the Stratford authorities, being naturally anxious to propitiate the great man, may have suggested that it would be well if young Shakespeare could be out of the way for a time. This would help him to decide on the adoption of a plan already seriously entertained of going to London to push his fortune among the players.

There is, however, another aspect in which this traditional incident may be looked at, which seems at least worthy of consideration. It is possible that Sir Thomas Lucy may have been prejudiced against the Shakespeares on religious grounds, and that this feeling may have prompted him to a display of exceptional severity against their eldest son. As we have seen, he was a narrow and extreme, a persecuting and almost fanatical Protestant, and several events had recently happened calculated to intensify his bitterness against the Romanists. In particular, Mary Shakespeare’s family connexions—the Ardens of Parkhall —had been convicted of conspiracy against the queen’s life. The son-in-law of Edward Arden, John Somerville, a rash and “hot-spirited young gentleman,” instigated by Hall, the family priest, had formed the design of going to London and assassinating Queen Elizabeth with his own hand. He started on his journey in November 1583, but talked so incautiously by the way that he was arrested, conveyed to the Tower, and under a threat of the rack confessed everything, accusing his father-in-law as an accomplice and the priest as the instigator of the crime. All three were tried and convicted, their fate being probably hastened, as Dugdale states, by the animosity of Leicester against the Ardens. Somerville strangled himself in prison, and Edward Arden was hanged at Tyburn. These events produced a deep impression in Warwickshire, and no one in the locality would be more excited by them than Sir Thomas Lucy. His intensely vindictive feeling against the Romanists was exemplified a little later by his bringing forward a motion in parlia­ment in favour of devising some new and lingering tortures for the execution of the Romanist conspirator Parry. As Mr Froude puts it, “ Sir Thomas Lucy,— Shakespeare’s Lucy, the original perhaps of Justice Shallow, with an English fierceness at the bottom of his stupid nature,—having studied the details of the execution of Gerard, proposed in the House of Commons ‘that some new law should be devised for Parry’s execution, such as might be thought fittest for his extraordinary and horrible treason.’ ” The Ardens were devoted Romanists ; the terrible calamity that had befallen the family occurred only a short time before the deer-stealing adventure ; and the Shakespeares themselves, so far from being Puritans, were suspected by many of being but indifferent Protestants. John Shakespeare was an irregular attendant at church, and soon ceased to appear there at all, so that Sir Thomas Lucy probably regarded him as little better than a recusant. In any case Sir Thomas would be likely to resent the elder Shakespeare’s convivial turn and profuse hospitality as alderman and bailiff, and especially his official patronage of the players and active encouragement of their dramatic representations in the guild hall. The Puritans had a rooted antipathy to the stage, and to the jaundiced eye of the local justice the reverses of the Shakespeares would probably appear as a judgment on their way of life. He would all the more eagerly seize any chance of humiliating their eldest son, who still held up his head and dared to look upon life as a scene of cheerful activity and occasional enjoyment. The young poet, indeed, embodied the very characteristics most opposed to Sir Thomas’s dark and narrow conceptions of life and duty. His notions of public duty were very much restricted to persecuting the Romanists and preserving the game on Protestant estates. And Shakespeare probably took no pains to conceal his want of sympathy with these

supreme objects of aristocratic and Puritanical zeal. And Sir Thomas, having at length caught him, as he imagined, in a technical trespass, would be sure to pursue the culprit with the unrelenting rigour of his hard and gloomy nature. But, whatever may have been the actual or aggravating circumstances of the original offence, there can be no doubt that an element of truth is contained in the deer­stealing tradition. The substantial facts in the story are that Shakespeare in his youth was fond of woodland sport, and that in one of his hunting adventures he came into collision with Sir Thomas Lucy’s keepers, and fell under the severe ban of that local potentate. The latter point is indirectly confirmed by Shakespeare’s inimitable sketch of the formal country justice in the *Second Part of Henry IV.* and the *Merry* *Wives* *of Windsor,—*Robert Shallow, Esq., being sufficiently identified with Sir Thomas Lucy by the pointed allusion to the coat of arms, as well as by other allusions of a more indirect but hardly less decisive kind. To talk of the sketch as an act of revenge is to treat it too seriously, or rather in too didactic and pedestrian a spirit. Having been brought into close relations with the justice, Shakespeare could hardly be expected to resist the temptation of turning to dramatic account so admirable a subject for humorous portraiture. The other point of the tradition, Shakespeare’s fondness for woodland life, is supported by the internal evidence of his writings, and especially by the numerous allusions to the subject in his poems and earlier plays. The many refer­ences to woods and sports in the poems are well known ; and in the early plays the allusions are not less frequent and in some respects even more striking. Having no space, however, to give these in detail, a general reference must suffice. The entire action of *Lords Labour's Lost* takes place in a royal park, while the scene of the most critical events of the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a forest inhabited by generous outlaws whose offences appear to have been youthful follies, and who on being pardoned by the duke become his loyal followers. In these early plays it seems as though Shakespeare could hardly conceive of a royal palace or capital city without a forest close at hand as the scene of princely sport, criminal intrigue, or fairy enchant­ment. Outside the gates of Athens swept over hill and dale the wonderful forest which is the scene of the *Midsummer Nights Dream;* and in *Titus Andronicus* imperial Rome seems to be almost surrounded by the brightness and terror, the inspiring charm and sombre shades of rolling forest lawns and ravines, the “ ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods.”

There can be no doubt, therefore, that during the years of home life at Stratford Shakespeare was often in the forest. But in the latter part of the time he would be found still more frequently hastening through the fields to Shottery, paying long visits at the Hathaway farm, followed by late and reluctant leave-takings. For the next important fact in Shakespeare’s history is his marriage with Anne Hathaway. This event, or rather the formal and ecclesiastical part of it, took place in the end of November 1582, the bond for the licence from the consistory court being dated on the 28th of the month. Mr Halliwell-Phillipps has, however, sufficiently proved by detailed instances that the formal and public part of the ceremony would, according to the usage of the time, have been preceded some months earlier by the betrothal or pre-contract, which was in itself of legal validity. Shake­speare’s marriage may therefore be dated from the summer of 1582, he being then in his nineteenth year, while his bride was between seven and eight years older. Many of the poet’s biographers have assumed that the marriage was a hasty, unsuitable, and in its results an unhappy one. It is necessary therefore to repeat with all possible