career. The loss of his mother would be deeply felt by her favourite son, but there was no bitterness in the bereave­ment, and it even seems to have exerted a tranquillizing, elevating effect on the poet’s mind and character. As he laid her in the grave he would recall and realize afresh the early years during which her loving presence and influence were the light and guide of his boyish life. With these vivid and varied family experiences a strong wave of home-yearning seems to have set in, which gradually drew the poet wholly back to Stratford. During the autumn visit connected with his mother’s death Shakespeare must have remained several weeks at the New Place, for on the 16th of October he acted as godfather to the infant son of an old personal friend, Henry Walker, who was an alderman of the borough. The child was called William after his godfather, and the poet must have taken a special interest in the boy, as he remembered him in his will.

It seems most probable that soon after the chequered domestic events of this year, as soon as he could con­veniently terminate his London engagements, Shake­speare decided on retiring to his native place. He had gained all he cared for in the way of wealth and fame, and his strongest interests, personal and relative, were now centred in Stratford. But on retiring to settle in his native town he had nothing of the dreamer, the sentiment­alist, or the recluse about him. His healthy natural feeling was far too strong, his character too manly and well-balanced, to admit of any of the so-called eccentricities of genius. He retired as a successful professional man who had gained a competence by his own exertions and wished to enjoy it at leisure in a simple, social, rational way. He knew that the competence he had gained, the lands and wealth he possessed, could only be preserved, like other valuable possessions, by good management and careful husbandry. And, taught by the sad experience of his earlier years, he evidently guided the business details of his property with a firm and skilful hand, was vigilant and scrupulously just in his dealings, respecting the rights of others, and, if need be, enforcing his own. He sued his careless and negligent debtors in the local court of record, had various commercial transactions with the corporation, and took an active interest in the affairs of the borough. And he went now and then to London, partly on business connected with the town, partly no doubt to look after the administration and ultimate dis­posal of his own theatrical property, and partly it may be assumed for the pleasure of seeing his old friends and fellow dramatists. Even at Stratford, however, Shake­speare was not entirely cut off from his old associates in arts and letters, his hospitable board being brightened at intervals by the presence, and animated by the wit, humour, and kindly gossip, of one or more of his chosen friends. Two amongst the most cherished of his com­panions and fellow poets, Drayton and Ben Jonson, had paid a visit of this kind to Stratford, and been entertained by Shakespeare only a few days before his death, which occurred almost suddenly on the 23d of April 1616. After three days’ illness the great poet was carried off by a sharp attack of fever, at that time one of the commonest scourges, even of country towns, and often arising then as now, only more frequently then than now, from the neglect of proper sanitary precautions. According to tradition the 23d of April was Shakespeare’s birthday, so that he died on the completion of the 52d year of his age. Three days later he was laid in the chancel of Stratford church, on the north wall of which his monument, contain­ing his bust and epitaph, was soon afterwards placed, most probably by the poet’s son-in-law, Dr John Hall. Shake­speare’s widow, the Anne Hathaway of his youth, died in 1623, having survived the poet seven years, exactly the

same length of time that his mother Mary Arden had out­lived her husband. Elizabeth Hall, the poet’s grandchild, was married twice, first to Mr Thos. Nash of Stratford, and in 1649, when she had been two years a widow, to Mr afterwards Sir John Barnard of Abington in North­amptonshire. Lady Barnard had no family by either husband, and the three children of the poet’s second daughter Judith (who had married Richard Quiney of Stratford, two months before her father’s death) all died comparatively young. At Lady Barnard’s death in 1670 the family of the poet thus become extinct. By his will made a few weeks before his death Shakespeare left his landed property, the whole of his real estate indeed, to his eldest daughter Mrs Susanna Hall, under strict entail to her heirs. He left also a substantial legacy to his second daughter and only remaining child Mrs Judith Quiney, and a remembrance to severaΓ of his friends, including his old associates at the Blackfriars theatre, Burbage, Heminge, and Condell,—the two latter of whom edited the first col­lection of his dramas published in 1623. The will also included a bequest to the poor of Stratford.

From this short sketch it will be seen that all the best known facts of Shakespeare’s personal history bring into vivid relief the simplicity and naturalness of his tastes, his love of the country, the strength of his domestic affec­tions, and the singularly firm hold which the conception of family life had upon his imagination, his sympathies, and his schemes of active labour. He had loved the country with ardent enthusiasm in his youth, when all nature was lighted with the dawn of rising passion and kindled imagination ; and after his varied London experi­ence we may well believe that he loved it still more with a deeper and calmer love of one who had looked through and through the brilliant forms of wealthy display, public magnificence, and courtly ceremonial, who had scanned the heights and sounded the depths of existence, and who felt that for the king and beggar alike this little life of feverish joys aud sorrows is soothed by natural influences, cheered by sunlight and green shadows, softened by the perennial charm of hill and dale and rippling stream, and when the spring returns no more is rounded with a sleep. In the more intimate circle of human relationships he seems clearly to have realized that the sovereign elixir against the ills of life, the one antidote of its struggles and difficulties, its emptiness and unrest, is vigilant charity, faithful love in all its forms, love of home, love of kindred, love of friends, love of everything simple, just, and true. The larger and more sacred group of those serene and abiding influences flowing from well-centred affections was naturally identified with family ties, and it is clear that the unity and continuity of family life pos­sessed Shakespeare’s imagination with the strength of a dominant passion and largely determined the scope and direction of his practical activities. As we have seen, he displayed from the first the utmost prudence and foresight in securing a comfortable home for his family, and provid­ing for the future welfare of his children. The desire of his heart evidently was to take a good position and found a family in his native place. And if this was a weakness he shares it with other eminent names in the republic of letters. In Shakespeare’s case the desire may have been inherited, not only from his father, who had pride, energy, and ambition, but especially from his gently descended mother, Mary Arden of the Asbies. But, whatever its source, the evidence in favour of this cherished desire is unusually full, clear, and decisive. While the poet had no doubt previously assisted his father to retrieve his position in the world, the first important step in building up the family name was the grant of arms or armorial bearings to John Shakespeare in the year 1596. The