

SHAKESPERE AND STRATFORD-UPON-AVON. THE DRAWINGS BY E. DUNCAN, ESQ.



SHAKESPERE'S HOUSE.

of a court-roll, dated 1552, lately published by the Rev. Joseph Hunter, in his "New Illustrations, &c., of the Life of Shakespeare," in which the Poet's father, John Shakspeare, is mentioned in immediate connection with Henley-street. This is certainly a most important document; and, we should think, the earliest mention of the name which can be found among the ancient records of the town. An examination of the Minutes of the Common Hall, Pleas of the Court of Record, Rent-Roll of the Lands, &c., belonging to the Corporation of Stratford, Proceedings of the Court-Leet, and Accounts of the Chamberlains of the Borough, although not uninteresting as showing the class of men who formed the "worshipful society" of the place, affords but very meagre information concerning John Shakspeare.

The town was then, according to the charter of Edward VI., June 26th, 1553 (granted only eight days before his death), under the jurisdiction of a Bailiff, fourteen Aldermen, and fourteen Burgesses. The first High Bailiff nominated under the new incorporation, 1553, was "Thomas Gilbert." Mr. Gilbert was a dyer; and, it is not improbable that John Shakspeare's second son, "Gilbert," was named after him. For 1554 William Whately was chosen. He is found to have been elected High Alderman in 1559; and, in the same year, licensed to keep a tavern, and to retail wines, &c. In 1555 we have "John Burbage," who is conjectured to have been related to the James and Richard Burbages, whom we find, thirty-four years afterwards, co-sharers with our Poet, in the Playhouse, at Blackfriars. In this year occurs the first recorded list of the Capital Burgesses.

In 1556 Ralph Cawdrey is Chief Bailiff. He was a butcher, and we find him chosen Chief Alderman in 1570.

In 1557 Francis Harbage (a skinner) is elected Head Bailiff. The first set of by-laws extant are dated Michaelmas Day in this year, and appear in the Council-book "A."

In 1558 we have Robert Perrot (a brewer); and, eleven years after, on the 7th of Sept. 1569, we find him "Fyned 20s., by order of the Hall, for non-attendance at Common Council."

In 1559 Adrian Quincey is styled First Bailiff. Mr. Quincey was a

grocer, served as Constable in 1554, and was elected Capital Alderman, 1562. A descendant of his, Thomas Quincey, married the Poet's second daughter, Judith Shakspeare, 10th February, 1615-16.

In 1560 Robert Sadler is the First Bailiff. He was a baker, and was chosen Capital Alderman in 1562.

In 1561 Lewis ap Williams, ironmonger and afterwards fishmonger, appears as First Bailiff. He was Chamberlain in 1558, and Chief Alderman, 1564.

In 1562 the High Bailiff is Humphrey Plymley, a mercer. He served as Constable 1558, and was first Chamberlain in 1559.

In 1563, George Whately, wollen draper, is High Bailiff. He figures as "Bridgewarden" in 1545, and again in 1547, and as Capital Alderman, 1556. (A second code of by-Laws are recorded in the Council Book (A) this year.)

In 1564, Richard Hill appears as High Bailiff. Mr. Hill was a wollen draper. In 1557 he is chosen ale-taster (a regulator of the measure and the quality of the beer), and in 1558 is elected second Chamberlain.

He died Dec. 17, 1592, and has a long inscription to his memory at the south end of the transept, in Stratford Church.

Passing over the intermediate names, we reach the most important, "John Shakspeare," who is recorded as High Bailiff in 1566, and obtains a grant of arms from the Herald's College in the same year.

Prior to this, we discover that in a civil action on the 17th of June, 1555, he is described as a Glover. "John Shakspeare de Stratford, in town, Warwick, Glover." On April 20, 1556, he was one of the Jury of the Court-Leet. In 1557 he is summoned on a Jury in a civil action, and sworn ale-taster. In the latter end of 1557 or early in 1558 he was elected a Capital Burgess; in 1558 and 1559 was chosen Constable, Oct. 5th, 1559, was sworn afforcer (there were four afforcers chosen annually who had the power of decreeing summary punishment for offences not mentioned by statute), and again in May, 1561. In 1561 and 1562 was Chamberlain; in 1563, Second Chamberlain. On July the 4th, 1565, was chosen Alderman. The next entry is that above,

recording his service as High Bailiff in 1566; and then no further records connect him with the Municipal duties for some years; the last occurred on Sep. 25th, 1566, and sets forth that "William Smith and Richard Courte are chosen to be Aldermen in the place of John Whiter and John Shakspeare, for that Mr. Whiter doth desire to be put out of the Company, and Mr. Shakspeare doth not come to the halles when they be warned, nor hath not done of long time."

From 1566 to 1571, a space of 15 years, we are thus in some measure enabled to trace the progress of John Shakspeare in what may be termed his public life. During this period, we find him proceeding through the accustomed course of Municipal honours till he attains the highest dignity the Corporation could bestow. It is reasonable to infer that at this time he possessed the respect and esteem of his townsmen, and was a thriving and responsible man. This is corroborated too by the scanty particulars of his private history which have been preserved. In 1566 he was admitted at the Court-Leet to two copyhold estates in Henley-street. The following is a translation of the entry upon the Court-roll.

Stratford-upon-Avon. View of Frank-pynde, with the Court and Justice of the Peace hold of the same, on the second day of October, in the year of the reign of William and Mary, by the grace of God, &c. the third and fourth.

Item. They present that George Turner has alienated to John Shakspeare and his heirs one tenement, with a garden, and even with their appurtenances, in Greenhill-street, part of the Lord, and delivered according to the roll, for the rent from thence to the Lord of sixpence per annum; and the said John in the aforesaid Court did duly for the same.

Item. That Edward West has alienated to him the aforesaid John Shakspeare, one tenement, with a garden adjacent to Henley-street, for the rent from thence to the Lord of sixpence per annum, and quit of Court, and the said John in the aforesaid Court did duly for the same.

In 1567 or 1558, he had wood and won the descendant of one of the oldest and highest families in the county, MARY ARDEN, of Wilmore, the mother of the Poet, and by this marriage became possessed of the property in Wilmore called Asbies, consisting of about sixty acres of arable and pasture land, and a house. "A small fortune," as Mr. Knight remarks, "for a descendant of the Lord of forty-seven manors!" but it was enough for happiness.

It is at this period, 1558, that the Register of Stratford commences and turning to the entry of baptisms in that year, we find the baptism of "Joan, daughter to John Shakspeare," on the 15th of Sept. Four years afterwards, on the 23rd of Decr., 1562, Margaret daughter to John Shakspeare, is baptised. (These daughters both died young.) We then come to the most important entry in this or any other register in the world—

1564, April 26. Gulielmus filius Johannis Shakspeare.

These few syllables attest the baptism of "William, the son of John Shakspeare," but, strange to say, no record has been found to stamp the day, the hour, the moment, when this immortal Son was given to the world. In this, as in almost every other circumstance of importance in the history of the Poet, our only authority is tradition, which asserts that he was born upon St. George's Day, the 23rd of April, three days before the entry of his baptism.

The subsequent entries in the register give the Poet three brothers and two more sisters, viz.—

- Gilbert, the son of John Shakspeare, baptised 12th of Oct., 1566.
- Joan, daughter of John Shakspeare, baptised April 15th, 1569.
- Richard, son of Master John Shakspeare, baptised March 17th, 1574.
- Anne, daughter of Master John Shakspeare, baptised Sept. 25th, 1579; and
- Edward, son of Master John Shakspeare, baptised May the 2nd, 1580.

Of these eight children which constituted the family of Shakspeare's father, five only—William, Gilbert, Joan, Richard, and Edmund—reached maturity.

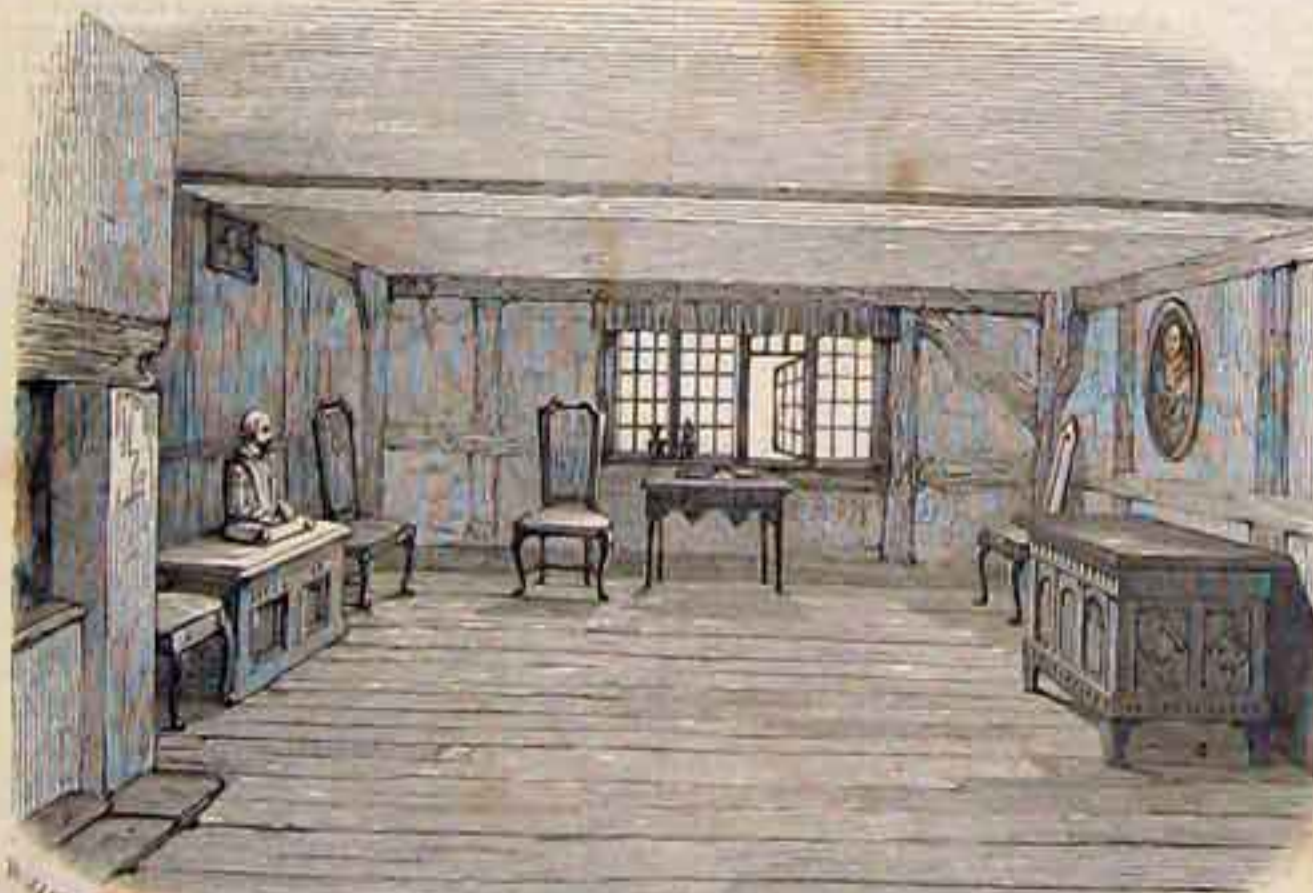
How given to John Shakspeare "ten children in all"—an ancient Malton has satisfactorily accounted for, by showing that, to make the confusion which involves the family history of the Poet worse confounded, the register and the books of the Corporation present another "John Shakspeare" and family resident in Stratford at the period. This other *Dromio* appears to have been in very humble circumstances; he is mentioned as a "shoemaker," and sometimes as a "corynor." The first entry concerning him occurs in the registry of his marriage to Margery Roberts, in 1584.

In 1570 we find John Shakspeare, the Poet's father, in occupation of a meadow of fourteen acres, with appurtenances, called Taggos, about a mile and a half from Warwick, at a yearly rent of eight pounds, equivalent in about forty pounds in the present day.

Four years afterwards, in 1574, he purchases the two copyhold houses in Henley-street, with gardens and orchards, of which houses, the tenement represented as the birth-place of William Shakspeare is a portion.

These facts throw little or no light upon the controversial point, whether Shakspeare was born in this tenement or not. As Mr. Knight observes, "William Shakspeare might have been born at either of his father's copyhold houses in Greenhill-street, or in Henley-street; he might have been born at Ingham; or his father might have occupied one

* See an account of Turbil de Arden's possessions in Digdale, from the Domesday Book.



CHAMBER IN SHAKESPERE'S HOUSE.

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