measure would help to give it smoothness and finish in the working, would supply in some degree at least the power of concentration and self-control indispensable for moulding the extremes of exuberant sensibility and pas­sionate impulse into forms of intense and varied dramatic portraiture ; and of course all the finer and regulative elements of character and disposition derived from the spindle side of the house would, throughout the poet’s early years, be strengthened and developed by his mother’s constant presence, influence, and example.

John and Mary Shakespeare had eight children, four sons and four daughters. Of the latter, two, the first Joan and Margaret, died in infancy, before the birth of the poet, and a third, Anne, in early childhood. In addition to the poet, three sons, Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund, and one daughter, the second Joan, lived to maturity and will be referred to again. William Shakespeare was christened in Stratford church on April 26, 1564, having most probably been born, according to tradition, on the 23d. In July of the same year the town was visited by a severe outbreak of the plague, which in the course of a few months carried off one-sixth of the inhab­itants. Fortunately, however, the family of the Shake­speares wholly escaped the contagion, their exemption being probably due to the fact that they lived in the healthiest part of the town, away from the river side, on a dry and porous soil. At the back of Henley Street, indeed, were the gravel pits of the guild, which were in frequent use for repairing the inundated pathways near the river after its periodical overflows. For two years and a half William, their first-born son, remained the only child of his parents, and all his mother’s love and care would naturally be lavished upon him. A special bond would in this way be established between mother and child, and, his father’s affairs being at the time in a highly prosperous state, Mary Shakespeare would see to it that the boy had all the pleasures and advantages suitable to his age, and which the family of a foremost Stratford burgess could easily command. Healthy outdoor enjoyment is not the least valuable part of a boy’s education, and the chief recreations available for the future dramatist in those early years would be the sports and pastimes, the recur­ring festivals, spectacles, and festivities, of the town and neighbourhood, especially the varying round of rural occupations and the celebration in the forest farms and villages of the chief incidents of the agricultural year. Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, each brought its own group of picturesque merry-makings, including some more important festivals that evoked a good deal of rustic pride, enthusiasm, and display. There were, during these years, at least three of the forest farms where the poet’s parents would be always welcome, and where the boy must have spent many a happy day amidst the free­dom and delights of outdoor country life. At Snitterfield his grandfather would be proud enough of the curly- headed youngster with the fine hazel eyes, and his uncle Henry would be charmed at the boy’s interest in all he saw and heard as he trotted with him through the byres and barns, the poultry yard and steading, or, from a safe nook on the bushy margin of the pool, enjoyed the fun and excitement of sheep-washing, or later on watched the mysteries of the shearing and saw the heavy fleece fall from the sides of the palpitating victim before the sure and rapid furrowing of the shears. He would no doubt also be present at the shearing feast and see the queen of the festival receive her rustic guests and distribute amongst them her floral gifts. At Wilmecote, in the solid oak- timbered dwelling of the Asbies, with its well-stocked garden and orchard, the boy would be received with cordial hospitality, as well as with the attention and respect due

to his parents as the proprietors and to himself as the heir of the maternal estate. At Shottery the welcome of the Shakespeares would not be less cordial or friendly, as there is evidence to show that as early as 1566 the families were known to each other, John Shakespeare having in that year rendered Richard Hathaway an im­portant personal service. Here the poet met his future bride, Anne Hathaway, in all the charm of her sunny girl­hood, and they may be said to have grown up together, except that from the difference of their ages she would reach early womanhood while he was yet a stripling. In his later youthful years he would thus be far more fre­quently at the Hathaway farm than at Snitterfield or the Asbies. There were, however, family connexions of the Shakespeares occupying farms further afield,·—Hills and Webbs at Bearley and Lamberts at Barton-on-the-Heath. There was thus an exceptionally wide circle of country life open to the poet during his growing years. And in those years he must have repeatedly gone the whole picturesque round with the fresh senses and eager feeling, the observant eye and open mind, that left every detail, from the scarlet hips by the wayside to the proud tops of the eastern pines, imprinted indelibly upon his heart and brain. Hence the apt and vivid references to the scenes and scenery of his youth, the intense and penetrating glances at the most vital aspects as well as the minutest beauties of nature, with which his dramas abound. These glances are so penetrating, the result of such intimate knowledge and enjoyment, that they often seem to reveal in a moment, and by a single touch as it were, all the loveliness and charm of the objects thus rapidly flashed on the inward eye. In relation to the scenes of his youth what fresh and delightful hours at the farms are reflected in the full summer beauty and motley humours of a sheep-shearing festival in the *Winter’s Tale* ; in the autumn glow of the “ sun-burnt sicklemen and sedge-crowned nymphs” of the masque in the *Tempest* ; and in the vivid pictures of rural sights and sounds in spring and winter so musically rendered in the owl and cuckoo songs of *Love's Labour's Lost !* But, in addition to the festivities and merry-makings of the forest farms, it is clear that, in his early years, the poet had some experience of country sports proper, such as hunting, hawking, coursing, wild- duck shooting, and the like. Many of these sports were pursued by the local gentry and the yeomen together, and the poet, as the son of a well-connected burgess of Strat­ford, who had recently been mayor of the town and possessed estates in the county, would be well entitled to share in them, while his handsome presence and courteous bearing would be likely to ensure him a hearty welcome. If any of the stiffer local magnates looked coldly upon the high-spirited youth, or resented in any way his presence amongst them, their conduct would be likely enough to provoke the kind of sportive retaliations that might naturally culminate in the deer-stealing adventure. How­ever this may be, it is clear from internal evidence that the poet was practically familiar with the field sports of his day.

In the town the chief holiday spectacles and entertain­ments were those connected with the Christmas, New Year, and Easter festivals, the May-day rites and games, the pageants of delight of Whitsuntide, the beating of the bounds during Rogation week, and the occasional repre­sentation of mysteries, moralities, and stage-plays. In relation to the main bent of the poet’s mind, and the future development of his powers, the latter constituted probably the most important educational influence and stimulus which the social activities and public entertain­ments of the place could have supplied. Most of these recurring celebrations involved, it is true, a dramatic