

## 7. From *This Star of England*, by Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn

1952

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The dynamic team of Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, joined later by their son Charlton Ogburn Jr., author of *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (1984), reintroduced the authorship debate to the postwar generation.<sup>1</sup> The following summary of the case for Oxford and against Shaksper has been lightly edited to reflect modern layout practices.

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There has been affirmatively presented in the foregoing chapters positive and irrefutable proof that “William Shakespeare” was the pseudonym of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. It seems therefore superfluous to present either arguments or evidence of a negative character to show the impossibility of William Shaksper’s being the famous dramatist. This volume would be incomplete, however, without a discussion of William Shaksper of Stratford, not only because he has been for so long the accepted author, but because from the part he played in the story Ben Jonson derived the idea of using him for the hoax in the First Folio.



Charlton Ogburn 1911-1998

It is necessary to note the distinction, yet similarity, between Lord Oxford’s *nom de plume* and the name of the Stratford man. Shakespeare (hyphenated on the title pages between 1598 and 1622 of eighteen quarto editions of plays) was obviously a made-up name, as the anonymous author of *Willobie his Avis*, in 1594 readily recognized. It was suggested—among other things—by the cognizance of Edward de Vere as Lord Bolbec, which was a lion shaking a spear, and by the complimentary address to the young Earl of Oxford at Cambridge University, in 1578, by Gabriel Harvey who, after extolling de Vere’s high qualities, his literary achievements and eminence, appealed to him to renounce literature and follow the martial career of his great ancestors, saying “Thine eyes flash fire; thy countenance shakes a spear.”

In Grecian mythology, Pallas Athena was the goddess of wisdom, philosophy, poetry and the

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<sup>1</sup> *This Star of England / ‘William Shakespeare’ Man of the Renaissance*, by Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn (New York: Coward-McCann, 1952).

fine arts. Her original name was simply Pallas, a word derived from *palein*, signifying a spear. She was generally represented with a spear. Athens, the home of drama, was under the protection of the Spear-Shaker. In our age such a signature would be understood at once as a pseudonym.

Pallas Athena, also goddess patron of the Greek theatre, wore a helmet which made her invisible. These facts known to Oxford, a student of Greek, might have influenced his choice of a pen-name. As the victor in jousting tournaments, in which he had few peers, he was known as a “spear-shaker.” Oxford’s nickname in certain circles was Will. *Wyll* was an old English word meaning well or spring. *Ver* meant spring. He put together these words and formed his pseudonym.

The Stratford man’s name was Shaksper, and thus we write it in this volume. His own spelling was *Shaksper* in five of the only six signatures he ever wrote, so far as can be found; the sixth was *Shakpe*. His biographers have generally added a final *e* to the name in interpreting these signatures. Experts in Elizabethan handwriting have asserted that the supposed final *E* was simply the flourish that follows the German or Gothic *F*, the script used in his handwriting. It is really of no consequence whether there is a final *E* or not. The first syllable is always short, and was written *Shack* in the body of his will. In a letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney asking that a loan be obtained from our “fellow countriman,” the name is spelled *Shaksper*, and in another letter the same fellow townsman calls him “*Mr. Shak*.” In the Stratford man’s marriage license the name appears as *Shaxper* and in the marriage bond it is *Shags per*. T. Whittington, a creditor of William’s wife for forty shillings, writes it *Shaxper*. The father’s name was signed as a witness to a conveyance as *Shaxbere* by Walter Roche, the ex-schoolmaster, one of the few persons in Stratford at that time who was literate. (Fewer than one-third of the aldermen and burgesses of Stratford in the latter half of the sixteenth century could write their names. Grand jurymen generally made their marks in their presentments.) The significant thing in these various spellings, as in all sixteenth century orthography, is the pronunciation, the phonetics. In Shaksper and Shakspeare the *A* was invariably short and the accent fell on the first syllable. Thus throughout this book we call the Stratford man by the name he himself used, Shaksper. When we say Shakespeare we mean the author, unless we are quoting or reciting the London entries which may refer to the Stratford man—such, for instance, as the reference to his being a tax-defaulter, etc.

The similarity of names was a pure coincidence, of which, however, advantage was taken by Shaksper to his own financial gain, and after his death by Ben Jonson, Bacon, and Lord Oxford’s family, for the insertion in the First Folio of the false clue that later led biographers and others in cumulative numbers to Stratford-on-Avon.

It should be understood that during Shaksper’s lifetime there was no reference which the most diligent research has been able to find, to indicate that he was ever the author of anything, except his will. Most of his entire life was spent in Stratford, first as a butcher’s apprentice during his teens and as a grain dealer from the age of 33 until his death. For several years he lived in London, having a dubious connection with the theater, finally becoming perhaps a minor actor. That is all we know of him. Every known item is given below. It could all be put on one page.

The recorded facts in the life of William Shaksper begin with an entry in the Stratford Parish Register: *C. Gulielmus filius Johannes Shaksper* was christened April 26, 1564. The date of his birth is not given. The next record is the issuance of a marriage license eighteen years later on November 27, 1582 in the Bishop of Worcester's Registry in Stratford, authorizing the marriage of William Shaxper to Anne Whatley of Temple Grafton. On the following day a bond was filed in the same registry signed by two bondsmen to guarantee the Bishop against all liability, should a lawful impediment exist to the marriage of Wm. Shagsper to Anne Hathway of Shottery. Just when the marriage of these Annes took place is not known; but within six months after these entries in the Bishop's Registry a daughter of Shaksper named Susanna was recorded as christened on May 26, 1583. And on February 2, 1585, was entered in the Registry at Stratford the baptism of twins born to the William Shaksperc. From the time of his own christening, April 26, 1564, until the date of the marriage license nothing whatever is known of his life. There is no record of his ever having attended school.

There existed in Stratford a Grammar School of sorts provided with few if any textbooks but with the inevitable "horn book chained to the desk." Shaksper's parents were illiterate; they could not have taught their son reading and writing. William Shaksper seems never to have acquired the art of penmanship, if we are to judge from the three crude signatures to his will in 1616 and the three illegible scrawls he made of his name in 1612—the only times he ever tried to sign his name, so far as diligent research has discovered. When Shaksper was asked to write he always declined, saying he was "in paine." as Beeston, the actor, declared in later years.

The common people of sixteenth-century England were not only illiterate but dismally ignorant; a wide gulf separated them from the nobility. In the provincial cities and towns the people spoke dialects scarcely comprehensible in other counties. This was the case of the soldiers and sailors who came from Stratford and other towns to fight in the war against Spain in 1588. The first English grammar was published only in the seventeenth century. Among the yeomen the art of writing was almost unknown, and among tradesmen in the provinces it was considered a high accomplishment.

The first biographer of William Shaksper who made an honest effort to find out and record the truth was Halliwell-Phillips. He tells us that in March, 1565, John Shaksper, the father of William, and his colleagues in office, could not even write their own names, and that nearly all tradesmen reckoned with counters. As bailiff, John Shaksper made his mark in signing official papers.

On March 29, 1577, a warrant of habeas corpus showed John Shaksper had been in prison. In 1592 it is recorded that he was one of fifteen persons who "come not to church for fear of process for debt." And he was fined for allowing filth to accumulate in front of his home. In 1575 John Shaksper acquired the house in Henley Street now misrepresented as the "Birthplace," which thousands of gullible tourists pay fees to enter.

After the birth of his twins in 1585 there is no further record in Stratford of William Shaksper (except that his name appears as a party to a court action in 1589) until 1597, when he contracted to purchase "New Place." He was recorded that year as a "householder" in Stratford and listed as the owner of "ten quarter of grain." According to tradition, which Halli-

well-Phillips accepted, he had been apprenticed to a butcher when he was thirteen. The Clerk of Stratford Parish, the only Stratfordian alive during Shaksper's life ever named in an interview, told one Dowdall that Shaksper left Stratford and became a "servitur" in a London theatre.

In 1593 occurred an event of pointed and comprehensive significance. This was the publication of the long poem, *Venus and Adonis*, written in polished, sophisticated English, which marked the Earl of Oxford's first public use of his pseudonym (the "first heir of my invention"—the name he had invented). The dedication to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, was signed "William Shakespeare." The publisher, John Harrison, had in 1578 published a volume on military tactics dedicated to the 17th Earl of Oxford. *Venus and Adonis* was printed by Richard Field, a London printer who had come from Stratford-on-Avon, where his father was a tanner, and who in this town of 1600 population was no doubt acquainted with the butcher, John Shaksper. *Venus and Adonis* at once became popular, and several subsequent editions were printed by Richard Field, who in 1594 also printed Oxford's second long poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, with his pseudonym, William Shakespeare, signed to the dedication to the Earl of Southampton. That the name "William Shakespeare" was recognized in some quarters as a made name is shown by an address prefixed to an anonymous poem, *Willobie his Aviso*, published late in 1594:

Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistering grape  
And Shake-speare paints poor Lucrece rape.

This is the first known allusion to the author "Shakespeare" under his pseudonym. As subsequent editions of *Venus and Adonis* were published, the mystery of the authorship grew. Persons at court and some of the literati knew that "William Shakespeare" was the anonymous dramatist whose plays had long been popular. In 1599 John Weever published a tribute beginning:

Honey-tongued Shakespeare, when I saw thine issue,  
I swore Apollo got them and none other.  
Rose-checkt Adonis.  
Romea-Richard, more whose names I know not.

Other writers who were aware that the author was the Earl of Oxford were Edmund Spenser, Marston, Greene, Thomas Nashe, and Marlowe. John Lyly and Anthony Munday, Kyd and Dekker, who had been in Oxford's employ as secretaries, knew. So did Gabriel Harvey. Some merely understood that "William Shakespeare" was the pen-name of a nobleman who wrote the perennially popular plays, but were ignorant of his identity.

Oxford's dramas were written at first for the entertainment of the Queen and the personages at court, including many foreign diplomats; he himself aided in producing them, and with other young nobles often acted in them. Then in 1580 he took over Warwick's company of actors who thenceforth performed Oxford's plays at court even after the Queen's own company was established by Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, in 1583. In this year, Lord Oxford leased the Blackfriars for use as a private theatre where his company acted under the management of Lyly and Evans. (Oxford's was the only adult company giving plays at court in the season of 1584-5.) His actors played in the provinces as a road company continuously for the first five years of the

Eighties, and from time to time until the Nineties. During the Eighties Lord Oxford also had a company made up of choir boys from St. Paul's and of the Chapel Royal, who played at court.

As such plays as *Hamlet*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* began to be played in public theatres, becoming more and more popular in the late Eighties and early Nineties, printers grew eager to publish them. This they could not do without the risk of being sued; nor could they obtain possession of the manuscripts. Although there was no statutory copyright in England under Elizabeth, there was common law copyright: that is, protection by the common law courts of the property rights of an author to his work. The principle of common-law copyright is still recognized by the courts of England and also by the courts of the United States, where there is also statutory copyright. Copinger and Skone James state:

Every man has the right at common law to the first publication of his own manuscript. He has in fact supreme control over his own production and may either exclude others from their enjoyment or may dispose of them as he pleases.<sup>2</sup>

This statement is applied to the common law of the Elizabethan era.

The printers of London were at a loss to know how they could meet the demand for the publication of these plays. Likewise theatrical producers were eager to obtain them for their theatres. Since the author, who was the owner of the copyright, was anonymous, known to comparatively few persons as the Earl of Oxford, and to a few others as a nobleman using the *nom de plume*, William Shakespeare, there was the obvious difficulty not only of obtaining possession of the manuscripts, but also of securing the right to produce or publish them. The demand became so urgent that finally an ingenious, although illegal, method was adopted by printers to meet it. This method is explained and worked out very cleverly by A. S. Cairncross. In his valuable study, *The Problem of Hamlet, a Solution* (1936, Macmillan), an actor with a well-trained memory who had played Marcellus in *Hamlet* memorized the parts of the other characters, writing out as much of the entire play as he could recall. The result was a garbled and abbreviated version occasionally embodying lines or words from some other play in which the actor had taken part. And this constituted the "stolen and surreptitious" copy of *Hamlet*. Cairncross proves that this pirated copy existed before 1593, and that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been written certainly by 1588.

Cairncross utilized the scientific studies of *Stolen and Surreptitious Copies* by Professor Alfred Hart of Melbourne University, demonstrating that the following plays were memorized, written out and published in garbled versions: the three parts of *Henry VI*, printed anonymously under the titles of *The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of Yorke*; *King Lear*, printed under the title *The True Chronicle of the History of the Life and Death of King Lear and His Three Daughters* (1608); and *Romeo and*

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<sup>2</sup> Copinger & Skone James on Copyright, (7th edition, Sweet and Maxwell, 1949). The Court of Appeals of the State of New York rendered a decision on December 29, 1949, holding that the common-law copyright of a literary composition is separate from the ownership of the paper on which it is written and that the copyright belongs to the author until disposed of by him and not to the owner of the author's manuscript. The Court affirmed the judgment, forever enjoining the owner of the manuscript written by Samuel L. Clemens—who likewise wrote under a pseudonym—from publishing it. [This reference and comment appear in parentheses in the body of Ogburn's text.—Ed.]

*Juliet as An Excellent Conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet* (1599). *Hamlet* was printed under its own title, and *The Taming of the Shrew* under the title of *The Taming of a Shrew*. All these pirated plays were performed and printed anonymously until 1598, except that the garbled *Hamlet* was not printed until 1603.

The question naturally arises, How did the printers justify their action in putting out plays without the consent of the owner? To obtain the answer we have to analyze and interpret various references to this practice as found in the writings of Ben Jonson and other contemporary works. It had been rumored for some time that the anonymous playwright was none other than the author of the two long poems published under the *nom de plume* of William Shakespeare. Now enters the young man who had come from Stratford and got a job as a “servitur” in a London theatre, William Shaksper. Struck by the similarity of his name to the name signed to the popular *Venus and Adonis*, he saw the possibilities for taking advantage of it.

It would be less risky (or so they thought) for printers to accept one of the “stoln and surreptitious” copies of the Shakespeare plays from this man who, though no more than an agent of an undisclosed principal, was connected with the London theatre. The gist of the offense of the “Poet-Ape” (Shaksper) was that he passed off plays of other men as his own. The Stratford man became so “proud by underhand brokery” that he must needs have a coat-of-arms and pass himself off as a “gentleman born.” Shaksper’s lowly status around the theatre, “a servitur,” a handyman, or a minor actor, would preclude him from making an application for a coat-of-arms.

The application could, however, be made by his father. Filed in 1596, the application was interlined with the statement that John Shaksper had married Mary, daughter of Robert Arden of Warwickshire, a yeoman branch of a family that bore arms, and the proposal was therefore submitted that he be allowed to impale the arms of Arden.

A draft of a “coat-armour” was drawn up in the College of Arms to John Shaksper (or Shakspere), dated October, 1596. It was not ratified by the College of Heralds, nor were the impaled arms of Arden authorized. According to Sidney Lee the Heralds “betrayed conscientious scruples and this claim was abandoned.” One reason, Halliwell-Phillipps suggests, was that both of Shaksper’s parents were “descended from obscure peasantry.” In 1597 however changes took place in the College and Shaksper now asserted that

certain draft grants prepared by the Heralds in the previous year [1596] had been assigned to John Shaksper while he was bailiff, and the Heralds, instead of being asked for a grant of arms, were merely “invited to give him a recognition or exemplification of it, which was a thing much more easily secured than a grant, for the Heralds might if they chose, tacitly accept without examination the applicant’s statement that his family had borne arms long ago, and they thereby regarded themselves as relieved of the obligation of close inquiry into his present status.” (Lee, 151.)

“There was, however,” according to Greenwood, “a limit beyond which these complaisant Heralds refused to go”—the claim of Mary Shaksper to the Arden arms.

Richard Grant White speaks of the “pretension of gentry set up” when the coat.of.arms was asked for with the actor’s money, that coat of arms which Shaksper prized because it made

him a “gentleman by birth.” Elsewhere he remarks, “The more than the squalid appearance of the place [on Henley Street] saddened me.”

The first application had been denied by the Garter King-at-Arms with the notation: *Non, Sanz Droict*. Sir William Dethick, Garter King-at-Arms in 1599, was charged with having granted coats to persons of base origin not entitled to them, and the case of John Shaksper was one of those complained of.

We have gone into this matter of the coat-of-arms rather fully because Ben Jonson makes much of it in satirizing Shaksper’s pretensions in his play, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (produced in 1598 and published 1601).

The year 1597 was a momentous one in our chronicle. It was the year Lord Oxford decided—with how great reluctance who can measure?—permanently to secure his anonymity as playwright, making it doubly sure by publishing his plays under the pseudonym used for his long poems in 1593 and 1594. And 1597 was the year William Shaksper decided to return to Stratford to live—or perhaps this was decided for him. Six of the plays we now call Shakespeare’s had been pirated in the manner Cairncross describes and printed in garbled, abbreviated editions. The true author had made no protest, had initiated no legal action to stop these thefts. But obviously this sort of thing could not be allowed to go on. Oxford’s decision meant that he must give up during his life all hope of being publicly acknowledged as the great dramatist. The next year 1598 marked the first time any of his plays were published under his pseudonym—*Richard II* and *Richard III* under the name of William Shakespeare, hyphenated, and *Love’s Labor’s Lost* under the name William Shakespere.

The next step was to get William Shaksper out of London, or at least get him away from the activities Jonson described in *The Poet-Ape*. It is interesting that Nicholas Rowe quotes Sir William Davenant as saying that the Stratford man had received one thousand pounds from the Earl of Southampton for the purchase of property. The first purchase made by Shaksper was of “New Place” in Stratford, which he contracted to buy in 1597. He completed the purchase in 1601 when he obtained a deed after a delay occasioned by the murder of the seller, William Underhill. Shaksper was described that year as a “householder” of Stratford. He bought additional real estate there, 107 acres, in 1602; and he purchased the tithes from the towns of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton and Welcombe in 1605 for four hundred and forty pounds. In 1614 Shaksper made another deal in Stratford real estate.

Besides engaging in these transactions, William Shaksper and his father—until the latter’s death in 1601—were grain speculators, supplementing the father’s business as a wool-dealer. In January, 1598, William is recorded as the third-largest hoarder of grain (corn) in Warwickshire. Records show that owing to the drought and to the Spanish wars, there was a shortage grain in Warwickshire in 1597-8. Jonson makes John Shaksper, in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, “the farmer who [almost] hanged himself on the expectation of plenty.” William also was engaged in selling malt. In July, 1604, his legal action against one Philip Rogers was tried in a local Stratford court. The suit was for two shillings loaned to Rogers and for one pound fifteen shillings, the purchase price of malt sold to Rogers by Shaksper in March, 1604. In February, 1609, William Shaksper obtained judgment for six pounds and one pound five shillings costs in Stratford against another fellow-townsmen, John Addenbroke, and a surety, one Thomas Horneby, against whom

according to Sidney Lee, Shaksper “avenged himself.” He sent the surety to prison for the unpaid judgment, Addenbroke having left town. In 1612 Shaksper’s name was in a bill of complaint affecting the tithes.

In 1614, William Shaksper, W. Combe, and M. Mainwaring sought to enclose for themselves the common pasture land near Stratford and thus deprive the poor of their time-honored rights of pasturage. The only recorded conversation of Shaksper’s so far found, is one with his “cosen,” Thomas Green, the town clerk who recorded it in his diary, 1614, as he did one or two other items’ about Shaksper and the enclosures. Shaksper did not discuss the theatre, did not discuss’ literature or the drama. He is merely reported as having told his “cosen” that they meant to enclose the commons no further than to Gospell Bush. The Town of Stratford successfully opposed this rather high-handed appropriation of the commons.

There is one remaining instance which must be noted to make the Stratford record complete. In the Chamberlain’s accounts of Stratford there is an entry to the effect that the Town of Stratford is charged for one quart of claret given to a preacher at William Shaksper’s home in 1614. That entry is worth a paragraph.

We pass on to the will which Shaksper executed in January 1616. The most interesting feature of Shaksper’s will is his signature, or rather his signatures. Next are the interlineations inserted after the will was drawn, as an afterthought; the bequest of his “second-best bed” to his wife, his sole bequest to her; and the bequests interlined at some later date to “John Hemynges, Richarge Burbage and Henry Cundell of xxvjs and viijd a peece to buy them rings,” which could be part of the “build-up” of Shaksper undertaken by the perpetrators of the hoax in the First Folio. Another very significant point regarding the will is that there is no mention whatever, no bequest, of a library or of a book or a manuscript. The will itemizes and disposes of various articles of a personal nature: a sword, a bowl, jewels, plate, but no books. Incidentally, no shares in any theatre were mentioned in the will. There was no devise to his wife, no life-interest was given her in the real estate which he left to his daughter; and no bequest was made to Ben Jonson, who said he loved Shakespeare “on this side idolatry.”

The only mention of Anne as Shaksper’s wife, except the bequest in 1616, is found in the will of Thomas Whittington, who had been a shepherd and who died in 1601. This is the extract from the will, as Halliwell-Phillips gives it: “Unto the poore people of Stratford xi.l. that is in the hand of Anne Shaxper, and is due debt unto me, being paid to mine executor by the said Wyllyam Shaksper or his assignees according to the true meanyng of this my will.”

The only letter ever written to William Shaksper, so far as has been discovered, is one from Richard Quiney in 1598 addressed to “Mr. Wm. Shackspere” and requesting a loan of thirty pounds. This letter was found in Stratford where it is now preserved. A letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quincy in the same year makes the request that “our countriman, Mr. Shaksper,’ procure a loan for him, thus indicating that Mr. Shaksper might have become a loan-broker. A second letter from Sturley to Quiney making the same request refers to him as “Mr. Shak.’

The foregoing is absolutely all that is known of the life of William Shaksper of Stratford-on-Avon. At his death in April, 1616, no one referred to him as an author, or playwright, or actor. In fact there was no public mention of his death at all.



His son-in-law, Dr. Hall, entered one line in his diary: "My father-in-law died on Thursday." That was all.

The facts of Shaksper's life in Stratford, meager as they are, suffice to demonstrate the impossibility of his having had any literary interests or of his capacity to write plays or poems. Knowing what we do of his life in Stratford from 1597 until 1614, we are convinced that he could not have been a writer or had literary interests. Had he owned a library, or even a folio or two, his will would surely have made some disposition of it, as it did of his bowl, his sword, and his second-best bed. An actor of that day with any education would have been interested in owning books. Hemming, who died in 1630 at the age of seventy-five, provided in his will that five pounds should be spent for books for the education of a grandchild.

[...]

It behooves us now, after having cited every item pertaining to Shaksper in the records of the day, to make a few observations about the lacunae in the records.

The Treasurer of the Chamber accounts, which record payments to actors, never list Shakespeare as an actor during the whole time Shakespearean plays were being produced at Court. (In the suspicious Hemming entry recited above he is, however, named one of three payees, "servants of the Lord Chamberlain.") Records in London and in some seventy smaller cities and towns in England, as we have said, give the names of the leading actors of Elizabeth's and also James's reign, and often the parts they played—Tarleton, Kempe, Burbage, Condell, Alleyn and others—but never once, until after his death, is the name Shakespeare mentioned as an actor in the cast, when it twice appears in Jonson's Folio of 1616. Mrs. C. C. Stopes in *Burbage and Shakespeare* confesses that the records of all actors appearing at Court from 1597 to 1616 fail to reveal a Shakespeare.

There is no reference of any sort anywhere identifying the dramatist and poet Shakespeare as the man from Stratford during the latter's lifetime. There is no reference during Shaksper's lifetime identifying him or the actor Shakespeare, as the playwright. No scrap of writing which can be attributed to the Stratford man, William Shaksper, no letters, no memoranda, no diary, no manuscripts, have ever been found. The reason that none has been found is patently that none was written. If we are to judge by his illegible scrawl—and that is all we have to judge by, he did not know how to write. He would say he was "in paine," when asked to write.

Edward Alleyn, the son-in-law and partner of Henslowe, was one of the leading actors of the period during which Shaksper is supposed to have been on the London stage. Alleyn's memoirs and papers, published in 1841 and 1843, "contain the names of all the notable actors and play-poets of Shaksper's time, as well as of every person who helped, directly or indirectly, or who paid out money or who received money in connection with the production of the many plays at the Blackfriars Theatre, the Fortune, and other theatres. His accounts were very minutely stated, and a careful perusal of the two volumes shows that there is not one mention of William Shaksper or Shakespeare in his list of actors, poets, and theatrical comrades."

Henslowe was a theatrical producer in London at the time and, from 1591 until 1609, kept a detailed account-book or journal of the plays he put on, the payments of royalties to dramatists, and

payments to actors. During this period he produced a number of Shakespearean plays. There is no mention from one end of his journal to the other of the name Shaksper or Shakespeare. The reason is obvious: Lord Oxford, as an anonymous dramatist and nobleman, accepted no royalty payments. The names, signatures, handwriting, of all other leading playwrights of the day are to be found in Henslowe's journal; but not Shaksper's. Frequent are the names of Ben Jonson, Dekker, Chettle, Marston, Wilson, Drayton, Munday, Heywood, Middleton, Porter, Webster, Day, Chapman, and others, but never one mention of Shaksper or Shakespeare as an actor or playwright. There is no record anywhere of any royalty payment to Shaksper or Shakespeare.

Although sixteen of the Shakespearean plays were entered for publication at the Stationers' Register before 1610, none was ever entered in Shaksper's or Shakespeare's name. There is no evidence whatever, not an iota, that anyone during Shaksper's life ever referred to him as the playwright. It was not until seven years after his death that the basis for the myth was laid in the "red herring" inserted in the First Folio. Had Shaksper been both a playwright and an actor, especially a theatrical manager, as his biographers maintain, he would have seen to it that his plays were retained for the theatre, and not stolen and published.

[...]

An immense gulf separates the illiterate youth of Stratford who at thirty-four was a grain-speculator, a dealer in malt and a frequent litigant in the courts of Stratford, from the broadly cultured courtier and nobleman, educated in the classics, in Latin and Greek, in French and Italian, in music and in law, who was the real author. In order to bridge this gulf and bestow upon the Stratford burgher the manifest qualifications of the writer of the Shakespearean plays, his biographers are compelled to rely upon manufactured evidence and conjecture. These biographers seem never to have suspected that the one reference to Stratford in connection with the poet-dramatist, to-wit, Leonard Digges's phrase in the First Folio, was inserted deliberately to divert suspicion from the true author to a dummy. "Thy Stratford moniment," he wrote. To enhance the plausibility Ben Jonson, who three years before had written a list of the distinguished persons he had known and omitted Shaksper's name, and Shakespeare's, now undertook to give Shaksper the status of an actor of the rank of Burbage, Alleyn, Heminge and Condell (to which he was certainly not entitled.) The name of William Shakespeare was listed in the First Folio, taking precedence over the others, as one of the leading actors of London: a flagrant deception.

When Oxford's daughters and their husbands, probably in collaboration with the eighteenth earl, decided to publish the twenty Shakespearean plays never before published, Ben Jonson's aid was enlisted for this First Folio, and two leading actors of the day, Hemminge and Condell, were made the "front" for the publication. Their names were signed to the dedicatory letter and to the preface addressed to "the Great Variety of Readers." Both compositions were obviously from the hand of Ben Jonson. The dedication is to "the most 'Noble and Incomparable Paire of Brethren William Earle of pembroke, etc., Lord Chamberlain to the King's most excellent Majesty, and Philip, earl of Montgomery" [Oxford's son-in-law], etc., etc.

The preface states that the friends of the author, who is dead, have collected his manuscripts "and so to have published them, as where (before) you were abus'd with divers stoln, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injunious imposters." The Preface

further assures the “Great Variety of Readers” that “wee have scarce received from him [the author] a blot in his papers,” because “what he thought he uttered with that easiness,” etc.

Of the thirty-six plays published in the First Folio, twenty had never before been printed, and most of these had never been produced on any stage. Where did Ben Jonson or the publishers obtain the manuscripts of those never-before produced or printed? Obviously from the “grand possessors” to whom, as stated in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609 Quarto, these manuscripts belonged. The “grand possessors” could only have been Oxford’s family—the author’s family. The illiterate Judith, daughter of William Shaksper of Stratford. or Shaksper himself, who was active in business in 1609 in Stratford, could not, by any stretch of courtesy, be called a “grand possessor .”

The publishers, as well as Lord Oxford’s family, undoubtedly foresaw the furor of interest which would be aroused by the appearance of these thirty-six great dramas, a score of them for the first time, in folio. It would be the most spectacular publishing event in English literary history. No expense and no effort were spared to make it a notable one. The cost was too high for the publication to have been an ordinary commercial venture. There is a record of one copy’s having been sold just after publication, in 1624, for one pound, which would be ten dollars in today’s money. Dr. Samuel Johnson, who was familiar with printing practices, estimated the number of volumes published to have been five hundred. Obviously the venture was subsidized by the two noblemen to whom the Folio was dedicated, the Earl of Pembroke, and his brother, the Earl of Montgomery, Oxford’s son-in-law. These two were the sons of Lord Oxford’s friend, Lady Mary Pembroke.

There is reason to believe that Ben Jonson may have actually suggested the publication of the First Folio, persuading the reluctant Countesses, Oxford’s daughters, that their father’s anonymity could be protected by going to the extreme of indicating that William Shakespeare was the name of a real person in Stratford, who had been a minor actor. It is significant that the Lord Chamberlain, who was the brother of Oxford’s son-in-law, arranged in 1616 for a pension to Ben Jonson of one hundred marks a year, temporarily increased in 1621 to two hundred pounds, equivalent to \$8,000 in today’s money.

Thus was laid the basis for the most amazing literary hoax of all time. Its success has surely gone beyond the most optimistic hopes of those who conceived and executed it. Ben Jonson himself would no doubt be the most astonished of all, could he know that William Shaksper of Stratford, the pretentious and uncouth impostor pictured in Jonson’s own plays, as Sogliardo-Shift and the Poetaster, is to this day believed, as a result of his artful ambiguities, to be the author of the great dramas which had so stirred Jonson’s envy. He would be also not a little gratified, for thus his own standing is enhanced; and he would always—did always—sacrifice any man, and any truth, for that.

Public curiosity concerning the author of the First Folio was inevitable, and this must be provided for. Essential for a frontispiece would be a likeness of the author, a picture of the mysterious “Shakespeare.” An engraving was accordingly made for this purpose by a London artist only twenty years of age. His name was Droeshout. It is not known what model he used for the engraving. Someone took thought also for providing paintings by famous artists of “Mr. Shakespeare.” A portrait of Edward de Vere was altered by some

capable hand. It was given a bald head; the ruff embroidered with the Tudor rose, which was *de rigueur* in the costume of courtiers, was painted out of the Oxford portrait and there was substituted the plain neckpiece of a commoner such as Shaksper might have worn. The wild boar crest embellishing the signet-ring Lord Oxford wore on his thumb is partially discernible. The Trentham coat-of-arms in the upper left-hand corner was painted out. (It was customary for a nobleman's portrait to be thus inscribed with his wife's coat-of-arms.) All this and more can be seen in Charles Wisner Barrell's X-ray and infra-red photographs-reproduced in *The Scientific American*, January 1940-of the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare which hangs in the Folger Library in Washington. This portrait of the Earl of Oxford, which shows him wearing the court dress of an Elizabethan nobleman, was painted by Cornelius Ketel, a well-known Dutch artist.

M. H. Spielmann, the great "orthodox" expert on the portraits of Shakespeare, asserts that of all the portraits only the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford monument (how different in appearance the two are!) display the slightest semblance of authenticity, and all the others are frauds made by unknown artists. The Hampton Court portrait, owned by the King of England, has many indications of being a portrait of Lord Oxford, clumsily painted over, as a Barrell X-ray picture shows.

Thus we see upon what a slim and mythical basis has been constructed, without any evidence worthy of the name, the tradition and belief that William Shaksper of Stratford was in fact the greatest of English poets and dramatists, William Shakespeare. Biographers have been forced to adopt tortuous devices in an effort to stabilize that theory. They have had to accuse the greatest luminary in the history of English literature of plagiarizing the works of lesser poets and dramatists such as Marlowe, Lodge, Greene, and even Kyd, so that they might date the plays to correspond with Shaksper's maturity. They have presented this essential courtier and this magnificent man of the Elizabethan Renaissance as writing potboilers for the Jacobean stage!

To explain the author's great learning, his knowledge of the classics of law, of court procedure, court manners and speech, Shaksper's biographers fall back upon another argument which is fallacious: that he was a genius and *ipso facto* became possessed of vast knowledge. It is true that the dramatist was a genius, the greatest the world has ever known. But a genius must acquire both knowledge and experience. Even a genius could learn Latin, Greek, French, Italian, history, law, only by close study under competent teachers and from textbooks. Such studies, either in a university or at the Inns of Court, were obviously not available to the Stratford youth. Flippancy is certainly no answer to the question, yet defenders of the Stratford man frequently say with a lofty air of finality that "Shakespeare was Shakespeare"; which is no more than to state that George Eliot was George Eliot or that Mark Twain was Mark Twain.

Class distinctions in England in the sixteenth century were marked and inflexible. Shaksper's family belonged to the peasant and yeoman class: Mary Arden's father was a small farmer near Stratford related to a family which had won the right to bear arms. The gulf between the peasant, yeomen, tradesmen class and the old aristocracy, not only in social status but also in education and political importance, was so great as to be almost beyond the realization of persons reared in the United States where there have been practically no class distinctions. Shaksper's parents and daughters were illiterate, and Shaksper—to judge by his crude handwriting—was almost so. Throughout his youth in Stratford the family lived in squalid surroundings. The educational facili-

ties were meager; there was a dearth of text-books: Stratford was once described as “a bookless community.” Most provincial towns were such. Books were very expensive, and few were obtainable except by the well-to-do and by the universities.

William Shaksper, coming to London from such an environment—uneducated, speaking a provincial dialect, becoming connected with the public theatre, where the lowest classes gathered, finally acting as a “fence” for stolen plays, and as a play-broker, could in no conceivable manner have had an entree to the court or to the homes of courtiers; nor could he have had any opportunity to acquire knowledge of court-life, of court-language, of court-etiquette, which the author of the plays possessed as by second nature. Few of the classics, Greek and Latin, had been translated into English. There were no public libraries, no encyclopedias or dictionaries, no means of acquiring even a smattering of learning, except from the original sources. It was very different from the situation today. There were no travel- or guide-books. Knowledge of other countries had to be acquired by travel or by listening to the discourse of persons who had travelled. Foreign travel was extremely costly: it was only the privileged and well-to-do who travelled abroad.

By no process of reasoning and only by blind faith, which accepts the traditional and adores the myth, could such an uneducated man as Shaksper—a man primarily interested in making money, materialistic, provincial—be today identified as the greatest poet and dramatist in English letters, the writer of the most polished verse and noblest dramas, when there is no evidence at all to support such a claim. One argument made to us was that since he has been regarded as the author for three hundred years, he must be the author. For a longer time than three hundred years the world was believed to be flat, and universities continued to teach this as fact even after Magellan’s fleet had sailed around the globe.