

The Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter

MARCH 1949

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NOTICES

On 7th April, at 3 p.m., at the Poetry Society's Room, 33 Portman Square, Mrs. M. H. Robins will read a paper, in which she has collaborated with Sir Henry Lawrence, on "Inspiration from Lady Pembroke." It is hoped for a large attendance to discuss a most interesting subject.

On 7th May there is to be a coach trip to Lavenham and Castle Hedingham. The cost will be about 12/6, including tea. There are a few vacancies. Application should be made to the Hon. Secretary.

SHAKESPEARE "BIRTHPLACE"

An article elsewhere in this issue relates the interesting circumstances in which a house in Henley Street, Stratford, was purchased as the birthplace of "the immortal bard."

In November 1948 the following letter from the Editor of the *News-Letter* was published in *The Listener*.

"Shakespeare Survey."

"Sir, I endorse your reviewer's praise of this handsomely produced volume, but surely all readers must be disconcerted by the following amazing passage in the essay entitled 'The Heritage of Shakespeare's Birthplace' by Levi Fox, the Director of what we must now say is called 'The Birthplace House':

'The records do not indicate precisely at what house in Stratford-upon-Avon William was born. Local tradition alone assigns the western part of the Birthplace property as his birthplace.'

Some may well ask whether in honesty after this frank avowal the trustees can continue to take 1s. 3d. from visitors to inspect it? Also, if the house is conjectural, what about the birthplace room in it? Presumably it is no longer so called.

This reminds one sadly of Henry James's clever story, *The Birthplace*. It should be better known."

There was no answer. What answer could be made? Stratford now owns it has the only unauthenticated literary shrine in England. In the next issue there will be some extracts from Henry James's story.

A BATTLE OF STRATFORD SPURS

In October the Editor received a card from the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon intimating that one "Mr. Wilfrid Osborne will deliver an attack upon the Anti-Stratfordians, under the heading 'The open conspiracy: a Counterblast to Fanaticism.'" This might be likened to a warning that an

enemy plane was approaching! A further notice sent to the Editor seemed more intimidating. It announced that "Mr. Osborne wields a very sharp sword."

The bomb was dropped (this is a more appropriate simile, for a sword is ineffective unless the opponent is close by), and the Editor made a counter-attack on the lecture as reported in the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*. With commendable fairness his letter was published in full, although the Stratford Editor gave it a heading of his own "An Old Old Story," whereupon the latter was reminded, in private correspondence, that the Stratford story was older than any heretical one. So far as the sword brandisher—perhaps spear shaker would be more appropriate—was concerned, he then gave up the fight, as intimated in the following letter which was also published:

"Sir, May I suggest that, as correspondence with Mr. Kent has never been instructive or edifying, it is best answered by being ignored."

Never! The Editor of the *News-Letter* had never heard of Mr. Osborne before October 1948.

There was private correspondence. Mr. Osborne intimated that the invitation was sent "at my express wish." He added: "Nevertheless I quite understand your desire not to be present." So, because the Editor would not spend two pounds on journeying to hear Mr. Osborne, with no promise of a platform, it was to be inferred that the editorial head was in a state suggesting the "quills upon the fretful porpentine" at the prospect of meeting a Stratfordian champion. The Editor retorted by inviting Mr. Osborne to travel to London for a debate. He pointed out that as the meetings of the Shakespeare Fellowship were in the afternoon, he need not be put to the expense of a night's lodging, as the Editor must have been at Stratford. He further guaranteed Mr. Osborne's return fare. The private correspondence—on Mr. Osborne's side—closed with the following epistle:

"Mr. Osborne has read Mr. Kent's letter, and is not surprised at the contents. He had already been warned of the futility of indulging in discussion with Mr. Kent, owing to Mr. Kent's fundamental incapacity to discuss this matter without intellectual paltering."

So Mr. Osborne, having fired his shot, ran away! It still remains that eighteen months after the Editor's challenge appeared in the Stratford paper

no inhabitant of that town has brought his courage to the sticking point and dared to champion its god, in the presence of the unbeliever.

Mr. Osborne kindly offered to recommend books for the Editor's enlightenment.

"My own library, I am afraid, is much too advanced for you, but on receipt of 6d. in stamps I will be pleased to arrange for a list of suitable books to be compiled." The Editor accepted the offer, and in due course the advanced student of Shakespeare kindly sent the elementary "picker up of learning's crumbs" a list of those books deemed suitable to his capacity. The Editor soon expressed sincere gratitude for this favour. In one or two of the works he found valuable ammunition. They were in the way of boomerangs. Here was Dr. F. S. Boas saying, in *Shakespeare and his Predecessors* (1896):

"In 1575 John Shakespeare increased his property by the purchase of two houses in Henley Street, including the one which tradition on very insufficient grounds has identified as the poet's birthplace.

As Oxford was included by Francis Meres in his *Wits Treasury* (1598) 'among the best for comedy among us,' he must have been a playwright, though no extant piece bears his name"

The Editor was referred to a history of Social Life in England. This was about as good as sending one to *The Arabian Nights* for evidence about Mahomet. A book of five hundred pages on Elizabethan grammar schools was found to contain no reference to Stratford, thus scotching the suggestion, so fondly advanced, that its seminary was one of considerable fame. Mr. Osborne had the audacity to recommend Dr. G. B. Harrison's Elizabethan and Jacobean Journals. These throw no light whatever on William Shakspeare of Stratford as the author of anything.

The Editor offered Mr. Osborne a copy of our pamphlet for a shilling. No order was forthcoming, nor any answers to the twenty questions sent to him. The Stratfordian has shown his spurs; he hath borne himself below the promise of his prospectus, doing in the figure of a lion the feats of a lamb.

THE PUSILLANIMITY OF THE PROFESSORS

The professors of literature are like the priests of a religion. Each has a faith and a shrine to guard. In the case of the former they are that William Shakspeare, occasional actor, wrote the plays that appeared under the name of "William Shakespeare," and that his holy place is Stratford-upon-Avon. This is the faith once for all delivered to the professors—by previous professors. It must be maintained as the price of a professorial chair, for whilst a Bishop can repudiate almost all the doctrines of his church and remain in his see, the Stratford god could not be denied without the professorial chair tottering to its fall.

All these gentlemen are "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in"—by tradition. Their position was

well put by Archbishop Whately, writing on a different issue:

"It may be expected that many who perceive the force of these objections, will yet be loth to think it possible that they and the public at large can have been so long and so greatly imposed upon. And here it is that the magnitude and boldness of a fraud becomes its best support; the millions who for so many ages have believed in Mahomet or Brahma, lean as it were on each other for support; and not having vigour of mind enough boldly to throw off vulgar prejudices and dare be wiser than the multitude, persuade themselves that what so many have acknowledged must be true."

The professors persuade themselves, with an obvious motive for doing so, but how can they persuade others? Dr. Ifor Evans informed the Sunday Shakespeare Society that he would require a year's vacation to answer the questions the Editor of the *News-Letter* would put to him, if he agreed to meet him on a platform. These about a belief maintained by the professor from his youth up! How more clearly could it be manifested that Dr. Ifor Evans obeys a convention, and does not follow a conviction. Yet, in his *Short History of English Literature*, he audaciously wrote: "to any unprejudiced view it is clear that the Stratford man wrote the plays." He teaches this behind college walls, but dare not maintain it on a public platform. If any young student thinks later that he knows better, he can be assured he will have no opportunity to demonstrate it. His old mentor will be too busy! Then there is Dr. Dover Wilson, who answers no questions, and Prof. Allardyce Nicoll, who knows very little about Shakspeare but does know he wrote the plays. As Dr. Johnson said, if you desert the probable you soon reach the marvellous.

Dr. G. G. Coulton wrote:

"Probability is the guide of life and it should be also the foundation of Historical Method. All discussions and theories are mischievous which by representing Historical Method as something esoteric, tend to obscure this truth. That which we label as peculiar to the specialist is in danger of becoming peculiar to a clique. The more we divorce History from the common life of ordinary men, the more we strangle its own vigorous life. The self-taught student is no doubt prone to exaggerate this; but University Professors are tempted to neglect it."

It was put in a more colloquial way by George Eliot. Mr. Hacket was told that parsons "are too high learnt to have much common sense."

"Well," remarked Mr. Hacket in a modest and dubious tone, as if throwing out a hypothesis which might be considered bold, "I should say that it is a bad sort of eddication as makes folks unreasonable."

Referring to parsons, recalls a recent leader in *The Times*. It was entitled "Ivory Tower." It commenced as follows:

"How those reprobate old divines who thundered through half a Sunday morning about stiff punishment to come must be chuckling. Their pulpits are occupied by milder incumbents rationed to a few brisk minutes of cheerful sermonizing. Threats of future retribution are out of fashion."

Yes; but the parson does not refer to the time when they were in fashion, and in the view of his predecessors founded in truth. If he did his congregation might ask whether he was likely to be less fallible than they had been? So with the professors of literature. They must keep the orthodox flag flying, or the prestige of the specialist must sag. William Hazlitt wrote:

"Hobbes is of opinion that if their passions or interests could be implicated in the question, men would deny strictly that the three angles of a right-angled triangle are equal to two right ones."

Bernard Shaw has put it as succinctly through the mouth of one of his characters: "You can't argue with a person when his livelihood depends on his not letting you convert him."

BACONIAN BARKS

Our Baconian rivals have been suffering some embarrassment. They have been confused with the Bacon Marketing Board, and so the Christian name of their hero has had to be added. Henceforth it is the Francis Bacon Society. They are worried too about the Oxfordians, and the ridiculous amount of attention they receive. There are dark hints in the New Year number of *Baconiana*. After saying that "The Oxfordians seem to get quite a lot of such extraneous and showy publicity given to them," there is this extraordinary passage:

"It would be interesting to learn what the paid membership of the Oxfordians amounts to and from whence they derive their funds . . . It is fairly obvious that many Stratfordians, who view the whole case of the Bacon Society with considerable misgivings, would be quite capable of subsidising an active organisation if they could, even say the Oxfordians, who, while they profess to throw Shaksper of Stratford from his pinnacle, are working primarily to attempt to undermine us if they can. It is a pity from their point of view that they have so poor a candidate in their sixteenth century fop who wrote nothing better than some doggerel . . ."

We need hardly say we have not a penny of subsidy from Stratford. We admit to being small in numbers, but we are growing, and our American offspring is much bigger than ourselves. As they added 150 members in one year, perhaps the world over there is little difference in numbers. Moreover, we are less than half the age of the Bacon Society. We have sold a thousand copies of our shilling pamphlet. We have had support from a few notable people. Marjorie Bowen still champions our cause. The late John Galsworthy was much impressed by Thomas Looney's book and purchased a number of

copies. Dr. Sigmund Freud wrote to our late President, Lt. Col. M. W. Douglas, expressing appreciation of the latter's book as "the most complete and impartial summary of the case." Dr. Freud also said in his *Autobiography* (1935): "I no longer believe that William Shakespeare, the actor from Stratford, was the author of the works that have been ascribed to him. Since reading *Shakespeare Identified*, by J. T. Looney, I am almost convinced that the assumed name conceals the personality of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford."

As to De Vere's "doggerel" let modern critics speak. "The Earl of Oxford has a charming lyric 'What cunning can express'" (Harold Child, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, 1909). "A poet of some merit in the courtly Italian vein . . . He was a great patron of literature. His own verses are distinguished for their wit, and in their terse ingenuity reflect something of the coxcombry which seems to have been a leading feature in his character." (W. J. Courthorpe, *A History of English Poetry*, 1897). "Oxford . . . wrote verse of much lyric beauty. A sufficient number of his poems is extant to corroborate Webbe's comment that he was the best of the courtier poets in the early years of Elizabeth's reign and 'that in the rare devices of poetry he may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent among the rest.'" (Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1899).

The three writers above quoted are dead. We have no reason to believe that they were ever sustained by Stratford subsidies. We can imagine Baconians chortling over the coxcombry. Let them chortle! One thing that divides us from them it is their extraordinary idea that the writer of the plays must have been a most admirable man, one of flawless character. Even some Stratfordians do not claim so much. The ethical test has no validity, and even if Bacon was as bad as Macaulay contended it would not constitute any difficulty in accepting the claim for his authorship of the plays. We can even believe that fops may be clever! Lord Byron and Oscar Wilde might so have been designated.

Perhaps the advertising opportunities of the Editor of the *Naus-Letter* are distressing to the Baconians. Like the texts in tramcars, his convictions must needs be apparent even to the unconverted, whereas Baconian propaganda is of use only to those who are seeking salvation from Stratford. The Editor is glad to say that his Oxfordian views now appear in the following books: *London for Everyman*, *London Worthies*, *The Lost Treasures of London*, *London for the Curious*, *London for the Literary Pilgrim*, *Mine Host London*, *My Lord Mayor*, *Let's All Go on the Thames*, *London for Americans*. Also, in the course of the present year there will be a short article by him, advocating the Oxfordian case, in a new edition of *The Encyclopaedia Americana*.

THE STRATFORD MONUMENT

There can now be no doubt whatever that it has been altered by reason of John Aubrey's description of it, published for the first time in a recent and most

admirable volume, *John Aubrey and His Friends*, by Anthony Powell :

"Mr. William Shakespeare, Poet, in his monument in the Church at Stratford-upon-Avon his figure is thus : a tawny sattin doublet, I think, pinked : and over that a black gown : the sleeves of the gown do not cover the arms, but hang loose behind."

MISAPPLIED QUOTATIONS

It is desirable that in furthering our cause no doubtful weapons should be utilised.

There are three quotations sometimes misapplied. Sir Edmund Chambers, in *William Shakespeare : a Study of Facts and Problems* (1930), after discussing hypothetical associations with Warwickshire, wrote :

"All this amounts to very little. Whatever imprint Shakespeare's Warwickshire contemporaries may have left upon his imagination inevitably eludes us. The main fact is his earlier career is still that unexplored hiatus, and who shall say what adventures, material and spiritual, six or eight crowded Elizabethan years may have brought him. It is no use guessing. As in so many other historical investigations, after all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the balancing of possibilities, the last word for a self-respecting scholarship can only be that of nescience."

Clearly Sir Edmund was not questioning the authorship, but only speculation about Shakespeare's early life. There has been similar ignorance about the youth of other great men, e.g. Chaucer and Cromwell.

"Ben Jocanan" in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* is not Ben Jonson, though Stevenson's *Dictionary of Quotations* said so. The editor of the Globe edition of Dryden shewed that it was a Dr. Samuel Johnson—not, of course, the "Great Cham." He was "author of a learned work *Julian the Apostate*, published while the Exclusion Bill was in agitation . . . and with objects exclusively political to shew the danger to a national religion from a sovereign of opposing faith, and to controvert the doctrine of passive obedience." A later line than those usually quoted refers to this work and says : "He chose the Apostate for his proper theme."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his lectures on Shakespeare, said :

"And ask your own hearts—ask your own common sense—to conceive the possibility of this man being, I say not the drunken savage of that wretched sciolist, whom Frenchmen, to their shame, have honoured before their elder and better worthies—but the anomalous, the wild, the irregular genius of our daily criticism ! What ! are we to have miracles in sport ? Or, I speak reverently, does God choose idiots by whom to convey divine truths to man ?"

Only Baconians—who also claim Dickens as a sceptic—have ever read these remarks as an indication of doubts as to the authorship of the plays. All that Coleridge implied was that Shakespeare was not simply the "poor Warwickshire peasant," as Carlyle

called him, but a cultured man. In other words, he conceived of him as Churton Collins did.

THE SHAKESPEARE BIOGRAPHERS

The following is a quotation from *John o' London's Weekly*. It is Phyllis Bentley, on a new book on the Brontës :

"Historians and biographers dealing as they do with fact, should never use the words 'must have,' 'surely' . . . Mrs. Harrison's work abounds in these locutions, so that one feels one must go through her statements with a toothcomb to discover what is fact and what fancy—or to use a politer and in this case juster term, imaginative reconstruction."

How reminiscent of Sir Sidney Lee ! Our member, Mrs. Mary C. Russell, has carefully read his famous "Life." She counted 171 examples of "wishful thinking" ! "Doubtless" and similar words occur forty-eight times ; "probably," and derivatives, thirty times. Mrs. Russell suggests for the title-page a quotation from *Hamlet*, "*Polonius* : What do you read, my Lord ? *Hamlet* : Words, words." Sir Henry Jackson, Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, once wrote :

"It seems to me that the case in favour of the Stratford player has suffered a good deal from the advocacy of Sidney Lee who, having edited the *Dictionary of National Biography*, has somehow come to be regarded as an authority on English literature."

We are now promised still another biography—by Mr. Ivor Brown. We can be certain this will be more cautious. Mr. Brown will not put in print the extraordinary suggestion made after his lecture to the National Book League that "sweet" and "honey-tongued" referred to the physical attractions of the bard. Mr. Brown has seemed at times as if he was on the brink of a plunge into the clearer waters of the Anti-Stratfordians, but he has resolutely refrained from accepting invitations to meet sceptics on a platform. If he had he might have fallen right in.

WHAT OF 1950 ?

Our President, Admiral Holland, is already agog with plans for the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of Edward de Vere. He points out that, owing to the change of calendar in 1752, the real date would be 22nd April (Shakspeare's would be 2nd May). He makes the sensible suggestion that we should always accept the orthodox date, 23rd April, as near enough. Suggestions for a celebration will be welcome from members. Three of them recently inspected Brook House, Hackney, now under repair. There is little left of the Elizabethan part, but perhaps in a year's time, in such an appropriate place, a meeting could be held.

"THE PLAYS THE THING"

The production of Miss Amphlett's play has been the event since the last issue of the *News-Letter*. report appears elsewhere. Mr. T. L. Adamson

expressed the hope that one day we should see it adequately performed, and in this we shall all join. It is an excellent piece of work, and the author deserves much more publicity than she can hope to get. Orthodoxy as regards Shakespeare, stalks the boards as it does the professorial platform. Would some of our wealthier supporters contribute to a special drama fund—to assist us in hiring costumes and a small theatre for a really first-class show?

TRUTH

This old established periodical, true to its name and reputation, published a valuable article by Sir Henry Lawrence, advocating the Oxford case. Letters in support from Lt. Col. Douglas and Mr. Percy Allen also appeared. The only one from a Stratfordian point of view relied upon ridicule, not reason, and was therefore true to type.

THE SHAKESPEREAN "BIRTHPLACE"

By H. CUTNER

In the many accounts given of the (supposed) birthplace of William Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon, few give the real reason why it was bought in 1847 to be preserved as a national memorial. That the property is—or rather was—as old as William's father may be taken for granted, but that he was in fact born there is very dubious indeed. All the same, and speaking for myself only, it does not seem to be of much consequence; for he must have been born somewhere, and most Elizabethan rooms of the sort were obviously much alike.

At all events, some such thought may have passed through the mind of the famous American showman, Phineas T. Barnum, when, always on the look-out for "novelties" he visited England in 1847, and found himself at Stratford—like his countryman Washington Irving before him—looking at this old property. What a *coup* it would be if it could be transferred, lock, stock, and barrel, to his museum in New York, and there proudly exhibited as the actual and factual Birthplace of William Shakespeare, the greatest poet in history!

It looked like a hovel, it is true, but any similar building, after three hundred years, might well have been the same. He seriously contemplated offering to purchase it. Rumours of this resolution spread about Stratford. On 10th April, 1847, "X" wrote to *The Times* about them. It is remarkable that he admitted dubiety about authenticity.

"Doubts have been entertained whether this is the identical house in Henley Street in which John Shakespeare lived at the time of the birth of his illustrious son; but, at any rate, it is clearly sustained that the boyhood of William Shakespeare was spent under that early roof. That fact has hallowed the place. It belongs to the greatest intellectual glory, not only of our nation but of our race."

On 16th April "E" backed up "X." "Its value," he wrote, "is said to be but £2,000, and several

American speculators are already in the field." Patriotic passions were surely aroused when he added "Are we about to relieve from transportation our felons and thieves, and to confer the honour upon one of our country's fondest treasures?"

A Government Department, the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, was appealed to, but in vain. Like Dickens's Circumlocution Office, not yet in imaginative being, they had acquired the art of not doing anything they could avoid. J. O. Halliwell—later Halliwell-Phillipps—then entered the field. This gentleman was not of the myth making order of Sir Sidney Lee. He fired more shots than anyone from Doubting Castle. He alluded to a "Black Bear," a sign speciously hoisted for the first time at Kenilworth a few years before. He continued:

"So with what is called Shakespeare's house at Stratford. Refer to the real history of the matter, and we shall find we have no authentic information respecting the particular house in which our great dramatist first saw the light."

After saying that he may have lived there, Halliwell continued:

"On the other hand the project of an American speculator to make a show of the house, first at London, then in the principal cities of America, and afterwards to sell it back again to the English when they are thoroughly ashamed of having suffered it to be disturbed from the only spot where it can be of any real interest, ought to be sufficient to shame us into some effort."

It did. A Metropolitan Committee (Lord Morpeth was its President) combined with one from the Shakespeare Club at Stratford. In August the Prince Consort contributed £250.

On 16th September, at the Auction Mart, London, the house was offered. The posters referred to it as "The True Heart-stirring Relic of a most glorious period and of England's immortal Bard. The most honoured monument of the greatest genius that ever lived." After all this, it was surely cheap to get it for £3,000, as the combined committee did. So the countrymen of the "immortal bard" were saved from the nightmare of seeing it "trundling about on wheels like a caravan of wild beasts, giants, or dwarfs, through the United States of America," a possibility envisaged in a leading article in *The Times*.

Barnum related the facts briefly in his autobiography, published in 1855.

"While in Europe I was constantly on the look-out for novelties. Not a fair was held within a reasonable distance that I did not visit, with a view to buy or hire such exhibitions as I thought would 'pay' in the United States. I obtained verbally through a friend the refusal of the house in which Shakespeare was born, designing to remove it in sections to my museum in New York; but the project leaked out, British pride was touched, and several English gentlemen interfered and purchased the premises for a Shakespearean association. Had they slept a few days longer I should have made a rare speculation, for I was

subsequently assured that the British people, rather than suffer that house to be removed to America, would have bought me off with twenty thousand pounds."

As at the time of the purchase only about £1,800 had been collected, perhaps the blasphemer who planned to remove the sacred shrine would have been pressed to reduce the ransom. Still, had he held out, a holy horror would, no doubt, have constrained all kinds of charities—balls, garden parties, theatrical performances, to stay the fell deed, and Barnum would have profited hugely by the credulity of the British-speaking people on both sides of the Atlantic.

Many are still more credulous than Dr. F. S. Boas and Mr. Levi Fox, the present Director. They are both in the line of doubters that was started by Halliwell.

The Birthplace has had various appearances during its career, and it is not certain what it looked like in Shakspeare's time. Even ten years after its purchase, very little had been done to improve it. In one of the first sketches made of the place in 1762, two gables are shown; by 1806 they had disappeared. They were added when the houses were restored. Sir Sidney Lee admitted that the only part of the house that remained as in Shakespeare's time was the cellar—and this is not shown to the public. What a racket "The Shakespeare Birthplace" is!

DID EDWARD DE VERE MAKE A PRIVATE MARRIAGE?

(Paper read by Mr. G. W. Phillips before the Shakespeare Fellowship on 13th November, 1948.)

Many facts concerning de Vere demand explanation. What caused the sudden collapse of the arrangements for his wedding, which the Queen was awaiting at Theobalds? When it was celebrated in London three months later, why did he, like Count Bertram, forthwith "put away the Countess, his wife"? Why was he so determined to go abroad, that he even went without permission? Before going again, in 1575, why did he think it necessary to tell the Queen and Dr. Masters that if Ann were with child, it was not his? Why did he refuse to speak to the Cecils on his return, and forbid Ann to come to Court? Except this child, which he disowned, why did she have no child in the first ten years of the marriage? Finally why, after refusing so long to cohabit with her, did he abandon his refusal at Christmas, 1581? And why was this simultaneous with the trouble about Ann Vavasor? What made him retire into obscurity after bearing the canopy in 1588, and what is the unlifted shadow which lies across his memory?

All these questions find a satisfactory answer, if, during his wardship, de Vere affianced himself to some lady of his own choice; if he had a son by her; and if she died in or before 1581.

In canon law, marriage is made by the consent of the parties, and for that consent no human power can supply. A forced marriage, accordingly,

is null. In 1570, the general European law still prevailed in England, whereby a mere agreement to marry, without any formal ceremony, secular or ecclesiastical, constituted a valid marriage, though not always indissoluble, until consummated. Nor could marriage settlements, or transfer of property be effected, until it was solemnized. Moreover, the law gave the sovereign, or the lord of the fee, the right to dispose of his ward in matrimony. If the ward refused the match proffered by his guardian, he forfeited the value of the marriage: and, if he married without his guardian's consent, he forfeited double the value (*valorem maritaggi*).

If, therefore, de Vere affianced himself to someone, she would be thenceforth his wife; but, if he did it without permission during his wardship, he would be liable to a forfeit so large that he could pay it only by extensive sale of lands. Such extensive sales began in 1576, on his return from Italy as a Catholic, and almost ceased from 1586, when he was granted the pension.

Possibly he met the lady while he was in the northern parts of this realm with the Earl of Sussex, about April, 1570 (for "men are April when they woo, December when they wed"); possibly, he wooed her with his sword, and won her love, doing her injuries; but, anyhow, it is likely that at that date, she and her family would be Catholics, especially if they were of the north. No wonder then that de Vere, though brought up Protestant, became a Catholic while abroad. Both would wish to keep the match private; she, because her family would not approve, and he because the Queen and Cecil would strongly disapprove, and would exact the forfeit.

His position would be that of Claudio in *Measure for Measure*:

"Thus stands it with me: upon a true contract
I got possession of Julietta's bed:
You know the lady; she is fast my wife,
Save that we do the denunciation lack
Of outward order; this we came not to,
On'y for propagation of a dower
Remaining in the coffer of her friends;
From whom we thought it meet to hide our love
Till time had made them for us."

St. John's letter to Rutland proves that in July, 1571, de Vere was lamenting a forsaken love, and was being dragged behind Cecil's chariot to marry Ann. The Queen's consent was a royal command.

A pre-contract was a canonical disability which would have barred this wedding everywhere except in England; but here it was nullified by an Act of Henry VIII, whereby subsequent formal marriage with another person constituted a valid marriage. Consequently, after 19th December, 1571, de Vere's legal wife would be, in England, Ann; elsewhere, the other lady. Hence, he would have a compelling motive to go abroad, for

"There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee,
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us:"

and there the marriage with Ann would be voidable, both because of a pre-contract, and because it was a forced marriage, as it would be his business to prove.

To achieve this, he must strive, first, to escape wedding Ann; and the simplest explanation of the fiasco at Theobalds, and the one least likely to appear in official history, is that the bridegroom, like Petruchio, failed to turn up on the appointed Sunday. Unable to escape, he must refuse intercourse with Ann, and make this refusal known, to prove that this forced marriage was not validated by subsequent consent. For this reason, he must disclose the fact that he was not the father of her expected child—a fact which, otherwise, he would properly have kept private. Clearly, then, the reason why she bore him no child in ten years is that there was no marital intercourse; for, when he kept company with her after Christmas, 1581, she bore ~~three~~ children in six years. And just as much proof as his refusal of intercourse affords that he had a wife living, just so much does his consenting to intercourse prove that his wife had died.

Being thus a widower, he was free to take Ann Vavasor abroad (as he was said to have intended) and there to marry her. Instead, he reconciled himself to Ann Cecil; and that demands a very cogent motive. This is found in the existence of a little son, who, being legally *filius nullius*, would presumably be one of Cecil's wards. To have the care of his son, at the first price he had to pay was this reconciliation.

The boy was born abroad between March, 1575, when de Vere was hoping for a son of his own (a hope not resting upon Ann), and January, 1576, when he wrote of his son as already existing; probably, therefore, in April, 1575, nine months after his elopement, or honeymoon, in July, 1574. This is the "kind of tumbling boy" scornfully mentioned by Cecil as one of the only four persons in the Earl's household in 1583; and he is "the page to the right noble the Earl of Oxenford" who, in 1584, aged nine, spoke a speech at Whitehall to the Queen.

Before following further the career of this missing page, it would be necessary, having first established the arrangement, meaning, chronology and authorship of Shakespeare's Sonnets, to show that he is no other than that poet's son, known to him by a pet name, Will; but a little later known to fame as William Shakespeare. Who his mother was, research might possibly discover: conjecture suggests only that her Christian name was Margaret, and that her surname began with the letter H.

His father's chief concern was to secure his son's rights as his heir. In 1587, relying on the Queen's assurance, he transferred the Honour of Hedingham (which was to have been Ann's jointure) to "his heirs by the lady Ann now his wife lawfully begotten" i.e. to Ann's daughters. After bearing the canopy, he asked the Queen to perform her assurance. She broke her promise. His son was disinherited, his hopes ruined, his ancestral property lost, himself disgraced. That is why he began to demolish Castle Hedingham: but Cecil acquired it from him, by fine, in Michaelmas Term, 1591.

METHINKS I SEE MY FATHER

(A paper read before the Shakespeare Fellowship on 12th February, 1949, by Miss Kathleen Eggar on the question of Edward de Vere's access to his father, the 16th Earl of Oxford.)

After pointing out that the 16th Earl of Oxford must have been the type of great gentleman—a great sportsman, a magnificent host, an honoured landlord—who would appeal strongly to youth, and that his (probably sudden, or at least unexpected) death when the boy was only 12½ years old would have made a tremendous impression on Edward, the speaker gave her reasons for deducing that John de Vere had planned his son's education from early childhood (he entered him as a fellow commoner, *impubes*, for Queen's College, Cambridge, at the age of eight), in collaboration with two remarkable tutors—Thomas Smith, of Cambridge, and Arthur Golding, the boy's young (maternal) uncle. She inferred that the general lines of study had followed the plan of Sir Thomas Elyot's book, *The Governour*, for the first thirteen years of a child's life, by which time the study of history should be reached. It was as Edward de Vere was approaching this age that his father died (1562), and in the following year Arthur Golding published his translation of *The Histories of Trogus Pompeius*, which he dedicated to his nephew in default of the latter's noble father, "to whom I had long before vowed this my travail."

This evidence of John de Vere's interest in history prompted speculation as to himself being possibly the author of some work. The fact that no work could be traced bearing the name of John de Vere did not daunt the enquirer, who found it only natural that the father of the arch-concealer should have set the example of literary camouflage. Acting on a hint obtained from Professor Tillyard's conviction that Shaksper of Stratford must have been heavily indebted to *The Mirror for Magistrates* for his historical sequence of plays, Miss Eggar examined the series of Tragical Histories which make up *The Mirror* with the explanatory preface and the interpolated discussions on poetry and politics; and came to the conclusion that the presiding William Baldwin and his committee of seven learned men were a cover for the 16th Earl of Oxford and a group of his literary friends.

After dealing with these points at some length, Miss Eggar went on to suggest that the curious circumstances of the early editions of the *Songes and Sonettes* by . . . the late Earle of Surrey, and other (the 1557 volume of poems so tiresomely nicknamed "Tottel's Miscellany" in the nineteenth century), indicated that the unknown Editor was Surrey's brother-in-law, the 16th Earl of Oxford. She questioned the name of "Nicholas Grimald"—the only poet's name given beside Surrey's and Wyatt's in the first edition on account of this name and the poems attached to it being omitted in every other edition of the *Songes and Sonettes*, and further, on account of an Epitaph lamenting the death of "Nicholas Grimald" in 1562—the year of John de Vere's demise.

(1) Earl Lord
Baldwin
(2) brought
(3) Thomas
who died
(4) sure

On the supposition that John de Vere would have left posthumous papers, the lecturer thought it possible that the 1563 volume in which this epitaph occurs—*Epytaphes and Sonettes*, by Barnaby G. . . . a collection prepared for printing by the 6th Earl shortly before his death, and seen through the press by the friend who inserted the epitaph for "Grimald," and wrote the apologetic Preface in the Author's absence out of the Realm, wherein it is explained that "the poor Printer" is already committed to the purchase of the necessary quantity of paper, and so on—in the style familiar to those who have studied original copies of poetical works published in the following two decades. The wish expressed—"to preserve the worthy Fame and Memory of my dear friend, Mr. Googe"—indicates that the author is not alive and therefore not the kinsman of Sir William Cecil who bore that name and survived that date.

Miss Eggar then touched briefly on the series of Churchyard volumes—the *Chippes* (1575), the *Charge* (1580) and the *Challenge* (1593)—and on the complications connected with these and certain poems in *Songes and Sonettes* and with someone of the name of Thomas Churchyard, who libelled Edward de Vere in the 'nineties.

In conclusion, Miss Eggar expressed her conviction that Edward de Vere must have been familiar with the Hamlet story from earliest youth, and suggested that John de Vere's Library contained an English version of the Latin Chronicle of *Saxo Grammaticus*, which was previous to the French version of 1576 from which Shakespeare's source is supposed to have been translated.

A final suggestion was that de Vere, like Hamlet, may actually have seen his father's ghost—a suggestion which throws light upon the puzzling Sonnet, No. 86.

MEETINGS

The meetings in November 1948 and February 1949 are reported separately.

At the annual general meeting on 9th October, 1948, a change in the secretaryship was made. Mr. T. L. Adamson relinquished the post after many years valuable service, which was cordially acknowledged by several speakers. The Fellowship gave a warm welcome to Mrs. M. H. Robins as his successor, and there was much pleasure at the announcement that her sister, Miss Hilda Amphlett, would assist her in the office. At the conclusion of business Mr. W. Kent gave an interesting talk on "Literary Masks," dealing, *inter alia*, with Miss E. M. Braddon and William Sharp, who invented "Fiona Macleod." He concluded with a fling at the orthodox Shakespeareans, who seemed to think the Elizabethans were not quick witted enough to devise a mask.

On 11th December Mr. Kent spoke on "Shakespeare and Shakspeare," and discussed the relations between the two. He pointed out the perhaps significant fact that the now customary spelling only appeared in Stratford after the death of the actor. He thought this might have been the result of collusion between Shakspeare's family and that of

de Vere. He could not agree with those who wanted to make the actor almost illiterate. Neither de Vere nor Bacon would have been likely to choose an obviously impossible "stooge." One early writer referred to Shakspeare as having a natural wit, and he might have been a man ready of tongue if unskilled in writing—like Sam Weller, who so laboriously composed a love letter. Then attribution of authorship to him would at any rate be plausible.

On Saturday, 22nd January, 1949, a reading of Miss Hilda Amphlett's play *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, was given at 33 Portman Square.

This play was written about ten years ago, but owing to the war it was the first public reading.

The play deals with the chief incidents in the life of Edward de Vere, starting with his marriage celebrations, at which Queen Elizabeth and many of her court are present. Then follows the attempted rescue of the Duke of Norfolk; Oxford's estrangement from his wife, Ann Cecil; the tennis court quarrel with Philip Sidney; Oxford's duel with Knyvett; his subsequent reconciliation with his wife. In the second act we meet Will Shakspeare, and the subtle way in which he is made to father the plays while Munday, half drunkenly, prompts him was most convincing. The play culminates with Oxford's second marriage to Elizabeth Trentham, his association with the Earl of Derby; Oxford's wish to obtain military honour or recognition for his son's sake, and to bury his heart with his life's work.

Mr. T. L. Adamson introduced the play, and Mrs. Adamson read out the stage directions for the guidance of the audience. To conform with the time limit imposed the play had to be cut. This in some cases resulted in the minor parts having insufficient scope for characterization, but there were some fine passages, and the character of the 17th earl was well defined.

The author was extremely happy in persuading Lt. Colonel Russell to read the part of Oxford. His interpretation of the young, turbulent, gay Oxford at the beginning of the play, right up to the disillusioned man of fifty, was masterly. Mrs. Robins made the most of the part of Ann, and Mr. W. Kent read Shakspeare. He achieved much unconscious humour by reading the part quite seriously—as it was intended. Of the others, Mr. H. E. Herlitschka's foreign accent and excellent delivery made the part of Mothé Fénelon outstanding. Perhaps, too, if we were talent-hunting, we should ask Mrs. Sassé to step forward and take a bow for her lines as the maid. We hope to see her in another play.

The author was called for at the end of the play and given an enthusiastic reception.

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