them, and if so we may be sure that the Stratford master, who was evidently the younger man, had been well trained and must have proved an efficient teacher. The masters who followed Brunsword were university men of at least average attainments and ability, as they rapidly gained promotion in the church. Thomas Hunt, who was head-master during the most important years of Shakespeare’s school course, became incumbent of the neighbouring village of Luddington ; and, if there is any truth in the tradition that the poet’s marriage was celebrated there, it is not improbable that, front having been a favourite pupil, he may have become the personal friend of his former master. In any case, during the years of his school attendance the poet must have gained sufficient knowledge of Latin to read for his own instruc­tion and delight the authors included in the school curriculum who had struck his fancy and stimulated his awakening powers. While his writings supply clear evidence in support of this general position, they also bring out vividly the fact that Ovid was a special favourite with Shakespeare at the outset of his career. The influence of this romantic and elegiac Roman poet is indeed strongly marked and clearly traceable in the poems as well as in the early plays.

According to Rowe’s account, Shakespeare was with­drawn from school about 1578, a year or two before he had completed the usual course for boys going into business or passing on to the universities. The immediate cause of the withdrawal seems to have been the growing embarrass­ments of John Shakespeare’s affairs, the boy being wanted at home to help in the various departments of his father’s business. The poet had just entered on his fifteenth year, and his school attainments and turn for affairs, no less than his native energy and ability, fitted him for efficient action in almost any fairly open career. But open careers were not numerous at Stratford, and John Shakespeare’s once prosperous way of life was now hampered by actual and threatening difficulties which the zeal and affection of his son were powerless to remove or avert. No doubt the boy did his best, trying to understand his father’s position, and discharging with prompt alacrity any duties that came to be done. But he would soon discover how hopeless such efforts were, and with this deepening conviction there would come upon him the reaction of weariness and disappointment, which is the true *inferno* of ardent youthful minds. His father’s difficulties were evidently of the chronic and complicated kind against which the generous and impulsive forces of youth and inexperience are of little avail. And, after his son had done his utmost to relieve the sinking fortunes of the family, the aching sense of failure would be among the bitterest experiences of his early years, would be indeed a sharp awakening to the realities and responsibilities of life. Within the narrow circle of his own domestic relationships and dearest interests he would feel with Hamlet that the times were out of joint, and in his gloomier moods be ready to curse the destiny that seemed to lay upon him, in part at least, the burden of setting the obstinately crooked straight. As a relief from such moods and a distraction from the fruitless toils of home affairs, he would naturally plunge with keener zest into such outlets for youthful energy and adventure as the town and neighbourhood afforded. What the young poet’s actual occupations were during the four years and a half that elapsed between his leaving school and his marriage we have no adequate materials for deciding in any detail. But the local traditions on the subject would seem to indicate that after the adverse turn in his fortunes John Shakespeare had considerably contracted the area of his commercial transactions. Having virtually alienated his wife’s patrimony by the mortgage of the Asbies and the disposal of all interest in the Snitterfield property, he seems to have given up the agricultural branches of his business, retaining only his original occupation of dealer in leather, skins, and sometimes carcases as well. His wider speculations had probably turned out ill, and having no longer any land of his own he apparently relinquished

the corn and timber business, restricting himself to the town trades of fellmonger, wool-stapler, and butcher. Aubrey at least had heard that Shakespeare after leaving school assisted his father in these branches,—and at times with a deal of youthful extravagance indicative of irre­pressible energy and spirit. Aubrey also reports, on the authority of Beeston, and as incidentally proving he knew Latin fairly well, that for a time the poet was a teacher in a country school ; while Malone believed from the internal evidence of his writings that he had spent two or three years in a lawyer’s office. These stories may be taken to indicate, what is no doubt true, that at a time of domestic need the poet was ready to turn his hand to anything that offered. It is no doubt also true that he would prefer the comparative retirement and regularity of teaching or clerk’s work to the intermittent drudgery and indolence of a retail shop in a small market-town. There is, however, no direct evidence in favour of either supposi­tion ; and the indirect evidence for the lawyer’s office theory which has found favour with several recent critics is by no means decisive. Whether engaged in a lawyer’s office or not, we may be quite sure that during the years of adolescence he was actively occupied in work of some kind or other. He was far too sensible and energetic to remain without employment; shapeless idleness had no attraction for his healthy nature, and his strong family feeling is certainly in favour of the tradition that for a time he did his best to help his father in his business.

But, however he may have been employed, this interval of home life was for the poet a time of active growth and development, and no kind of business routine could avail to absorb his expanding powers or repress the exuberant vitality of his nature. During these critical years, to a vigorous and healthy mind such as Shakespeare possessed, action—action of an adventurous and recreative kind, in which the spirit is quickened and refreshed by new experiences—must have become an absolute necessity of existence. The necessity was all the more urgent in Shakespeare’s case from the narrower circle within which the once prosperous and expanding home life was now confined. We have seen that the poet occasionally shared the orthodox field sports organized by the country gentle­men, where landlords and tenants, yeomen and squires, animated by a kindred sentiment, meet to a certain extent on common ground. But this long-drawn pursuit of pleasure as an isolated unit in a local crowd would hardly satisfy the thirst for passionate excitement and personal adventure which is so dominant an impulse in the hey-day of youthful blood. It is doubtful, too, whether in the decline of his father’s fortunes Shakespeare would have cared to join the prosperous concourse of local sportsmen. He would probably be thrown a good deal amongst a somewhat lower, though no doubt energetic and intelli­gent, class of town companions. And they would devise together exploits which, if somewhat irregular, possessed the inspiring charm of freedom and novelty, and would thus be congenial to an ardent nature with a passionate interest in life and action. Such a nature would eagerly welcome enterprises with a dash of hazard and daring in them, fitted to bring the more resolute virtues into play, and develop in moments of emergency the manly qualities of vigilance and promptitude, courage and endurance, dexterity and skill. It would seem indeed at first sight as though a quiet neighbourhood like Stratford could afford little scope for such adventures. But even at Stratford there were always the forest and the river, the outlying farms with adjacent parks and manor houses, the wide circle of picturesque towns and villages with their guilds and clubs, their local Shallows and Slenders, Dogberries and Verges; and in the most quiet neigh-