military power mightier than any subject had wielded before would give the district an exceptional prominence in the national annals, which would be locally reflected in an answering wealth of historic tradition. In Shakespeare’s day Warwickshire thus sup­plied the materials of a liberal elementary training in the heroic annals of the past, and especially in the great events of the recent past that had established the Tudors on the throne, consolidated the permanent interests of the Government and the country, and helped directly to promote the growing unity and strength, pro­sperity and renown, of the kingdom. The special value of Shakespeare’s dramatic interpretation of this period, arising from his early familiarity with the rich and pregnant materials of unwritten history, has recently been insisted on afresh by one of our most careful and learned authorities. In the preface to his work on *The Houses of Lancaster and York,* Mr James Gairdner says:—“ For this period of English history we are fortunate in pos­sessing an unrivalled interpreter in our great dramatic poet Shakespeare. A regular sequence of historical plays exhibits to us, not only the general character of each successive reign, but nearly the whole chain of leading events from the days of Richard II. to the death of Richard III. at Bosworth. Following the guidance of such a master mind, we realize for ourselves the men and actions of the period in a way we cannot do in any other epoch. And this is the more important as the age itself, especially towards the close, is one of the most obscure in English history. During the period of the Wars of the Roses we have, comparatively speak­ing, very few contemporary narratives of what took place, and anything like a general history of the times was not written till a much later date. But the doings of that stormy age,—the sad calamities endured by kings—the sudden changes of fortune in great men—the glitter of chivalry and the horrors of civil war,— all left a deep impression upon the mind of the nation, which *was kept alive by vivid traditions of the past at the time that our great dramatist wrote.* Hence, notwithstanding the scantiness of records and the meagreness of ancient chronicles, we have singularly little difficulty in understanding the spirit and character of the times.” Familiar as he must have been in his youth with the materials that enabled him to interpret so stirring a period, it is not surpris­ing that even amidst the quiet hedgerows and meadows of Strat­ford Shakespeare’s pulse should have beat high with patriotic enthusiasm, or that when launched on his new career in the metropolis he should have sympathized to the full extent on his larger powers with the glow of loyal feeling that, under Elizabeth’s rule, and especially in the conflict with Spain, thrilled the nation’s heart with an exulting sense of full political life, realized national power, and gathering European fame.

In the interval that elapsed between the battle of Bosworth Field and the birth of Shakespeare Warwickshire continued to be visited by the reigning monarch and members of the royal family. The year after his accession to the crown Henry VIII., with Queen Catherine, visited Coventry in state, and witnessed there a series of magnificent pageants. In 1525 the Princess Mary spent two days at the priory, being entertained with the usual sports and shows, and presented by the citizens on her departure with hand­some presents. The year after Shakespeare’s birth Queen Elizabeth made a state visit to Coventry, Kenilworth, and Warwick, the young queen being received at every point of her progress with unusually splendid demonstrations of loyalty and devotion. And nine years before Shakespeare’s birth King Edward VI., in the last months of his reign, had specially interested himself in the re­establishment by royal charter of the free grammar school of the guild at Stratford, which had been suppressed at the dissolution of religious houses during his father’s reign.

The town of Stratford lies on the north bank of the Avon, at a point about midway in its course from its rise in Northamptonshire hills to its junction with the Severn at Tewkesbury. On entering the town, across Sir Hugh Clopton’s noble bridge, the road from the south-east fans out in three main directions,—on the right to Warwick and Coventry, on the left to Alcester, while between runs the central street, the modern representative of the old Roman way to Birmingham, Chester, and the north. Further to the left a fourth and less important road leaves the town beyond the church, and, keeping in the main the line of the river, goes to Bidford, Salford Priors, and Evesham. ft is a picturesque country road connecting a string of undulating villages and hamlets with Stratford. The town itself consisted in the 16th century of the low gable- roofed wood-and-plaster houses dotted at intervals along these roads and down the cross streets that connected them with each other and with the river. Most of the houses in Shakespeare’s time had gardens at the back,

and many at the sides also ; and the space between the houses, combined with the unusual width of the streets, gave the town an open cheerful look which enabled it to retain pleasant touches of its earlier rural state. As its prosperity increased the scattered dwellings naturally tended to close up their ranks, and present a more united front of exposed wares and convenient hostelries to the yeomen and graziers, who with their wives and families frequented the place on fair and market days. But in Shakespeare’s time the irregular line of gables and porches, of penthouse walls and garden palings, with patches of flowers and overarching foliage between, still varied the view and refreshed the eye in looking down the leading thoroughfares. These thoroughfares took the shape of a central cross, of which Church, Chapel, and High Streets, running in a continuous line north and south, constituted the shaft or stem, while Bridge and Wood Streets, running in another line east and west, were the transverse beam or bar. At the point of intersection stood the High Cross, a solid stone building with steps below and open arches above, from which public proclamations were made, and, as in London and other large towns, sermons sometimes delivered. The open space around the High Cross was the centre of trade and merchandise on market days, and from the force of custom it naturally became the site on which at a later period the market-house was built. Oppo­site the High Cross the main road, carried over Sir Hugh Clopton’s arches and along Bridge Street, turns to the left through Henley Street on its way to Henley-in-Arden and the more distant northerly towns. At the western end of Wood Street was a large and open space called. Rother Market, whence Rother Street running parallel with High Street led through narrower lanes into the Evesham Road.

This open ground was, as the name indicates, the great cattle market of Stratford, one of the most important features of its industrial history from very early times. In the later Middle Ages most of the wealthier inhabitants were engaged in farming operations, and the growth and prosperity of the place resulted from its position as a market town in the midst of an agricultural and grazing district. In the 13th century a number of charters were obtained from the early Plantagenet kings, empowering the town to hold a weekly market and no fewer than five annual fairs, four of which were mainly for cattle. In later times a series of great cattle markets, one for each month in the year, was added to the list. The name of the Stratford cattle market embodies this feature of its history, “rother” being a good Saxon word for horned cattle, a word freely employed in Early English, both alone and in composition. In the 16th century it was still in familiar use, not only in literature but in official documents and especially in statutes of the realm. Thus Cowell, in his law dictionary, under the heading “Rother-beasts,” explains that “the name compre­hends oxen, cows, steers, heifers, and such like horned beasts,” and refers to statutes of Elizabeth and James in support of the usage. And Arthur Golding in 1567 translates Ovid’s lines—

“ Mille greges illi totidemque *armenta* per herbas Errabant—”

“ A thousand flocks of sheep,

A thousand herds of *rother-beasts,* he in his fields did keep.”

The word seems to have been longer retained and more freely used in the Midland counties than elsewhere, and Shakespeare himself employs it with colloquial precision in the restored line of *Timon of Athens·.* “It is the pasture lards the rother’s sides.” Many a time, no doubt, as a boy, during the spring and summer fairs, he had risen with the sun, and, making his way from Henley Street to the bridge, watched the first arrivals of the “ large-eyed kine ” slowly driven in from the rich pastures of the “ Red Horse Valley.” There would be some variety and excitement in the spec­tacle as the droves of meditative oxen were invaded from time to time by groups of Herefordshire cows lowing anxiously after their skittish calves, as well as by the presence and disconcerting activity of still smaller deer. And the boy would be sure to follow the crowding cattle to the Rother Market and observe at leisure the humours of the ploughmen and drovers from the Feldon district, whose heavy intermittent talk would be in perfect keeping with the bovine stolidity of the steers and heifers around them. There was a market-cross at the head of the Rother expanse, and this was the chief gathering place for the cattle-dealers, as the High Cross was the rallying point of the dealers in corn and country produce. In