

THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP

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NEWS FROM AMERICA

In the May issue of the "News-Letter" we drew attention to an excellent article, entitled "Elizabethan Mystery Man," by one of our members, Mr Charles Wisner Barrell, which appeared in the "Saturday Review of Literature" (New York, May 1st). In introducing the article, the Editor of the "Saturday Review of Literature" wrote:

The theory that the Earl of Oxford wrote the plays usually attributed to William Shakespeare has for some years had an increasing vogue. The "Saturday Review" believes that the movement has gained enough momentum to interest its subscribers, and publishes Mr Barrell's summary of the theory for the literary record. It has asked Professor Elmer Edgar Stoll of the University of Minnesota to reply to Mr Barrell's article in a discussion of the Oxford theory and similar hypotheses. Mr Stoll's article will be published next week. - Editor

Mr Barrell's article was a very clear and concise statement of the salient points of the case for Lord Oxford as "Shakespeare," based largely on Mr J. Thomas Looney's famous book "Shakespeare Identified." In the following issue (May 8th) Professor Stoll attempted the impossible task of replying to Mr Barrell. It goes without saying that his reply was a complete failure. He made no attempt to meet any of the vital points raised by Mr Barrell - indeed, he could not, for he had not even troubled to read "Shakespeare Identified."

Mr Barrell's counter-reply to Professor Stoll appeared in the issue for May 22nd. It is so good that we make no apology for reproducing it here in full:

Professor Stoll seems to argue, if I read him aright, that disagreement with the orthodox Stratford canon is a type of "heresy" that in itself shows sub-normal reasoning powers on the part of the sceptic. If such

be the case, we must revise our opinion of the mentalities of such men as Henry Hallam, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lord Palmerston, John Bright, Mark Twain, Henry James, and Dr Sigmund Freud (to name but seven out of seventy times that number), for every one of the above-mentioned has put himself on record as a vigorous disbeliever in the Stratfordian synthesis.

Professor Stoll has evidently not troubled himself to read the basic books of Oxfordian research, which are Looney's "Shakespeare Identified" and Ward's "The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford." Instead he devotes more than half his space to laboured ridicule of a phase of Percy Allen's controversy with the late John Drinkwater. This reminds me of the time that one Alf Landon inaugurated a political campaign with a fighting talk on maple syrup. It is an ancient device of the political propagandist, adopted by the reviewer, and is known as "red herring drag" or "shoving the sham sample."

As a matter of fact, some thirty books have been published in corroboration and amplification of Looney's original findings. Dr Gerald H. Rendall, former Principal of Victoria College, University of Liverpool, and for fifteen years Headmaster of the Charterhouse School, has written three of these. Dr Gilbert Slater, Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford University, a prominent member of the British Royal Historical Society and a recognized authority on Elizabethan economics, is the author of another important contribution in "Seven Shakespeares." Mrs Eva Turner Clark's "Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays" can be found in every well-equipped library specializing in Shakespearean research. In airily dismissing her work as an alternative for bridge or backgammon, Professor Stoll's "criticism" runs true to form. I wonder whether he has actually read any of these books. Even Percy Allen's pamphlet seems to have reached him at second-hand, by way of John Drinkwater.

The Professor becomes difficult to follow at times, especially when he endeavours to confuse the Oxfordian case with the Baconian theory. The evidence is of a fundamentally different type, Oxfordians depending in no important particular upon cryptograms, ciphers, or Rosicrusian symbols. Edward de Vere's personality, his

known activities and writings, as well as the letters of his relatives and associates, and the comments of his contemporaries, answer hundreds of Shakespearean questions that remain mere conjectures in the minds of Stratfordians and Baconians alike. Dr Stoll would have us believe that the Stratford man's life is a thoroughly documented record, whereas such is by no means the case. George Saintsbury refers to the orthodox life-story as "the great Perhaps."

Professor Stoll takes me to task because I do not tell him forthwith why it was that Lord Oxford never came forward to claim credit for the immortal plays. It is a leading question and one that will not be flinched under proper jurisdiction. From the vasty ocean of the Public Record office in London we have recently dredged up several documents which go far to explain this important circumstance. I have also completed of late at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C., an investigation into another phase of the mystery which should prove equally interesting. The main reason why it seems inadvisable to blurt out these matters at this time is a very practical one. My literary agent won't let me.

Ignoring the chief point of my argument in comparing similarities in "situation plus phraseology," as disclosed in Oxford's 1584 letter to Burghley and Shakespeare's Sonnet 121, Professor Stoll finds only the Biblical reference worthy of comment. In one particular, I am glad to acknowledge his correction. The phrase "I am that I am" does appear in the Geneva Bible of 1560. Dr Stoll states very positively that Shakespeare read it there. I will agree that the author of Sonnet 121 may have done so. Arguing backwards - as all Stratfordians do - from the works to their creator - that would be the natural assumption. But there is not one scintilla of personal evidence to show that Will Shakespere of Stratford ever owned or read a Geneva Bible and nobody knows this better than Professor Stoll himself. On the other hand, if he will turn to page 33 of Ward's "The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford," he will find this transcription from a record of Lord Oxford's expenditure during 1569 and 70:

"To William Seres, stationer, for a Geneva Bible,

gilt, a Chaucer, Plutarch's works in French, with other books and papers 2. 7. 10."

Here in one entry we have three books mentioned as the personal property of the literary Earl, each one of which is "known" by Stratfordians to have been "read by Shakespeare." Yet no record exists to show that any book of any type was ever owned by the Stratford man.

Parallels in word imagery between Oxford's writings and Shakespeare's mean little or nothing, says Professor Stoll. By the same token, I suppose, similarities in design, colour-treatment, or brush-strokes count for nothing in identifying a painter's works. Textual affinities are certainly of paramount importance in tracing questionable literary identities. What, may I ask "is" literature if not text? Lord Oxford's letters and other writings are studded with Shakespearean ideas expressed in the distinctive phraseology that sets Shakespeare's work apart. To present Kyd, Spenser, Lyly, and others as definite originators from whom Shakespeare "borrowed" is no real answer, because it can be shown that Oxford was using the Shakespearean imagery and word-patterns years before any of these men came to the fore.

If the proponents of orthodoxy could show us one - only one - letter or other personal document from the hand of the rustic Will containing a single Shakespearean phrase, no question of his responsibility for the creation of the poems and plays would ever have been raised.

Charles Wisner Barrell.

New York City.

The sequel (so far) is an admirable letter which appeared in the issue for June 5th from Miss Carolyn Wells, the well-known American novelist, whose charming books are no doubt familiar to many members of the Fellowship. Her letter is given in full below:

I don't know when I have had a more joyous thrill than when I opened your paper of May first, and found Mr Barrell's paper on Edward De Vere.

I have been a constant student of the Oxford-Shakespeare question since 1920, and have much

literature on the subject, following upon Mr Looney's book. "Shakespeare Identified" is not only a fascinating book, it is clear and convincing argument that cannot be ignored or disbelieved by a thinking reader.

Of those who don't "care" who wrote Shakespeare, Mr Looney calmly states, "Indifference to the personality of the author is usually but the counterpart of an indifference to the writings themselves." So of these people and of those who persist in believing in the Stratford Shakespeare, we can but say, as was said of Ephraim, "he is joined to his idols, let him alone." But remember, when the sneering and jeering takes place, to inquire if the dissenters have read and studied the subject exhaustively. A negative reply will automatically disqualify them for participation in the argument. And a negative reply you will surely get, for any one who has read Mr Looney's book with an open mind has an open mind no longer, he is a disciple of Mr Looney and the Shakespeare Fellowship, which now has branches in every civilized country.

When I read Mr Barrell's paper in the "S. R. L." of May first, I was moved to write to the editor, asking him to beware of articles by contributors who had not read "Shakespeare Identified." Then I thought it would be an unnecessary warning. Then the next issue appeared, with a paper written in the well-known vein of the Stratfordian adherents, and I decided it would be more help for our Oxford side than if it had not been printed! And I feel justified in my decision by the delightful page in a recent issue, whereon Mr Barrell agrees that Mr Stoll gives no evidence of having read the two basic books of the controversy.

The greatest literary question of the ages has been opened up by the "Saturday Review of Literature," and for that gesture, no praise is too high.

Carolyn Wells.

New York City.

The "Saturday Review of Literature" is the first important literary periodical which has opened its pages to a really serious consideration of the Oxford theory. All members of the Shakespeare Fellowship, we are sure, will be most grateful to

the Editor, and will look forward to further developments in the future.

THE ANNUAL DINNER

by D. F. Allen, B.A., Assistant Keeper of Coins
and Medals, British Museum.

The Annual Dinner of the Shakespeare Fellowship was held on Sunday June 6th, at 7 p.m. at the Florence Restaurant, London. The dinner was well attended; forty-five members and guests were present, but unfortunately, several officers of the Fellowship were absent through ill-health and other reasons. In the absence of the President, Colonel M. W. Douglas, C.S.I., C.I.E., Mr Percy Allen, and Captain Ward, Mr Ernest Allen kindly took the chair.

The Chairman, in his speech, after welcoming the guests, and commiserating the sick, proceeded to give an account of the progress of the Oxford theory in the last year. He stressed the importance of the discovery that the real Shakespeare was buried in Westminster Abbey. In discussing Professor Cairncross's book on "Hamlet," he observed that even out of the mouths of its avowed enemies, the theory continued to gain unintentional support. In more practical matters of propaganda he mentioned Mr Percy Allen's American tour: he explained the disappearance of the Fellowship's column in the "Shakespeare Pictorial"; he welcomed the birth of the Fellowship's own "News-letter"; and spoke of the interest in the subject now being taken by the "East Anglian Magazine." Summing up, he emphasized that the protagonists of the Oxford theory had nothing to hide and nothing to fear. He threw out a universal challenge to the learned world to refute their discoveries.

Mr Louis Golding, who spoke next, is a direct descendant of Lord Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding, the famous translator of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and other works. Mr Golding, in a speech teeming with subterranean wit, exploded the myth that Arthur Golding had ever been Lord Oxford's tutor. He then proceeded to show a remarkable familiarity with all the less creditable achievements of his illustrious ancestor, which included such diverting incidents as debt, fraud, and prison. The pleasure which he obviously took in such family skeletons was, however, more than compensated by his equally extensive familiarity with Arthur Golding's translation of the two hundred sermons of Calvin.

He was followed by Mr Adamson, whose lectures on Shakespeare are well-known. He was perhaps the most convincing advocate of the Oxford theory heard in the evening. He approached the problem from the point of view of interpretation. He explained, from his own experience, how the Oxford theory enabled him to lecture with understanding on Shakespearean subjects which he had previously had to gloss over. It freed him from the sense of hypocrisy which he had hitherto felt.

Mr Shaw Desmond began by disarming his audience. Besides being an Irishman he was also a creative artist, and he could therefore say nothing that was expected of him. He took the line of orthodox scepticism, but he clearly had been tempted to play with fire. While admitting grudgingly that there was something to be said for the Oxford theory, he had nevertheless been caught by the glamour of the word "genius." He believed passionately in the unaccountability of genius. There was, however, one issue on which he felt himself wholly in sympathy with the Oxfordians: he shared their bitter and uncompromising hostility to The Professors, who, it appeared, persistently refused to take seriously his own metaphysical speculations.

The last speaker, Mr George F. Holland, President of the O.P. Club, gave a spirited defence of The Professors as such: he even maintained that a Professor could be intellectually honest! He then reverted to the "genius" theme, which always plays an important part in the speeches at the Annual Dinner. To him, genius riding rough-shod over ignorance would always provide a more inspiring picture than birth and education fulfilling themselves.

The Chairman, declaring the dinner at an end, maintained that genius affected only the quality, and not the subjects, of composition. Poets, even when geniuses, were within the sphere of their own experience. The dinner ended at 11 o'clock.

OXFORD - DAVENANT - SHAKESPEARE

by Miss M. Kirsten Goodman

William Davenant, the 17th century poet who wrote an "Ode in Remembrance of Master William Shakespeare," claimed to spring from the ancient family, the Davenants of Sible Hedingham.

This apparently insignificant biographical detail, given in a footnote in the chapter on Davenant and Cowley in "From

Shakespeare to Pope," by Edmund Gosse, is charged with interest for any who believe that Lord Oxford wrote the Shakespeare plays and who feel that some explanation must be found as to how the authorship could have been planted so successfully and so permanently on the man of Stratford. (The reason why it should have been done is not to be touched on here.)

Knowing the very strong tradition connecting William Shakespeare of Stratford in friendship with the Davenants of the Crown Tavern at Oxford (some versions even making their second child, William, baptised in 1606, Shakespeare's natural son), we can with no great stretch of invention or imagination find a possible meeting place at the Crown, at some date after 1586, for the travelling countryman William Shakespeare, and the noble lord, Edward de Vere, who, whenever visiting Oxford, might conceivably spend an hour or two in the establishment presided over by a native of his own locality, Castle Hedingham in Essex.

Supposing Lord Oxford and Shakespeare to have been distant relations, as some hold, the introduction would be the more easily explained; and supposing Shakespeare to have been earning his living in London, according to tradition, in some capacity at the theatre, this would again provide a point of contact which might be stressed by "mine host," a man, as Gosse remarks, "who possessed an unusual taste for plays, playwrights, and everything connected with acting." Any contact thus established might well lead to further meetings either at Oxford or in London.

William Davenant, born in 1606, could not, of course, have known the 17th Earl of Oxford, but his father, John Davenant, might have acquired his interest in the drama from early associations in the neighbourhood of Castle Hedingham.

Whatever the facts, here is a field for enquiry which may or may not yield to further discoveries. This slight reference by Gosse to the Davenant origin is followed up in the same chapter by other material of possibly great importance to Oxfordians. It is related that the subject of Davenant's Shakespearean paternity was introduced "at the dinner-table of Lord Oxford" by Pope, who quoted Betterton as his authority for a certain detailed anecdote relating to William Davenant as a child, in connection with William Shakespeare. This dinner party must have occurred more than a century after the death of the 17th Earl, the title having already passed to a collateral line, but

the repetition of the three-fold connection, i.e. Oxford-Davenant-Shakespeare cannot but arrest attention. Could it have been that Pope's interest in the works of Shakespeare had created in him the desire to probe behind the scenes, and was it a mere coincidence that he should have raised the subject in the house of the then Earl of Oxford?

From these enthralling but possibly, in this connection, meaningless anecdotes, Gosse passes on to the actual biography of William Davenant, and here again it is interesting to learn that, probably in 1624, he was taken into the service of Lord Brooke, once the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, now an old man living "in considerable state at Brooke House, in London," where, as all Oxfordians know, the 17th Earl died 20 years earlier, his widow selling the house to Lord Brooke in 1609. May not young Davenant have heard gossip and reminiscences of the previous occupants of Brooke House, and of their doings? Fifteen years is not a very long time, and a young man might well be interested to learn of the affairs of one whose name had always been familiar, and whose birthplace was near his own family's original home. If there had been an important secret in Lord Oxford's life, might not Davenant have stumbled across it?

There can be no doubt that in these three instances - mere details in his intended theme - Gosse establishes for us this strange and persistent, though tenuous and remote, connection in fact between William Davenant and the habitations of the Earls of Oxford, and links it up with the convincing and equally persistent tradition of the Davenant-Shakespeare intimacy. Gosse refers to the Ode as "the very first verses which Davenant wrote at the age of eleven" (on the grounds, one supposes, that Shakespeare's death in 1616 caused their immediate composition), and adds: "This Ode is of no use to us; it is crammed with effete and monstrous conceits, but contains no single crumb of autobiographical evidence." A reading of the poem will prove at least the latter part of this sentence to be correct, but is it not possible that the very obscurity of the Ode itself, and the life history of the author and his family, may serve to illuminate the darkness that surrounds its subject? It should be noted as possibly limiting the implication in the above remarks, that Sir Aston Cokaine's Elegy on Michael Drayton, who died in 1631, contains the same imagery of the dried-up river, evidently a literary convention of the period. The whole short poem is interesting in this connection.

William Davenant may well prove a useful line of research in the attempt to establish the Oxfordian position.

OCCASIONAL NOTES

Congratulations to our member, Sir William Power, who was knighted on February 1st this year. We quote from a leading article in the "Hackney Gazette":

Hearty congratulations will be extended to Mr William R. Power, who has been created a Knight. It is definitely a case of an honour being conferred where an honour is due. Mr Power has grown old in the service of his native borough of Hackney, his interest in which has transcended all others. Its history and lore have become an obsession with him. He has read stories in stones, has almost gloated over every article and document which bore traces, however slight, of local antiquity - he possesses a home museum of his own which deserves a place in the municipal archives - and his lectures and writings on the ancient Hackney upon which he doted have delighted hundreds, if not thousands, of those who are not merely concerned with utilitarian present, but love to imbibe the atmosphere of the past, and to associate in imagination with the royal and other distinguished personalities and queer characters who once moved and had their being in the district.