

# THE Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter

OCTOBER, 1942

*President*, LIEUT.-COL. W. M. DOUGLAS, C.S.I., C.I.E.

*Hon. Treasurer:*

J. J. DWYER, ESQ.,  
Acer-Las, Ala Road,  
Pwllheli, Caernarvonshire,  
Wales.

*Honorary Secretary:*

T. L. ADAMSON, ESQ.,  
6 Upper Cavendish Avenue,  
Church End, Finchley, N.3.

*Hon. Editor of News-Letter:*

PERCY ALLEN, ESQ.,  
38 Elm Gardens,  
Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

*Hon. Assistant Secretary:*

MISS PHYLLIS CARRINGTON,  
South View, Shillingford,  
nr. Bampton, N. Devon.

The Editor is always glad to receive information, press-cuttings, letters, or short articles, which may be

useful for the next News-Letter. Articles should not usually exceed 400 words.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

The Editor has to record, with deep regret, the death of three members of the Fellowship, Mrs. W. Skene Laurence, the Rev. R. Flynn, and Gen. Stewart of Coll., all of whom were friends of his. Our President writes:—

“I am indeed sorry to hear of the passing of the three members, all of whom I knew, and each individually so different. I remember Flynn doing me the honour of coming all the way to Lavenham to hear me lecture, so enthusiastic was he for the cause. I realise the loss of a friend of yours in Mrs. Skene Laurence. I have had talks with her more than once—a clever, interesting woman. Stewart was a connection of mine . . . an able man who ought to have gone further as an R.E. We cannot replace them: on the other hand I am glad to hear of your new recruits.

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Our new recruits in their order of joining the Fellowship, are Miss Jane Lomax, Mr. and Mrs.

Martin Gilkes, Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Akehurst, Mrs. Llewellyn Lewis, and Mrs. Royston Cambridge. Four of these are residents of Welwyn Garden City; Mr. and Mrs. Gilkes live at Stratford-upon-Avon, where they are well known. Mr. Gilkes is a brother of the present Head of Dulwich College. Miss Jane Lomax is a distinguished portrait-painter who has exhibited much at the R.A.; and Mrs. Lewis is, professionally, Miss Dorothy Cox, the well known marine-painter—a close friend of Hilaire Belloc, whose “Elizabethan Commentary” is reviewed in this issue by Mr. Dwyer.

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Mr. Lingard Ranson has called the Editor's attention to *The Story of Lady Vere*, wife of Sir Horatio Vere, included in W. H. Davenport Adams “*Stories of the Lives of Noble Women*” (1885). The author says that, “According to the fashion of the age, her memory was also honoured with several anagrams. Thus:—

*Marie Vere* . . . . Ever I arme.  
and *Vere mira* . . . . Truly admirable."

These are interesting additions to the long list of Vere anagrams and word-play in Elizabethan literature, including the Shakespeare plays.

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During the spring and summer the Editor has been continuing his activities on behalf of the cause, in Stratford-on-Avon and in Welwyn Garden City. He has already addressed, or will, in the near future address, on Shakespearean subjects, the following organizations at Welwyn: The Ladies Luncheon Club; The Ring; the Herts Branch of The Historical Society; The Welwyn Dramatic and Literary Group, this last being a new Society of which the Editor is the first President. These talks have already produced several new members. Mr. Allen has also arranged a course of twelve lectures on the *History of Our Drama*.

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### The Vere Motto

A paragraph under the above title, by Mr. J. J. Dwyer, appeared in our April issue. It contained several mis-prints of a destructive kind, which the Editor—granted that his sight is imperfect—should not have overlooked. He apologizes, accordingly, to Mr. Dwyer, and to readers of the News-Letter. The motto from St. Thomas Aquinas's Hymn, *Adoro te Devote*, should read as follows:

Credo quiddam dixit Dei Filius:  
Nil hoc verbo veritatis verius.

### Sir Edward Vere and Mr. Barrell's Discovery

Mr. C. Wisner Barrell is to be warmly congratulated upon his discovery that Oxford's illegitimate son by Anne Vavasour (1581) was Sir Edward Vere, whose identity, now established, is a valuable and interesting addition to our knowledge of the strange life-story of Lord Oxford. But, since the Editor has received several letters on the subject, it should be made clear that the discovery extends only to the historical identity of this bastard son, and not to his parentage.

The fact of the birth of an illegitimate son, by Anne Vavasour, to Lord Oxford, and the resultant strong connecting links with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Measure for Measure*, have been dealt with in several books, including some by Mrs. Clark and the Editor. The theory of the fair Youth of the Sonnets as Oxford's son, was first promulgated among our members about 1927, and is gone into, in detail, in the Editor's unpublished book on the Sonnets, written about 1933. Nor must we forget "*The Tragic Story of Shakespeare Disclosed in the Sonnets*" (1932), by Gerald Phillips, and, particularly, Dr. Rendall's excellent book "*Personal Clues in Shakespeare's Poems*

and *Sonnets*" (1934). Both these books revealed Oxford as author of the Sonnets. Identifications of the Dark Lady, the Fair Youth, and so forth, are and must remain, matters of personal interpretation. Meanwhile, all good fortune to Mr. Barrell's further researches.

### The Life of William Shakespeare

(Penguin Series) by HESKETH PEARSON

The inclusion of a Penguin volume on Shakespeare under the heading of "Biography" provokes a smile. This one should be assigned to the realms of mythology. Dr. W. R. Inge, according to a current anecdote, when asked to write a Life of Christ pleaded that the materials did not exist. An increasing number feel the same regarding our great literary god, and the point could be proved out of the mouths of the orthodox. Mr. Pearson, however, is not of these. Unconscious of his peril, he sails through dangerous seas "like little wanton boys that swim on bladders," with the result that he has come near to wrecking on the Shakespeare Cliff a rising reputation as a biographer, made by readable books on Thomas Paine, Sidney Smith, and Henry Labouchere. I always mark my books, making a cross for a query. The crosses in this volume would serve a fair-sized churchyard.

How does he know all this? is a question always in the reader's mind. We are told, for example, that Shakespeare's mother was "helpful and docile." "Exceptional men use their mothers as material for their art, unless, like Dickens, they dislike them; so we may infer from the fact that William left no recognizable portrait of his that he was fond of her." This is a priceless specimen of Mr. Pearson's deductions. Shakespeare's wife was

"Of a religious and charitable disposition. She imparted a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures to her eldest child, but Shakespeare could not have shared the religious convictions of his wife and father."

He could not have been inferior in character, for he was "friendly, gentle, obliging, kindly, unassuming, engaging, good-natured, and sweet-mannered." He had too a constitutional infirmity that prevented him out-Falstaffing Falstaff in liquor, as in his Shore-ditch days he "often excused himself from what threatened to be a drunken debauch on the ground that he did not feel well."

Extraordinary examples of credulity are these that follow.

Chettle's reference was to Shakespeare; Heminges and Condell's address in the First Folio was of their authorship; Shakespeare's copy of Montaigne is in the British Museum! he loathed Elizabeth; he received a handsome present from the Earl of Southampton. In the last case there is a little caution—"the sum has probably had a nought added to it." Mr. Pearson, apparently, knows nothing of Mrs. Stopes'

vain endeavour to trace any connection between the Earl and the Stratfordian.

Pure and puerile speculation abounds. Here are two delicious examples. The "domestic and rustic nature" of the *Winter's Tale* shows that the author had "put in a fair amount of time at Stratford in 1610." Mr. Pearson is about to publish a book on Bernard Shaw, which, judging from an extract in "*John o' London's Weekly*," should be very entertaining. I hope we are not to be told that prior to writing *John Bull's Other Island*, the author sojourned in his native land, or that "*The Doctors' Dilemma*" was a protest against surgeons contriving to cut the carcase of G.B.S.

Speculating on the possibility of Shakespeare having something on his conscience in connection with Essex, Mr. Pearson says, "We can only wonder." This attitude must be that of many readers towards our author's conscience. For example, on what ground does he tell us that the letter to Quiney was addressed "Mr. William Shakespeare?" It was, even on orthodox showing, "Mr. Wm. Shackespere." This is not speculation but mis-representation of which Dr. Harrison was also guilty.

The book is an asset to us sceptics, but a great danger to the uninitiated. Nevertheless much exasperation was not unmingled with enjoyment.

W. KENT.

## Elizabethan Commentary

by HILAIRE BELLOC  
(Cassell, 7s. 6d.)

In his oddly-named "*Elizabethan Commentary*" Mr. Hilaire Belloc deals again with the story of the Reformation in England, and with Elizabeth's part in it. It is not a study of her reign or of her personality, still less, of the literature of the period. But it expresses, as forcibly as ever, his well known conclusions that the England in which Shakespeare wrote was mainly Catholic, that the Reformation was essentially a revolution designed to preserve property acquired through the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and that the leader and controller of the process during the reign of Elizabeth was her minister, William Cecil. Elizabeth, he says, "was in the main a spectator, not the maker, of the scenes through which she passed."

He has said more in other books on the problems presented by the peculiar character and behaviour of the Queen. Here he is content with repeating the facts that the Tudor heritage was (biologically speaking) a bad one, that at an important juncture of her early life she was forced to live in disreputable surroundings, and that her character was permanently influenced by the famous flirtation with Thomas Seymour when she was fifteen. (He passes very lightly over the indelicate evidence given at the trial.) Of her so-called love-affairs in adult life there is little, excepting a reference to Leicester and Amy Robsart and a word about Anjou, and a contemp-

tuous glance at the fatuous half incestuous maternal arrangements with the unfortunate Essex.

On the important question of her physical disability or abnormality, Mr. Belloc stands with practically all the historians. "There are," he says, "two things certainly known: first that she was sexually abnormal, second, that we have to-day no sufficient full and definite evidence upon the *exact* physical conditions of the abnormality. Clearly she would never bear children. We can consult and conjecture from heredity."

Mr. Belloc says in a parenthesis that "tradition and commonsense compel us to believe" that William Shakespeare was the author of *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, etc.; but the sentence is introduced with an "if"—"if he were the author of such things," and his unusually guarded language at this point suggests that he is aware of the existence of a problem which it is not his present purpose to discuss.

J. J. DWYER.

## Peele's "Sonnet" on Oxford (1590)

Mr. Alan Bland has brought to the Editor's notice some interesting lines by George Peele, supposed by Garnett and Gosse, Editors of the *History of English Literature*, to refer to the retirement of Sir Henry Lee from his office of Champion to Queen Elizabeth. These lines are appended to

POLYHYMNIA describing the immediate  
*Triumph at Tilt* before Her Majesty on the 17th  
November last past (1590).

His golden locks Time hath to silver turned:

O! Time too swift, O! swiftness never ceasing!

But youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurned,

But spurned in vain, youth waneth by increasing.

Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;  
Duty, faith, love are roots and ever green.

His helmet soon shall make a hive for bees,

And lovers sonnets turn to holy psalms,

A man-at-arms must serve upon his knees,

And feed on prayers, which are Old Age his alms;

But though from court to cottage he depart,

His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest sits in homely cell,

He'll teach his swains this carol for a song.

Blest be the hearts which wish my sovereign well,

Cursed be the soul that think her any wrong.

Goddess allow this aged man his right,

To be your beadsman now that was your knight.

I hastened to look up *Polyhymnia* in Alexander Dyce's edition of Peele's works. The results—as always when Oxford is concerned—were surprising. *Polyhymnia* is a poem on the jousts held on Nov. 17, 1590, in the Tilt Yard at Westminster, in the presence of the Queen who sat "under her Gallery window." After Lee and other knights had "performed their service in arms," Her Majesty was

greeted with sweet music, during the course of which a Gentleman named Hales sang, though with variations, the verses quoted above. In the original poem the first person, "My golden locks," appear for "His" and in the version above quoted in line 3 of the first stanza, the words "age hath ever spurn'd," are substituted for "age at youth hath spurn'd."

The significance of these changes is great. Apparently the "sonnet," as originally written, and sung before the Queen, has been deliberately altered before being appended to *Polyhymnia*, in order to make it apply to some other "He"—"Which he, Sir" as William asks of Touchstone, who is Oxford, in *As You Like It*, V.1. The first name-clue is the insertion in the new version of the verses of the word "ever" in line 3, thus providing the first stanza with the usual "Ever or Never" identifying pun. Thus altered, the lines fit Oxford perfectly, especially Oxford as "Shakespeare." Lee, in this year of his retirement, 1590, was fifty-nine; Oxford, who had retired from court in 1589, was forty in 1590, and, though relatively young, has told us, in the second Shakespeare sonnet, dating from that same year, that his beauty is deeply trenched, that he is "a tattered weed" who now looks on the world with "deep sunken eyes." In Elizabeth's time, of course, "old age" set in much earlier than it does to-day, and Oxford's hair may have been turning grey, although the "Ashbourne" portrait, probably of the mid-nineties, shows it still dark.

The opening line of stanza 2:

His helmet soon shall make a hive for bees  
contains a direct hint at "honey-tongued Shakespeare," and reminds us also that Oxford, himself a successful joust, had been given a military command in Flanders in 1585, until suddenly recalled and lavishly pensioned by the Queen. In 1590, the year with which we are concerned, Sir William Segar, Garter-King-at-Arms, had published his "*Book of Honour*," wherein are recorded both Oxford's and Lee's triumphs at joust. Further comment upon Peele's verses—particularly their close links with *As You Like It*—must, for reasons of space, be left over until our next issue. Meanwhile our thanks are due to Mr. Bland for a discovery which if it be genuine—and of that I am confident—is both interesting and important.

## Francis Bacon as Shakespeare

The following letter, which explains itself, has been sent by the Editor to the Editor of *World Service*.

To the Editor of *World's Service*,  
13 Chesham Place,  
S.W.1.

July 25, 1942.

### Shake-speare Speaks Again ?

Sir,  
My attention has been called to an article in your

issue of June last, wherein appears a message received by automatic script, in February last, purporting to come from Francis Bacon. Assuming its genuineness, the message is deeply interesting, as much for its omissions as for its admissions.

This difficult question of Bacon's share in writings which have appeared under the pen-name of "William Shake-speare" is one that I have studied closely. My conclusions, arrived at many years ago, and substantially concurred in by co-workers and fellow-members of The Shakespeare Fellowship, are briefly as follows:

The author of Shakespeare's sonnets, and of some two-thirds of the plays in the Shakespeare Folio of 1623, including the best known tragedies and comedies, was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

Oxford's work, after his death in 1604, was continued by a group of noblemen and gentlemen connected with the Vere, Stanley and Sidney families (the Pembrokes), who used Oxford's pen-name, "William Shake-speare." Among these was Bacon, Oxford's cousin by marriage.

Bacon probably wrote "*The Rape of Lucrece*," and had a hand in several of the Shakespeare Histories, particularly *Henry VIII*, but excluding the *Henry IV* plays, which are Oxford's, Bacon was one of the group of aristocrats behind the publication of the 1623 Folio purporting to be edited by Heminge and Condell, the actors.

It is a most remarkable fact that these conclusions clash in no essential detail with what we are told (and not told) in Bacon's own message, if such it be. Bacon states that he "dealt with religion, philosophy, science and drama," putting drama not first but last! He further asks for remembrance of

"My true identity, and what I did as statesman, as philosopher, educationalist and teacher. A selfless patriotism was the consuming fire from which I produced those "Histories" I wrote under the pen-name of Shake-speare."

If Bacon were the complete "Shakespeare," it is surely most remarkable that he neither describes himself as a dramatist, nor makes any direct claim to have written the great Shakespearean tragedies and comedies, nor the sonnets. He does claim "those Histories," but names not one of them, nor claims to have written them *all*. We know that he wrote a prose "*Life of Henry VII.*"

Even were it shewn that the alleged communication from Bacon is spurious (which I do not suggest), its specific statements, and equally striking omissions, seems to corroborate strongly the wholly independent conclusions at which many of us Oxfordians, members of The Shakespeare Fellowship, have arrived. The "Group Theory," in short, is the only explanation of the Shakespeare mystery that fits *all* the now ascertained facts and legitimate inferences.

(Signed) PERCY ALLEN,  
(Vice-President of the Shakespeare Fellowship).