

6. From *The Man Who Was Shakespeare*, by Eva Turner Clark

1937

Eva Turner Clark was an early follower of Looney's who published her ground-breaking study, *The Man Who was Shakespeare* (New York: Richard R. Smith), in 1937. Clark's Introduction strongly sums up the case against Stratford and for Oxford, as it stood just before World War II.

Clark's great contributions are three. First, she boldly focused attention on the absence of direct evidence supporting Oxford's candidature, pointing out that contemporary political considerations aside, "The great fire of London in 1666 and before that time the burning of playhouses, including manuscripts of plays, instigated by Puritan fanatics, destroyed many records." She also noted the possible role of the notorious forger, John Payne Collier, "who was for many years highly regarded as a Shakespearean scholar, and had the run of the Bodleian Library and other repositories of Elizabethan manuscripts, until 1853, when he was first suspected of literary forgeries, particularly in connection with evidence bearing on the Shakespeare plays." In other words, there are explanations beyond conspiracy which may account for the absences in the historical record.



Eva Turner Clark 1871-1947

Finally, Clark showed the importance of correctly understanding the date and chronology of Shakespeare's dramas, especially *Hamlet*, first mentioned as early as 1589. The play is simply too mature for a twenty-five year old playwright, even one of genius. Oxford was of course older than Shaksper by some 16 years, making better sense of the existing evidence.

From the beauty of language and imagery, the rhythmic swing of verse, the universal knowledge, the aristocratic understanding, and the thousand qualities which distinguish the plays known since 1598 as Shakespeare's, scholars have for generations held the opinion that the writer of those plays was gentle, musical, observant, broadly educated, widely read, and held a position near to the nobles of Queen Elizabeth's Court. There can be no gainsaying such a conclusion. The plays reveal it.

Scholars admit quite frankly that "the conception which each one forms of Shakespeare the man must be derived in the main from the impressions of personality implied in the plays." They are not, however, on firm ground when they attempt to attach these qualities of cultivated mind to

William Shakspeare of Stratford and to place him in easy social relations with the Elizabethan Court. (The spelling “Shakespeare” in these pages means the dramatist; “Shakspeare” means the Stratford actor.)

They *imagine*, but have no evidence, that William attended the Stratford Grammar School up to the age of twelve or thirteen years. They *imagine*, but have no evidence, that William then left school because his father’s poverty and inability to meet his penny tax, for which they have evidence, compelled it. They *imagine*, but have no evidence, that the boy assisted his father in his business of butcher, glover, or wool-dealer’ (authorities differ as to the father’s business), trying to keep the wolf from the Shakspeare door, though this theory appears to be confirmed by the tradition reported in the seventeenth century by Aubrey and Dowdall, to the effect that William spent his youth as a butcher’s apprentice.

William is really first heard of at the age of eighteen when his marriage to Anne Hathaway took place, though the facts concerning it are not known with exactitude. If the five previous years were spent as his father’s helper in the small-village poverty suggested by modern historians, it can hardly be assumed that he experienced any great leap to affluence at the time of his marriage, for it is not apparent that Anne was an heiress. Within a few months after the marriage, a child was born to the young couple; twins came less than two years later; by the time William was twenty, he was carrying the burden of a considerable family.

Try to imagine this poor young uneducated father, living in a small provincial community, as Stratford then was, at a time when travel was by horseback and news was old when it arrived. Try to imagine young William in this environment attempting to supply the needs of five individuals. In order to provide for a family of five--then or now--a youth of twenty, inexperienced in the ways of the world and without other resources than his brain and hands, must put forth Herculean efforts to pull himself and his little family out of the mire of poverty, even to secure merely necessary food, clothing, and shelter.

While granted that he may succeed in accomplishing so much, it is not possible to imagine him finding time or strength *at the selfsame period* to cultivate his mind in the fine arts, law, history and diplomacy, and to win an easy familiarity with the social and political leaders of the day. Yet this is what advocates of the Stratford theory of Shakespeare authorship asks us to accept in the youth of Stratford. One cannot fill a four-gallon pail with water and expect to pour an equal amount of wine into the pail while the water is in it. No more can a man’s brain be filled with the workaday facts of daily living and at the same time find room in that brain for an overpowering amount of a completely different type of knowledge. Yet that is what we are asked to believe in the case of William of Stratford.

William was twenty years of age in 1584 and, from the life of privation he was then living, he is supposed to have burst upon the sophisticated world of London four or five years later as the greatest dramatist of all time.

That he went to London and became a member of one of the playing companies is undoubtedly true, though very little is known of his early life in London, and the impression he made upon his contemporaries at this period was slight. A few ironical remarks seem to record their opinion of him. His rise to affluence during the decade of the 1590’s must be explained in some other way.

When we are told that late in that decade he was on terms of such intimacy with Mary Fitton, one of the Queen's Maids of Honor, that he incurred the enmity of a rival in Mary's affections, the young Earl of Pembroke, we are forced to declare that such a social inconsistency was not only unlikely but impossible. Not long after this date, he is shown by the records in a lawsuit as living in lodgings at the home of a wigmaker, the kind of environment in which we would expect to find him.

On the other hand, there was another man living in England at the same period, fourteen years older than William Shakspeare of Stratford, of whom contemporary critics wrote that he was the best lyric poet and the greatest dramatist of Elizabeth's day; yet we are told today that, with the exception of a few early verses, all his writings have disappeared. This man was Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England. His early fame as a writer, his rank among the nobility as premier earl, and his position at Court as a favorite of the Queen, would indicate that a special effort to preserve his plays would be made by his admirers, even though Elizabethan convention demanded anonymity of so exalted a personage.

Evidence is accumulating to show that the Earl of Oxford's plays were not lost but were preserved to posterity by being printed under the assumed name of William Shakespeare, a name of like sound but different spelling to that of the unlettered, almost illiterate man of Stratford. Several plays, later known as Shakespeare's, were issued anonymously in quarto by pirate printers in the early 1590's but not until 1598 was a quarto published with the since-famous name on its title page.

That Lord Oxford knew William of Stratford as a minor member of Lord Strange's Company of actors may well be believed because the evidence points to that company's having been made up largely of actors from his own Paul's Boys, otherwise known as Oxford's Boys, a company dissolved in 1590 for caricaturing Martin Marprelate on the stage. As William was more of a businessman than actor, as indicated by later transactions, Lord Oxford would have found him a useful agent in dealing with the printer. Particularly would this have been the case since the person who printed Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in a handsome edition and other books in which Oxford would have been interested was also from Stratford. This printer, Richard Field, after serving a long apprenticeship, had married his late master's widow and secured control of her printing business. In dealing with the printer for the Earl, it would have been far easier for William to use his own name in arranging for the printing of the poem, *Venus and Adams*, the first publication to bear the name of William Shakespeare, than to take a strange one, since he could not divulge the name of the real author.

Writing of *Venus and Adonis*, Sir Sidney Lee observes:

Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* had emulated the example of Theocritus and Bion, the pastoral poets of Greece, in narrating the Greek fable of Venus and Adonis. Ovid's poem filled a generous space in the curriculum of every Elizabethan school, and at all periods of his career Shakespeare gave signs of affectionate familiarity with its contents.

Of course Sir Sidney meant the author of the plays when he made that statement, because the plays do reveal that "affectionate familiarity." Sir Sidney could not grant such a familiarity to the

Stratford actor, who could hardly have reached the sophisticated Ovid in the school's curriculum before he left school at the tender age of twelve.

We *know* that the Earl of Oxford had had every opportunity to gain an "affectionate familiarity" with Ovid, for it was while acting as his tutor that his uncle, Arthur Golding made the translation of the *Metamorphoses* that is so frequently quoted in the plays. As a brilliant student, it is not too much to assume that he assisted in the work of translation.

Of William's handwriting, six illiterate-appearing signatures are all that is known. The evidence on the handwriting of one of the hands in the scrap of manuscript of the play, *Sir Thomas More*, is too slight to be acceptable. The signatures constitute the only specimens of his penmanship that can be accepted by students in general. Can anybody believe that the man who wrote the easy fluent lines of the plays was dependent on a hand that labored from letter to letter? That the brilliant brain was enchained by such a physical handicap is unthinkable! The penmanship must have been as easy and flowing as the lines set down. The few clumsy signatures of the Stratford man should be compared with the easy lines of the Earl of Oxford, legible today as when they were written. Such a hand could glide rapidly over the paper to transfer quickly to its surface the sublime thoughts which crowded into the owner's brain. Not only did Oxford's facile pen lend itself to transfixing his thoughts quickly upon paper but, as he is known to have employed secretaries to whom he dictated business letters (some of which have survived), it is more than possible that he dictated many lines of his plays to Lyly, Munday, and others, known to have been employed by him.

Whatever evidence exists on the actual facts of William Shakspeare's life shows him to have been a penny-pinching business man, court records testifying to the pettiest of squabbles with neighbors and associates, quite consistent with the poverty of his youth when he was forced to niggardly economies in order to make ends meet in the care of his family. The litigious bickerings to which he gave his time and thought in his days of affluence are not consistent with the bigness of mind which evolved the great plays with their broad philosophy and light humor. The careless attitude of the dramatist towards gold and possessions, as evinced in the plays, can no more be reconciled with the avarice shown in the Stratford man's petty lawsuits than can the smoothly flowing lines of lyric poetry be reconciled with the clumsy, labored signatures of this same man of Stratford. Lord Oxford's indifference to his immense inheritance, which slipped through his fingers until all was gone, to the great annoyance of his father-in-law, Lord Burghley, is perfectly consistent with the dramatist's attitude towards gold and possessions.

A point of great significance is that provincialisms found in the plays are not peculiar to Warwickshire. Even the most ardent Stratfordians have been mystified by the fact that a youth recently arrived in London should have displayed little or no trace of his county's dialect in even his earliest writings and, while there are in the plays as a whole some words supposedly peculiar to Warwickshire, there are just as many idioms from other English shires. Had he written the plays, we may be sure there would be much evidence of Warwickshire dialect. Lord Oxford, on the other hand, was familiar with the speech of London and the Court.

A phalanx of University opinion exists upon the question of the chronology of the plays. Dr. Cairncross, has done a notable piece of work, work which his fellows are bound to respect, even though the corollary to it is the rejection of the Stratford Shakspeare as the author of the plays.

Placing the mature play of *Hamlet* not later than 1589, which he does, argues that most of the plays were written before that year, when William was only twenty-five years of age. The “hiatus” in his life from 1584 to 1592, mentioned by Sir Edmund Chambers in his monumental biography, *William Shakespeare* (in which he assumes that the Stratford man was the dramatist), and his conclusion that “after all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the patient balancing of possibilities, the last word for a self-respecting scholarship can only be that of nescience” ill sorts with the conclusion of Dr. Cairncross that the great play of *Hamlet* was written in the 1580’s. If the young provincial had written it, he would have been heralded throughout the London literary world; written by the Earl of Oxford, contemporary writers would not have commented in print for they dared not state publicly that England’s Lord Great Chamberlain was a dramatist, because a large portion of the home population held a very low estimate of the stage, and foreign statesmen would have been unpleasantly critical of Elizabeth for permitting her high officials to demean themselves by writing for the stage.

Sir Edmund Chambers is aware of the weakness of the chronological arrangement of the plays, as supported by Stratford theorists, although he accepts it. He says:

The chronology of the plays becomes difficult at this point, and it is therefore frankly a conjecture that an attempt at *Timon of Athens* early in 1608 was followed by a serious illness, which may have been a nervous breakdown, and on the other hand may have been merely the plague. Later in the year Shakespeare came to his part of *Pericles* with a new outlook. In any case the transition from the tragedies to the romances is not an evolution but a revolution.

Any chronological arrangement of the plays which requires such a conjecture without an iota of evidence cannot be taken seriously. For it must be substituted a chronology which shows a steady evolution, not a revolution. A chronology based on contemporary allusions, subtly, sometimes even boldly introduced into the dramas, reveals a literary and dramatic development which is definitely an evolution. Innumerable allusions are to be found in the plays if events between the years 1576 and 1590 are studied.

A key which unlocks the door to the whole problem of chronology is provided by the Records of the Court Revels and it is highly important that it be examined by the light let in by that open door. By means of the key, we find that ten plays were recorded as being played at Court in the late 1570’s under titles suggestive of later Shakespeare plays, the revising of old plays and providing them with new names being a common practice in Elizabeth’s day. In each play that is considered the revision of a certain earlier recorded play, there are numerous allusions which apply to the period immediately preceding the recorded date in the Court Revels of the early play under consideration. With ten plays thus provided to indicate the presence in them of topical allusions, we conclude that what is true of the ten must also be true of all the other Shakespeare plays. That only ten plays are found thus recorded is due to two reasons: after Christmas of 1580, the Earl of Oxford lost the Queen’s favor (the reason for which will be taken up elsewhere), hence his plays were not produced at Court for two-and-a-half years (when he was again received at Court) and, following that period, the practice of including the names of plays in the Records of the Court Revels was discontinued. However, with the theory of topical allusions established by a study of ten plays and supported by the evidence of a steady literary and dramatic development, it is possible to construct the order of later plays by allusions alone.

Another argument which favors an earlier period of authorship is that the literary style of the Shakespeare dramas antedates the style of Ben Jonson and his contemporaries. The great dramas reflect a moderated Euphuism, a Euphuism tempered by a finer taste than Lyly's. Antithesis and idealistic imagery made possible the use of beautiful and expressive words and the author, with his ear for music and rhythm, brought about an enrichment of the English language, a contribution to the language, never since approached by any writer. This patent fact and a courageous independence as to the observance of the dramatic unities were not to the taste of the later satirist, the academic Jonson, who, in spite of much great and original work, made a fetish of the classics and the unities. When Jonson did admire a phrase or a sentence of his predecessor, he did not hesitate to borrow.

William Shakspeare of Stratford was less than ten years older than Ben Jonson and thus may be considered a contemporary, yet the style of the Shakespeare plays is of a period a whole generation earlier than the Jonson plays, another form of denial of the Stratford man's authorship. The two groups of plays can hardly be compared, one reflecting the taste of Queen Elizabeth's reign, the other that of the reign of King James.

It is a significant fact that all the courtiers with whom the dramatist is believed to have come in contact were intimates of the Earl of Oxford. The Earl of Southampton, to whom in 1593 *Venus and Adonis* was dedicated, was at that time betrothed to Oxford's daughter, though they did not marry, and the next year she became the wife of the sixth Earl of Derby (thought by Professor Lefranc to have been the author of the plays). The Fair Youth of the *Sonnets* is believed by some students to have been the Earl of Southampton; by others, William Herbert, the young Earl of Pembroke. There are other theories but most Shakespearean controversialists will argue hotly over the relative merits of these two. As Southampton in 1593 had been betrothed to Oxford's eldest daughter, so in 1598 Pembroke was betrothed to Oxford's second daughter, though they also did not marry, probably owing to the scandal about this time in which Pembroke's name was linked with that of Mary Fitton. In 1604, several months after the death of the Earl of Oxford, his third and youngest daughter became the wife of Pembroke's brother, Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. It will be recalled that it was to these two brothers that the First Folio was dedicated in 1623.

Regarding that handsome and expensive volume, it is hard to believe that the printers published it on speculation: the usual theory, for it was too costly for many people to buy and half of those who could have paid the price that was necessarily charged for it were Puritans, fanatically opposed to the drama, whether written or played. The two Herberts, earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, rich favorites of King James, had, through the wife of Montgomery, a vital interest in keeping the plays alive and surely met the heavy cost of printing them.

Having shown that the circle of Lord Oxford's intimates included all courtiers whose names are generally connected with the name of Shakespeare, there remains only the name of Sir Francis Bacon to be considered. It is an interesting fact that he also was connected with Oxford, for he was a first cousin of the Earl's wife, Anne Cecil, and a close friend of the two Herberts. After Bacon's fall from the King's favor in 1621, he turned to his philosophical writings again and in 1622 and 1623 his works were being printed. As a person acquainted with the intricate problem of book publication, it was natural that his cousin, the Countess of Montgomery, should turn to him for advice and assistance in getting her father's plays published. Some of the printers' de-

vices used in decorating the Folio of 1623 would have been, quite logically, the same devices which appeared in the Bacon volumes of the same period.

The question as to why direct evidence on this problem of authorship has not appeared is not difficult to answer. In the beginning there was the author's desire for anonymity, which means that the number of persons who actually knew the facts was limited, though there is written evidence showing concern regarding an anonymous author during the decade of the 1590's. The great fire of London in 1666 and before that time the burning of playhouses, including manuscripts of plays, instigated by Puritan fanatics, destroyed many records.

A very different kind of destruction will perhaps account for the loss of evidence of the most vital kind. John Payne Collier, in spite of some serious misdeeds in early manhood, was for many years highly regarded as a Shakespearean scholar, and had the run of the Bodleian Library and other repositories of Elizabethan manuscripts, until 1853, when he was first suspected of literary forgeries, particularly in connection with evidence bearing on the Shakespeare plays. It has since been definitely proved that his so-called "discoveries" of manuscript evidence, reports of which he published between 1831 and 1849, were mostly fabrications. Because of his reputation for scholarship, he was permitted almost unlimited freedom in the handling of original manuscripts, with what today we would consider an amazing lack of supervision. As during many years he worked at will among the most famous collections of Elizabethan papers, committing endless forgeries without being detected until long afterwards, it is a natural presumption that he destroyed those documents which did not fit in with his ideas, a presumption, which, strong as it is, is unfortunately beyond proof. As Collier began his forgeries some twenty years before the Stratfordian theory was challenged by the first skeptics, proponents of the Baconian theory, he must have discovered among the old records evidence to show that Shakspeare of Stratford was not the author of the plays that bore his name. Such are the documents he would have destroyed, a thing far easier to do than his fabrication of the elaborate forgeries he worked upon for twenty years or more. We may ask, why did he prefer to forge documents to uphold the Stratfordian theory rather than announce his discovery that a different man was the author of the great plays.

Our surmise must be that, having worked for so many years on the theory that the Stratford man was the author of the plays, he had built an edifice that he could not bear to topple to the ground, and rather than do it, he preferred to patch his upper stories and keep his knowledge of the foundation weakness to himself.

Until recently so little was known of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford that scholars have taken the easiest way and, if they had any occasion to refer to him at all, have spoken of him as "Burghley's ill-conditioned son-in-law," repeating a phrase they found in earlier books, without going to the trouble to determine if such all expression were based on facts or to learn upon what his difficulties with his wife or her father were based; to learn that, as a victim of Hatton's envy and jealousy, he was naturally and rightly resentful; to learn that his quarrels with his cousins, the Howards, were largely due to righteous indignation over their political intrigues against the Queen.

Evidence available today shows that scandalous reports set going by secret enemies brought about the separation of the Earl and his Countess, to the grave concern of her father; that, as the events of the next few years unrolled, along with the Earl's fall from the favor of the Queen, the

same secret enemies appear to have been behind the curtain; that, with the curtain now drawn aside, it is found that the men who, by scandalous whisperings and innuendo, brought about his downfall, were closely associated with those who were openly inimical to him, self-seekers, envious of his place of favor with the Queen.

Evidence that the Earl was grossly libeled may be found within the covers of one book, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (1928), written by Captain B. M. Ward, after five years of research in England's archives, in response to a demand for more knowledge of the man acclaimed by Mr. J. Thomas Looney in 1920 as the true author of the Shakespeare plays in an epoch-making book, "*Shakespeare Identified in Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*." The two books just mentioned constitute the foundation works upon which all later writings upon the theory of the Oxford authorship of the Shakespeare plays have been based and must be based. My own essays on this subject in the past and in the pages which follow would never have been written had it not been for the basic evidence contained in them. My *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* and *The Satirical Comedy, Loves Labors Lost* have shown the amazing number of topical allusions to be found in the plays, when those plays are placed with some approximation to the dates when they were originally written; several years, on the average, earlier than the Stratfordian theory places them.

The present volume deals rather with the life of Lord Oxford and shows his equipment for the part played by the greatest dramatist ever known through most of the dramatic reign of the great Queen Elizabeth. It tells of his love and knowledge of history, mentioned by Arthur Golding; his love and knowledge of music, mentioned by Farmer; his sixteen months' travel on the Continent, of which a year was spent in Italy, and his speaking knowledge of the French and Italian languages; his foremost position as poet and dramatist, mentioned by contemporary critics; his knowledge of law gained as a student at Gray's Inn and increased as the ranking member of the second parliamentary committee of Triers of Petitions; his knowledge of the New World gained through acquaintance with the leading explorers of the day, shown by frequent investments in their voyages; his knowledge of flowers and plants, gained through his acquaintance with John Gerarde, famous herbalist and director of Lord Burghley's wonderful gardens; his knowledge of astronomy and astrology, gained through his acquaintance with Dr. Devine; his knowledge of horses and horsemanship, shown by his success in the various tournaments in which he took part; all of these things, and others too numerous to mention, made up the mental equipment of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.

Students of the Shakespeare plays are well aware that just such mental equipment was necessary to the author of those plays. That the author was a genius is a conclusion accepted by all but this result was attained by his transcendent ability to assemble fragments of his widespread knowledge in such a fashion that they fitted together like the parts of a complicated machine, and were welded together by his exquisite understanding of words and his musical appreciation of rhythm. Genius in drama must have such a combination; it does not leap, like Minerva, full-armed from the head of Jove. Carlyle has said, "Genius means the transcendent capacity of taking trouble," but the tools of knowledge must be acquired before they can be used by a writing genius. Even the ordinary business or social letters of Lord Oxford attest an unusual ability to express his thoughts clearly and directly, an accomplishment seldom found within the grasp of his greatest contemporaries.

Queen Elizabeth had a great affection for her young ward, whom she had known from earliest childhood, and from the time he came of age Lord Oxford was an object of envy among certain jealous courtiers. As the years passed, this envy grew into a policy of settled intrigue against his influence with the Queen. His hereditary right to the office of Lord Great Chamberlain—thus the premier earl of England—made his position highly important; and he was by marriage closely related to Lord Burghley, the great Lord Treasurer, whose power was the greatest single influence in England. Both being important officials, it is difficult to tell whether certain inimical actions were based on personal malice or were a part of the political opposition ordinarily aligned against Burghley, represented by Leicester, Hatton, and the Howards. The backbiting set in motion by these enemies during his early manhood, recognized by both Oxford and Burghley at the time, and declared by them to be based on tales without foundation, has continued down through the centuries to give Oxford an evil reputation. It is unfortunate that only the malice of his enemies has been repeated, for an examination of the characters of the men opposed to Oxford shows them to have been men of such blackguard types that his character shines like gold beside theirs.

In view of the recent discovery at Lubeck of a manuscript which shows that Thomas à Kempis was the translator and not the original author of *The Imitation of Christ*, for five centuries attributed to him (the credit for the original work being now given to Gerard Groote, who died of the plague in 1384, fifty-six years before à Kempis finished the translation), hope revives that a similar manuscript of one of the Shakespeare plays may still exist, and will be recovered eventually from some dark corner of one of the many repositories of English archives. Yet, even without precious direct evidence of such a manuscript or some equally important legal document, we must recognize the value of circumstantial evidence and know that it is in many **ways** stronger than direct evidence, upon the authenticity of which doubt can be cast by those disinclined to accept such evidence. When, moreover, circumstantial evidence is made up of a vast number of interlocking facts, each one confirming the other, we are compelled, even against our personal wishes, to accept the decision based upon it. The Oxford authorship of the Shakespeare plays is a theory built upon such an array of consistent testimony that its protagonists gladly submit the evidence to the world's unbiased readers. The complete story cannot be told in one small volume, but certain facts and theories here presented will contribute something to the larger work that will in time be written.