

THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP NEWS - LETTER.

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EDITORIAL

by Col: M.W. Douglas C.S.I. C.I.E.

President of the Shakespeare Fellowship.

We have bid "Vale" to "The Shakespeare Pictorial", and now extend our "Ave" to the "Fellowship News-Letter"; which will be circulated every second month hereafter.

In addition to the Editorial, our "Letter" will consist of one or more Articles, Occasional Notes, and correspondence; and contributions from our members will be welcome under any of these heads.

We anticipate many advantages therefrom. Apart from the unfettered freedom of opinion, hitherto unattainable in a public journal, and the circulation of interesting information constantly coming to our notice, we gain knowledge of the views of our members, hitherto, and regrettably so, an unknown quantity. As a result we may reasonably look forward to an increase in numbers.

Our founder Sir George Greenwood laid stress on the value of a Fellowship Journal. But our numbers, in those days, were few, and the cost prohibitive. Undoubtedly we missed thereby many valuable contributions from him. He was ever on the alert for new developments and few champions of orthodoxy cared to cross swords with him. Andrew Lang did so, and to his detriment ("Shakespeare Bacon and the Great Unknown".)

In sympathy with the leading Baconian critics - a member of their Society through not a convert - Sir George in his "Shakespeare Problem Restated" delivered the "coup de grace" to the Stratford case. It is admitted that Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Bright, Dickens, O.W. Holmes, Henry James, Mark Twain, and other distinguished men rejected the Stratford faith. James in fact said "that fellow Greenwood has finally settled the business!"

Again, Mathew Arnold, Poet, author, and critic of balanced judgement wrote:

"And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
Didst tread in earth unguess'd at - Better so!"

One is tempted to wonder what may be the considered views of the supporters of orthodoxy towards this brief and formidable list, and what defence is forthcoming for the Editors of the "Review of English Studies" who return to the publisher unopened any anti-Stratfordian book!

Our first contributions went to the "Hackney Spectator", and there for more than six years we sent a monthly article to the "Shakespeare Pictorial." The swing of the tide, however, controls all things; we have delivered our message; and it is well that we should pause.

It is certain that our Articles have been widely read and are in the main responsible for a tolerant and even sympathetic attitude toward the researches of the Fellowship.

Said a Reviewer:

"The Oxford case indeed, whether we accept it or not, cannot be ignored."

We may here after renew our contributions to the Press, but, we are not likely to abandon our "News Letter", which has come to stay.

SHAKESPEREAN ADVENTURES IN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES.

by PERCY ALLEN.

For some years past I had been seeking opportunity to visit Canada and the United States; partly from curiosity, but principally, I think, with the hope, and intention, of planting, in both those countrys, some fresh seeds of the Oxfordian faith, and the new interpretations of Shakespeare which must necessarily arise therefrom. Not since 1920 had I sent foot in the U.S.A.

I sailed from Southampton in the "Ascania", on September 26th, 1931, and landed at Quebec, on Sunday evening, October 4th, after a pleasant and uneventful voyage; but in that interesting old city I had no opportunity to do any Shakesperean work, excepting at one dinner-party, at the Military Club, where - after much questioning on my views about Shakespeare - one of the Judges of the Court of Quebec, the Hon: Justice Gibsone, shewed himself much interested. Both in Canada and the States my experience was that the legal minds took a keen, though always cautious, interest in my arguments and points of view.

On October 9th I took train to Montreal, where I promptly got into touch with Miss Martha Allan, the clever actress-dramatist who directed the Montreal Repertory Theatre, from the stage of which, on October 15th spoke on "English Drama from 1900 to the Present Day", appending, at the close of my speech, a brief statement of my Shakesporean faith, to which the Montreal newspapers gave more prominence, in their head-lines, than they did to the main thesis. Many of those present expressed interest in the Shakespeare question and to those who gave me their addresses, leaflets concerning the Fellowship, and our books, have already been sent out. A Montreal, equally with Quebec, those to whom I had sent letters of introduction showered kindness upon me - particularly the Dean of Quebec Brigadier General Mervyn Prior, and Miss Martha Allan.

At Ottawa, provided with valuable introductions from, among others Mr. Malcolm Morley - who had recently adjudicated the Dominion Drama Festival of Canada - and our London members, Mrs. Herridge, and Mr and Mrs Hamlet Philpot, I was kept even more busily engaged than at Montreal. There was the usual, and always enjoyable, round of lunches and dinners; and I was particularly indebted to Col. H.C. Osborne, a prominent citizen of Ottawa, who, despite many calls upon his time, interested himself much in my work, and invited me to develop my case, for Oxford as Shakespeare, at a dinner-party at the Colony Club, which I gladly consented to do. It was a male party; and among those present were Mr. George Stephens, principal correspondent of the "London Times" in Canada, two Judges of the High Court of Ottawa, and the Chief Justice of Canada, Sir Lysall Duff, who stayed for a part of the discussion, which followed the dinner. During my stay in the beautiful Canadian capital, I accepted an invitation from Mrs. Edith Buck, Head-Mistress of Elmwood School, to lecture to the mistresses, and the elder girls of her school, on "The Court of Queen Elizabeth" and, subsequently, on "Lord Oxford as Shakespeare", especially in relation to "Hamlet" and the Sonnets. The interest aroused by the series of these talks was very keen, among mistresses and pupils alike - an encouraging fact, seeing that Elmwood is one of the most prominent schools in the City.

The last week of October found me at Toronto, as the guest of our member, Mrs. W.S. Waugh, who is one of that Irish branch of the de Vere family, the Vere-Hunts - pronounced, I am told, "Vair" Mrs. Waugh gave a tea-party in her flat, after which I spoke on Oxford-Shakespeare, with discussion following. Subsequently Mrs. Waugh and I attended a dinner of the Toronto Shakespeare Society, presided over by Prof. Wilson Knight of Toronto University, the well known writer on Shakespeare, who was then rehearsing "A Winter's tale" for local production. He asked me to speak and I took the opportunity to tell the diners something of the historical events which are dramatized in the play - a view-point which, I think, greatly surprised most of those present who had not the remotest idea that "A Winter's Tale" was anything else than a work of fantastic imagination.

A few days later Mrs. Waugh and I were the guests of the Toronto Branch of the international P.E.N. Club. at a luncheon at which the chair was taken by the President of the Macmillan Publishing Company of Canada. I spoke, once more, on the topicalities of the Shakespeare plays, and tried to impress upon those present the importance of perceiving that many Shakespeare plays excepting, in part, certain historical ones - dramatized from first to last, actual people and events. Among those present, were Prof. Wilson Knight - who proposed a vote of thanks to the speaker - the distinguished Canadian poet, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, Prof. Pelham Edgar of Toronto University, and other men and women of letters resident in Toronto. Since leaving Canada, I have heard from Mrs. Waugh - among the kindest of hostesses, and the keenest of our members - that she, and others who are interested, are considering the possibility of founding a Branch of the Fellowship in Toronto. My own impression was that, had my stay in these Canadian cities been prolonged a little longer, I could soon have consolidated the work that, in the short time at my disposal, I could only begin to begin.

Meantime, our member Mr. Thomas O'Connor, of Concord, New Hampshire U.S.A. with whom I had long been in correspondence, had been working assiduously, as my honorary Agent, arranging meetings for me in the United States, with the result that, before I had been more than three hours across the border, I met, at Hanover, New Hampshire, Mr. O'Connor himself and several of the Professors from Dartmouth College, which is among the oldest and most distinguished Universities in America. There, after tea in the presence of many Professors and undergraduates, I spoke, from the Oxfordian view-point, upon "Hamlet" and the Sonnets, with an animated discussion following. Subsequently, some half dozen of the Professors invited Mr. O'Connor and myself to dine with them at the local hotel, where the Shakespearean discussion was continued until a late hour. "We have had a grand evening" was Mr. O'Connor's comment. certainly the occasion was, as the phrase goes "historic"; for never before, so far as I know, had any University, in any English-speaking country, opened its academic gates to an Oxfordian! Among many whom it was a real pleasure to meet at this dinner-table Professor W.B. Drayton Henderson, whose introductory notes to "The book of the Courtier" by Castiglione (Everyman Edition) have long been familiar, and useful, to me.

From Dartmouth Mr. O'Connor accompanied me to Concord, where I spent the following evening, at St. Paul's School, one of the best known in America, and - with Groton School - corresponding, one might almost say, to our own Eton and Harrow. We were shown round by Mr. Alington, son of the Dean of Durham; and later we dined in the great hall, before attending an interesting meeting of the St. Paul's School Literary Society, at which the boys, with Mr. Chittenden presiding, read literary compositions of their own.

Subsequently I spoke to the boys, and to a number of masters and their friends on "Twelfth Night", as a topical play dealing with the Alencon marriage etc. At first I was a little anxious as to the reception I was likely to get; but I need not have been so; for very seldom, in a long and varied experience of public speaking, have I had a warmer reception. The boys were excited by what they heard; and so, I think, were some of their masters. Mr. Chittenden said things that were most gratifying, though modesty forbids me to set them down here. Recently, in a letter to Captain Ward., Mr. O'Connor tells us that, ever since our Oxfordian incursion upon them, St. Pauls School has been in something of a turmoil over this Shakespeare business, and is staging an Oxford-Shakespeare debate. We fluttered some dove-cote in Corioli; and the boys are eagerly seeking further information.

After Concord came Manchester, where, as the guest of Mr. Louis P. Benezet, I spoke at the Public Library, with Mr. Benezet in the chair. Again, after a rather slow start, the meeting was much interested; and there followed an animated discussion, with many questions asked. Since then, my host - a prominent citizen of Manchester - has interested himself deeply in the Oxford-Shakespeare subject, which, he confesses, has eclipsed his other hobbies. He is already a member of the Fellowship, and is contemplating the preparation of a text book upon the subject, for use in schools. Mr. Benezet's interest was first aroused by our indefatigable member, Mr. O'Connor.

Boston came next; and although I had no "full-dress" lectures there I was able, it seems, to do something for our cause in that beautiful city principally among the professors of Boston University, many of whom I met at the University Club, where we had some interesting after-lunch discussions. I had no time to visit Harvard University; but Mr. O'Connor kindly arranged for me a drawing-room meeting, at the house of Mr. and Mrs. R.R. Seeber, Cambridge (Mass), not far from the University. We had an enjoyable evening and, I think, a successful one. Our subject was introduced by Mr. O'Connor in a very apposite speech. Another Boston resident interested in our work is Mr. F. Allen Burt of Brookline, to whom I have sent some books. Mr. and Mrs. Burt took me for a delightful motor-drive to the rock at Plymouth, which marks the spot where the Pilgrim Fathers landed in The Mayflower in 1620. Thinking of what America must have been, no more than some 316 years ago, three years only before the publication of the first Shakespeare folio, and comparing it with the populous industrial country that it is today - the change, in so short a time, seems almost incredible.

From Boston I took train direct to New York, which was an even fuller city than usual, by reason of an exhibition of motor-cars, which was being held in Central Park.

With some difficulty I got a room at the Bristol Hotel, in 48th Street; and soon settled down in that amazing city - which I last visited in 1920 - under the tutelage of our valued member, Mrs. Edward Hardy Clark, who showered kindness upon me during the whole of my stay in the Capital. Together, we had an interesting afternoon at The Imperial Theatre, where Mr. Leslie Howard - relatively a novice in Shakespeare - was playing "Hamlet", undaunted by the fact that Mr. John Gielgud - generally held to be easily first among the Shakesperean actors of today, - was playing the same part at the Empire Theatre, where Irving and Ellen Terry acted sometimes in New York. Mr Howard gave a performance so full of charm, that the audience drew from him a speech, in which he gently rebuked the press-critics for some rather harsh notices. Almost continuously, I believe, throughout the run, his audiences insisted upon an after-curtain speech from the actor; but, during a brief talk I had with Mr. Howard, in his dressing-room, I gathered that he was rather despondent over his reception, as a whole; though the fact, as I see it, is, that no actor, however gifted, can expect, without long experience, to make a genuine success in the great Shakesperean leads. Mr. Howard's was a pleasing, and delightful performance; but it was technically immature, especially when compared with that of Mr. Gielgud, at an adjoining theatre.

Mrs. Clark had originally offered me her drawing room, at 470 Park Avenue, for a Shakesperean meeting; but she kindly decided to take, instead, the beautiful Ball Room of the Colony Club, also in Park Avenue, to which were invited a number of her friends, and other residents of New York City who were likely to be interested, for an afternoon talk on "Hamlet" (Nov. 16) - this play almost choosing itself, as my subject, since two distinguished actors were presenting the Prince of Denmark, in the Broadway district not far away. There was a large audience, which included, besides several of our New York members four or five actors and actresses from Mr. Leslie Howard's company, among whom were my old friend, Mr. Wilfrid Walter (the King), Mr. Stanley Lathbury (First Grave-Digger) and others. Mrs. Clark opened the proceedings, with an excellent speech, a copy of which I have sent to our Hon. Sec., who will be pleased to send it to any who may be interested. Our hostesses words were a general introduction to the case for Oxford as Shakespeare, as a preliminary to my own talk, in which I tried to show that the "Hamlet" play, and Shakespeare's sonnets were both unmistakably, the autobiographical work of Lord Oxford, the original of Hamlet-Shakespeare, as surely as Lord Burleigh was the original of Polonius. Among those who took part in the subsequent discussion were Messrs Wilfrid Walter and Stanley Lathbury, and our two members, Mr. Martin Heydon, and Mr. Paul Munter, the subject being further thrashed out during the tea and cocktail party that followed. If all enjoyed the afternoon as much as I did, the function was certainly a success.

Among those who regretted their inability to be present were the well known Shakesporean scholar, Dr. Tannenbaum, and Mr. James Gray, the Literary Editor of the "New York Sun", with whom, however, at his office in Broadway, I had some talk upon the Oxford-Shakespeare case, in which Mr. Gray has been interested partly through his meetings with, and the books of, Mrs. Clark, and, in part, through letters from some of our members, myself included, that have appeared in the "Times Literary Supplement". Before leaving New York I was interviewed by a representative of The "New York Sun", which - on the day that I sailed for England, in the "Laconia" - published nearly a column of matter, which, I thought, was very cleverly and accurately put together, in view of the complexity of the subject, to a young journalist who was being introduced to the Oxford case for the first time. The reporter told me that this was the first occasion on which Shakesporean unorthodoxy had been made convincing and intelligible, to him. Shortly before my departure, I had an interesting talk with Mr. Martin Heydon, who has supplied me, then and since, with some very interesting and valuable notes upon certain obscure topical allusions in the plays. Personal contact with our members abroad was one of the great pleasures of this trip.

My journey home, in the "Laconia" - a very comfortable Cunard liner provided a most enjoyable rest; but I found occasion to slip in, here and there, a little Shakesporean propaganda, which may eventually bear fruit. Indeed, some of my fellow passengers were so interested that a lecture or two on board, would, I think, have drawn good audiences, without seriously rivalling the official cinema. One young lady passenger who, having overheard a part of a conversation, "asked for more" - turned out to be Miss Coghill, an actress who was crossing the Atlantic to play Regan, in "King Lear", for Mr. Newgent Monk, at the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich.

Looking back upon the tour, my general impression is that audiences both in Canada and the States, are more open-minded concerning Shakespeare than are corresponding audiences over here; and that the Oxford case is destined to make much progress there during the next few years. All being well, I propose to repeat the tour, or a part of it, during the autumn of 1938.

In conclusion, I want to express my warmest thanks to all those many friends, in Canada and the States, who vied with one another in offering me hospitality, courtesy, and kindness. No space remains for a long list of names; but I must mention, in particular, our three members, Mrs. W.S. Waugh, of Toronto; Mrs. Edward Hardy Clark, of New York; and that indefatigable toil my unofficial agent in the U.S.A. - Mr. Thomas O'Connor, of Concord, to whom much of my gratitude is due.

OCCASIONAL NOTES.

We are glad to hear that Miss Greenwood has completed her condensed version of Sir George Greenwood's "The Shakespeare Problem Re-stated", which was an unanswerable and devastating attack on the Stratfordian position.

Dr. A.S. Cairncross, the author of "The Problem of Hamlet", has been in correspondence with us, and has read some of our literature. The main points of the Oxford hypothesis were brought to his notice, and also the strong case for Raleigh as the author of "The Tempest". He remains unconvinced, but without making any comment on the evidence. He thus maintains that "Hamlet" was written by Shakespeare when twenty-four years of age, explaining that "it is not your middle-aged men who write tragedies, world-weariness is a phase of heaviest incidence in youth". But the issue is not one of moods, but of knowledge of life, self-characterisation and expression. Professor Lefranc observes that the psychology of Dr. Cairncross must be limited and elementary!

An interesting correspondence between Mr. Percy Allen and Dr. Cairncross is now taking place in the "Times Literary Supplement" - Mr. Allen pointed out that two members of the Shakespeare Fellowship - Admiral Holl and Mrs. Clark - were the first to date "Hamlet" in the mid fifteen-eight thus doing away with the necessity for the entirely imaginary "Ur-Hamlet" supposed to have been written by Kyd.

Mr. F.L. Ranson, of 38 Market Place, Lavenham, Suffolk, a most enthusiastic Oxfordian, has just sent us details of an interesting find he has made in the Parish Register of the village of Shimpling. This village is about two miles from the Manor House of the de Vere family at Lavenham. It appears that from 1554 to 1582 the Rector of Shimpling was the Rev. Hugo Evans. It is significant that when Lord Oxford wrote "Merry Wives of Windsor", one of the characters was the Rev. Sir Hugh Evans.

Mr. Ranson has recently published a small illustrated booklet about Lavenham and its history, dedicated to the late Col. B.R. Ward C.M.G., and with a foreword by Col. M.W. Douglas C.S.I., C.I.E., President of the Shakespeare Fellowship. Lavenham is one of the chief centres of the de Vere country. Members who would like to buy copies, price 1/3d. post free are invited to write direct to Mr. Ranson at the above address.

We are delighted to hear that Mr. E.P. Ray who for the past six years has so generously given us a page in his monthly "The Shakespeare Pictorial", has been elected Mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon for 1937. We are sure that all members of the Shakespeare Fellowship will join in wishing Mr. Ray every success during his term of office.

Congratulations to our member, Captain C.S. Clarke, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, who has been awarded the M.C. in the recent operations in Palestine.

Col. Douglas is shortly issuing two proof etchings of Hedingham Castle and St. Augustine Tower, Hackney. Details will shortly be circulated for information.

Will members please address all communications for publication in, concerned with, "The Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter", to :-

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who will forward them to the Editorial Committee.