

# THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP

## NEWS-LETTER

No. 15

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### ANNUAL DINNER

The annual dinner was held at the Florence Restaurant, London, on Wednesday, May 10th. The attendance was normal. The speeches reached an unusually high standard of excellence, and were without exception interesting. Of members of the Fellowship the following spoke: The President, who briefly outlined our case in his usual lucid manner; Mr Percy Allen, who dealt at length with the recently published book "Amazing Monument" and some of our recent discoveries; Miss Marjorie Bowen (Mrs Arthur Long), who delivered a graceful and generous eulogy of the work of our more active members, and expressed appreciation of the keen intellectual interest their labours had afforded her.

After the interval, Mr Ernest Allen touched on the topic of Shakespeare as an aristocrat, and was followed by our visitors. Their speeches were entirely sympathetic and encouraging. Mr E. Roden Buxton expressed considerable interest in our researches and hoped they would progress and develop. Mr J. Foster Forbes outlined some of his own experiences in archaeological investigation. He too had found how difficult it was to get new ideas taken up and treated seriously. Mr Forbes was followed by Mr Charles Williams, who was both sympathetic and original. He congratulated the Fellowship on having "created a new myth," not thereby meaning that we were merely hunting a shadow, but that we had unearthed an original point of view that might well lead to discovery of the truth. He was followed by Mr Shaw Desmond, who spoke in his characteristically brilliant and elusive style. His chief point was that few writers are really responsible beings. They are usually controlled by spirits outside themselves, urging them almost unconsciously to write. He thought this joint control might finally solve the difficult problem "who was Shakespeare."

Throughout the evening there was no hostile criticism and evidence of marked appreciation of the Fellowship's work, more so probably than on any previous occasion.

## NEWS FROM AMERICA

The following is an extract from an article in "The Argonaut" (April 21st, 1939), an important weekly. Our member, Mr George Frisbee, is to be congratulated on having been responsible for securing so useful a convert.

THE SHAKESPEARE ANNIVERSARY - LITERATURE'S GREATEST MYSTERY  
by Flodden W. Heron, President, The Literary Anniversary Club

. . . In 1769 (at a festival put on by Garrick) the fabrication of Shakespeare anecdotes and relics at Stratford Museum became manifest and all kinds of deceptions have since been practised there. Thus one hundred and seventy years ago the doubt as to Shakespeare's authorship began and unrelenting Time has developed it into the world's greatest battle in literature. No other literary subject has provoked so great and varied a body of scholarship. This is not a war as between nations, but it is a literary controversy that has armies of followers in countries the world over, and as time goes on, the battle becomes more intense. The writer is but an humble soldier in the ranks of that steadily increasing majority of readers who believe that Edward De Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), is the man who wrote what are known as the Shakespearian plays.

All schools, universities, and colleges have endorsed and they also teach that one William Shakespeare was the author of these plays. Thereby a belief has been inculcated and has become so well established that it is not easily discarded. Yet delving students and scholars for nearly two centuries have finished their studies in the conviction that there is much that is mystery and unsolved in these master-pieces of the English language.

We must remember when studying this subject that during and previous to the Elizabethan period, any connection with theatricals was considered disgraceful and the writing of verse was nearly so. As evidence of this I quote from "Puttenham's Arte of Poesie" (1589) as follows:

"In these days poets as well as poesie are become subjects to scorn and derision. Now of such among the Nobility or Gentry as be very well seen in the making of poesie, it is come to pass that they are loath to be known of their skill. So, many that have written commendably have suppressed it, or suffered it to be

published without their names. And in her Majesty's time that now is, are sprung up another crew of courtly makers (poets), Noblemen and Gentlemen, who have written excellently well, as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman Edward Earle of Oxforde" . . .

. . . All we believers ask is that others make a test for themselves. If you are a doubter, select those of the so-called Shakespeare plays that you like best and read them seriously until you become saturated in the beauty, wisdom, and amazing scholarship of these immortal works. Then imagine and try to impute the "miracle of genius" to William Shakespeare, a butcher's apprentice and later in life a maltster and land-speculator, who resided in a village with a population of less than one thousand people. Read two books, the one written by Looney, of which the late John Galsworthy sent dozens of copies to his friends, and also a more recent volume, "The Man Who Was Shakespeare," by Mrs Edward H. Clark, vice-president of the Shakespeare Society in England, and draw your own conclusions.

With each year bringing additional information from researchers it would seem that it is only a question of time when all serious students of the great myth will join the growing army of believers who are convinced that Edward De Vere was the genius who should be crowned king of poetry and the Muses.

#### DEATH OF MR HAMLET PHILPOT

We regret to announce the death last May of Mr Hamlet Philpot. Mr Philpot - as indeed his whole family - was an enthusiastic member of the Shakespeare Fellowship: and had for some years acted as Hon. Secretary of the Hampstead branch of the Fellowship. The following notice appeared in the "Hampstead and Highgate Express," May 12th, 1939:

At the age of 83 the death occurred on Sunday of Mr H. S. Philpot, of Bigwood Court, Middleway, Hampstead Garden Suburb.

Hamlet Stanley Philpot was educated at Marlborough College and became a scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, where he took his M.A. degree. He became a private tutor in classics and history, and in 1918 he was appointed to the



Department of the Interior, Ottawa, and he remained in Canada until his retirement in 1930.

In 1931 he came to live in the Garden Suburb, leaving three years later for Oxford, and returning in 1936. Particularly interested in literature, Mr Philpot was the honorary secretary of the small Hampstead Branch of the Shakespeare Fellowship.

He leaves a widow, and two sons by his first and two sons by his second marriage.

The funeral took place at Golder's Green Crematorium on Wednesday.

#### "INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE"

An open letter to Dr G. B. Harrison from Mr William Kent.

Dear Sir,

I have read the above "Pelican" book with much interest. A good deal of the information imparted should be most useful, and, on the occasion of my tenth annual Shakespeare ramble round Bankside, on 22nd April, I will mention it. It gives succinctly a very good idea of the theatre in the Shakespearean era.

I shall, however, be compelled to express my amazement at your lack of frankness on the authorship question. As Mr E. E. Kellett said recently in the "News-Chronicle": "It is too late in the day to ignore the anti-Stratfordian theories." Surely there should have been a reference to other Richmonds in the field, or was it, fearing you could not unhorse them, you felt it desirable to turn the blind eye?

This might have been permissible had you been discussing only the plays and the theatres of the time, but you go into the "materials for the life of Shakespeare," although some may think it significant that the preceding chapter is entitled "The Legend of Shakespeare."

"This book is mainly intended for the general reader," says the jacket. Yes, but the "general reader" is well aware of the sceptics and may reasonably ask for some mention. This year there has been an article on the Baconian theory in "Pearson's Magazine" and several articles advocating another claimant and rebutting him in "John O'London's Weekly." Both the monthly and the weekly are aimed at appealing to the "general reader." You are, I am sure, well aware of the articles in "John O'London's," as one was the work of Dr W. P. Barrett who showed courage if not capable of carrying any conviction to sceptical minds.

Now for a few points in your book.

In explaining the paucity of information about Shakespeare you say:

"No one yet knows, nor ever will know, the private life of Queen Elizabeth herself: and even such details as the date and place of the marriage of the Earl of Essex or of Sir Walter Raleigh are unknown."

Surely we know a good deal about Queen Elizabeth from such books as Agnes Strickland's *Life* and a much later work "The Private Life of Queen Elizabeth," by Frederick Chamberlin. According to the Dictionary of National Biography and Lytton Strachey's "Elizabeth and Essex," the Earl was married in 1590. With regard to Raleigh, of course, one would not know for certain for he had been in disgrace (and in the Tower of London) about the lady. The generally accepted date is 1592. You may mean we do not know the exact day of the year, but you do not use the word "exact" and this would be so unimportant I cannot think this was the point. The place too would be of no significance. I am sure no sceptic has tried to make capital out of the fact that we do not know where Shakespeare was married. Even on orthodox showing, marvellous though the young man was, he had not written any immortal work to draw attention to himself at eighteen.

You quote what you call "possibly an invented jest" from Manningham's diary. Why was the entry not completed "Shakespeare's name William"?

Sir Edmund Chambers and the Shakespeare Allusion Book give the entry complete. Was it you felt it a risk to put an idea into your readers' heads. They might well think it odd that the writer should have felt it necessary to make memo of the Christian name of an immortal writer. Fancy somebody to-day making a note in a diary of an anecdote of Shaw and troubling to add "Shaw's name Bernard."

On p. 37 you quote the famous letter to Quiney and you say (in inverted commas, too) the letter was addressed to "Mr Wm Shakespeare." How then does Sir Sidney Lee read it as "Mr Wm Shackespere"? Sir Edmund Chambers also reads it that way. Have you re-examined the documents and come to the conclusion they were wrong? I can understand the danger here from your point of view. Who would know better than a fellow townsman how Shackespere pronounced his name (this is no question of spelling admittedly diverse in that era, but of pronunciation), and what is the explanation of a Shackespere becoming Shakespeare in print?



Now as to the Will, you purport to reprint in full and you start "In the name of God, Amen! I William Shakespeare." Furnivall gives this as "Shackspeare" and so does Chambers. Why, sir, do you alter it? You give "William Shakespeare" again at the end, whereas Chambers has "Shakspeare." You are not very candid with your readers. I wonder if you have seen the original Will. I have. I say that only a tendentious imagination can get "Shakespeare" from the signatures!

I am glad, however, you tell us that the allusions to Shakespeare "give no indication of what the man himself was like." This may give some readers to pause and think. It is mighty strange that the great writer was so unimpressive a personality that nobody seems to have kept a letter he wrote, nor penned a literary sketch of him.

"All great writers to some extent betray their origin. It is not difficult to guess that Jane Austen lived in a narrow circle or that the social background of Thackeray differed considerably from that of Dickens."

True, and who would imagine that the writers of the Shakespeare plays came from a town like Stratford? They reveal considerable knowledge of court circles. Who would ever have even suggested the man of Stratford if the plays had come down to us anonymous? Why (p. 35) did a young man from Stratford (with a name to make in the world) want to publish "Richard II" anonymously?

"Now, however, that good writers had been attracted to write plays, young men of fashion and intelligence were becoming interested in the theatres."

Was it likely they would have no interest in their composition, but leave it all to underlings? You mention elsewhere the Earl of Derby but, of course, there is no reference to the fact that in 1599 the Earl was "busye in penning commodyes for the commoun players." This would be dangerous indeed.

You are no doubt aware of the book called "Amazing Monument," by Ivor Brown and Geo. Fearon. This must be another blow at your case, as although the authors are orthodox, they are too respectful to us sceptics to please St John Ervine, and some are sure to think that the "ramp" goes deeper than these writers say.

Having written my little book, "London for Shakespeare Lovers" (warmly praised by the "Times"), on orthodox grounds, I was reluctant to yield to arguments, but I could hold out no more. I felt the Stratfordian case had been exploded. It may interest you to know that in my new book, "London Worthies" (see

enclosed), I include the man of Stratford and the Earl of Oxford under the heading of "Shakespeare," and in the preface I say:

"I also throw down the glove to anybody who chooses to debate on the issue: 'Is it reasonable to believe that the Stratford actor wrote the Shakespeare plays?' I have little expectation of any response. The Stratfordians are so reluctant to enter the war they maintain they can so easily win; so mercifully reticent about publishing the book that must bomb us out of existence."

Dr Harrison is welcome to pick up the glove if he is so disposed.

I propose to read my letter to a meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship on the 19th inst., and would, of course, read any reply at the same time.

Yours faithfully,

(Sd) W. KENT.

P.S.--Two further corrections for a new edition (I assume you will correct the spelling of Shackspeare's name), four on p. 41 should be 4½ ; St Olive's (p. 42) should be St Olave's.

Dr Harrison, in his reply (given below), did not meet any of Mr Kent's charges. In boxing parlance, he took it on the jaw without making the least attempt to defend himself or attack his adversary.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of the 9th April, which I did not answer before as I have been abroad. Doubtless you will explain at the next meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship the reason for my silence.

If you are not convinced that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays attributed to him, I do not think there is much point in starting a controversy. To my mind the evidence produced in the chapter "Material for the Life of Shakespeare" in my little book is sufficient to establish his claim. These things, however, are a matter of conviction, and argument usually results rather in confirming one's own convictions than in shaking any one else's.

As for your comment that we know a good deal about Queen Elizabeth from such authors as Agnes Strickland and Mr Frederick Chamberlain, if you ever go into the matter at all deeply your faith in these authors will probably be shaken. As for the date

and place of the marriage of the Earl of Essex, I would refer you to my own Life of Essex.

Yours faithfully,

(Sd) G. B. HARRISON.

#### OCCASIONAL NOTES

On April 19th, at St Ermins, Westminster, Mr Percy Allen gave the last of his series of lectures, when he spoke on "The Mystery of the First Shakespeare Folio, 1623." Despite the European crisis, the attendance was the largest of the series, about 50 persons being present, under the chairmanship of our President, Col. M. W. Douglas. An animated discussion followed, in which, in addition to the President, Messrs. Ernest Allen, William Kent, J. J. Dwyer, and the Hon. Mary Pakington took part. The lecturer and the debaters, between them, seemed to make out an unanswerable case for the Folio being due to the collaboration of a number of aristocrats and writers, with Lord Oxford as principal pen, and including his son-in-law, Lord Derby, Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lady Pembroke, the Earls of Montgomery and Pembroke (sons of Lady Pembroke), Benjamin Jonson, and, probably, George Chapman - Heminge, Condell, and William Shaksper of Stratford all being "masks" for the concealed aristocrats.

Mr Allen thanked members and friends for their support and announced that, circumstances permitting, he would continue the series next autumn, at the same meeting place.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor, Shakespeare Fellowship "News-Letter"

Sir,

Mr J. Thomas Looney wrote in his "Shakespeare Identified":

"We have a flood of Shakespearean plays being published authentically right up to the year before the death of Edward de Vere, then a sudden stop, and nothing more published with any appearance of proper authorization for nearly twenty years."

In 1609 there were published simultaneously "Troilus and Cressida," "King Lear," "Pericles," and the Sonnets, which event coincided with the sale to Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, of King's Place, Hackney, by the Countess of Oxford, her husband



having been then deceased five years. It is thought therefore that the respective manuscripts were surreptitiously obtained when the widow vacated the premises in question.

"Troilus and Cressida" is exceptional in being preceded by a preface, written by an anonymous scribe, the dedication of which runs:

"A neuer writer, to an euer reader, newes."

We know that "ever" was a cryptic signature of de Vere as witness Sonnet 76:

"Why write I still all one, EVER the same,  
And keep invention in a noted weed,  
That EVERY word doth almost spell my name,  
Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?"

May not the dedicatory line quoted above, and otherwise apparently nonsensical, be construed thus: "This preface is written by one who is not de Vere (non-ever), but addressed to an ever reader, i.e. the reader of a play by Oxford? And then the writer indulges in much pompous adulation of the author as a writer of Comedies, thus corroborating Francis Meres's statement: "The best for comedy amongst us bee Edward Earle of Oxford."

Although the late Sir George Greenwood was of opinion that, in consideration of style, Ben Jonson wrote the preface, it would seem more likely to have been the handiwork of the bombastic and affected Thomas Thorpe, who was responsible for the dedication of the Sonnets. In writing therein of "that eternitie promised by our EVER-living (i.e. immortal) poet," Thorpe again uses Oxford's sign-manual, denoting the latter's authorship of the Sonnets, and thus links them with "Troilus and Cressida." The "promised eternitie" is doubtless a reference to Sonnet 55:

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

The "grand possessors" of the manuscripts, of whom Thorpe speaks, were probably annoyed at the unauthorized publication, as the time was not ripe, and they had other plans in view, which would be upset by any disclosure, patent to the discerning, by a third party of the Oxford authorship. Some copies of the 1609 edition of the play bear an ordinary title-page - without any preface following - stating that the piece was printed "as it was acted by the King's Majesties servants at the Globe."

Mr Looney, with considerable ingenuity and careful analysis, argues that "Troilus and Cressida" is a largely revised edition of an earlier play by Oxford entitled "Agamemnon and Ulysses."

Other attempts have been made to assign the authorship of Shakespeare's play to Henry Crabbe and Thomas Dekker on the strength of a reference in the Diary of Philip Henslowe (1599) to a play entitled "Troyules and Creassedaye," and apparently written by them. But there is no reason why there should not have been two plays dealing with the same theme, considering the prominence given to the story of the lovers in Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde," and Lydgate's "Troy Book."

Oxford's "Agamemnon and Ulysses" may well have been the play acted at the Globe, as the preface to "Troilus and Cressida" further states that the latter was a new play: "Refuse not, nor like this the less for not being sullied with the smoaky breath of the multitude, but thank fortune for the scape it hath had amongst you" - as if the intention to perform it on the stage had been thwarted.

The lines in the Prologue to the play:

"Hither am I come

A prologue arm'd, but not in confidence

Of author's pen or actor's voice,"

would seem to have some reference to the War of the Theatres, which raged from 1600 for about four years, with Jonson on the one hand, with Marston and Dekker and their actor friends on the other as protagonists.

Sir Sidney Lee, whilst asserting that Shakespeare wrote the play in 1603 (presumably because James Roberts apparently obtained a licence in that year, but the play was not published - Mr Percy Allen gives the date of 1598) remarks:

"Passages in Ben Jonson's 'Poetaster,' moreover, pointedly suggest that Shakespeare cultivated so assiduously an attitude of neutrality that Jonson acknowledged him to be qualified for the role of peacemaker. The gentleness of disposition with which Shakespeare was invariably credited by his friends would have well fitted him for such an office."

Surely Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, who possessed to a marked degree that "highly cultivated mind" which Sir George Greenwood postulated as the necessary condition precedent of a "Shakespeare," and who could so admirably fill the picture of Virgil in the "Poetaster," could act in the role of peacemaker with infinitely greater success and efficiency than "an unlettered and untravelled man, who knew no country and no language but his own."

The man from Stratford, besides, could not fail, as an actor, to be connected too intimately with one of the parties in

the controversy to prove a persona grata in any attempts at reconciliation.

Yours faithfully,

R. J. A. BUNNETT.

Bolden Lodge,  
Kent Road, Harrogate.