

The Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter

SEPTEMBER 1948

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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, 9th October, 1948, at 3 p.m.

No separate notice will be sent out.

All members are urgently requested to be present.

At the conclusion of the business Mr. William Kent will give a short talk on "Literary Masks".

OXFORDIANS—WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

Oxfordian watchmen—what of the night? This is the question asked by Mr. H. Cutner, our able and worthy treasurer, on another page. He thinks it is rather black. Stratfordians abound, and are still "in heathen darkness dwelling", to quote a missionary hymn the Editor sang in the days of his nonage. He fears it is quite true. Because he agrees with his friend he has always emphasised more the negative than the positive case. It is putting the cart before the horse to push De Vere to audiences of people who have thought so little about the matter that they see no objection to Shakspeare. In the short article the Editor has contributed to the *Encyclopaedia Americana* he has started with demolition. When, however, Mr. Cutner hints at too much complacency, a demurrer may be offered.

We cannot gate-crash into societies. We must wait to be asked. It is noticeable that if several subjects are offered, the chances are that one touching on Shakespearean scepticism will not be accepted. This only underlines the contention of Sir George Greenwood, forty years ago, that the Stratfordian belief had become a religion. To query the accepted authorship, in some quarters, is hardly less shocking than it would be to offer to discourse on "Is there a God?" or "Is Buddhism preferable to Christianity?"

The Editor has a recent example. Like our worthy secretary, he is a cricket-lover. Visiting Leeds for a test match, he agreed to address John O'London's Literary Circle there. He offered a talk on London or on the Shakespeare problem. The former was preferred. However, he was able, in his stride, to push in a wad of Shakespearean heresy. This proved so interesting to the audience that he came near to giving a second lecture. He found some inclination to sudden conversion, and no hostility. A few pamphlets were sold. This is a hint. If De Vere cannot be admitted by the front door, try a side one!

However, front doors may be delightfully thrown open. During the coming winter, under the auspices of the Wandsworth Borough Council, the Editor is lecturing at five of its libraries (Wandsworth, Putney, Balham, Clapham and Earlsfield) on "Who was Shakespeare?" Streatam Library alone is omitted, and this only because, strangely, the Libraries Committee had overlooked the fact that the date proposed was Boxing Day. There is no deception. The Editor disclosed his man.

What to him is more vexatious is the ineptitude of the intellectuals. Of course, the professors are past praying for! They are the priests of the esoteric faith in Stratford. Dr. Dover Wilson, in his ivory tower—more impregnable because it is in North Britain—is comparable with the Grand Lama of Tibet. He is an oracle, and the delphi is Stratford. He answers no questions. The Editor sent him twenty! Other writers, however, not professors of literature, may be almost as obtuse. J. B. Priestley has been referred to in a previous issue. Dr. G. G. Coulton was another example. The Editor recently read his magnificent book *Medieval Panorama* (1938). There are allusions to the Shakespeare problem. "To treat it as a marvel that Langland was able to quote all the Latin we find in *Piers Plowman* is as perverse as the belief that Shakespeare could not have written as he did unless he had really been Francis Bacon." There is another reference to "the limbo of Baconian theories". Dr. Coulton, it is safe to assume, had never heard of De Vere. It would appear also that this great scholar, exploder of myths about the Middle Ages, and consequently the *bete noir* of the Roman Catholic Church, swallowed the myth from Stratford. Probably he had never investigated the matter, but it is regrettable that men of his eminence, who have no time for it, are not content with humble agnosticism. Stratfordians are very fond of the assumption that we sceptics place all our addled eggs—as they consider them!—in one basket. In other words, we have one argument, i.e. that the Stratford man could not have had the necessary education. Last winter, when the Editor listened to the extraordinary discourse on the sonnets referred to in the previous issue of the *News Letter* (he will be on the same platform shortly), and the presence of sceptics was revealed, the secondary schoolmaster who had been the speaker tackled that question. Not a word had been said about it, but it is an excellent plan gratuitously to provide an argument for your opponent, always taking care to select one to which *you think* you know the answer!

This leads me to the type of minor objector, who, with some reading behind him, thinks he knows all about it. A few months ago the Editor had a letter in the *Evening News* avowing his belief that, contrary to the general opinion, the Monument was designed by Robert Hooke, the City Surveyor, and not Sir Christopher Wren. This was based upon the publication in 1935 of Hooke's diaries, probably as little read as Thomas Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*. This brought a cavilling communication from one Edward A. Schalch of Thames Ditton, who intimated that he was a lecturer and was writing a book. In the course of correspondence the Editor mentioned other myths, and intimated that in his views a good pair were Whittington and his cat and Shakspeare and his plays. To this Mr. Schalch replied that the "Shakespeare-Bacon-de Vere controversy has become almost humorously threadbare . . ." The Editor retorted that this was hardly borne out by his experience, and mentioned that the British Council, the London County Council, the Wandsworth Borough Council, and the Editor of the *Encyclopaedia Americana* had all shown hospitality to the heresy. The Editor also invited what legal gentlemen would call further and better particulars of the threadbareness, and of the literature Mr. Schalch had read upon the subject. Needless to say there was no response, and the usual excuses when a debate was proposed. However, Mr. Schalch deserves a mark that could not be given to Dr. Coulton. He had *heard* of a third claimant! The Editor likes his phrase "humorously threadbare". It certainly applies to Stratfordian proponents, including himself.

To conclude on an encouraging note. In July the Editor lectured to the London University Vacation Course on "London for the Literary Pilgrim." Most of the audience consisted of American citizens. Prof. Bullough, who presided—a specialist on poetry in general and Sir Philip Sidney in particular—at lunch afterwards, said he was glad the Editor had mentioned his Oxfordian theories. He thought these matters should be aired. An American in the audience revealed himself as an Oxfordian who had carried out some investigation overseas.

A CANON WITHOUT COURAGE

The following is an extract from the *Stratford-upon-Avon Scene*, reporting a service in the Church in connection with the birthday celebrations :

"Canon Stevens referred to people who issued challenges to debate the authorship of the plays ; people who wanted to rob Stratford of its great citizen in favour of 'this earl or that earl'. His message was 'Equip yourselves, men and women of Stratford, with everything you can know about Shakespeare. Read the plays ; read his life ; read the dramatic literature, built up by truly eminent writers. Then you will be able to face every attack. If the case were taken into court tomorrow every judge and juryman would come down on the side of Stratford and Southwark !'

"Canon Stevens said he noticed someone smile :

perhaps it was the man who issued a challenge to debate."

On reading the above the Editor wrote to the Canon. The following are extracts from his letter :

"I cannot but express my amazement at the audacity of the above statement in view of the fact that you have never shown any willingness to stand up to attack yourself. It is like the clergy to exhort others to fight their battles. Courage has never distinguished them . . . Again let me say an audience of goodly size can be offered you next winter at the City Literary Institute for a courageous defence of your Stratfordian faith . . .

"I was not at Stratford, so was not the smiler. How he would have smiled if he had known the preacher was exhorting his audience to do what he dared not do himself . . . I thank you for the advice you gave to your audience to read the biographies. Nothing is more likely to lead to scepticism. My advice would be 'Bury your head in the sand. Turn a blind eye to all the sceptical books. Go on in the simple faith you once said was your attitude.'

"I will come to any meeting at my own expense when you are speaking on Shakespeare, provided I am allowed to speak as long as you.

"The appropriate quotation for your Stratford discourse :

'But good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny ways to heaven ;
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.'"

THE SHAKESPEARE "BIRTHPLACE"

In our next issue we shall publish an article by Mr. H. Cutner on the amusing circumstances of the purchase of the so-called birthplace. A few months ago there was published (by the Cambridge University Press) *Shakespeare Survey*, the first issue of "An Annual Survey of Shakespearian Study and Production". This admirable volume includes an essay entitled "The Heritage of Shakespeare's Birthplace" by Levi Fox, its Director. He says :

"THE RECORDS DO NOT INDICATE PRECISELY AT WHICH HOUSE IN STRATFORD-UPON-AVON WILLIAM WAS BORN. LOCAL TRADITION ALONE ASSIGNS THE WESTERN PART OF THE BIRTHPLACE PROPERTY AS HIS BIRTHPLACE."

Tradition is often a lying jade. At any rate, the annual report of the Trustees and Guardians showed that during 1947 103,137 people paid a shilling each to visit it. So in that time a sum of over five thousand pounds was obtained, on the amazing admission of the Director, by false pretences. The racket will be more profitable in 1948 as the entrance fee has been raised to 1s. 3d.

It is no use any reader writing to the Director for he has assured the Editor that he never enters into

controversy. We can be equally assured that he would be also "one of these same dumb wise men" if asked to publicise in *Stratford* the admission quoted above. It will not appear in the guide to the "Birthplace", otherwise so enlightening to the discerning.

Some years ago the Editor was in Westminster Abbey when he was accosted by a woman who said: "Excuse me, but is this an old abbey?" Probably out of the large number that visit the "Birthplace" only a small proportion are better informed about Shakespeare than that woman about the original West Minster. The appropriate quotation is Malvolio's remark: "I say this house is as dark as ignorance." In no place in the British Isles is ignorance more profitable than at Stratford-on-Avon.

SIR WILLIAM DUGDALE

Early in the year Mr. E. R. C. Brinkworth gave a talk over the wireless on Sir William Dugdale. He said he was the greatest of all antiquaries. The Editor wrote to him asking his opinion as to the accuracy of Dugdale in respect of the Shakespeare monument. The reply was as follows:

"Dear Mr. Kent

Thank you very much for your interesting letter. I must confess that I have never given my attention to Shakespeare's iconography. I agree that it is extraordinary to find Dugdale out in any inaccuracy and I am glad you have put the matter to the Dugdale Society. It will be interesting to know what they think of it."

The Editor informed Mr. Brinkworth that the Dugdale Society and the present Sir William Dugdale declined any discussion of the matter—for obvious reasons.

In this connection it should be said that it now appears that the alteration in the Stratford monument must have been made at a date earlier than suggested in the Shakespeare Fellowship's pamphlet. Nicholas Rowe reproduced Dugdale's engraving in his edition of the works in 1709 and repeated it in 1714. In 1725, however, in an edition published after his death, the monument appears as it is now. It is difficult to understand how Dr. Thomas, in 1730, was content to reproduce Dugdale's engraving. He may, however, have taken the view that he was concerned only with what Dugdale saw.

LAVENHAM

The Editor has had an interesting letter from Mr. F. Lingard Ranson of Lavenham. He says:

"I am delighted that the *News Letter* has come back with such renewed vigour. Yes! it is very good indeed, and I am glad to say equal to that of our American friend, which I have always admired. . . . The pamphlet which you enclosed is exactly what I have been looking for. I often get asked for details of the Oxfordian side of the Shakespearean question of authorship, and here they are. *Just the very thing for the beginner* . . .

Some years ago (1937) I published the enclosed

short account of Lavenham. . . You will note some reference to Edward de Vere as Shakespeare. As a result of a review in our local paper and magazine I was asked to write an article on this subject. There was a lively correspondence for some months. . . . but I defeated my critics (thanks to the help of Mr. Allen, Col. Douglas, Capt. Ward, etc.), and I was very pleased when the County Magazine asked me to edit a Shakespearean page . . . It proved a great success, but owing to the war the magazine ceased, and when it began to be published about two years ago I was seriously ill and have remained so until a few months ago, when I began to make wonderful progress. I have made 'feelers', and have been asked to contribute, not on the subject of Shakespeare, but as an antiquary with subjects of antiquarian interest.

The truth is the bulk of our Suffolk folk are Baconians (Bacon's mother was of Lavenham origin).

Regarding Castle Hedingham . . . at one time the owner did take an interest in the question. But it was because of zeal shown by the Rev. H. Flynn of Belchamp St. Paul—home of Arthur Golding, uncle to the 17th Earl of Oxford—who was a near neighbour.

In Lavenham we had several lectures on the Oxfordian subject. Once Col. Douglas came. He had a good audience, who passed a resolution that they quite accepted Oxford as the author, but the war put paid to everything like this, and now the people are too indifferent."

The enclosed guide to Lavenham is a model of this kind of book, and it is not surprising that Mr. Ranson's work has gone into six editions. There are more than three pages on De Vere, and the last cross-heading in the book is "Lavenham is in the genuine Shakespeare Country".

How many readers would be prepared to form a party to visit this country next spring? The committee of the Fellowship would endeavour to make arrangements if there was sufficient response.

SHAKESPEARE'S TOPICAL REFERENCES TO HIS OWN PLAYS

By REAR-ADMIRAL H. H. HOLLAND, C.B.

At the meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship on 10th April, 1948, Admiral Holland gave an interesting lecture on the above subject. He took plays in pairs and showed how one was connected with the other by what seemed an allusion that, in a loose way, bound the two together. This, he thought, assisted us in fixing the chronology. The following present some of his suggestions. The dates in brackets are those he assigns to the play.

Midsummer Night's Dream (1573). Thisbe and Pyramus are lovers, their parents disapproving. She goes to meet him at Ninny's tomb, and is seized by a lion (her mantle getting covered with blood). *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1576). Sylvia and Valentine are lovers, her father disapproving. She goes to meet him at Mantua. Captured by brigands and rescued

by Proteus, she says: "Had I been seized by a hungry lion, I would have been a breakfast to the beast, rather than have false Proteus rescue me."

Merchant of Venice (1577). Antonio, in bond to the Jew for three thousand ducats, has to give a pound of his flesh in payment of the bond. *Love's Labour's Lost* (1578). Costard (a prisoner of Don Armado) is given a letter by him and the offer of his freedom if he delivers it to Jacquenetta. Thinking of the service he has to perform, and then Armado, as he exits, Costard says: "My sweet ounce of man's flesh! my incony Jew!"

Hamlet (1583). When the ghost of his father encountered Hamlet on the battlements, its last words to him are "Remember me." *The Winter's Tale* (1584). Paulina, talking to the King about his wife, supposed by her to be dead, says: "Were I the ghost that walk'd I'd bid you mark her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't you chose her; then I'd shriek, that even your ears should rift to hear me, and the words that follow'd should be 'Remember mine.'"

Winter's Tale (1584). Antigonus, after depositing the baby girl Perdita on the desert coast of Bohemia, hears "a savage clamour," and says: "This is the chase! I am gone for ever. [Exit, pursued by a bear]." *Twelfth Night* (1587). Fabian, describing to Sir Toby Belch, Viola's condition at the thought of fighting a duel with Aguecheek, says: He "pant and looks pale, as if a bear were at his heels."

Othello (1588). Othello is a Moor of Barbary, and his jealousy is the main theme of the play. *As You Like It* (1589). Describing how she would tease her lover, Rosalind says: "I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen."

Antony and Cleopatra (1597). In that wonderful description that begins: "The barge she sat in like a burnished throne burn'd on the water," Enobarbus describes to Agrippa how Cleopatra, when she first met Mark Antony, "purs'd up his heart upon the river of Cydnus." *Cymbeline* (1598). Iachimo describes Imogen's bedchamber to Posthumus and says: "It was hang'd with tapestry of silk and silver; the story proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman, and Cydnus swell'd above the banks."

King Lear (1598). King Lear foolishly decides to divide his kingdom among his three children. *Julius Caesar* (1599). Cassius says: "If you would consider the true cause why all these fires, why all these gliding ghosts, why birds and beasts from quality and kind . . . you shall find that heaven hath infused them with these spirits, to make them instruments of fear and warning." These portents had appeared in the play. Cassius also says "Why old men fool and children calculate." There is nothing to account for this remark which is quite inexplicable except as a reference to a previous play.

Julius Caesar (1599). At the end of the play, Brutus having been defeated, says farewell to Strato, then he runs on his sword and died. *Macbeth* (1599). says: "Why should I play the Roman fool and die on my own sword?"

THE SHAKESPEARE CIRCLE

By WILLIAM KENT.

The above is the title of a book by C. Martin Mitchell (Cornish Bros., Ltd., Birmingham). It will come as a boon and a blessing to men and women who dissent from the orthodox Stratfordian faith regarding the author of the "Shakespeare" plays. "All Stratfordians who are interested in their town, wrote a reviewer in the *Stratford-on-Avon Scene*, will find this book a valuable addition to their shelves." Is this to imply "a worm in the bud"? Those interested in the town may find the book enlightening; those keen on facts about its hero must feel a chilling frost come over their spirits as they read it.

The Stratford archives, we are told, were well kept. They are certainly very voluminous. Mr. Levi Fox, Director of the "Birthplace", recently informed an audience that the trustees possessed fifty thousand documents. Shakspeare's son-in-law, Dr. Hall, left "extensive writings," Mr. Mitchell tells us. He nobly conceals his grief here, but inwardly he must have wept like anything to see such a quantity of manuscript and not a scrap to show that William Shakspeare had ever engaged in literary work or had any particular importance. In his opening chapter our author says it is "high time that John Hall took his proper place in history . . . He must no longer remain just 'Shakespeare's son-in-law'." This is matter for mirth. On the showing of his book Shakspeare was principally of note as Dr. Hall's father-in-law. There is no evidence that his son-in-law took any more interest in him than any other Stratfordian in his relations by marriage, and Mr. Mitchell candidly tells his readers that "at home in Stratford Dr. Hall bulks as far the bigger of the two".

Is there no explanation? Of course there is! What Stratfordian ever failed to bring up from the vasty deep of his superstitious imagination some conjecture to cover an embarrassing fact? If you have smiles, prepare to shed them now. William Shakspeare, though even our author has "more than a suspicion" that he "did a little trading", and his litigious propensities are never denied, was "self-effacing," "modest and unpretentious." So it came about apparently that Dr. Hall became known as one "who had married the daughter of the man who purchased New Place," and who shyly hid his literary light under a bushel.

Early in his book the author—a Stratford septuagenarian—cites Dr. G. M. Trevelyan's great *Social History*. Naturally, he does not quote the following passage: "Society is getting so mixed that even a theatre manager, if he has made his money and settled down as a leading citizen in his native town, shall, when he died, have his bust within the chancel." Of course, the most astute epistolary angler would not land the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, into a Shakespeare controversy, but how does this make sense if the manager was also the greatest poet and dramatist in our literature?

Mr. Mitchell makes some allusions to Shakspeare's

father. Here we have him in the true lineage of Lee. Perhaps "good wombs have born bad sons," but Mr. Mitchell is determined to believe that the lovable William Shakspeare must have had at least a likeable father. John "must have been a downright goodhearted man." He was "tough, determined." "It is true they turned him out of the Council when he ceased to attend regularly, but they only treated him as they did any other Corporation official who fell below the recognized standard of conduct." Most amazingly, Mr. Mitchell says "even Sir Sidney Lee admits" he could "write with facility and was credited with financial aptitude." Passing over the extraordinary implication that Lee was a valuable witness because of a taint of scepticism, Mr. Mitchell should have known that at the time of his death in 1926 he had long recanted that view as to John Shakspeare's penmanship. In 1909, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he wrote: "there is no evidence that he could write."

Now let me examine a few of Mr. Mitchell's remarks about son William. Of course "the grammar school at Stratford was one of the foremost in the Midlands." This being so, it is odd that no single student from our point of view, and only one from any other, made any fame for himself. Here is a delicious morsel of Mitchell:

"From his garden he could easily throw a biscuit into the grammar school ground, where he would have so often played as a boy, and perchance as a 'reverent senior' on its bowling green. The head master who lived equally close by, might on occasion have been invited over to drink a cup of sack and exchange a Latin phrase or two with the poet and cousin Greene or the doctor."

Perhaps our author would like a few more "mights." The boys of the school *might* have staged one of the plays in honour of the school's greatest son; the Head Master *might* have planned some such celebration of his fiftieth birthday. He *might* have penned some reminiscences of the great poet for posterity. Some of his old schoolfellows *might* have done the same. Alas, they were affected by a passionate reticence! He himself, according to our author, was "unassuming"!

How moving, too, he becomes when referring to the Monkwell Street lodger:

"And at the Montjoys in Cripplegate we may reasonably judge he had at the most one or two rooms to himself in that smallish establishment where he stayed so long—the best part of ten years, probably more—even through the disturbing domestic changes that we know took place. At the same time, the kindly interest he took in the affairs of the unpretentious Huguenot family, when asked to do so, and his judicious help when they got into that legal tangle of theirs, cannot fail to draw out affectionate regards for the great man, as he then was in the eyes of London—though his wig-maker doubtless thought him to be just a quiet contented lodger. One would like to have such a quiet, sympathetic person about the house."

We need not quarrel about that long tenancy,

though its length is much exaggerated, but will proceed to paint a pretty picture in our minds. Shakespeare writing his two plays a year in one of those small rooms with a landlord who, likely enough, could not write, but was himself in the theatrical profession. He harbours genius unawares; he is not curious about this continually scribbling lodger. Moreover, when a lawyer's clerk comes to take a deposition from this remarkable man in 1612, when, like Prospero, he had laid aside his art, he describes the one-time "great man in the eyes of London" as a gentleman of Stratford-on-Avon. Perhaps the present writer, who also was a lawyer's clerk and has taken some thousands of statements from witnesses, had Bernard Shaw been amongst the number, would have started "George Bernard Shaw, Gentleman of Ayot St. Lawrence, states . . ."

Of the Earl of Southampton, Mr. Mitchell writes: "For several years at least these two men must have been in unusually close acquaintanceship." Perhaps he has never seen the biography of the Earl by Charlotte Carmichael Stopes (1922), in which the author said frankly: "I did not start this work for his sake, but in the hope that I might find more about Shakespeare, which hope has not been satisfied." Southampton is as barren as Stratford! Truly, as our author says, "It is a little short of the marvellous how many fathoms deep Shakespeare drowned his sceptre and his book . . . and becomes just an unpretentious, simple Stratford-on-Avon householder and cultivator of a town garden! Whilst flamboyant, argumentative, Ben Jonson is to be buried in the Abbey." To which some of us might retort, like the would-be cleric, faced by the thirty-nine articles, "I believe as much as I can but the Lord will forgive me if I have not the digestion of an ostrich." Naïvely too we are told "every good Shakespearean will, of course, have his or her own list of attributes." No faults, however! Attributes only, please! Baconians and Stratfordians are ranged together here. De Vere was a naughty fellow and so could not have written anything worth noticing. The lives of poets are as edifying as the lives of the saints!

So a good poet must be good throughout. Certainly a good husband; loving too! Here comes in Shakspeare's second best bed, as famous as the Bed of Ware, mentioned in *Twelfth Night*, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Mr. Mitchell knows all about it. "That clause was inserted as a special mark of affection to secure to her the indisputable possession of what meant so much to the couple concerned." This should, however, have been rounded off with an explanation of the slight cast upon the best bed. I believe a favoured one is that, as a pair of old shoes may be easier to the feet than new ones, a second best bed might have been more comfortable to lie upon. However, the bed cannot be regarded as a weapon in any warfare. It must remain in cold neutrality. Except for the fact that it was certainly a wooden one, we might refer to an iron curtain.

Of course, Will was fond of "Anne and the bairns."

"We know the poet's love for all little children."

His plays, far above those of all other dramatists of his day, reverberate with gentle allusions to the young. (I like sometimes in imagination to picture that weekly Shipston carrier who worked the Stratford area, taking the poet cheese and eggs and maybe occasionally a couple of Avonside ducklings, and bringing back toys or trinkets, or maybe a pair or two of stockings or a shawl, from the Cheapside shops.)

We are told that "an intriguing essay could be written on Shakespeare in London, the man of sorrows, the man of work and play." Most true! Such essays have been written. You turn a blind eye to facts and brighten up your imagination. I must agree too that it is most unlikely that Shakspeare had his family in London, though I see no reasons why, if he had, there should be any documentary reference. I agree that "the unsophisticated and country-bred wife, and three young children, would be swamped in the necessarily theatrical surroundings and mixed associates of Shoreditch or Blackfriars."

Referring to Shakspeare's stay here, there is a reference to Richard Quayney's request for the loan of £30. "The letter that was met with the poet's prompt acquiescence is to-day in the Birthplace Museum." I have many times taken parties to see the tablet on the site of the Bell Inn in Carter Lane, from which the letter was written. I have always said that there was no evidence whether the money was advanced. Mr. Mitchell's statement is nothing but guesswork. In one place he refers to Sir William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire*. Of course, he does not tell us that the monument represented there is not the one now in the Church. What about it, Mr. Mitchell?

Now, as to Dr. Hall, really the hero of this interesting book. He left books behind him, but his father-in-law, "an ardent reader of history, romance and the classics," left none! Still more remarkable, Dr. Hall left many manuscripts, some relating to the maladies of fellow Stratfordians. He died in 1635, three years after Milton's famous sonnet had been prefixed to the Second Folio. The man of whom it was said "Kings for such a tomb would wish to die" was, we are asked to believe, Hall's father-in-law. Yet it never occurred to him that anybody would be interested in an account of his end. "Shakespeare's last illness is unrecorded—there is a gap in the Observations at that date." Strange indeed. Perhaps some Baconian tampered with the manuscript! Still one might have thought that some other document, say a letter, would intimate Hall's pride in father-in-law. There is nothing, and when, as we all know, Dr. Cook paid a visit to his widow in 1642, and "bought the whole of her husband's holograph papers," there was no sign of a manuscript of her father or even one of his precious books which surely would have passed into possession of his children, even if he had surprisingly forgotten them when making his will.

This leads to my conclusion. Mr. Mitchell, flicking at others, often unconsciously flicks at himself. Referring to Judith Quayney, *née* Shakspeare, and the

little known about her, he says "one guess is as good as another." This applies to the many guesses of Mr. Mitchell and is school. He refers to the "ignorance, credulity and superstition of the Middle Ages" as regards medicine. I fear these words could be turned against him in respect of Shakespeare. If the plays of "Shakespeare" had come down to us anonymously, I am sure neither Mr. Mitchell nor any other writer would ever have suggested that they were the work of the man he wants us to honour. There is a story of a lady who admitted she had never felt any doubts about the existence of God until her vicar started to defend the belief. I would urge upon Mr. Mitchell the moral of this. The more books Stratfordians write to defend their god, the better pleased we heretics will be. Even Sir Sidney Lee's works have not been so disquieting as this book must be to the reader who wants to believe in the Stratfordian faith and asks only for evidence.

Still, however worthless it may be as a contribution to literary history, or as propaganda for the Shakespeare Evidence Society, for which there is a crying need, I am sure those of the medical profession will find in it much of interest.

ARE WE PROGRESSING?

By H. CUTNER

I use this heading deliberately because I feel sometimes that the Fellowship requires a little shaking out of its complacency.

We are a propagandist society, and it is our business to make converts. Effectively to do this is "to spread the gospel," and it behoves every member to tackle Shakespearean orthodoxy at every turn. We need the chance of debating, of lecturing, of providing "brains trusts," before as many literary and other societies as possible, and members should make it a point to press our claims wherever they can. That we have a very hard and long way to go was shown in the debate Mr. William Kent held in May, 1948, at the Community Centre in Maida Vale.

Ostensibly it was supposed to be a debate as to whether it was reasonable to believe that William Shakspeare of Stratford could have written the Plays; and Mr. Kent, who opened the proceedings, put up a very good case against him. I certainly expected his opponent, the Secretary of the Johnson Society, Mr. Frederick Nixon, would follow by demolishing Mr. Kent's arguments, but he preferred merely to give some reasons why he was certain that the Stratford man did actually write the plays. He barely touched upon any argument against, mostly relying on the fact that if Horace, who was a slave, could write such beautiful Latin—Mr. Nixon gave us a few specimens—or an ostler's son—meaning Keats—could be a great poet, there should be no difficulty in believing that an illiterate from Stratford could write thirty-seven of the most famous plays in the world; and he pooh-poohed any difficulty with regard to the fifteen thousand words Shakespeare used, or his classical knowledge, or his familiarity with the procedure at royal courts.

The resulting discussion from the audience was all

eye-opener. One gentleman, an expert on genealogies, spoke for fifteen minutes at least, quite irrelevantly—even dragging in the Tübingen school on the New Testament—to emphasise his belief that Shakspeare wrote the plays. Another, faced with the reproduction of the Shakespeare Monument from Dugdale, could find hardly any difference from the present Monument—claiming that the old gentleman hugging a sack of corn was much like the one with a pen in his hand—they represented the same monument! A lady gave an interesting account of the greatest Shakespearean scholar that ever lived (whom she knew), and who was the son of an illiterate Scottish peasant. He could recite the whole of the plays by heart; therefore Shakspeare of Stratford must have written the lot! Another gentleman, apparently feeling frustrated because Bacon had not made the expected appearance, read out of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* part of J. M. Robertson's anti-Baconian article, and scathingly pointed out that Bacon wrote the whole of Elizabethan literature—according to some Baconians: this proved once again that Shakspeare wrote the Plays! Another gentleman suggested that the Earl of Oxford went to Shakspeare when he wanted some plays written, and this indisputably proved who wrote them. Even one or two other speakers, having perhaps an uneasy suspicion that Mr. Kent's arguments had not been touched, rather incoherently admitted that the problem was of course difficult to understand; but, after all, the plays must have been written by the Stratford man. The small number who comprised the few who voted with Mr. Kent were mostly members of the Fellowship. Voters for the Stratfordian were not many more in number, and several abstained from voting.

What is the moral of all this? Well, it is obvious that, apart from pressing the claims of de Vere, we of the Fellowship have got a great fight against the almost universal belief that the Plays were written by Shakspeare of Stratford. The work of Sir George Greenwood seems to be quite forgotten or unread. The credulity of the average Shakspeare-believer is almost incredible, but it is there. Before saying anything about Oxford—or even Bacon—we have to show that it was impossible for the Stratford man to have written a line of the Plays—that there is no evidence whatever to “wed” him to them, and the belief that he did, in the case of the ordinary member of the public, rests almost entirely on the fact that he was told so at school.

The Fellowship has to be a “teaching” Fellowship; we must master the case against Shakspeare, and urge it when and where we can. Only then can we show that, among the claimants for the glory of the real Shakespeare, the most reasonable is the man who was acclaimed among the “greatest” for comedy, and the greatest of the Court poets by his contemporaries—Edward de Vere. But we have a tremendous fight ahead of us yet.

I should like this to be a call to arms. If the Fellowship has any *raison d'être* it is to spread the good news. Is it too much to hope that every member

will contribute something for the cause? Not just attendance at our meetings or paying a subscription, but that little extra effort which will make him or her a missionary.

There is no room whatever for complacency.

DICKENS AND SHAKESPEARE

Baconians like to claim that Charles Dickens was an unbeliever in the Stratfordian faith and to imply that he had an inclination therefore to what they consider the only true faith as regards the authorship of the Shakespeare plays. Through the courtesy of his old friend L. C. Staples, Editor of *The Dickensian*, the Editor of the *News-Letter* is able to quote Dickens's words. They were in a letter dated 13th June, 1847, addressed to William Sandys, a Cornishman who was to have given Dickens assistance in a proposal that was never carried out, to commence a novel (possibly *Martin Chuzzlewit*) in the former's county.

“I have sent your Shakesperian extracts to Collier. It is a great comfort to my thinking, that so little is known concerning the poet. It is a fine mystery; and I tremble every day lest something should come out. If he had a Boswell society wouldn't have respected his grave, but would calmly have had his skull in the phrenological shop windows.”

This hardly implies doubts as to authorship, and the date of the letter almost precludes any knowledge on Dickens's part of Baconian theories. It seems to imply rather a fear that there might be some revelation of Shakespeare's character disturbing to admirers such as have been made regarding Dickens himself in recent years.

* * *

Mrs. Fitzroy Carrington has presented the English Speaking Union with a number of books on the Oxfordian theory of the author of the “Shakespeare” plays. Captain R. W. Orme, the Public Relations Officer, wrote: “We are honoured to be entrusted with an exceptional collection such as this, and I would like to express our deepest gratitude.”

* * *

Two of the most enthusiastic members of the Shakespeare Fellowship, Sir Henry Lawrence, K.C.S.I., and Mr. T. M. Aitken have published a useful pamphlet entitled *The Inspiration of Shakespeare*. It includes the two articles contributed by the former to the *News Letter* and, in addition, a letter from Mr. Gelett Burgess which appeared in the *New York Tribune* on 8th June, 1947, and a letter from Mr. Aitken published in *The International Women's News* for October, 1947. Any member desiring a copy of this valuable pamphlet should apply to Mr. T. M. Aitken, Larchwood, Boar's Hill, Oxford.

GEMS OF MYTHOLOGY

Of his first eight years in London nothing is known. When he was 27 Shakespeare wrote his first play *Love's Labour's Lost*. During the next twenty years Shakespeare wrote 37 plays. Queen Elizabeth was very fond of his poetry which he read to her, and of his plays which he had acted at court. Fame and

popularity did not spoil Shakespeare the man. In February, 1616, he attended Judith's wedding at Stratford, and a few days later he entertained some of his old friends, among them Ben Jonson, a great writer. As soon as they departed people noticed that Shakespeare looked ill. On 23rd April, 1616, he passed away, leaving behind him his incomparable bequest to us.

Fifty Famous Lives by G. H. Holroyd (1938).

* * *

If our view of the origin of *Henry VIII* is correct, our last glimpse of Shakespeare as an author reveals him in the act of rendering a good natured service to a fellow dramatist, an attitude entirely in keeping with his character.

Dr. Richard Garnett
(*English Literature*, 1903).

* * *

The serene spirit of his latest plays coincides with the date of his residence at Stratford, and could not well have been his if he had not been living in the enjoyment of domestic tranquility. He can hardly have felt any deep affection for his wife with whose society he had dispensed for so long, but continuous dispeace would hardly have escaped the Stratford gossips. The eccentric bequest to his wife of his second best bed must have been explicable by some circumstances unknown to us. Could it have been Mrs. Shakespeare's marriage bed?

Ibid.

When a thing is asserted as a fact always ask who first reported it, and what means he had of knowing the truth.

James Spedding.

* * *

The falsehood of a story will not prevent it from keeping its place in history if it once gets admitted with a good introduction and without audible protest.

James Spedding.

* * *

Claimants can always count upon a following. It doesn't matter who they are, nor what they claim, nor whether they come with documents or without. It was always so. Down out of the long vanished past, across the abyss of the ages, if you listen, you can still hear the believing multitude shouting, "Perkin Warbeck" and "Lambert Simnel."

Mark Twain.

* * *

It generally takes three hundred years to make people believe a fact when a myth gets a start.

Mark Twain.

* * *

The orthodox Shakespearean faith has now assumed the position of an established religion. It has its priests, its creed, its articles, its anathemas, and its communications. Some of its dignitaries, I grieve to say, are even following the example of those ecclesiastical

persons alluded to by the late Professor Huxley, who consider themselves justified in their old established custom of using opprobrious names to those who differ from them. Thus as 'Yah, infidel' was good enough argument for the rationalist, so now 'Yah, lunatic' is good enough for him who diverges from the straight path of Stratfordian orthodoxy.

Sir George Greenwood (1902).

(Dr. Dover Wilson, in a note to the Editor, expressed his satisfaction at being among the sane people. In reply the Editor cited this passage from Greenwood, and thanked Dr. Dover Wilson for pointing his moral forty-six years after he thus wrote).

* * *

In this intellectually demoralising myth I trace an analogy with the muddling through theory which has been infinitely harmful to the nation. In effect Stratfordians must be held to believe that an uneducated person could surreptitiously absorb all the learning of the Elizabethan age and transmute it into immortal verse because he was an Englishman to whom the ordinary processes by which vast knowledge may be acquired were unnecessary. Hograth Hulzer, the eminent German scholar, shortly before his death in 1924, put one aspect of this question in forcible language. It is a plain matter of fact that, through a continued irrational belief in the Shakespeare delusion, the noble history of culture in England is disfigured by a most unsightly blur. The denial of truth always leads to hypocrisy and cant. Any poison of error, persistently poured into the open ears of a nation, especially of its boys and girls at school, inevitably affects the whole public mind with false methods of thought producing consequences fatal to efficient intelligent life.

Lord Sydenham of Coombe.

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71 Union Road, S.W.4. (Mac. 2007.)

The Hon. Editor is always glad to receive MSS., newspaper-cuttings, letters, etc., for publication. Articles should, if possible, be typewritten.