passed through the county, and one of them, the mail road from London through Oxford to Birmingham, Stafford, and Chester, was the “streete” or public way that crossed the Avon at the celebrated ford spanned in 1483 by Sir Hugh Clopton’s magnificent bridge of fourteen arches. Immediately beyond the bridge rose the homely gables and wide thoroughfares of Shakespeare’s native place.

In Shakespeare’s time Warwickshire was divided by the irregular line of the Avon into two unequal but well-marked divisions, known respectively, from their main character­istics, as the woodland and the open country, or more technically as the districts of Arden and Feldon. The former included the thickly-wooded region north of the Avon, of which the celebrated forest of Arden was the centre, and the latter the champaign country, the rich and fertile pasture-lands between the Avon and the line of hills separating Warwick from the shires of Oxford and North­ampton. Shakespeare himself was of course familiar with this division of his native shire, and he has well expressed it in Lear’s description of the section of the kingdom assigned to his eldest daughter Goneril,—

“ Of all these bounds,—even from this line to this,

With shadowy forests and with champains rich’d,

With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,—

We make thee lady.”

No better general description of Warwickshire could indeed be given than is contained in these lines. Taking the Roman roads, Watling and Ricknild Streets, as boundaries, they vividly depict the characteristic features of the county, including its plenteous rivers and wide- skirted meads. The old and central division of Arden and Feldon is clearly embodied in the second line, “with shadowy forests and with champains rich’d.” This distinction, practically effaced in modern times by agricultural and mining progress, was partially affected by these causes even in Shakespeare’s own day. The wide Arden, or belt of forest territory which had once extended not only across the county but from the Trent to the Severn, was then very much restricted to the centre of the shire, the line of low hills and undulating country which stretched away for upwards of twenty miles to the north of Stratford. The whole of the northern district was, it is true, still densely wooded, but the intervening patches of arable and pasture land gradually encroached more and more upon the bracken and brushwood, and every year larger areas were cleared and prepared for tillage by the axe and the plough. In the second half of the 16th century, however, the Arden district still retained enough of its primitive character to fill the poet’s imagination with the exhilarating breadth and sweetness of woodland haunts, the beauty, variety, and freedom of sylvan life, and thus to impart to the scenery of *As* *You Like It* the vivid fresh­ness and reality of a living experience. In this delightful comedy the details of forest-life are touched with so light but at the same time so sure a hand as to prove the writer’s familiarity with the whole art of venery, his thorough knowledge of that “highest franchise of noble and princely pleasure ” which the royal demesnes of wood and park afforded. In referring to the marches or wide margins on the outskirts of the forest, legally known as purlieus, Shakespeare indeed displays a minute technical accuracy which would seem to indicate that in his early rambles about the forest and casual talks with its keepers and woodmen he had picked up the legal incidents of sylvan economy, as well as enjoyed the freedom and charm of forest-life. Throughout the purlieus, for instance, the forest laws were only partially in force, while the more important rights of individual owners were fully recognized and established. Hence it happened that Corin’s master, dwelling, as Rosalind puts it in a quaint but characteristic

simile that betrays her sex, “here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat,” could sell “ his cote, his flock, and bounds of feed,” and that Celia and Rosalind were able to purchase “ the cottage, the pasture, and the flock.” It may be noted, too, that, in exchange for the independence the dwellers in the purlieus acquired as private owners, they had to relinquish their common right or customary privilege of pasturing their cattle in the forest. Sheep, indeed, were not usually included in this right of common, their presence in the forest being regarded as inimical to the deer. When kept in the purlieus, there­fore, they had to be strictly limited to their bounds of feed, shepherded during the day and carefully folded every night, and these points are faithfully reflected by Shake­speare. Again, only those specially privileged could hunt venison within the forest. But if the deer strayed beyond the forest bounds they could be freely followed by the dwellers in the purlieus, and these happy hunting grounds outside the forest precincts were in many cases spacious and extensive. The special office of a forest ranger was indeed to drive back the deer straying in the purlieus. The banished duke evidently has this in mind when, as a casual denizen of the forest, he proposes to make war on its native citizens :—

“Come, shall we go and kill us venison ?

And yet it irks me, the poor dappled fools,

Being native burghers of this desert city,

Should, in their own confines, with forkèd heads,

Have their round haunches gor’d.”

And the melancholy Jacques, refining as usual with cynical sentimentalism on every way of life and every kind of action, thinks it would be a special outrage

“ To fright the animals, and to kill them up,

In their assign’d and native dwelling place.”

Not only in *As* *You Like It,* but in *Love's Labour's Lost,* in A *Midsummer Night's Dream,* in the *Merry Wives of Windsor,* and indeed throughout his dramatic works, Shakespeare displays the most intimate knowledge of the aspects and incidents of forest life; and it is certain that in the first instance this knowledge must have been gained from his early familiarity with the Arden district. This, as we have seen, stretched to the north of Stratford in all its amplitude and variety of hill and dale, leafy covert and sunny glade, giant oaks and tangled thickets,—the wood­land stillness being broken at intervals not only by the noise of brawling brooks below and of feathered outcries and flutterings overhead, but by dappled herds sweeping across the open lawns or twinkling in the shadowy bracken, as well as by scattered groups of timid conies feeding, at matins and vespers, on the tender shoots and sweet herbage of the forest side. The deer-stealing tradition is sufficient evidence of the popular belief in the poet’s love of daring exploits in the regions of vert and venison, and of his devotion, although in a somewhat irregular way perhaps, to the attractive woodcraft of the park, the warren, and the chase. The traditional scene of this adventure was Charlecote Park, a few miles north-east of Stratford ; but the poet’s early wanderings in Arden extended, no doubt, much further afield. Stirred by the natural desire of visiting at leisure the more celebrated places of his native district, he would pass from Stratford to Henley and Hampton, to Wroxall Priory and Kenilworth Castle, to Stoneleigh Abbey and Leamington Priors, to Warwick Keep and Guy’s Cliffe. The remarkable beauty of this last storied spot stirs the learned and tranquil pens of the antiquaries Camden and Dugdale to an unwonted effort of description, even in the pre-descriptive era. “ Under this hill,” says Camden, “ hard by the river Avon, standeth Guy-cliffe, others call it Gib-cliffe, the dwelling house at this day of Sir Thomas Beau-foe, descended from