

Nearly Forgotten Article by J.T. Looney

Additional Support for Edward de Vere as Shakespeare

By James A. Warren

In an almost unknown article that appeared in 1922, entitled “The Earl of Oxford as ‘Shakespeare’: New Evidence,” J. Thomas Looney provided information uncovered after the publication of “*Shakespeare*” *Identified* that he said “may help to illustrate the general argument and to hasten the recognition of the Earl of Oxford as the greatest figure in English literature.” The article with Looney’s new evidence first appeared in *The Golden Hind* (Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1922), a publication of only 75 copies. His article has never – with one partial exception – been reprinted.

The Golden Hind was a beautifully constructed quarterly of art and literature put together with care by its editors, Clifford Bax and A. O. Spare, to provide their readership with visual and literary pleasure. It is a shame that the many interesting stories, poems, reviews and articles – and the prints and lithographs – that appeared in its eight issues are not better known today. Cecil Palmer, the publisher of “*Shakespeare*” *Identified*, was one of the subscribers to *The Golden Hind*, a link that perhaps explains the appearance of Looney’s article in the quarterly’s inaugural issue.

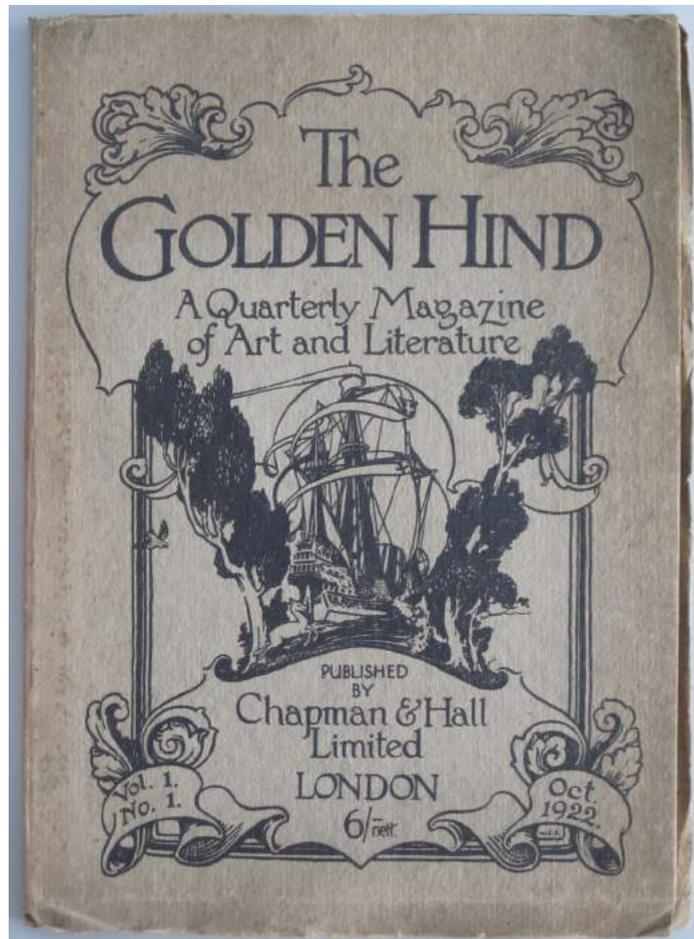
The one partial reprint was a freely edited excerpt from the middle of the article that appeared in *Oxfordian Vistas* (pages 168-176), a companion volume of articles edited by Ruth Loyd Miller that accompanied her third edition of Looney’s “*Shakespeare*” *Identified* and *The Poems of Edward de Vere*, in 1975. Because I enjoy tracking down first editions of Oxfordian materials, I found and purchased a copy of the issue of *The Golden Hind* with Looney’s article. A dozen libraries in the United States and counties of the British Commonwealth also hold copies of some issues of *The Golden Hind*.

Upon reading the original publication, I discovered that only about half of Looney’s 5,300-word article had been included in *Oxfordian Vistas*, and that excerpt had been freely edited. I thus felt a bit of a thrill upon realizing that I was perhaps the first person interested in the Shakespeare authorship question in many decades to read the full text of Looney’s article.

Of particular importance are Looney’s thoughts on why the authorship question rose to prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century. In contrast to traditional Shakespearean scholars, who sometimes attribute the rise of interest in authorship doubt to a spread of the madness that afflicted Delia Bacon in her final years, Looney provided an entirely plausible explanation involving the intersection of two movements arising in the nineteenth century. The first was the marked interest in practical historical research, which “brought to light the disconcerting fact that the English

writer most distinguished by the brilliancy of his powers was, paradoxically, separated from all his fellows by a glaring deficiency of relevant personal records.” The second was the development of a scientific study of literature, which “yielded a truer measure of the culture represented by the works.” These two developments, Looney explained, “produced in many minds a definite conviction that a school of literature of the first rank had been allowed to grow up around a personality having no title whatever to the honour.”

Looney then presented a newly-discovered example of how “Oxford’s career and personal relationships have been distinctly embodied in the Shakespeare writings.” That example is drawn from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and concerns the “almost exact parallel” between the financial aspects of the



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marriage contract arranged by Mr. Page and Mr. Shallow regarding a marriage between Anne Page and Slender in the play, and the arrangements made by Lord Burghley and the Earl of Leicester for a marriage between Anne Cecil and Philip Sidney in real life. “The story of Slender’s intended marriage to Anne Page being upset by her marriage to Fenton,” Looney observed, is “in all essentials analogous to that of Sidney, Anne Cecil, and the Earl of Oxford.”

Looney concluded with thoughts on how such linkages between the life of the true author and his works increases our understanding and enjoyment of them. “It is because the Shakespeare literature embodies work representing all periods of Oxford’s lifetime, sometimes in a single play,” he explained, “that efforts to fix a Shakespeare canon on the basis of an author younger than the Earl of Oxford have proved so inconclusive.” Readers willing to accept that embodiment will “find in Oxford an author whose presence illuminates each page and transforms the literature from the most impersonal to the most personal documents in the English tongue. We have, in fact, become possessors of a new literature: a merriment heightened by personal touch with the great laughter-maker; the eternal human tragedy reinforced by a sense of the shadows that gathered around his life.”

The entire text of this article follows so readers can gauge, in Looney’s own words, the importance of the additional evidence he uncovered in support of “recognition of the Earl of Oxford as the greatest figure in English literature.”

Note: This article reprint has been edited for consistency and to correct a few errors in the first printing. In quoted passages, Looney’s italicizations for emphasis have been retained. Despite diligent effort, we have been unable to find additional information about the State Paper of 1573 as cited by Looney in this reprint.

The Earl of Oxford as “Shakespeare”: New Evidence

by J. Thomas Looney

(from *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October, 1922, pp. 23-30)

The strongest single argument in favour of William Shakespeare’s authorship of the plays attributed to him is that belief in it went unchallenged for over two hundred years. What is far from generally understood is that the rapid undermining of that belief in recent years is due mainly to two movements belonging specifically to the nineteenth century.

First, there was the marked interest in practical historical research. The merely traditional was laid aside; all kinds of archives were ransacked; everywhere search was made for original sources of information. Applied to “Shakespeare” matters, this movement brought to light the disconcerting fact that the English writer most distinguished by the brilliancy of his powers was, paradoxically, separated from all his fellows by a glaring deficiency of relevant personal records.

The second movement was the development of a scientific study of literature. This threw up sounder criteria of literary criticism, which when applied to the “Shakespeare” writings, completely reversed the established opinion respecting the mental equipment of the dramatist. In the previous century, David Hume could write, without misgivings, of Shakespeare’s lack of “instruction from the world or from books,” and of the unfitness of the plays for “a refined and intelligent audience,” and even of “the reproach of barbarism” brought by them upon the English nation (*History of England*). So long as such views prevailed, doubts respecting the authorship were practically impossible. When, however, nineteenth century scholarship had yielded a truer measure of the culture represented by the works, doubt arose immediately, almost as a matter of course, and, along with the phenomenal silence of the records, produced in many minds a definite conviction that a school of literature of the first rank had been allowed to grow up around a personality having no title whatever to the honour. Thus, the Shakespeare problem, which for all time will probably be regarded as one of the most romantic affairs in the records of literature, came to have a place in the world’s history. Before the nineteenth century, however, it could hardly have arisen; during that century its rise was inevitable.

My concern here is neither with the evidence upon which William Shakespeare’s claims have been rejected, nor with the haphazard handling of the problem, which brought first Francis Bacon, and afterwards a succession of other claimants, upon

the scene. I confine myself wholly to the claims of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, to whom the “Shakespeare” writings were traced, as a result of a simple scheme of research, explained two years ago in my work, *Shakespeare Identified*. The evidence then submitted still seems to me, as it has seemed to others, an adequate vindication of his title. New evidence, however, has kept on accumulating, and some of this may help, at any rate, to illustrate the general argument and to hasten the recognition of the Earl of Oxford as the greatest figure in English literature.

The discovery that Oxford’s career and personal relationships have been distinctly embodied in the Shakespeare writings has already won recognition from people holding widely divergent views on the authorship question. But for hostility to the authorship theory, it would probably have been regarded as the most important discovery about the Shakespeare literature that has yet come to light. Continuing this fascinating line of research, I propose to develop an argument first noticed last year in my introduction to Edward de Vere’s poems. This has to do with his marriage, in December, 1571, at the age of twenty-one, to the daughter of Lord Burghley, Anne Cecil, who was then barely fifteen years of age.

At the age of twelve, Edward de Vere had inherited one of the proudest titles in the English peerage and, as a ward of the Crown, he passed a large part of his youth in the company of Queen Elizabeth. William Cecil, being Master of the Court of Wards, Oxford made his home at Cecil’s fine new residence in the Strand. Prior to Anne Cecil’s marriage to the Earl of Oxford, negotiations for her marriage to Philip Sidney had been pushed forward almost to a settlement, and it is in the peculiar circumstances of this matrimonial project – quite an outstanding episode in Sidney’s biography – that we find a special combination of details, with an almost exact parallel in the most significant of Shakespeare’s plays. For verification of the various facts I refer the reader to the respective articles in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and to H. R. Fox Bourne’s *Life of Philip Sidney*.

Two of the most noticeable features of Sidney’s career are his comparative poverty and his very dependent attitude towards his rich and powerful uncle, his mother’s brother, Robert Dudley, Queen Elizabeth’s Earl of Leicester. Seldom do we find Sidney’s name in contemporary records except in association with Leicester’s; and, as Sidney’s father was absent in Ireland at the time of the marriage negotiations, the actual bargaining, for such it undoubtedly was, fell to Anne’s father and Sidney’s uncle, the two outstanding figures of Queen Elizabeth’s Court. The first move had evidently come from Sidney’s friends, for Cecil stated quite frankly that he sought a wealthier husband for his daughter. Indeed, the peculiar emphasis given to all the pecuniary details of the business, along with the social eminence and respective relationships of the two chief agents, are all so unique as to quite justify the attention which Sidney’s biographers have given to the matter. The governing idea throughout was, clearly, to make Sidney acceptable financially as a husband for Anne, and, if

effect had been given to the proposed arrangements, his position would have been completely changed for the better. The amusing thing is that while Anne was being so assiduously wooed for Sidney with financial concessions from Sidney's friends, he himself showed no enthusiasm; he wished to stand well with those who were directing matters, but that was all.

Notwithstanding a most elaborate formulating of terms, the project, somehow, came to nothing and Anne was married to the Earl of Oxford, evidently with some precipitance, for Burghley had not intended her to be married till she was sixteen, and no financial arrangements like those drawn up for Sidney have been discovered. It is difficult to say definitely where the responsibility for the change lay. Cecil speaks emphatically of "a purposed determination in my lord of Oxford to marry with my daughter," and affirms that Oxford "moved it to me himself," somewhat to his surprise. (*Belvoir MSS., I., 95.*) In the same letter, he recognizes Oxford's superiority of birth, makes an uneasy reference to the project respecting Sidney, and discloses that at least one other person was regarded as a likely husband for Anne. Between the lines it is possible to read a suggestion of resistance from Burghley. On the other hand, Lord St. John, who afterwards married into the Cecil family, laid the chief responsibility at the door of Anne Cecil herself. "The Earl of Oxford," he wrote in July, 1571, "hath gotten himself a wife, or, at least, a wife hath caught him." Everything, therefore, points to Anne having made up her mind very decidedly against Sidney and having, with Oxford's co-operation, upset the plans so carefully made by her father and Sidney's uncle. A point of central importance is, that while Anne's and Sidney's affairs, in the project which miscarried, were directed by these respective relatives, Oxford stands quite alone. His father and mother were both dead. No single relative of his appears in the story, and he is represented as having initiated and carried to a successful issue, his matrimonial arrangements.

Two other remarks on the general situation are necessary. Firstly, all the details in the Sidney arrangements would naturally be strictly private at the time, and have only become known in recent years through the publication of Cecil's papers. Oxford, however, as an inmate of Cecil's house, and, doubtless, an interested listener to domestic discussions on the subject, would have many of the particulars impressed upon his mind at the time. From Anne herself, too, he would naturally learn something of the details. Secondly, as a Royal ward, much of his time would be spent at Windsor Castle, in intimate association with all the people who figure in the story.

Now Shakespeare has but one play in which he fastens himself to a particular piece of English soil, namely, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Therefore, to any theory assigning the plays to an Elizabethan courtier, this drama must be of commanding importance. The dramatist's familiarity, both with the inside and with the surroundings of the castle, is eloquent [sic] of much more than a casual acquaintance, while the address and bearing of his characters – although townspeople – continually be-

speak the life of the Court. Our immediate interest, however, is not in the inimitable Falstaff fun, but in the thread of romance which combines the comical episodes. This is the story of Slender's intended marriage to Anne Page being upset by her marriage to Fenton – we have, also, a minor aspirant to the hand of Anne – a story in all essentials analogous to that of Sidney, Anne Cecil, and the Earl of Oxford. Such triangles of romance are, no doubt, common enough, both in real life and in fiction; it is in the combination of distinctive circumstances that we shall find, I think, clear proof of an intended identity.

It will not be agreeable to Englishmen, who have magnified Sidney into a great heroic figure, to learn that our “Shakespeare” satirized him in the character of Slender, making him in this role the key to *The Merry Wives*. It is many years however, since Horace Walpole, in his letter to Hume, first questioned the fashionable estimate of Sidney, and, although our business is with a definite group of facts rather than personal judgments, the significant point is that “Shakespeare's” treatment of Sidney, as Slender, harmonizes with Oxford's known attitude to him.

To save space, then, I must ask for a very attentive reading of Act 2, Scene 4, where the leading characters all meet at the house of Page. At once we are struck with the amusing emphasis given to Slender's money affairs, the central place that these take in the matrimonial project, and his constant clinging to the skirts of his uncle, Robert Shallow. If, in addition, Act 1, Scene 1, and Act 3, Scene 3, be read, the general sense of identity will probably be irresistible.

Only in the chief scene (Act 3, Scene 4) is Shallow spoken of as “uncle” to Slender; everywhere else the less committal word “cousin” is used, and whether accidental or deliberate the fact is equally significant. Another interesting point is that after Anne's father and Slender's uncle have discussed the business and fixed up an understanding (i.e., between Acts 1 and 3), Slender's position has manifestly improved. The marriage provision made for him, like Sidney's, was going to put him on his feet. Just, too, as the first move in the matter had come from Sidney's friends, so do we find it comes from Slender's friends. The chief agent on Sidney's side was his uncle, Robert Dudley; the chief agent on Slender's side is his uncle, Robert Shallow. The director of Anne Page's affairs, as of Anne Cecil's, is a well-to-do and financially watchful father. Slender, like Sidney, is curiously lukewarm, but anxious to please the negotiators. Anne Page, like Anne Cecil, is evidently averse to the marriage. Add to this that Fenton, who occupies the place of Oxford, appears in the same orphaned condition – he is evidently in possession of his inheritance, and no single family representative appears – he personally presses his suit with Anne's father, taking up the same determined attitude that Cecil has described in Oxford, and, like him, carries his plans through to a successful issue. Place, then, the scene at Windsor – the meeting-ground of all the parties in the romance of real life – and it becomes evident that we have an analogy, probably as extraordinary, in its way, as any in English literature. Those who

have at any time interested themselves in Elizabethan literature will not need to be told that such a use of contemporary personalities was a common practice. Now, for the first time, however, it has become possible to bring the “Shakespeare” dramas into line with the literary usages of the day.

With the facts before him, the reader may be left to follow up the parallel in the play, and to enjoy the superb satire on Sidney’s lukewarmness and on Leicester’s active interest. He will be able, then, to pick out single sentences, so condensing the whole historic position as to make doubt almost impossible. It is when we turn to precise details, however, that we meet with a body of evidence which ought to settle the question of identity at once and for ever. And first we shall take Slender’s financial position. Shallow and Page having met, and evidently decided upon an income for Slender, and a jointure to be settled by Slender upon Anne, the young people are again brought together, whilst Shallow stands by to urge his lukewarm nephew to the encounter. Anne, having learnt something of the details, expresses her aversion in an aside:

This is my father’s choice,
O, what a world of vile ill-favour’d faults,
Looks handsome in *three hundred pounds a year*.
(3, 4, 31-33)

In Act 1, Sc. 1 (256-258), Anne’s dower has been discussed in her absence, and on her return, Slender, trying evidently to recommend himself to her, remarks:

I keep but three men and a boy yet,
till my mother be dead. But what though? Yet I live like
a poor gentleman born.

The fact that Slender’s friends are straining their resources to make him acceptable as a husband for Anne is amusingly illustrated in Act 3, Sc. 4 (48-50):

Shallow: He will make you a hundred and fifty pounds
jointure,
Anne: Good Master Shallow, let him woo for himself.

That Slender’s revenue is derived from lands is brought out in the contrast with Dr. Caius, who is “well-moneyed”; Slender is “*well landed*” (4, 4, 85).

We turn now to the actual case of Philip Sidney, and as the biographies are not quite accurate, we shall take the details direct from the Hatfield MSS. (I., 415). The first, and much longer section of the proposed settlement, deals exclusively with obligations incurred on behalf of Sidney. Here it is evident that Sidney’s friends had sought the match, and that in consequence, Cecil was driving a hard bargain. Out of lands belonging to the Sidneys, valued at £1,140. 3s. 2d. yearly, only £100 a year

was to be left for younger sons, and another £100 for the payment of debts and the marriage of daughters. Philip and Anne (or their children) were ultimately to have all the rest, the following being the chief arrangements:

1. On the day of the marriage, Sidney should have an income of £266. 13s 4d. (400 marks) yearly. As lay rector of Whitford, in Flint, he already had 80 a year; so that, after all charges against the living had been met, his total immediate income would be something over “three hundred pounds a year.”
2. At his father’s death he was to receive an increase of only £147. 16s. 7d. a year; whilst at this mother’s death an increase of £325. 14s. 3d.: “in all, £473. 10 s. 10d.”

Whatever the reason for this, his mother held the key to the situation, and for a really substantial improvement in his position, he had to wait *till his mother be dead*. In fact, if she should die before his father, Philip’s share of the family revenue would actually become greater than his father’s share. He would have his Whitford sinecure and his mother’s death would bring comparative affluence, and decided importance, to this “poor gentleman born.”

3. Anne was to receive a *jointure*, the actual amount of which, however, is not stated. Two references to it appear on this side of the contract: one, that it would be *augmented* by 66. 13s. 4d. yearly on the death of “the father.” (This must mean Philip’s father: Cecil’s undertakings form a separate section.) An original jointure of £150 would be, however, in proportion to the other items; if the various sums are added, about £133 yearly of the estate is still unappropriated.

The remainder of this section deals with minor re-adjustments. We may safely leave all these particulars to the reflection of the reader, and pass now to the other side of the bargain.

Again taking the play first, Hugh Evans (very significantly a Welsh parson – for Sidney had been brought up with Welsh associations), the friend of Shallow and Slender, raises the question of a marriage between Slender and Anne Page, and again the money, Anne’s marriage portion, takes first place. Two clearly separated items are referred to, both pointedly cryptical:

1. An inheritance of *seven hundred pounds*, left by “her grandsire on his death’s bed,” when “she is able to overtake seventeen years old.”
2. “A better penny”: that is a somewhat larger sum, which, it is suggested, “her father” might bestow (1, 1, 55).

Similarly, two paragraphs exactly cover the whole of Anne Cecil's marriage portion; and, keeping to the order in the play, I shall reverse them, placing her father's gift last.

1. After stating that the young people shall have "diet and lodging within (Cecil's) house for two years," it proceeds: "if Anne's younger brother or brethren shall die without issue, A. C. shall have, in reversion, after the death of her father and mother, £200 lands, and also a dwelling-house within 13 miles of London, meet for a gentleman of £500 lands" (an inheritance, therefore, of exactly *seven hundred pounds*.)
2. "The sum of £1,000 shall be given with Anne Cecil" (the "better penny" than £700, which Anne Page's father was to bestow).

The chief interest centers in the first clause. Here we have two parts of a single provision, the link between them being missing. The closing phrases suggest however, that although actual possession was deferred, the house was intended for their almost immediate occupation; hence the connection with the two years' lodging at Cecil's house. As Anne would be fifteen or sixteen at her marriage, this would make her "seventeen (or eighteen) years old" when they took over this residence. I do not stress the point but it cannot be ignored.

Another gap in this reference to a £700 reversionary interest is that no indication is given of its actual source, while there are conditions attached to it which could hardly be of Cecil's own making. It placed the possible heirs of a sickly six-year-old boy (Robert Cecil) between Anne and the inheritance; it deliberately passed over Cecil's elder son Thomas (by his first wife) and his younger daughter Elizabeth (by his second wife) and fixed the property, in reversion, upon the legal heirs of his second wife. This could hardly have been a voluntary contribution to his daughter's marriage portion; it is much more likely that, such as it was, it was Anne's in her own right. On the other hand, Anne Page's "seven hundred pounds" came from "her grandsire on his death's bed." This raises the questions of whether Anne Cecil's grandfather had any outstanding connection with the Cecil property, whether a death's-bed will was involved, and if so, whether it throws any light on the peculiar conditions attached to the seven hundred pounds in the marriage settlement.

To all these questions an answer is to be found in another important document in the Hatfield MSS. (I.116). From this it appears that Burghley's father, Richard Cecil, whose wealth supplied the first solid foundation to his son's fortunes, was hostile to William's first marriage, and was suspected of having made a will unfavourable to his son. Cecil's second marriage being eminently satisfactory, a new will, "15 or 16 lines written on a great skin of parchment with his own hand," was shown to a Mr. Digby a few months before his death. This, he affirmed, "was his will, but *no man should know his mind before his death*." The death took place, not at his own residence, but at

Cecil's house, then in Cannon Row, Westminster (Hat. MSS., V., 69), and the question seems to have arisen whether "his father did engross" the will. Cecil's mother was reluctant to produce it, while Cecil himself had come to some kind of an understanding with her "to carry out his father's meaning more than he was bound to." It is no straining of language then, to speak of Cecil's inheritance as having come from Anne Cecil's "grandsire upon his death's bed." The matter was certainly of very considerable interest and moment in the early history of the house of Cecil.

Whatever may have been the hidden facts, it is clear that Cecil did not receive the whole of the property free from penalties arising from his father's original displeasure. It is reasonable to suppose that some of it was assigned to the heirs, male or female, of Cecil and his second wife. Such, at any rate, is the very peculiar condition attached to Anne Cecil's reversionary interest in the £700. Everything points to its having come from "her grandsire on his death's bed," and there are even indications that she was not to touch it till "she was able to overtake seventeen years old." The play, the marriage settlement, and the document respecting Anne Cecil's grandfather, therefore become but complementary parts of one consistent story. The question to be faced by those who sincerely want the truth is, whether they actually belong to one another or, have we, in these matters become the sport of the gods? Dramatic embellishments would naturally be mingled with the facts, but it is doubtful whether another case could be cited in which a dramatist so closely followed facts of this nature and placed an identification so entirely outside the range of reasonable dispute. Even if there had been no correspondence whatever, in the details, the mere accentuation of the financial side of an abortive marriage project, with parallel personal relations and identity of place, would have made the case well-nigh unassailable. With the details as they are, argument becomes superfluous.

Starting then with the identification of Slender with Sidney, we find the drama packed with corroborative trifles; the tall, "slender" body, the somewhat pinched face of Sidney's early portraits, his stomach weakness, his strained politeness, his bookishness, the rawness and forwardness mentioned by Leicester, the *three* servants in his travel license: all are in the play. The relative ages and social standing of the principals, the "sharp words" of Cecil's wife, the gambling of Leicester, the suspicion and tricky espionage of Cecil's colleague Francis Walsingham (whose place is taken, naturally by Page's friend 'Frank' Ford): all are there. Even the retention of several Christian names is startling.

Our chief concern, however must be with Fenton, who occupies the place of the Earl of Oxford. Take, then, the following references to him: "Great of birth," "his state gall'd with expense," "his riots," "his wild societies," "he capers, he dances, he writes verses," "he kept company with the wild prince and Poins." Hardly a word that does not make such a pointed allusion to Oxford that when they are placed together, it almost seems as if it was intended that he should be recognized. Certainly,

if these phrases had been submitted, in combination, to any courtier between 1570 and 1580, he would have guessed at once that the Earl of Oxford was meant. The reference to “the wild prince and Pains” is strikingly apposite. In *Henry IV, Part One*, “Shakespeare” presents Prince Hal associated with Falstaff and his crew in a wild adventure at Gadshill, between Gravesend and Rochester. There, Falstaff and three others waylay travelers, after which the party rides “merrily to London,” to meet at the Boar’s Head Tavern, Eastcheap. Consider, then, the following matter-of-fact record, in a State paper of 1573:

“William Fawnt and John Wotton (complain) to Burghley. . . . Have been assaulted between Gravesend and Rochester, by three of the Earl of Oxford’s men, who escaped towards London.”

(Dom. 1547-1580, p. 461)

What would readers of today not give to have a detailed account of all that transpired? Here we have the exact spot, the suggestion of a similar escapade, a party of the same size, and the same subsequent movements (the flight to London). To these we may add the fact that the last occasion in history upon which we meet with the Earl of Oxford’s men was when they performed some unknown play at the Boar’s Head Tavern, Eastcheap, in the very year that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was first published (1602). The question of whether Fenton is Oxford may, I think, be left safely to the judgment of impartial readers. The only remaining point is whether Fenton is “Shakespeare.” This involves the evidence as a whole, which cannot be adequately treated within the scope of this article. A few brief observations bearing mainly upon the play may, however, be submitted:

1. The entire situation is treated purely from Oxford’s point of view.
2. The exceptional tenderness and reverence in the treatment of Anne Page (see Hepworth Dixon’s *Royal Windsor*) rank her with Juliet and Desdemona, as the girl-wife of “Shakespeare.”
3. Thirty years elapsed between the events and the pirated publication of the play. By that time Oxford was the only survivor of all who had taken part in the events represented. Twenty years more elapsed before the authorized publication.
4. Soon after his marriage (if not before) Oxford was immersed in the literary and dramatic movement of the time. Though represented as a leading force, and one of “the best in comedy,” the traces of his activities are so slight in the contemporary records (see Fleay’s *London Stage*) as to suggest deliberate secrecy. Puttenham, in fact, speaks of him as the chief of a band of poets whose writings could not “be found out or made public” (1598).

5. After the death of Lady Oxford he went into retirement, during which came the great Shakespearean outburst, involving plays in which as we have just seen, the most private affairs of his youth and early manhood were represented.
6. No single line of drama under his name has survived, although no less than 556 plays have come down to us for the classic period of English drama: 1584-1642. (*Fleay*, p. 388).

To these general considerations I would add a literary detail just recently noticed. After Oxford's marriage, Burghley attempted to exercise surveillance over his son-in-law, and thus provoked in October, 1584 a spirited protest, not published however, until recent years.

"My Lord," [Oxford] wrote in a postscript addressed to Burghley, "the other day your man Stainer told me that you sent for my man Amis. . . . I think it very strange that your lordship should enter into that course with me. . . . I mean not to be your child or your ward. *I am that I am*, and scorn to be offered that injury to think that I am so weak as not to be able to govern myself. . . . wherefore [I] desire that your lordship will leave that course as hurtful to us both."¹

To the Shakespeare student this immediately recalls Sonnet 121 (published in 1609):

Or on my frailties why are frailer spies?
 . . . *I am that I am*, and they that level
 At my abuses reckon up their own;
 I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel.
 By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown.

(Sonnet 121: 7, 9-12)

Here we have the same situation, resented in the same spirit, treated in the same style and there, rooted in the centre of both outbursts, is the identical sentence, the pivot of both utterances, an unmistakable index of personality, and, in every word of it, characteristically "Shakespearean." And so it is, whenever we are able to pierce the mists of calumny and touch directly the person of the Earl of Oxford.

Of the importance of solving the Shakespeare problem little needs to be said. To students, anxious for a canon of Shakespeare's writings, it must come first, for the basis of any such canon must be dynamic as well as static. It must embrace not only intrinsic qualities and persisting forms, but also the parallel movement of the mind and art of the author, and the mind and art of his period. And it is because the Shakespeare literature embodies work representing all periods of Oxford's lifetime, sometimes in a single play, that efforts to fix a Shakespeare canon on the basis of an

author younger than the Earl of Oxford, have proved so inconclusive. The question cannot, therefore, be shelved, except at the price of critical futility.

“Shakespeare” addressed himself, however, not to the scholastic intellect but to the human soul. And it is to those who approach “Shakespeare” in the spirit of “Shakespeare” that the authorship question matters most. Such readers will find in Oxford an author whose presence illuminates each page and transforms the literature from the most impersonal to the most personal documents in the English tongue. We have, in fact, become possessors of a new literature: a merriment heightened by personal touch with the great laughter-maker – the eternal human tragedy reinforced by a sense of the shadows that gathered around his life. In place of a colourless personality we substitute one whose very defects and excesses mark his kinship with the world’s great poets. For genius, which is but specialism in its most intense form, while it enriches the race, always exacts a high penalty from the individual. Thus it is that poets, who from the greatest heights of imagination and passion have poured down treasures upon mankind, have so frequently been adrift in relation to ordinary affairs. We accept with gratitude what they give, while we tenderly and reverently draw a veil over their weaknesses and failures.

Concerning one reputed weakness in Oxford, I am bound, however, to express a carefully considered dissent. While others have said much of his relationship with Anne Cecil, he has remained strangely silent. Did he leave it to the plays ultimately to reveal the truth? The question is too large for present discussion. It seems to me that their teaching is unmistakeable: namely, that if “the sweet little Countess of Oxford” is destined to live in English literature as Ophelia, Juliet, Desdemona, and Anne Page, then, what Beatrice was to Dante, such, under widely different circumstances, did Anne Cecil become to our English “Shakespeare.” It is a great thing for us, then, that she lies in Westminster Abbey, and one day, when the world has done justice to Edward de Vere, her monumental tomb there will doubtless become a shrine, where, binding in one the memory of both, fit public honours will be paid to him who has become the glory of England.

Note

1. Feuillerat, Albert (1874-1953), *Contribution a L'Histoire De La Renaissance en Angleterre*, published in French by Cambridge University Press, 1910. p. 533.

