to memory; which when they had done they were exercised in construing and parsing the examples in the English rules; and this was called the first form... The second form was to repeat the Accidents for Parts; to say forenoon’s lessons in Propria quæ maribus, Quæ genus, and As in præsentii, which they repeated memoriter, construed, and parsed; to say an afternoon’s lesson in Sententiae Pueriles, which they repeated by heart, and construed, and parsed; they repeated their tasks every Friday memoriter, and parsed their Sentences out of English.

The third form was enjoined first to repeat two parts together every morning, one out of the Accidents and the other out of that aforementioned part of the Grammar; and together with their parts, each one was made to form one person of a verb Active in any of the four conjugations. Their forenoon’s lessons were in Syntaxis, which they used to say memoriter; then to construe it, and parse only the words which contain the force
of the rule. Their forenoon lessons were two days in Æsop’s Fables and other two days in Cato; both which they construed and parsed, and said Cato memoriter: these lessons they translated into English, and repeated all on Fridays construing out of the translations into Latin.

The fourth form having ended Syntaxis, first repeated it, and Propria quæ maribus, etc., together for parts, and formed a person of a verb Passive, as they did the Active before. For lessons they proceeded to the by-rules, and to Figura and Prosodia; for afternoon lessons they read Terence two days and Mantuan two days, which they translated into English, and repeated on Fridays as before [i.e., construing their English translations back into Latin].

The fifth form said one part in the Latin, and another in the Greek Grammar together. Their forenoon’s lessons were in Butler’s Rhetoric, which they said memoriter and then construed and applied the example to the definition. Their afternoon’s lessons were two days in Ovid’s Metamorphosis and two days in Tully’s Offices, both which they translated into English. They learned to scan and prove verse in Flores Poetarum; and repeated their week’s work on Fridays as before.

So Hoole proceeds to the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth forms. Whether in the fifth form Shakespeare acquired the little Greek of which Jonson speaks, we cannot say. His teachers, fellows of Oxford, were certainly qualified to give instruction in the elements of the language.

Although the curriculum was mainly concerned with the classics, pupils were commonly required to become familiar with the Bible ¹ (in the Geneva version, which is very close to the King James’s version). The young Shakespeare seems to have read with avidity the stirring histories contained within its pages, and he shows an intimate knowledge of both the Old and the New Testament. Probably more than any other single book it helped to mold his English style, and to supply him with the noble vocabulary he was later to use with such effectiveness.

¹ See Foster Watson, The English Grammar Schools, pp. 50–62.
How many books he had access to outside the school we do not know. Doubtless not many in his own home,¹ or in the home of his father's most intimate friends. On the other hand, from his schoolmasters, from his vicar, and from the homes of the better educated,² he could, were he so disposed, have borrowed books on various subjects, particularly chronicles, the Latin classics, a few romances, and innumerable theological treatises; and that he borrowed some we must believe, for in general unless the habit of reading is formed before the age of twelve it is not easily acquired in later life. We have no evidence, however, that at this early date he was a voluminous reader. Probably he found his chief pleasure in outdoor sports, and in "nature's infinite book," which in the regions about Stratford lay wide open before him in unusual attractiveness.

¹ That John Shakespeare on one occasion, at least, bought a book is shown by Mrs. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Environment*, p. 61.
² Mrs. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Environment*, p. 57, has shown that Stratford was by no means a bookless place.