precise nature of his occupation, the kind of wares in which he principally dealt, there are various and conflict­ing statements that have given rise to a good deal of dis­cussion. The earliest official statement on the subject occurs in the register of the bailiff’s court for the year 1556. He is there described as a “glover,” which, according to the verbal usage of the time, included deal­ing in skins, as well as in the various leather-made articles of farming gear, such as rough gauntlets and leggings for hedging and ditching, white leather gloves for chopping wood, and the like. But in addition to the trade of glover and fell-monger tradition assigns to John Shakespeare the functions of butcher, wool-stapler, corn- dealer, and timber-merchant. These occupations are not incompatible, and together they represent the main lines some of which at least a young farmer going into the town for trading purposes would be likely to pursue. He would naturally deal with the things he knew most about, such as corn, wool, timber, skins, and leather-made articles used in farm work—in a word, he would deal in farm conveniences and farm products. In a town that was the centre and chief market of an agricultural and grazing district, and as the member of a family whose wide connexions were nearly all engaged in farming operations, his prospects were certainly rather favourable than otherwise. And he soon began to turn his country connexion to account. There is distinct evidence that he early dealt in corn and wood as well as gloves and leather, for in 1556 he sues a neighbour for eighteen quarters of barley, and a few years later is paid three shillings by the corporation for a load of timber.

The poet’s father was evidently a man of energy, ambition, and public spirit, with the knowledge and ability requisite for pushing his fortune with fair success in his new career. His youthful vigour and intelligence soon told in his favour, and in a short time we find him taking an active part in public affairs. He made way so rapidly indeed amongst his fellow-townsmen, that within five years after entering Stratford he is recognized as a fitting recipient of municipal honours ; and his official appointments steadily rise in dignity and value through the various gradations of leet- juror, ale-taster, constable, affeeror, burgess, chamberlain, and alderman, until in 1568 he gains the most distinguished post of official dignity, that of high-bailiff or mayor of the town. Within twenty years after starting in business in Henley Street he thus rises to the highest place in the direction of municipal affairs, presiding as their head over the deliberations of his fellow aldermen and burgesses, and as chief magistrate over the local court of record. Three years later, in 1571, he was again elected as chief alderman. There is ample evidence, too, that during these years he advanced in material prosperity as well as in municipal dignities and honours. As early as 1556 he had means at his command which enabled him to purchase two houses in the town, one in Henley Street with a considerable garden, and another in Greenhill Street with a garden and croft attached to it. In the following year he married an heiress of gentle birth, Mary Arden of the Asbies, who had recently inherited under her father’s will a substantial sum of ready money, an estate at Wilmcote, consisting of nearly 60 acres of land with two or three houses, and a reversionary interest in houses and lands at Snitterfield, including the farm tenanted by Richard Shakespeare, her husband’s father. Being now a landed proprietor and a man of rising position and influence, John Shakespeare would be able to extend his business opera­tions, and it is clear that he did so, though whether always with due prudence and foresight may be fairly questioned. To a man of his sanguine and somewhat impetuous temper the sudden increase of wealth was

probably by no means an unmixed good. But for some years, at all events, he was able to maintain his more prosperous state, and his new ventures appear for a time to have turned out well. He is designated in official documents as yeoman, freeholder, and gentleman, and has the epithet “ master ” prefixed to his name ; this, being equivalent to esquire, was rarely used except in relation to men of means and station, possessing landed property of their own. In a note to another official document it is stated that about the time of his becoming chief magis­trate of Stratford John Shakespeare had “lands and tene­ments of good worth and substance” estimated in value at £500, and though there may be some exaggeration in this estimate his property from various sources must have been worth nearly that sum. And in 1575 he increased the total amount by purchasing two houses in Henley Street, the two that still remain identified with the name and are consecrated by tradition as the birthplace of the poet. But this was his last purchase, the tide of his hitherto pro­sperous fortunes being but too clearly already on the turn. Having passed the highest point of social and commercial success, he was now facing the downward slope, and the descent once begun was for some years continuous, and at times alarmingly and almost inscrutably rapid.

It seems clear indeed from the facts of the case that, notwith­standing John Shakespeare’s intelligence, activity, and early success, there was some defect of character which introduced an element of instability into his career, and in the end very much neutralized the working of his nobler powers. Faintly discernible perhaps from the first, and overpowered only for a time by the access of prosperity that followed nis fortunate marriage, this vital flaw ultimately produced its natural fruit in the serious embarrass­ments that clouded his later years. The precise nature of the defect can only be indicated in general terms, but it seems to have consisted very much in a want of measure and balance, of adequate care and foresight, in his business dealings and calcula­tions. He seems to have possessed the eager sanguine tempera­ment which, absorbed in the immediate object of pursuit, overlooks difficulties and neglects the wider considerations on which lasting success depends. Even in his early years at Stratford there are signs of this ardent, impatient, somewhat unheedful temper. He is not only active and pushing, but too restless and excitable to pay proper attention to necessary details, or discharge with punctuality the minor duties of his position. The first recorded fact in his local history illustrates this feature of his character. In April 1552 John Shakespeare is fined twelve pence, equal to between eight and ten shillings of our English money now, for not remov­ing the heap of household dirt and refuse that had accumulated in front of his own door. Another illustration of his want of thorough method and system in the management of his affairs is supplied by the fact that in the years 1556-57 he allowed himself to be sued in the bailiffs court for comparatively small debts. This could not have arisen from any want of means, as during the same period, in October 1556, he made the purchase already referred to of two houses with extensive gardens. The actions for debt must there­fore have been the result of negligence or temper on John Shakespeare’s part, and either alternative tells almost equally against his habits of business coolness and regularity. Another illustration of his restless, ill-considered, and unbalanced energy may be found in the number and variety of occupations which he seems to have added to his early trade of glover and leather-dealer. As his prospects improved he appears to have seized on fresh branches of business, until he had included within his grasp the whole circle of agricultural products that could in any way be brought to market. It would seem also that he added farming, to a not inconsiderable extent, to his expanding retail business in Stratford. But it is equally clear that he lacked the orderly method, the comprehensive outlook, and the vigilant care for details essential for holding well in hand the threads of so com­plicated a commercial web. Other disturbing forces may probably be discovered in the pride and ambition, the love of social excite­ment and display, which appear to be among the ground notes of John Shakespeare’s character so far as it is revealed to us in the few facts of his history. His strong social feeling and love of pleasurable excitement are illustrated by the fact that during the year of his mayoralty he brought companies of players into the town, and inaugurated dramatic performances in the guild hall. It is during the year of his filling the post of high-bailiff that we first hear of stage plays at Stratford, and the players must have visited the town, if not, as is most likely, at the invitation and desire of the poet’s father, at least with his sanction and support.