

THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP

NEWS-LETTER

No. 10

July 1938

THE ANNUAL DINNER

by D. F. Allen, B.A., Assistant Keeper of Coins and Medals,
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The Annual Dinner of the Fellowship was held at the Florence Restaurant, London, on May 11th at 7 p.m. About fifty-one members and guests were present, including Miss Marjorie Bowen and Mr Hermon Ould, secretary of the P.E.N. Club. Our President, Col. M. W. Douglas, C.S.I., C.I.E., was in the chair.

The President, who spoke first, paid a tribute to the memory of the late Dr Gilbert Slater, Professor of Economics in London University, and a convinced Oxfordian, an appreciation of whose work appeared in the last "News Letter." He then reviewed the various books relating the authorship of Shakespeare's plays which had appeared in the year. He laid especial emphasis on the work of Professor Abel Lefranc, the protagonist of Lord Derby.

Mr Percy Allen, having pointed out that there was no longer a Stratfordian case to answer, gave instances of puzzles which the Oxford case could solve. He referred in particular to the problem of the Shakespeare portraits, which invariably depicted an aristocrat.

Mr Wilfred Walter, the well known actor, representing unofficially the dramatic profession, gave the guests an amusing interpretation of "Hamlet" through the eyes of an imaginative foreigner. Hamlet, he "proved," was a woman disguised as a man!

Mr Shaw Desmond agreed that 90 per cent of the arguments were on the side of Oxford, but he proceeded to show that arguments were not enough to account for the Shakespearean genius, a quality of transcendental origin. It remained uncertain whether Mr Shaw Desmond regarded 90 per cent of the arguments as enough to convince him.

Miss Henrietta Leslie, a Committee member and Hostess of the P.E.N. Club, described how inadequate she had always felt the traditional Shakespeare. To read an author's works without studying his life was unfair to both author and works.

Mr Francis Bligh Bond suggested that the quality of genius might be improved by the practice of automatic writing; he gave instances of poems written in this way on subjects of which their authors had no knowledge. He suggested this as an explanation both of Shakespeare's genius and his erudition.

Mr T. L. Adamson, having a more painstaking view of genius than the previous speaker, said that Shakespeare was the only major literary figure in Europe whose recorded life was not in any way reflected in his writings. He commended the Oxford Theory as the only workable solution to this difficulty.

Mr Ernest Allen returned to the subject of portraits of Shakespeare, and showed that at least eight portraits, traditionally known as "Shakespeare," in fact represented Lord Oxford.

Mr Percy Allen concluded the evening by reading a skit on the Oxford theory composed by an author who had the impertinence to cloak his anonymity behind the name of Lewis Carrol!

NEWS FROM HOLLAND

A Dutch correspondent writes:

The literary editor of Holland's most influential newspaper, the "Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant," gave on May 14th last a three-column review of Professor A. G. van Kranendonk's "Shakespeare en zijn tijd" ("Shakespeare and his period") published by E. Querido of Amsterdam.

After enumerating and commenting upon the Shakespeare literature produced in Holland during the last twenty-five years, the reviewer welcomes this new book written by a scholar of wide reading, who has made himself thoroughly conversant with Elizabethan literature, and now puts before the cultivated public of the Netherlands a convincing picture of England's "golden age."

The review, however, regrets the superficial attitude towards the all-important question of the Bard's identity. Mr van

Kranendonk derives his opinion on the Bacon hypothesis from reading J. M. Robertson (1912) on the subject, which seems a curious choice for an author seeking to enlighten his countrymen on its merits! Without making his readers acquainted with any anti-Stratfordian arguments, and without even mentioning any of the anti-Stratfordian writers, he concludes that "there is no reason to doubt"!

In his preface Mr van Kranendonk intimates that this book is only a preamble to all he has to say on Shakespeare. We may therefore assume that more remains behind; and it is to be hoped that he will seize such future opportunity of informing himself and his readers upon the results of modern research as is embodied in the works of so many members of the Shakespeare Fellowship. "The public in Holland has the right to be properly informed on the subject," says the "Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant."

A fortnight later the editor of "N.R.C." treated the identity problem himself in his newspaper. He compares de Vere and his group of dramatic authors to Richelieu's "Bureau Politique" of which Pierre Corneille was a member. He quotes Looney, Rendall, B. M. Ward, and Allen: he reminds van Kranendonk of K. D. W. Boissevain's essay ("Haagsch Maandblad", September 1931) proving de Vere to have been "the Man," and Shakspeare a "marionette": and lastly he discusses Professor Benezet's booklet "Shakspeare, Shakespeare, and de Vere." Without endorsing all Benezet's conclusions, he admires the latter's interpretation of the Sonnets, and describes the ingenious 'tests' to which Benezet submits various Elizabethan dramatists. Considering the authority and wide circulation of "Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant" these articles may have already counteracted Professor van Kranendonk's grave error.

It is hardly necessary to add that, in the biographical part of his book, van Kranendonk encounters all the contradictions, inconsistencies, and incongruities that exist between the actor's life and the Poet's work. As an example of his indifference to the problem of identity and chronology it may be pointed out that, whilst reproducing de Wit's drawing of the Swan Theatre, he appears ignorant of its importance in dating "Twelfth Night" (an admittedly mature comedy) at least as early as 1596. Moreover, although he quotes the inept interpretation of "Mr W. H." in the dedication of the Sonnets as "Mr William Himself," he fails to mention Colonel Ward's discovery of

William Hall as the "onlie begetter." Lastly, in enlarging upon the subject of the three pages of manuscript claimed to have been written by the Poet himself, he cites Sir E. Maunde Thompson, but fails to mention the refutations by Greenwood and Canon Rendall.

Undoubtedly, however, this book will stimulate the study of Shakespeare all through Holland and its overseas dominions, as well as in Flanders. From the point of view of general culture this is, of course, highly desirable.

NEWS FROM AMERICA

Dr Louis P. Benezet, one of our most enthusiastic members, and the author of "Shakspere, Shakespeare, and de Vere" (recently reviewed in the "News-Letter"), addressed a meeting last April at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. We understand that Dr Benezet is joining the faculty of Dartmouth College this autumn. The following is an extract from "The Dartmouth," the College newspaper, dated April 21st, 1938. Dartmouth is one of the oldest universities in U.S.A., and it is there that Mr Percy Allen delivered a lecture on the Oxford theory last year.

Speaking before the Ticknor Club yesterday evening in the Sanborn House Living Room, Louis P. Benezet '99 superintendent of schools in Manchester, and a prominent member of the Shakespeare Fellowship, upheld the assumption that Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, was author of the Shakespearian works.

De Vere was a member of the same group of distinguished contemporaries which included Sir Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon, who supposedly helped the author of the plays, but he has been overshadowed by Bacon until recent years. Oxford was a precocious genius who graduated from Oxford University at fifteen and was experienced in law, military tactics, literature, and drama which would give him the background necessary to compose the works attributed to Shakespeare.

The exact translation of classical manuscripts, the aristocratic viewpoint in all the plays, the use of technical military terms and law terms, the careless use of money, the familiarity with music in all of its forms, and the constant use of French and Italian phrases and

settings point more to the educated, polished Earl than the common business-like playwright, Shakespeare. More research is necessary before any true conclusions can be reached, but this claim solves many of the difficulties which are evident when the plays are attributed to Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE

"A la rencontre de 'William Shakespeare'."

By M. Mathias Morhardt

Reviewed by Colonel M. W. Douglas, C.S.I., C.I.E.

M. Morhardt has two objectives in view: the first, to convince his readers that Shakspere of Stratford was not the poet, the second to proclaim that France, in the person of M. Abel Lefranc, has discovered that the sixth Earl of Derby was "Shakespeare." Professor Lefranc contributes a preface to this interesting book, as already published in "La Revue Bleue."

We must congratulate M. Morhardt on his able treatment of the Stratford hypothesis, which is devastating, and cannot fail to make its mark on the French public interested in the problem. The evidence in favour of Derby is slight.

In the first chapter he cites "Richard II" as a political play, published anonymously in 1597, and under the name "Shake-spear" in 1598. The Queen recognized herself in the King, and made every effort to trace the author. She beheaded Sir Gilly Merrick for being concerned with the play, and imprisoned Sir John Hayward for referring to it in a scientific treatise. The Stratford claim in these circumstances is absurd. "Shake-spear" was an obvious pseudonym used, not by Derby, but probably by one of the noblemen supporting the Earl of Essex. M. Morhardt, however, omits to mention the Northumberland MS. (discovered in 1867), and the striking evidence therein connecting Bacon with the authorship of "Richard II" and "Richard III." We read that the Folio of 1623, in which Shakspere of Stratford. was substituted as the poet, is the origin of the Shakespeare problem; but the "uncultured" actors Heming and Condell, as editors, were the villains of the piece. They wrote the two epistles and were responsible for the falsehoods or suggestio falsi therein, and for the 20,000 errors in the plays. These are not the views of the Cambridge Editors nor of Sir George Greenwood. It is accepted by unorthodox scholars that Ben Jonson knew the secret, and that the Stratford man for some

uncertain reason was substituted as the poet. But Ben Jonson as the literary agent, probably paid, was undoubtedly responsible for the contents of the Folio, and wrote the two epistles. Heming and Condell, according to Drinkwater "church wardens and men of substance," were included to support the Stratford fiction. Their names were not in the original Will of January 1616; but were included in March after the drinking bout, in which Shakspeare joined Jonson and Drayton, and which resulted in his death. Buyers had to be found for the Folio, and Jonson was commissioned to provide a good advertisement; and the allusions to "the original copies in the handwriting of the poet," etc., were devices which prevail in the present day. The mistakes in the text, in some cases based on prompt copies, were due to bad quartos. But, as Greenwood writes, alluding to improvements in the text, "I only lay stress on the important fact that here again is conclusive evidence of the careful revision and re-writing of Shakespeare's plays, by whomsoever done," obviously by Jonson.

We are told that Ben Jonson was on good terms with the Derby family, and that the Earl of Derby was related by marriage to the "incomparable Paire," the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, the patrons of the Folio. But neither here, nor elsewhere, does the Group theory, which includes Derby, so ably put forward by the late Professor Gilbert Slater in his "Seven Shakespeares," come into the picture. Oxford's connexion with the Folio cannot be ignored. As a playwright his works were second to none; Meres recorded in 1598 that he was the best living author of Comedies; and Sir Sidney Lee states that he was a writer of "exquisite lyrics." Of the patrons of the Folio, and as such financially responsible, one of them was Oxford's son-in-law, while the other had been previously affianced to one of his daughters. Lady Pembroke, their mother, was his intimate friend.

M. Morhardt is on terra firma in Nérac, when he proves that the original "Love's Labour's Lost" was written by William Stanley after 1584, in which year his tutor Richard Lloyd published his "Pageant of the Nine Worthies," subsequently satirized in the play. The Earl of Derby is credited with the authorship of "Hamlet," which, as Professor Abel Lefranc states in his preface, reflected the life of Mary Queen of Scots, and the Darnley murder. Professor Lefranc dates the composition 1594. It is noted that the fourth Earl saw the castle of Elsinore in 1582; and the death of Hélène de Tournon, referred

to indirectly in "Love's Labour's Lost," provided the scene for Ophelia. M. Morhardt is not apparently acquainted with recent evidence regarding "Hamlet" as published by Dr Cairncross and Admiral Holland. It is now certain that there was only one "Hamlet," and it was written, as Admiral Holland shows, in 1583. Moreover, "Hamlet" is certainly an autobiography, and there is no evidence connecting Derby personally with the play.

In "Merry Wives" M. Morhardt identifies Justice Shallow as a J.P. named Proctor, who brought a Star Chamber case against the Earl of Derby. This is a reasonable solution, but one which was generally known.

In "Twelfth Night" we are told that Ffarrington, the steward of the Derby family, is not only Malvolio, but also Polonius and Oswald. Mr Allen prefers Sir Christopher Hatton as Malvolio, and that Polonius is Burleigh is generally accepted, even by Chambers.

"The Tempest," we are told, was written by Derby as his "Swan Song" in 1611, after recovering "la sérénité," which had been disturbed since 1594 by accusations that he was connected with the death of Ferdinando, his elder brother. But M. Morhardt has not considered Sir Walter Raleigh, whose collaboration with Lady Pembroke is very well supported by Professor Slater and Captain Ward. No one knew the West Indies, Bermuda, and Virginia, so well as Raleigh, and the knowledge of nautical terms is a feature of the play.

M. Morhardt then deals with the vocabulary and encyclopaedic knowledge of "Shakespeare." But, as Greenwood observed, neither vocabulary nor the knowledge belonged to one man. The Shakespearean works are the product of "many pens and a master mind," a support for the Group Theory.

M. Morhardt relies mainly on the researches of Professor Lefranc, Greenwood, and Dr Gray of Jesus College. He does not seem to have read Professor Georges Connes's valuable book, which is a mine of evidence.

Chronology is relevant in this problem, and we must remember that the Earl of Oxford was born in 1550, Derby in 1561, Shakspeare in 1564. With these dates in mind let us realize that "Midsummer Night's Dream" appeared in 1573, and that "Portia and the Merchants" (the forerunner of the

"Merchant of Venice") was acted as a Masque in 1580. The Sonnets (Chambers) were written from 1595 to 1600; and the author was past forty years of age, and lame.

May we suggest to M. Morhardt that he reads "Seven Shakespeares," by the late Professor Gilbert Slater, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.Hist.S. The views of this distinguished scholar and Professor of Economics may possibly interest so earnest and able a critic as M. Morhardt.

RECENT BOOKS ON THE SONNETS

by Percy Allen

Strangely anomalous though it may sound, the fact remains that the Shakespearean Sonnets present, to an Oxfordian, the easiest, and at the same time, one of the most difficult of all his interpretative tasks. The name of their author is "pike-staff" plain: he is the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, and no other. But when we come to identifications of the Fair Youth, the Dark Lady, and the relations of the poet to those two, there is room for wide difference of opinion. Some of us, for example, are satisfied that the Dark Lady is Queen Elizabeth; while others can scarcely listen with patience to any such suggestion.

Among the orthodox, opinion is equally and almost inexhaustibly divided, except upon certain points, viz: that the Dark Lady cannot be named with any certainty; that Shakespeare wrote nearly all the sonnets; and that they are printed, on the whole, in approximately the right order. Among Shakespearean students of all schools, the majority, it seems, accept Southampton as the Fair Youth, many of them holding that the "confined doom" refers to the Earl's conviction and imprisonment in 1601, after the collapse of the Essex rising. Two recent books are "Shakespeare's Sonnets," edited by Tucker Brook (Oxford University Press, 12s.), and "The Sonnets of Shakespeare, a Psycho-Sexual Analysis," by McClure Young, published by the author (Exchange National Bank Building, Columbia, Miss., U.S.A., 2 dollars), in which Mr Young repudiates utterly the long-held idea that sonnet XX admits sexual perversion between the poet and the young man.

A third recent book is "The Sonnets of Shakespeare and Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, together with

'A Lover's Complaint,' and 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' "(Oxford, Blackwell, 12s. 6d.), edited, with an Introduction, by Mr Walter Thomson. Mr Thomson, like Mr Young, scorns the perversion theory, and shows beyond dispute, that the word "passion," in Sonnet XX simply means an emotional outburst or poem, precisely as in Watson's "Passionate Century of Love" (1582), and in "Midsummer Night's Dream," where Thisbe's "passion" ends the play within the play. Mr Thomson, struck by the indisputable difference of poetical quality between the first sonnets and the last, has concluded, as his title tells, that the sonnets were the work of two men, Shakespeare (of Stratford) and Southampton, who "sent (them) to each other in small batches" - an opinion which will interest our member Mr G. W. Phillips, who in Chapter XI of his book, "Sunlight on Shakespeare's Sonnets," holds that the "Will" sonnets were written by the Fair Youth, who is Oxford-Shakespeare's own son, Will. Mr Phillips questions also the authenticity of several of the closing sonnets, from 142 onwards.

According to Mr Thomson, both "A Lover's Complaint," and "The Phoenix and the Turtle," are also aimed by Shakespeare at Southampton, the last named commemorating the Earl's fall in 1601, the year of that mysterious poem's publication. Mr Thomson believes that "Mr W. H." means "William Henry," the Christian names of the two collaborating authors: he will have nothing to do with the theory that the Fair Youth was Will Hughes or Hews, an actor - which is the solution advanced by Lord Alfred Douglas, who has recently supported it with vigour in the correspondence page of the "Times Literary Supplement."

Though I agree that a case can be argued by Oxfordians for Southampton as the Fair Youth, that theory seems to me to be utterly untenable by orthodox writers, upon chronological grounds alone. Oxford was born in 1550; Shaksper in 1564; and Southampton in 1573. Shakespeare in sonnet II tells us that he is forty years old, or over; and the verses, read as a whole, are obviously the work of a middle-aged man, writing to a young one. They date, by almost general consent, from the nineties, when Shakespeare was about thirty; but how can they be the work of a man of thirty, writing to a man no more than nine years younger? The disparity of age is quite insufficient. Shakespeare's sonnets, to my thinking, are, far more probably, as Mr Phillips holds, the work of a father, writing to his illegitimate son.

OCCASIONAL NOTES

The late Miss Esther Singleton's book "Shakespearian Fantasias" is now out of print; but Mrs FitzRoy Carrington (Miss Singleton's sister, and a member of the Fellowship) has a few copies left, and will be pleased to supply them at 6s. each (post free). The books are nicely bound, and the "fantasias" make delightful reading. Apply to: Mrs FitzRoy Carrington, 84 Northway, N.W.11.

At the request of several members, and with Col. Douglas's consent, Mr Percy Allen wrote to the Dean of Westminster suggesting that if permission were granted for the opening of Spenser's tomb, each London Shakespeare Society should be invited to send a representative. The Dean's reply is as follows:

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for your letter of June 4th, and for the suggestion which it contains. The actual fact is that I have not as yet given any definite permission for the opening of Spenser's tomb, and in any case I fear that if we do open it, it will be impossible for a variety of reasons to invite representatives to be present.

THE "SUPPLEMENT" TO THIS "NEWS-LETTER"

With this issue of the "News-Letter" there is, for the first time, a "Supplement." The publication of this Supplement has been made possible thanks to the generosity of the author, Mr J. Shera Atkinson, who has defrayed the expenses, and who is a long-standing member of the Fellowship.

When the "News-Letter" was launched eighteen months ago the editorial committee found themselves confronted with the limitations of finance. Broadly speaking, our income will only permit of a "News-Letter" of ten pages (say 4,500 words) published bi-monthly (i.e. six times a year). It was felt that most of this space should be devoted to the activities of the Fellowship both at home and abroad, and to reviews of recently published books likely to interest members. This meant that there was little, if any, space left for articles.

The editorial committee, however, realize that there must be many members who have written, or could write, valuable and interesting articles running to, say, 5,000 words. It is quite beyond our power with our present income to publish such articles out of Fellowship funds. But we invite any member who may have such an article in mind, and is prepared to defray the cost, to write to the Hon. Secretary, Shakespeare Fellowship, 3 Valley Green, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

The cost of the "News-Letter" - and this also applies to the "Supplement" - is 8s. 3d. per page for 100 copies. A page contains about 450 words: which means that a ten-page article (say 4500 words) would cost just over £4. The first 100 copies would be required by the Fellowship for issue with the "News-Letter." But the author could obtain for himself 25, 50, or 100 additional copies of his Supplement at a very small extra cost. These additional copies of the Supplement would be bound by a clip in the top left hand corner just like the "News-Letter."