at Redstone near Arley, within sight of the river’s majestic sweep amidst its bordering woods and hills, is by far the most important literary monument of semi-Saxon. And, while the poem as a whole displays a Saxon tenacity of purpose in working out a comprehensive scheme of memorial verse, its more original parts have touches of passion and picturesqueness, as well as of dramatic vivacity, that recall the patriotic fire of the Celtic bards. A hundred and fifty years later the first great period of English literature was inaugurated by another poem of marked originality and power, written under the shadow of the Malvern Hills. The writer of the striking series of allegories known as *Piers Plowman's Visions* was a Shrop­shire man, and, notwithstanding his occasional visits to London and official employments there, appears to have spent his best and most productive years on the western border between the Severn and the Malvern Hills. In many points both of substance and form the poem may, it is true, be described as almost typically Saxon. But it has at the same time a power of vivid portraiture, a sense of colour, with an intense and penetrating if not exag­gerated feeling for local grievances which are probably due to the strain of Celtic blood in the writer’s veins. Two centuries later, from the same district, from a small town on an affluent of the Severn, a few miles to the west of the river, came the national poet, who not only inherited the patriotic fire and keen sensibility of Layamon and Langland, but who combined in the most perfect form and carried to the highest point of development the best qualities of the two great races represented in the blood and history of the English nation. Mr J. R. Green, in referring to the moral effects arising from the mixture of races in the Midland district, has noted this fact in one of those sagacious side-glances that make his history so instructive. “ It is not without significance,” he says, “ that the highest type of the race, the one Englishman who has combined in their largest measure the mobility and fancy of the Celt with the depth and energy of the Teutonic temper, was born on the old Welsh and English borderland, in the forest of Arden.” And from the purely critical side Mr Matthew Arnold has clearly brought out the same point. He traces some of the finest qualities of Shake­speare’s poetry to the Celtic spirit which touched his imagination as with an enchanter’s wand, and thus helped to brighten and enrich the profounder elements of his creative genius.

The history of Warwickshire in Anglo-Saxon times is identified with the kingdom of Mercia, which, under a scries of able rulers, was for a time the dominant power of the country. In later times, from its central position, the county was liable to be crossed by military forces if rebellion made head in the north or west, as well as to be traversed and occupied by the rival armies during the periods of civil war. The most important events, indeed, con­nected with the shire before Shakespeare’s time occurred during the two greatest civil conflicts in the earlier national annals— the Barons’ War in the 13th century, and the Wars of the Roses in the 15th. The decisive battles that closed these long and bitter struggles, and thus became turning points in our constitutional history, were both fought on the borders of Warwickshire,—the battle of Evesham on the south-western and the battle of Bosworth Field on the north-eastern boundary. The great leaders in each conflict—the founder of the Commons House of Parliament and the “ setter up and puller down of kings”—were directly connected with Warwickshire. Kenilworth belonged to Simon de Montfort, and its siege and surrender constituted the last act in the Barons’ War. During the Wars of the Roses the county was naturally promi­nent in public affairs, as its local earl, the last and greatest of the lawless, prodigal, and ambitious barons of mediaeval times, was for more than twenty years the leading figure in the struggle. But notwithstanding this powerful influence the county was, like the country itself, very much divided in its political sympathies and activities. The weakness and vacillation of Henry VI. had stimulated the rival house of York to assert its claims, and, as the trading and mercantile classes were always in favour of a strong government, London, with the eastern counties and the chief ports and commercial towns, favoured the house of York. On the other

hand, South Wales, some of the Midland and most of the western shires, under the leadership of the Beauforts, and the northern counties, under the leadership of Clifford and Northumberland, supported the house of Lancaster. Political feeling in the Princi­pality itself was a good deal divided. The duke of York still possessed Ludlow Castle, and, the Welsh of the northern border being devoted to the houses of March and Mortimer, Prince Edward, the young earl of March, after the defeat and death of his father at Wakefield, was able to rally on the border a “mighty power of marchmen,” and, after uniting his forces with those of Warwick, to secure the decisive victory of Towton which placed him securely on the throne. Still, during the earlier stages of the struggle the Beauforts, with the carls of Pembroke, Devon, and Wiltshire, were able to muster in the south and west forces sufficient to keep the Yorkists in check. And when the final struggle came, —when Henry of Richmond landed at Milford Haven,—the Welsh blood in his veins rallied to his standard so powerful a contingent of the southern marchmen that he was able at once to cross the Severn, and, traversing north Warwickshire, to confront the forces of Richard, with the assurance that in the hour of need he would be supported by Stanley and Northumberland. Warwickshire itself was, as already intimated, considerably divided even in the more active stages of the conflict, Coventry being strongly in favour of the Red Rose, while Warwick, under the influence of the earl, was for a while devoted to the cause of the White Rose. Kenilworth was still held by the house of Lancaster, and Henry VI. at the outset of the conquest had more than once taken refuge there. On the other hand Edward IV and Richard III. both visited Warwick, the latter being so interested in the castle that he is said to have laid the foundation of a new and “ mighty fayre ” tower on the north side, afterwards known as the Bear’s Tower. Edward IV., in harmony with his strong instinct for popularity, and command of the arts that secure it, tried to conciliate the people of Coventry by visiting the town and witnessing its celebrated pageants more than once—at Christmas in 1465 and at the festival of St George in 1474. Although he was accompanied by his queen the efforts to win the town from its attachment to the rival house do not appear to have been very successful. Under Edward’s rule the manifesta­tion of active partisanship was naturally in abeyance, and no doubt the feeling may to some extent have declined. Indeed, in the later stages of the struggle Warwickshire, like so many other counties, was comparatively weary and quiescent. When Richard III. advanced to the north the sheriff of the shire had, it is true, in obedience to the royal mandate levied a force on behalf of the king, but as this force never actually joined the royal standard it is naturally assumed that it was either intercepted by Henry on his march to Bosworth Field or had voluntarily joined him on the eve of the battle. In view of the strong Lancasterian sympathies in the north and east of the shire the latter is by far the more probable supposition. In this case, or indeed on either alternative, it may be true, as asserted in the patent of arms subsequently granted to Shakespeare’s father, that his ancestors had fought on behalf of Henry VII. in the great battle that placed the crown on his head. Many families bearing the name of Shakespeare were scattered through Warwickshire in the 15th century, and it is therefore not at all unlikely that some of their members had wielded a spear with effect in the battle that, to the immense relief of the country, happily closed the most miserable civil conflict in its annals.

But, whether any of his ancestors fought at Bosworth Field or not, Shakespeare would be sure in his youth to hear, almost at first hand, a multitude of exciting stories and stirring inci­dents connected with so memorable and far-reaching a victory. After the battle Henry VII. had slept at Coventry, and was entertained by the citizens and presented with handsome gifts. He seems there also to have first exercised his royal power by con­ferring knighthood on the mayor of the town. The battle was fought only eighty years before Shakespeare’s birth, and public events of importance are vividly transmitted by local tradition for more than double that length of time. At this hour the quiet farmsteads of Mid Somerset abound with stories and traditions of Monmouth and his soldiers, and of the events that preceded and followed the battle of Sedgemoor. And a century earlier local traditions possessed still more vitality and power. In the 16th century, indeed, the great events of the nation’s life, as well as more important local incidents, were popularly preserved and transmitted by means of oral tradition and scenic display. Only a small and cultured class could acquire their knowledge of them through literary chronicles and learned records. The popular mind was of necessity largely fed and stimulated by the spoken narratives of the rustic festival and the winter fireside. And a quiet settled neighbourhood like Stratford, out of the crush, but near the great centres of national activity, would be peculiarly rich in these stored-up materials of unwritten history. The very fact that within eight miles of Shakespeare’s birthplace arose from their cedared slopes the halls and towers of the great earl who for more than a quarter of a century wielded a political and