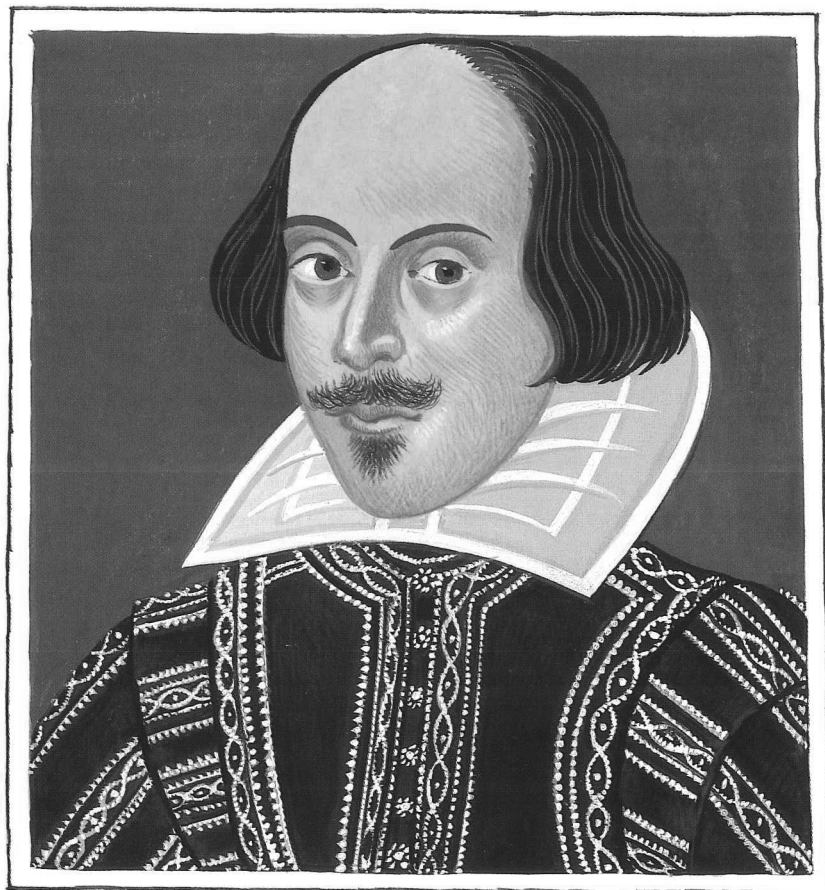


BARD OF AVON

The Story of
William Shakespeare

DIANE STANLEY AND PETER VENNEMA

ILLUSTRATED BY DIANE STANLEY



MORROW JUNIOR BOOKS
New York

To Catherine,
my firstborn,
my thespian

D.S.



The authors would like to thank Dr. William B. Hunter,
who inspired this book and whose help was invaluable in writing it.

The full-color artwork was done in gouache, opaque watercolor paint,
on Fabriano watercolor paper. The text type is 14 point Bernhard Modern.

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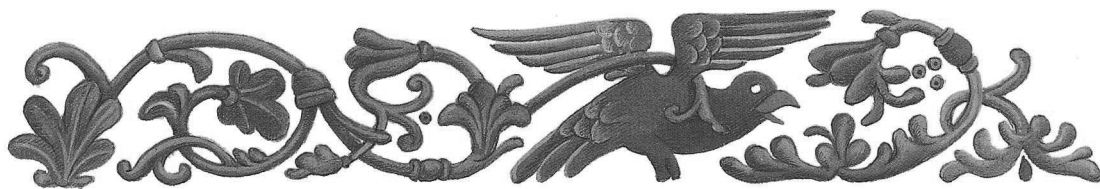
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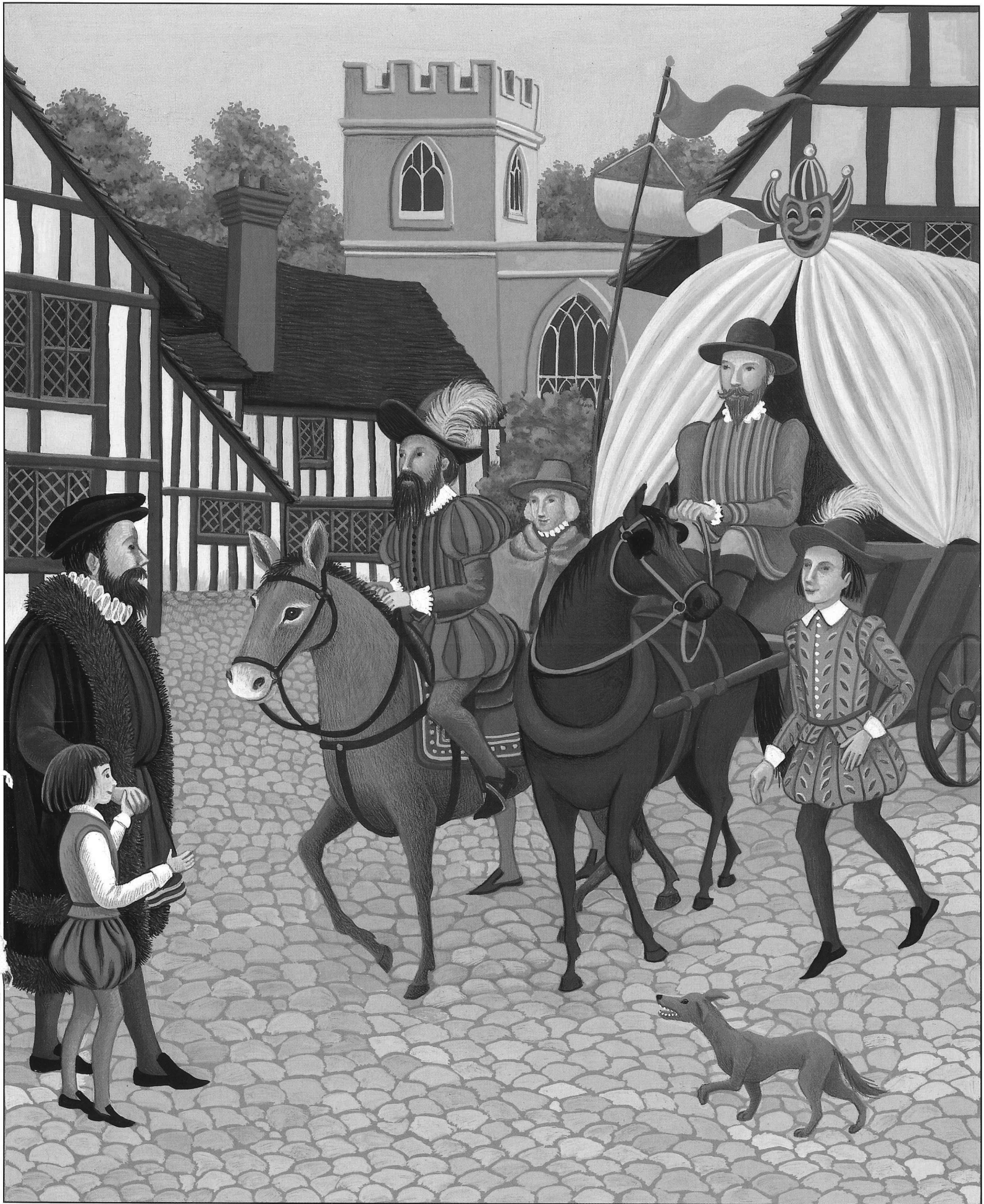
William Shakespeare is one of the most famous men who ever lived. Yet much of his life is a mystery to us. He did not keep a diary, and none of his personal letters has survived. We do not even know exactly when he was born—only the date on which his baptism was registered. We know a little about his parents, his wife, and his children. Besides his plays and poems, the only other documents we have are business transactions, court papers, and his will.

Of course, we know a great deal about the times in which he lived—of Queen Elizabeth and King James, and the great men who admired and encouraged Shakespeare's work. His friends and fellow writers have left us bits of information in their books and letters. After he died, many tales about his life were told, though we do not know which—if any of them—are true.

In writing this story, we have tried to show how historians investigate a life lived long ago. Like detectives, historians gather all the known facts together until a pattern begins to appear. And when that pattern reveals the life of one of the most exceptional writers of all time, what an exciting discovery that is!

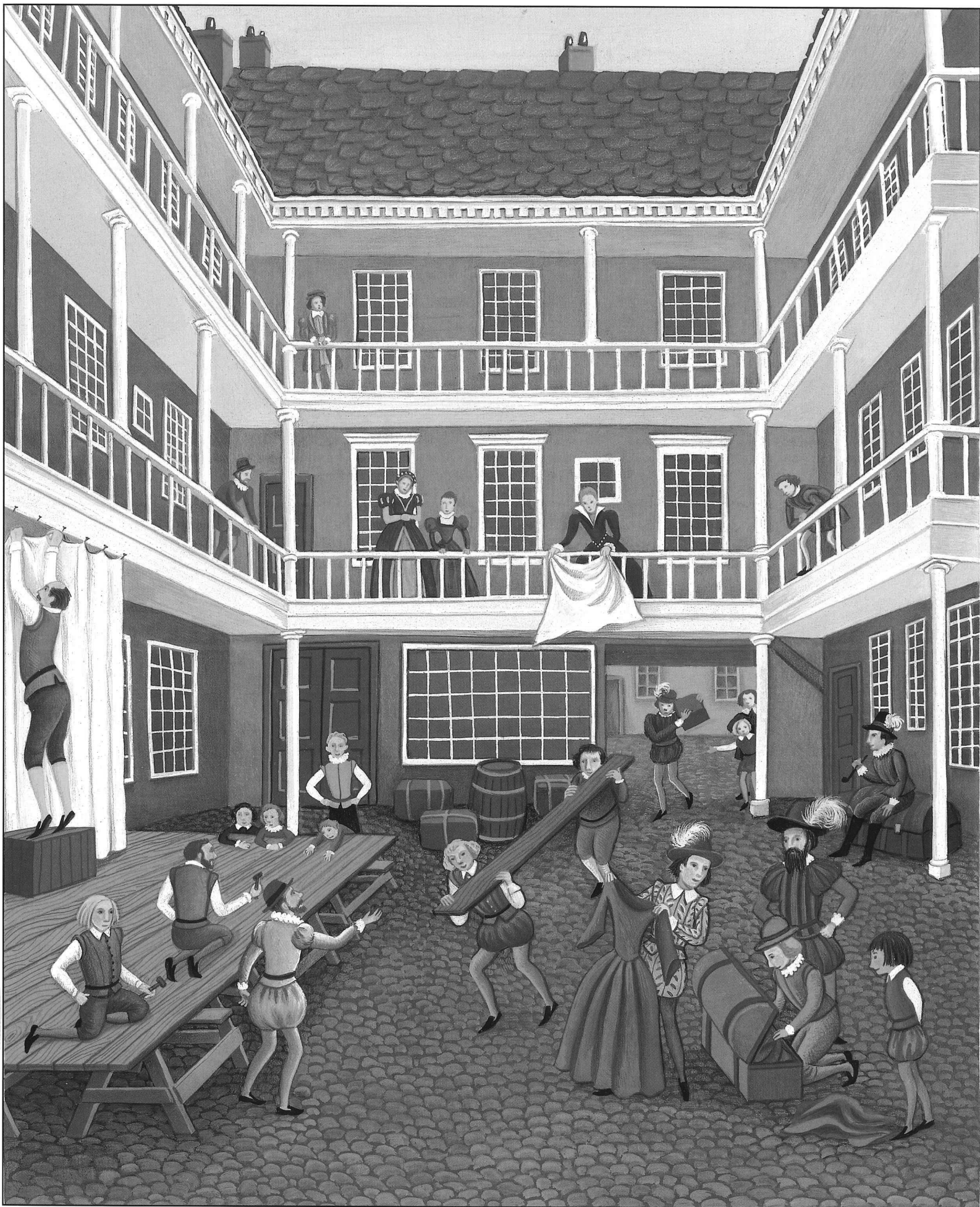
IN THE YEAR 1569, A COMPANY OF TRAVELING ACTORS CAME TO THE LITTLE English town of Stratford-on-Avon. As their cart rolled into the town square, the high bailiff, or mayor, greeted the actors and led them to the guildhall where they would do a special performance for him. If he liked the play, he would give them a license to present it to the public.

The high bailiff was John Shakespeare, a prosperous glove maker. He was pleased and agreed to pay the Queen's Players nine shillings—less than fifty dollars today. Perhaps he allowed his five-year-old son, William, to sit in front with him for the special performance. If so, it was the first play he ever saw.



The actors were given permission to perform, so they began to unload their cart. They set out trestles in the courtyard of an inn and laid long boards over them for a stage. They hung a curtain behind it as a backdrop and took out their costumes and props. Soon they were ready to entertain the good folk of Stratford.

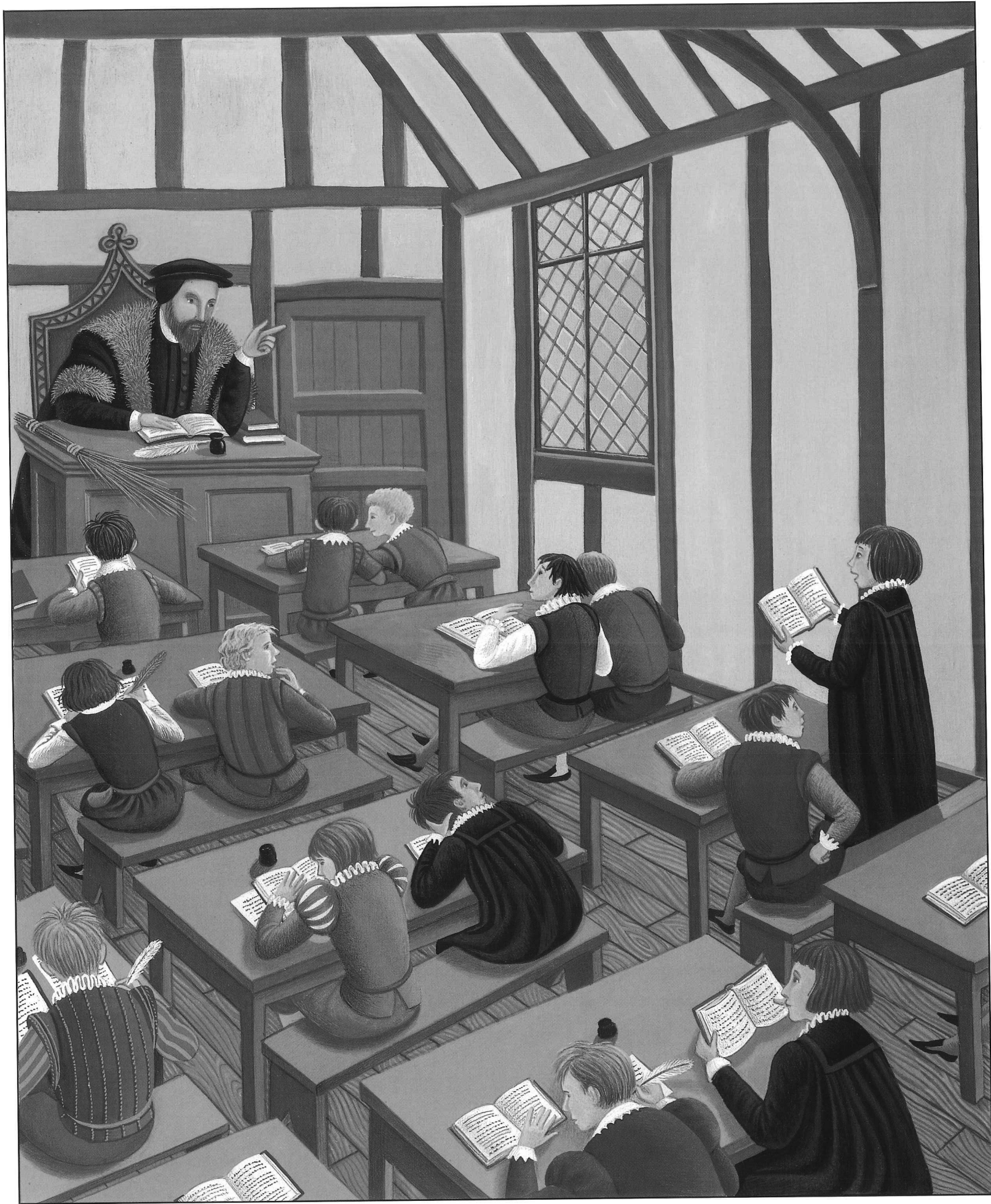
We don't know what play they performed. Perhaps they did *Ralph Roister Doister*, a funny play with characters named Matthew Merrygreek and Margery Mumblecrust. Or it may have been a tragedy about some great hero, with lots of sword fighting and dramatic speeches. Doubtless, the people loved it and talked about it long afterward, for public entertainment was rare in those days. From then on, traveling players came to Stratford almost every year, and it was always a special event.



When William was six or seven, he entered the local grammar school. It was a good school for its day, and it was free, though only boys could go. The schoolmaster taught the younger boys to read and write. In another part of the room, he led the older boys in the study of Latin and Greek. They memorized long passages of poetry in those languages. William had an amazing memory, and years later he frequently referred to the myths and history of his childhood study in the great plays he wrote.

William graduated from Stratford Grammar School when he was sixteen. By then, the Shakespeare family had fallen on hard times. John Shakespeare owed money. He could not pay his taxes. He was no longer a town leader and, at one point, didn't even go to church for fear of being arrested for debt. Obviously, there was no money for a university education.

So William Shakespeare went to work, but we don't know what he did. He probably helped his father make gloves, though some people think that he was a schoolmaster's assistant and others that he worked for a lawyer.



Only one thing is certain: when William Shakespeare was eighteen years old, he got married to Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six. John and Mary Shakespeare were probably against the marriage. First of all, the family was short of money. And the house on Henley Street must have been crowded and noisy enough already, for William had three brothers and two sisters, and the youngest of them was only three. Even so, William brought his new wife to live with them, and when their daughter Susanna was born, six months later, there were ten people in the house. Less than two years later, there were twelve, when Anne gave birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith.

Some time after that, William left Stratford and went to London. No one knows when he left or under what circumstances.

Anne, Susanna, and the twins stayed behind in Stratford. We assume that Will sent money to support them, and came sometimes to visit. But he never took them to London to live with him, and he and Anne had no more children. It does not appear that they had a very happy marriage.