

# The Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter

SEPTEMBER 1947

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

The Annual General Meeting of the Fellowship will be held at the Poetry Society's Room, 33 Portman Square, W.1. on Saturday, 27th September, 1947 at 3 p.m.

All Members are urgently requested to attend.

If time permits Mr. William Kent will speak on "Some Recent Oxfordian Criticism."

### BIRTHPLACE CELEBRATIONS

At the time of writing there is much fuss being made at Stratford about the Centenary of the purchase of the Birthplace House, and a *Times* leading article was devoted to this glorious event and the share which our great national newspaper had in the acquisition of what the auctioneer's bill called "The truly heart-stirring relic." *The Stratford-upon-Avon Scene* (which incorporates the *Shakespeare Pictorial*, in which the Fellowship once had a monthly page) contained an article on the subject by Mr. Levi Fox, M.A., "A Director of the Birthplace Trust." He had the following revealing paragraph:

"When visitors first began to make their pilgrimage to Stratford-on-Avon to see the place of his birth is not known. The fact that Stratford was the place of his birth as well of his death was widely known in the seventeenth century, as evidenced by references in the works of a number of authors of the period. Shakespeare's Birthplace is specifically denoted on the earliest official plan of the town published by Winter in 1759, and an engraving based on a drawing of the building was published in 1769. Shakespeare's house figured prominently in the Garrick Jubilee celebrations of that year."

Some of us are a little surprised that the supposedly great poet should have been dead 143 years before any reference was made to his house in Stratford. Of course, it figured prominently at the Jubilee. If the truth was known, Garrick did far more to make Stratford famous than Will Shakspeare ever did. With great simplicity, the writer proceeds to refer to "spurious relics," as if these were all in the dark past. "Library, museum and record collections, have been built up by gift and purchase," we are told. It is singular that no collector has found a scrap of Shakspeare's handwriting in his native town. The six laboured and semi-illiterate signatures having been discovered elsewhere. Nor has any document

been found to suggest he was a writer of anything except—with difficulty—his own name. These too might be described as unfinished works.

### THE STRATFORDIAN RETREAT

The Stratfordians retreat all along the line.

Last year the Editor of the *News Letter* had a letter in the *South London Press*:

"My final offer to the literati of Southwark, including the Provost; Mr. George Isaacs, Minister of Labour; The Mayor, the Aldermen (including Styles), and Councillors; Canon Stevens; George Young. I can offer you next winter a good audience for a debate on the authorship question. The meeting place will be handy. I will pay fares. I will lend orthodox books for ammunition; I will give you a couple of jokes against the heretics. What more can I do? Will no Southwarkian bring his courage to the sticking point, and defend his cause in public? If not, judgment must go against Southwark in default."

There was no response from Southwark. Canon Stevens, who yearly—on "Shakespeare Day"—offers a large crowd a cheap orthodox concoction, was challenged to debate years ago. Last April, knowing a few heretics were about, he indulged in jibes. He was requested to repeat them in public where a heretic could reply. Again there was no response. The Southwark-Shakespeare business is a ramp second only to that of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Dr. Arundell Esdaile, formerly Secretary to the British Museum, in an excellent book on its Library, had the following note:

"That the triumph of the scientific spirit of truth is not yet complete, few have such good reason to be aware as the staff of the British Museum, who are continually interrupted by believers in old superstitions such as astrology, and still more in new, such as Bacon-Shakespeare, Anglo-Israel, and the mystic meaning of the Pyramids."

It was amazing that there should be even a hint that the triumph of the scientific spirit of truth was to be found in orthodox conclusions regarding Shakespeare. Surely the scientific spirit is exemplified by Looney and Greenwood, not by Lee and Co. Of course, there was no reason to believe that Dr. Esdaile would have made an exception of the Oxford case. The Editor therefore sent him our pamphlet. Dr. Esdaile's reply was that "the theory is amusing and less absurd than the Baconian. But that is not

to say much. . . . I have always felt that the contempt of the experts was good enough to exonerate me from study of the theory, beyond casual reading. There is in fact no reason to doubt that Shakespeare wrote nearly all the plays and poems going under his name, and that he was a quite celebrated man of letters in his own day." When Dr. Esdaile was duly informed that this was a staggering suggestion to come from the late secretary to the British Museum and could be excused only as due to "casual reading," his only reply was a reference to the famous *Shakespeare Allusion Book*. This letter concluded as follows: "I am sorry to be rather curt; but like all B.M. men am very impatient of these theories for the reason suggested in my book."

The following are extracts from the Editor's rejoinder:

"You refer me to the *Shakespeare Allusion Book*, not apparently having noticed that I deal with it in my essay. The editor, C. M. Ingleby, assiduously collects all those allusions, and then has to say 'It is plain for one thing that the bard of our admiration was unknown to the men of that age.' How does this fit in with your idea of contemporary reputation? Is there any ground for thinking that the Stratfordian was a shy, retiring fellow who would hold aloof? There is no parallel in literature for this. Much reference to a certain writer, yet no impression of his personality. . . .

"What is the 'reason suggested' in your book for rejecting unorthodox theories as to Shakespeare? There is none. You simply make a dogmatic statement."

No reply was received. The usual Stratfordian retreat as soon as anything of a stand is made by the enemy. Yet Dr. Esdaile had the audacity to say in a postscript to one of his letters that "the controversy is not merely not 'respectable,' it does not exist."

It does not exist to the orthodox for the same reason that Nelson failed to see a certain signal. In vain it was pointed out that the *Times Literary Supplement* had said that it was reasonable to ask who wrote the Shakespeare plays? According to the late Secretary to the British Museum it was "capable of being very foolish." I fear the same must be said of one of its officials! As a reader there for thirty-one years, the Editor is in a position to say that Dr. Esdaile is presumptuous in supposing that his are the opinions of all the staff.

Professor Allardyce Nicoll is a man with a well-merited reputation as an authority on drama. Last January he gave his presidential address to the Shakespeare Club at Stratford-upon-Avon which, in his orthodox days, the Editor had the pleasure of addressing. The Professor's address was reported in the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* with big headlines:

"What Do We Know about Shakespeare?"

Professor Allardyce Nicoll's Caution about Stratford Traditions."

The caution must have been most disconcerting. It was an amazing performance. It must have produced almost as much of a shudder in the audience as might have been felt in St. Paul's Cathedral if its

modernist Dean, kicking over all theological traces, had, in a sermon on Christmas Day, told his audience they did not know where or when Christ was born. The following are extracts from the report of the lecture:

"The first warning was that what was not known about Shakespeare was astronomically beyond what was known. We did not know the day when he was born; we had no idea of what he was doing in his boyhood or early manhood. We knew that he was married about 1582, and it was possible that his bride's name was Anne Hathaway, but even if we professed to be certain, we could not be sure that she lived in the cottage at Shottery. We had no knowledge of what Shakespeare did from that time on, until his sudden appearance in London in 1592, if we excepted the baptismal record of some of his children, born in Stratford. He appeared as a moderately successful actor, and shortly after wrote two poems and dedicated them to noblemen. From that time onwards we had more information about Shakespeare's dramatic activities from stray records and the publication of his plays. But even in this period, when he had established himself, we did not get any intimate pictures of William Shakespeare, now a famous poet and playwright, friend, no doubt, of men in many walks of life. . . . We did not know that Shakespeare attended the Grammar School. . . . People must be on their guard before accepting any of the stories that had come down concerning Shakespeare, even those that grew up among a generation in Stratford who could have known him personally. The possibilities of confusion were too great for us to assume that there would be a great deal of truth embodied in this gossip."

The Editor of the *News Letter*, twenty-five years ago, heard with much pleasure and profit a course of lectures given by Professor Allardyce Nicoll on Shakespeare at King's College. He therefore sent him a copy of the pamphlet. In the course of his cordial reply Professor Nicoll said:

"I don't know how to take your statement that I am 'in the way of being a Shakespeare heretic.' I know that I shall read the pamphlet that you have so kindly sent me with very great interest, but I warn you that, so far from being a heretic in the special sense of the term, I am an absolutely confirmed 'Stratfordian.' My heresy, if any, takes the form only of being extremely sceptical when I am confronted with seventeenth century gossip regarding William Shakespeare. In certain cases gossip may be true, but, unless there is some confirmatory evidence, I myself prefer to leave such information as unproved. Thus, in all probability, I shall not be convinced by your arguments in favour of the Earl of Oxford—unless, of course, you have unearthed some documentary material, such as hitherto, has not been printed. I thought it best to warn you."

Some of us have looked in vain for the documentary material to support the Stratfordian case. It is

extraordinary that the Professor should be so sceptical of alleged facts about the life and yet so credulous of a mere tradition as to authorship. Surely the men who passed on the tainted stories also passed on the myth as to authorship? Similarly Ivor Brown and George Fearon, in their amusing and delightful volume *The Amazing Monument*, make fun in plenty of the appurtenances of the shrine and its guardians, but of course the god is secure! To some of us it does not make sense.

The Editor has challenged Professor Nicoll to debate on his own ground (Stratford or Birmingham), the simple issue being "Is it reasonable to believe that William Shakspeare wrote the Shakespeare plays?" He offered, if required, to pay all expenses. Professor Nicoll declines. This is shocking. A man will teach a class what he is not prepared to maintain on a public platform. The Stratford myth is not only a delusion; it is a debasement of the mind. Oh, what a fall there is in the Editor's estimation of his old Master!

On a pamphlet issued in connection with "Shakespeare Day" in Southwark, appeared the following under the name of the Mayor of Southwark:

"Many of his Comedies and Tragedies . . . were written on the banks of our river, in our very midst . . . he trod our streets here in Southwark and lived and suffered amongst us."

The Editor wrote to the Mayor challenging him to justify this statement and offering a debate. Again no answer. The programme of the festival showed the head of the Earl of Oxford surmounted by the usual hat of Francis Bacon!

To describe the Stratfordian position to-day, we may well have recourse to Milton's description of the overthrow of the enemy of light in *Paradise Lost*:

"Ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,  
Confusion worse confounded."

### THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP'S PAMPHLET

In the autumn of 1946 the Committee of the Fellowship decided that the time had come for the publication of a pamphlet setting out succinctly the claim that the real Shakespeare was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Two of its members, Mr. William Kent and another, who wishes to remain anonymous, were asked to prepare drafts with a view to the publication of a joint essay. When the authors had completed their work, and copies of the essays were circulated amongst other members of the Committee, it was considered that both were of such merit that separate publication was the most desirable course. The Secretary of the Fellowship, Mr. T. L. Adamson, acted with Mr. W. Kent as joint editors, and the pamphlet was ready for circulation in April 1947.

Of course, there was not much press notice of so heretical a publication. As Brooke House is in Hackney, a copy was sent to the *Hackney Gazette*. A paragraph duly appeared; the line taken was Laodicean. There was also one in the *Western Morning News*, apparently copied from the Hackney

paper. There were paragraphs in the *Middlesex Advertiser* and *John O'London's Weekly*. Unfortunately, in no case was information given as to where the pamphlet could be obtained. However, the Editor of *John O'London's Weekly*, having had enquiries, asked for these particulars.

Sir Francis E. J. Smith, of a well-known firm of solicitors, Messrs. Lee and Pembertons, wrote for a copy of "your excellent and very interesting brochure." Colonel Earle of Calne (Wilts.) wrote that Sir Francis, his cousin, had shown him a copy and he wanted one. A K.C. ordered six copies. Miss Mary Wentworth Kelly, of the International Sportsmen's Club, wrote that the "most interesting pamphlet has converted me to your theory." She ordered eighteen copies. A copy was requisitioned by the Librarian of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Earl of Lytton has had correspondence with the Editor of the *News Letter*. He invited an explanation of the line of Ben Jonson's "Sweet Swan of Avon," and a full reply was sent to him. David Gorsky, scholar of Bruton School (Somerset) wrote "several of us were decidedly struck by your pamphlet." He asked the same question as the Earl.

Two members of the Fellowship did magnificent service in the distribution of the pamphlet, Sir Henry Lawrence and Mr. T. M. Aitken. They have kindly sent the Editor the following account of their propaganda in Oxford. Mr. T. M. Aitken:

"When the pamphlet was issued I conferred with Sir Henry Lawrence, and we decided, on the principle that we must educate our masters, to send copies to a number of prominent men. We therefore made lists to a total of well over one hundred names and sent a copy with compliments to, among others, the following: Marquis of Linlithgow, Earl of Halifax, Earl of Lytton, G. M. Trevelyan, Master of Trinity; Heads of some other colleges at Cambridge; Lord Lindsay, Master of Balliol; Heads and Fellows of other Oxford colleges; Dr. Gilbert Murray; Lord Elton; Walter Elliott; Dr. Major; Sir Ronald Storrs; H. Wilson Harris, Editor of the *Spectator*; Sir Hartley Shawcross; J. B. Priestley; G. Bernard Shaw; Dorothy Sayers; Sir Laurence Jones; Sir Alfred Zimmern; Arthur Bryant; S. de Madariaga; J. Dover Wilson; Bernard Darwin; Sir Cyril Norwood.

"It could hardly be expected that men of such standing as the above would proclaim their conversion by return of post, or that some of them would readily admit they had been teaching false doctrine most of their lives, and so reactions to the pamphlet are only coming slowly, but there is no doubt that quite a number have been impressed.

"A professor of Glasgow admits our case seems very convincing. A well-known author, so far orthodox, writes: 'As a lawyer I do feel you have prepared a case that is going to be very difficult to answer.' Sir Laurence Jones writes: 'The pamphlet is much in demand and has converted even some octogenarians.' A well-known K.C., who is also a D.Sc. and an LL.D., confesses: 'It now seems difficult to believe that W. S. wrote the

plays bearing his name. He appears to have been no scholar, and de Vere seems a likely choice.' " Sir Henry Lawrence adds :

" Most of the answers imply that the writers are too busy to bother : e.g. ' It does not matter who Shakespeare really was, so long as the poems and plays exist.' And much ignorance is shown : ' If I err, I err in good company. Sir Edmund Chambers has no doubt about the authorship ; he has spent most of his life investigating the life and the sources.' But compare Chambers' final conclusion in his own words : ' After all the careful scrutiny of clues, and the patient balancing of possibilities the last words for a self-respecting scholarship can only be that of nescience.' And, be it added, Chambers wrote in 1930, and the startling publications of Slater and Rendall were in 1931 and 1934.

" One candid friend wrote : ' As I get older I cling desperately to my belief that Shakespeare was Shakespeare, and I keep my mind firmly closed to any evidence to the contrary.' But there is hope in the young. I have heard of various instances of boys and girls aged 10 to 17 proclaiming de Vere with youthful contempt for the old superstition."

The Fellowship owes a debt of gratitude to Miss Marjorie Bowen and Mrs. M. H. Robins, Assistant Hon. Secretary. The former made a generous contribution towards the cost of its production, and the latter gave much time to its distribution. The cost has involved a great strain upon the resources of the Fellowship, and it is hoped that members will continue their endeavours to increase sales. Twelve copies are offered for ten shillings.

#### LIBRARIANS.

The Editor of the *News Letter* is an occasional contributor to the *Librarian* under the pseudonym of " Bookworm ". He recently devoted his column to an exposition of the case for Oxford, and this brought enquiries from librarians at Brighton and Shrewsbury.

### " ALIAS WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE "

Among the " Seven Shakespeares " listed by Dr. Gilbert Slater in his book of that name is Roger Manners, Fifth Earl of Rutland. The arguments for his authorship of the plays were first advanced by Prof. M. Demblon, of Brussels, over thirty years ago, but his thesis appeared so hopelessly inadequate that, outside a few special readers interested in such problems, the case for Roger Manners as the veritable " Shakespeare " was relegated to the home of lost causes. There it would have remained but for the enterprise of Mr. Claud W. Sykes, whose *Alias William Shakespeare* (Francis Aldor, London, 15/-) is a valiant attempt to resuscitate Roger Manners with scholarly argument, the technique of a Sherlock Holmes, and a Watson-like stooge so that a triumphant solution of the mystery must if possible be effected.

Mr. Sykes is fortunate enough to be introduced by Arthur Bryant, whose Preface proves how much he has enjoyed Mr. Sykes' ingenious arguments—though

he rather surprisingly admits that " but for one circumstance " he would have been completely convinced." This is, " that nothing in Mr. Sykes' narrative—for it is more than mere argument—makes me think that the William Shakespeare commemorated in Stratford church did not write his own plays." After this illuminating comment one need not be surprised to find that nothing (or very little) in Mr. Bryant's subsequent lucubrations proves that he knows very much of the Shakespeare problem. To give one instance, he says that he " can see nothing more unbelievable in the fact that the son of a dealer in agricultural produce in a little provincial town should have written *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* than that a Bedford tinker's son should have written *The Pilgrim's Progress*." This is, of course, the old argument—answered a thousand times—about genius, sheer genius, being able to do almost anything. If Mr. Bryant had had a little more acquaintance with the Shakespeare problem he would never have made it. If Prof. Cairncross is right, then *Hamlet*, written in 1588, was the production of William Shakespeare at the age of 24, and the brilliant author already had a dozen other plays to his credit by then. How he managed to assimilate the knowledge of history his plays show, to portray the way in which the highest aristocracy talked and acted and to reveal the extraordinary familiarity with topographical details on the continent by the age of 24, is not at all clear. On the other hand, why shouldn't a tinker's son write *The Pilgrim's Progress* at the age of 50, considering that he was brought up in a Puritan atmosphere, knew the Authorised Version of the Bible nearly by heart, and certainly was—like the writer of the plays of Shakespeare—a genius? As Prof. Saintsbury says of Bunyan, " He could see everything that was in the range of his sight and tell what he saw infallibly." Had William Shaksper of Stratford, at the age of 24, seen France, Italy and Denmark?

Mr. Sykes is, of course, on sure ground when he deals with the Stratford case. This was done so thoroughly by Sir George Greenwood that even such orthodox defenders as Sir Edmund Chambers have had to make concession after concession. It is when he comes to providing the evidence that the plays were written by Roger Manners that we begin to suspect there is no evidence. He dismisses Bacon and all the evidence connecting him with the plays almost as coolly as he does Edward de Vere, whose candidature for the honour he finds " amazing." De Vere was, he admits, " a poet of some distinction," but the " main " objection to his authorship is that he died in 1604 ; and both Stanley and Raleigh are rejected on, among other grounds, that they never went to Denmark—which the author of *Hamlet* must have done. The man who " shook the spear " who was " always in the right place at the right time," was undoubtedly Roger Manners !

The chronological difficulties connected with this candidate are contemptuously dismissed. Manners was born in 1576, and even at the age of twelve he was writing letters " reminiscent of Shakespearean prose." One letter which Mr. Sykes gives in proof

of this appears to me to be exactly the kind of letter a boy at school aided by his master could easily write, but let that pass. If, as Prof. Cairncross shows, *Hamlet* was written in 1588, are we to suppose that Roger Manners at the age of twelve actually did write it? Even if this date is disputed, it is a fact that the date given by one of the authorities quoted by Mr. Sykes, the editor of the "Irving Shakespeare" (violently orthodox) for *Love's Labour's Lost* is 1589-90; Prof. Furnivall "has no hesitation" in picking it out as Shakespeare's earliest play, and he gives its date as 1588-89. Thus, if Roger Manners was its author, he must have written one of the wittiest plays in the English language, with its wonderful knowledge of the court of Navarre, and packed with all sorts of hidden allusions to Elizabeth's own court, at the age of thirteen or fourteen! Anybody who can believe that will believe anything.

The way Mr. Sykes deals with the chronological difficulties is most interesting. Roger Manners died at 36, and he points out that Raphael, Mozart, Burns and Byron all died just before or after their 36th year. Sir Philip Sidney was an ambassador at 22; Victor Hugo wrote his first poem at the age of 20; and Thomas Chatterton filled two volumes with his poems and died before his eighteenth birthday. All these things are true, and prove the precocity of genius, but it would have been more to the point if Mr. Sykes had shown that Burns, a peasant, could easily have written Byron's travel poems without leaving Scotland; that Raphael would have had no difficulty in painting George Morland's typical English rustic scenes without leaving Italy; or that Mozart could have written operas if he had lived in Siberia without any knowledge of librettos, and so on. Genius yes, but even genius has to be taught and requires study. How could Roger Manners have written *Love's Labour's Lost* at the age of thirteen?

There is no evidence whatever that Roger Manners was recognized by his contemporaries as a playwright. There is exceptional contemporary evidence for Edward de Vere. His signed poems, most of them written before he was 20, challenge comparison with those of any other poet of the same age; and in 1598, though Meres mentions Shakespeare as well, he yet admits that "the best for comedy among us be Edward Earl of Oxford." Better than "William Shakespeare?"

"It is easy," says Mr. Sykes, "to see how Rutland could have written 'Richard III.'" He managed to see a copy of Legge's "Richard Tertius" which contained "Richard's wooing of Anne, which does not figure in the chronicles." Mr. Sykes gives 1593 as the date of its composition so that Rutland was 17—and given genius and a copy of a book, why should anyone be surprised that Rutland wrote it? Furnivall gives 1590-91 as the date for *Midsummer Night's Dream*—Manners was then 14, but after all, was not Raphael precocious? Mr. Sykes thinks the date should be between 1593 and 1595, so that even he had to jib at 14 in spite of Raphael. When commentators disagree as to dates, Mr. Sykes, of course, prefers to choose the one which suits Manners. The earl was in Padua in 1596, so that must be the

date for *The Taming of the Shrew*. Whilst Chambers gives 1594, and Garnett 1595, *The Everyman's Dictionary of Dates* gives 1596, so 1596 must be right. As this date is also the one given for *The Merchant of Venice*, what greater proof can there be that Manners also wrote the play at that date? It all falls so sweetly in line!

It can be admitted that Manners, like probably all the noblemen of his day, went to the theatre or saw private theatrical performances, but how this proves he also wrote plays is quite beyond me.

The evidence from many sources that Edward de Vere is the writer known as "Shakespeare" is overwhelming; and it is a pity that Mr. Sykes, instead of attacking the Stratfordian authorship, did not devote more of his time to demolishing it.

Mr. Sykes' book should, however, be read by all Oxfordians. It will help to strengthen their case. It is very well written, and throws a great light on the active part noblemen played not only in matters of State in Elizabeth's time, but in the development of the theatre.

H. CUTNER.

## OXFORDIANS DEBATE WITH MISS NEILL

At the City Literary Institute on 22nd February 1947, under the auspices of the Shakespeare Fellowship, with Miss Marjorie Bowen in the Chair, Miss S. D. Neill, B.A., spoke on "Why I have yet to become an Oxfordian."

Miss Neill, who unfortunately arrived over fifteen minutes late, spoke for nearly an hour, and it was not possible for either Mr. J. J. Dwyer or Mr. W. Kent, who ably replied, to develop adequately in the time which remained, their answers to the objections which she raised to the case for Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, as "William Shakespeare." Miss Neill stated that while she rejects the orthodox view that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays and poems (those who so believed were "past praying for and organically disposed to credulity"), and some years ago accepted the Oxford case, she now feels that that case is not clear, and we "just do not know."

She would appear from her remarks to have but a superficial acquaintance with J. T. Looney's *Shakespeare Identified* and B. M. Ward's *Life of Oxford*, and to be unacquainted with the extensive further research by such scholars as Canon G. H. Rendall, Admiral H. H. Holland, and Mr. Percy Allen, which has strikingly corroborated Looney's conclusions. *Shakespeare Identified* remains the best first book for a student of the subject, but a knowledge of the subsequent work is essential for anyone who seeks to pass an opinion on the matter.

Miss Neill was apparently not aware of the history of the "Ashbourne" portrait of "Shakespeare," nor of the fact that it, and the Grafton and Hampton Court portraits, are all, as has been shown by recent research, almost beyond question, portraits of Oxford. As was pointed out, her suggestion that in the case of the "Ashbourne" portrait, a faker, when the

demand for Shakespeare relics arose, had happened upon a portrait of the Earl and added the requisite name and dates, etc., could hardly account for three portraits. It would be rather a coincidence that Oxford's portraits, and no others, should happen to come into the portrait forgers' hands for the production of "Shakespeare" portraits.

She thinks that the very early poems of Oxford are poor stuff. Unprejudiced authorities of standing, such as Sir Sidney Lee and Dr. Grosart, have not shared that opinion. That they were "quarries" from which "Shakespeare" derived immortal lines in the plays is beyond all question. For example, the lines in *Romeo and Juliet* beginning "Else would I rend the cave where Echo lies," and the Echo stanzas (139-142) in *Venus and Adonis*, founded on Oxford's Echo verses (which were not published until recent times), and the passage in *Othello* commencing "If she be haggard" which comes direct from Oxford's verses on "Women."

Miss Neill questioned Looney's view that many of the plays were originally written in the 1570's and 1580's, and were put into literary shape—the form in which we have them—in the 1590's. She expressed the view that the writer was not the type of man who could or would "go over" past work again in that way: that they were written in the heat of inspiration, rapidly, and not thereafter worked upon or re-written. This argument, that the plays were thrown off rapidly in final shape, has surely been abandoned by all thinking commentators, orthodox or not. Has she forgotten Ben Jonson's lines at the beginning of the *First Folio*?

"For though the poet's matter nature be  
His art doth give the fashion; and that he  
Who casts to write a living line must sweat—  
Such as thine are—and strike the second heat  
Upon the Muses' anvil; turn the same  
And himself with it, that he thinks to frame  
Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn."

We need not accept Ben Jonson's testimony on everything, but at least he knew what he was talking about when he made that statement, and could have no purpose in misleading us.

Miss Neill as a woman knows that the simplicity of line in the masterpiece of the dress designer is apparent only, and is not achieved save by a high degree of art and meticulous attention to detail. *Ars est celare artem.*

How can she think the work of our greatest artist in words demanded or received less careful thought?

Miss Neill objected to the argument for Oxford authorship which is based on the claim that the plays are full of situations and characters from Oxford's life and surroundings, that it is improbable that a writer would introduce private and personal matters into plays for the public view.

She brushed aside the incontrovertible evidence that in fact the plays contain many such situations and characters.

Miss Marjorie Bowen dealt effectively with the objection, saying from her own great experience as a writer that from whatever source the plot is drawn the writer is bound to rely on his own experience

and contacts for what he writes, and Mr. Kent gave forceful illustrations of this from the works of Charles Dickens.

Miss Neill suggested that it was more likely that Oxford's son-in-law, the Earl of Derby, was the real Shakespeare. As the contemporary evidence in support is mainly a report by a spy that Derby was politically unimportant because he was busy "penning comedies," and the only important modern supporter is the French scholar Professor Abel Lefranc, whose work she admitted she had not read, it is not easy to attach much value to this point in her case.

The value of the debate was limited by reason of the slightness of the acquaintance of the opening speaker with the case, which she sought, somewhat airily, to brush aside.

J. S. A.

## HERETICS' WEEK, STRATFORD-ON-AVON

The British Council arranged, and advertised as "Heretics' Week," two lectures and a debate during the mornings of 20th, 21st and 22nd May last, in the lecture hall at Mason Croft, Stratford-on-Avon. This was once the home of Marie Corelli, who had anathemas for all Shakespeare heretics. The lectures were by Mr. Percy Allen and Mr. Alfred Dodd, respectively exponents of the Oxfordian and Baconian theories of authorship. On the third day there was a debate between the two. The lectures and debate were well attended, the audiences being evidently composed in the main of persons with slight acquaintance with either theory. The fact that the audience at the debate was considerably the largest indicates the interest which the two lectures had aroused.

The Chair was taken on each occasion by Miss Lee, representing the British Council.

Mr. Allen, whose lecture dealt with *Twelfth Night*, did not attempt an exposition of even the main outline of the case for the authorship of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, for which the time at disposal would have been inadequate. He confined himself to analysing a number of the references in the play to events which took place in the 1570's, and to the actors in those events with whom characters in the play can be identified. Members of the Fellowship will be well acquainted with the convincing identification by Mr. Allen (in, for example, his *Plays of Shakespeare and Chapman in relation to French History*); and others of Olivia with Queen Elizabeth; Malvolio with Sir Christopher Hatton; Orsino with Alençon; Viola with Alençon's envoys, La Mole in 1572, and Simier in 1579; Sir Toby Belch with Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek with Sir Philip Sidney.

The second lecturer, Mr. Alfred Dodd, examined at considerable length the claims in favour of the orthodox theory, the Oxfordian and the Baconian. The lecture had been already printed, and at the close copies, occupying twenty closely-printed pages, and entitled "Who was Shakespeare? Was he Francis Bacon, the Earl of Oxford, or William

Shakspere?" were distributed to those present. The lecture (unlike Mr. Allen's, which had left time for questions and discussion) occupied the full time allotted to the meeting.

On the third day, as Mr. Dodd had in effect stated his case on the previous day, Mr. Allen opened the debate, being followed by Mr. Dodd in reply, an interesting general discussion bringing the proceedings to a close. In his opening Mr. Allen said that, while claiming that the Plays were mainly the work of Oxford, he believed Will Shakspeare had a part in their authorship (particularly in the comedy scenes) but did not believe that Bacon had any substantial share in the work.

In the space of this short note it is a matter of difficulty to attempt more than to convey the general impression which the lectures and debate left on the mind of the present writer, and to mention a few points which he found of interest.

Mr. Allen had too little time for his lecture to give more than a slight indication of the evidence on which his identifications rested. Anyone who has studied the Oxford case in the works of Mr. Allen and other writers will appreciate this, but Mr. Lewis Biddulph, the Hon. Treasurer of the Bacon Society, who wrote a review of the lectures and debate in "Baconiana" of July last, and has evidently not made any study of the Oxford case, dismisses the identifications as "the spinning of cobwebs" and "light, airy fancies."

Mr. Biddulph, in a question which he put after the lecture, suggested that to portray Sidney as "the cowardly and drunken" Aguecheek (to use Mr. Biddulph's own expressions) would have been so gross a libel on Sidney that the identification must be incorrect. Actually, no doubt, it was the kind of caricature which was most appreciated by the court audiences for whom the play was intended, and was, as Mr. Allen indicated, probably free from any real malice or ill-feeling. There is adequate evidence that the Earl and Sidney were on good terms, despite the well-known quarrel on the tennis court.

Mr. Dodd, who claimed to have studied the Oxford case, displayed slight knowledge only of it in his lecture and the debate, and his purported summary of it and references to Oxford's character and life gave a distorted and inaccurate view of the case. Mr. Dodd then proceeded to ridicule his own distorted presentation of it and asked the audience to infer that the Oxford case was without foundation. While this is well worn debating technique, it is not adapted to help in a search for the truth. Might not Baconians profit perhaps from a study of Francis Bacon's own methods of inquiry, in his undisputed writings?

Mr. Dodd was more effective in his setting out of the evidence against, and the lack of evidence in support of, the orthodox case.

When he came to the case for Francis Bacon he stated, as if it were fact, much of the "story" of Francis Bacon which Mrs. Gallup claimed to have discovered in cipher in the First Folio of the Plays, in Bacon's works, and in those of many of his contemporaries (all of which she claimed he wrote).

Mrs. Gallup's "deciphering" is, beyond all doubt, as she ultimately in effect admitted, pure invention.\* The "hidden story" is not in the style of Bacon or any other Elizabethan, but Mrs. Gallup's pseudo Elizabethan English, hysterical and diffuse, and contains such anachronisms as the constant use of the pronoun "its," which was never used in Bacon's time, besides incorporating considerable passages from Pope's translation of the Iliad, made long after Bacon's time.

Mr. Dodd was, he said, prepared to rest his entire case on the evidence of Sonnets 88, 111 and 125, that the writer had been impeached on the evidence of a suborned informer, attainted, and convicted of a crime, and the fact that that was true of Bacon, but not of Oxford nor of William Shaksper. It may perhaps be suggested that no ordinary reader of the Sonnets would find it possible to attach any such meanings to the sonnets in question, any more than one would regard otherwise than as figurative Sonnet 46: "Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war," etc.

The other parts of his case were equally unconvincing, such as the so-called evidence of the Northumberland manuscript, which in fact proves precisely nothing in regard to the question at issue.

Mr. Allen put up the better case, and generally the audience seem to find him more interesting than his opponent.

The British Council have created a wise precedent in encouraging the open discussion, in Stratford-on-Avon itself, of the authorship question.

J. S. A.

## THE SHAKESPEARE MYSTERY

Since the case for William Shakespear of Stratford is against all human probability the problem is to find and prove an alternative solution. The Baconian heresy is dead, choked with its cryptograms: the choice of Lord Derby eloquently expounded by Abel Lefranc is denied by his long silence before his death in 1642.

Slater has shown that the personality of Lady Pembroke, *nee* Mary Sidney, provides the key. This lady was the daughter of Sir Henry Sidney, an eminent officer of Queen Elizabeth, who successively governed Ireland and South Wales. She was sister to Philip Sidney, and both were enthusiasts for poetry.

They attended the Queen's Court and were closely allied in friendship and blood to the nobles who wrote plays (under disguise) and maintained companies to act them.

Among these patrons of the Drama, the chief were

Edward de Vere	Earl of Oxford
William Stanley	Earl of Derby.

Marriage ties connected them. De Vere's eldest daughter married Derby. De Vere's third daughter married Lady Pembroke's younger son: and second daughter was for a time engaged to Lady Pembroke's elder son.

Philip Sidney and his sister jointly wrote "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia," a poem much esteemed at the time.

\* See "Secret and Urgent, the Story of Codes and Ciphers," by Fletcher Pratt (Robert Hale Ltd., 1939), page 92.



When Philip was killed near Arnhem in 1586,  
 Lady Pembroke revised and edited it.

When Lady Pembroke died in 1622, the poet  
 William Browne wrote the famous epitaph :

Underneath this sable hearse  
 Lies the subject of all verse  
 Sidney's sister Pembroke's mother  
 Death ere thou hast slain another  
 Fair and learned and good as she  
 Time shall cast a dart at thee.

Mary was born in 1561 ; married Lord Pembroke  
 in 1577 ; had two sons in 1580 and 1584. The  
 elder William succeeded his father in 1601, the  
 younger Philip was created Lord Montgomery and  
 succeeded his brother in 1630. These are "The  
 most noble and incomparable pair of brethren" to  
 whom the First Folio was dedicated in 1623.

What was the reason for the adoption of a  
 pseudonym, and for its inviolable secrecy ? Elizabeth  
 was open to attack from many quarters : firstly  
 from Spain with the Armada of 1588 and subsequent  
 threats of invasion from the Low Countries ; aided  
 by attempts at assassination. Secondly, from Mary,  
 Queen of Scots, with French help ; thirdly by revolts  
 of discontented nobles.

Such powerful noblemen as the Duke of Norfolk  
 and the Earl of Northumberland were executed.  
 Oxford and Derby were under suspicion of Catholic  
 sympathies, and Derby of ambition to supplant the  
 Queen through his royal descent. Elizabeth was  
 therefore jealous to command the attendance of her  
 chief nobles at her court. When Oxford went  
 abroad to Brussels without her leave he was summarily  
 recalled. So when Lady Pembroke held her poetic  
 entertainments at Wilton, close by the Avon in  
 Wiltshire, her guests ran no small risk from the  
 Queen's displeasure, if they were discovered.

At Wilton House Lady Pembroke entertained  
 Queen Elizabeth in 1599, and King James in 1603 ;  
 she invited James to see a Shakespeare play, and  
 added, "The man Shakespeare is here now." Her  
 two sons were then engaged to Oxford's two  
 daughters ; what more natural than that Oxford  
 was in Wilton House with the brides-elect ? There  
 is no doubt that Oxford in his youth led a riotous  
 life and scorned the social conventions ; in fact the  
 Queen sent him to the Tower for the *lese majesté* of  
 seducing a Maid of Honour.

Some men of sober mind held that such a man  
 could not have composed these works of genius. It  
 is hard to gauge the artistic temperament but there  
 is little reason to suppose that in the sixteenth  
 century it was more staid than in the nineteenth : and  
 in recent times art and riot have seldom lived apart.

Moreover here again the influence of Mary, Lady  
 Pembroke, may have been paramount. Many of  
 the Shakespeare plays are assigned to the 1590's, and  
 in 1590 Oxford was 40, thus passing the age of folly,  
 and Mary was 30, at the height of her charm and  
 wisdom. Due allowance must be made for the  
 conjunction of poetic minds.

Slater has pointed out numerous passages in the  
 Shakespeare plays which betray a woman's touch ;  
 and Mary was experienced in revising and editing

her brother's copious output. Court etiquette did  
 not permit noblemen to produce dramatic plays  
 under their own names and Lord Burleigh strongly  
 disapproved of the association of his son-in-law  
 Oxford with play-actors, then classed by law with  
 vagabonds. None the less, noblemen wrote ; and  
 contemporary critics agreed that Oxford was the most  
 talented writer ; while it is established that he sold  
 many of his estates in order to support his companies,  
 and his secretaries such as Lyly and Munday. It  
 would clearly have been most improper for a lady of  
 high degree to be known to have such low pursuits.

The secrecy that began through fear of Elizabeth  
 was thus continued into the reign of James owing to  
 society pressure. Oxford adopted the *nom de plume*  
 of William Shakespeare when he published *Venus*  
 and *Adonis* and *Lucrece* in 1593 and 1594. When  
 William Shakespeare of Stratford came to London  
 and joined a theatrical company, Oxford made use  
 of this coincidence to supply a mask for all the output  
 of Wilton House.

Slater suggests that after Oxford's death in 1604  
 Lady Pembroke occupied the years of her widow-  
 hood in preparing these plays for publication, and  
 that her sons, while they undertook the publication,  
 determined that the anonymity should be preserved.  
 They selected Ben Jonson as their agent. In 1619  
 Jonson told Drummond that he was in receipt of an  
 annual payment from Lord Pembroke. Lord  
 Pembroke, as Lord Chamberlain, was in charge of  
 the Drama, and also gave Jonson a permanent  
 salary from the State. It is alleged that a room in  
 Wilton House was known as Jonson's room. He  
 was thus commissioned to fabricate the myth con-  
 necting the humble citizen of Stratford with the  
 genius of this family of noblemen.

Jonson's invocation of the "Sweet Swan of Avon"  
 is a sample of his imaginative powers : for the Swan  
 was Lady Pembroke and the Avon flowed by Wilton.  
 Jonson's humorous deception has not been success-  
 fully challenged till the present. Those who know  
 of Jonson only from the inscription "Oh Rare Ben  
 Jonson" may like to study the opinion of John  
 Dryden in his *Absalom and Achitophel* that no man  
 was "more made for mischief."

SIR HENRY LAWRENCE.

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 (Macaulay 2007).

The Hon. Editor is always glad to receive MSS,  
 newspaper-cuttings, letters, suggestions, etc., for publi-  
 cation, and he counts upon the active co-operation of  
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