

The Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter

SEPTEMBER 1950

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NOTICES

The Annual General Meeting of the Shakespeare Fellowship will be held at the Poetry Society's Rooms, 31 Portman Square, W., on Saturday, 7th October at 3 p.m.

At the conclusion of the business there will be a discussion on the B.B.C. broadcast "Who wrote Shakespeare" by Giles E. Dawson.

A REAL OXFORD MOVEMENT!

In the course of the thirteen years' career of the Shakespeare Fellowship's *News-Letter* there has never been so much cause for rejoicing on the part of Oxfordians.

First: The Quatercentenary Dinner, held at the English Speaking Union's premises, Charles Street, was a great success. At the outset, thanks should be given where thanks are due. They certainly are to Mrs. M. H. Robins and her sister, Miss Hilda Amphlett. It can be said of them, in memorable Johnsonian phrase, they touch nothing they do not adorn. Many of us must have admired the artistry displayed, even in the lettering of the guests' names on the tables. Mr. and Mrs. Adamson also should be praised most heartily. The former's concern for the welfare of all was that of Capulet at his feast. "Welcome gentlemen"—and ladies was the hearty note of all his remarks. To Mrs. Adamson was due the floral decoration of the tables.

All of the sixty or more present agreed, we are sure, that there was not a dull speech. The Chairman briefly outlined our case for the benefit of those whose appetite for a dinner had not waited upon digestion of Oxfordian data, in proposing "The Immortal Memory of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford." He was supported by the Editor, who gave some account of his missionary enterprise and his baiting of professors. In proposing "The Memory of J. Thomas Looney," Miss Katharine Eggar, A.R.A.M., gave an account of the proto-Oxfordian and his theory. After some delightful "Music for the Virginals and Songs to the Lute" by Miss Cecily Arnold and Mr. Marshall Johnson, the toast of "Our Guests" was proposed by Colonel J. W. Russell. There were three replies, and the first speaker came as a pleasant surprise to almost all present. He was John de Vere, Lord Wakehurst, K.C.M.G. His Lordship's attention had been drawn

to the Fellowship by noticing an announcement of a meeting in *The Times*. His presence also was appropriate for another reason; he is Chairman of the English Speaking Union. Lord Wakehurst, finding in the Oxford case, "fresh woods and pastures new," naturally trod warily. He expressed his great pleasure in finding so many met to honour the memory of an ancestor, and he has since displayed great eagerness to know more of the nobleman whom the Shakespeare Fellowship believes to have been the real "Shakespeare." He was followed by Mr. Collin Brooks, Editor of *Truth*, to whom the Fellowship owes much. Before the Dinner he had printed an article by the Editor of the *News-Letter*, setting forth the case for Oxford, and several had preceded this one. Mr. Brooks intimated that he had gone half-way with us, and, if invited next year, might find himself three-quarters of the way! Some of us would like to have contended that there was no parallel between the story of the Stratford Shakspeare—as related by the orthodox—and the careers of Charles Dickens and H. G. Wells, but peace should be upon the lips of toasting men, and we refrained. The final speech was from Mr. A. C. T. White, V.C. As Principal of the City Literary Institute, the Shakespeare Fellowship is indebted to him. He was most happy in his allusions to the lot of hosts and guests in the immortal plays.

Never have the depredations of time—"the subtle thief"—been more regretted. Most of us went away wishing we could have met earlier and lingered longer. The one regrettable thing was the absence, through ill-health, of the President, Rear-Admiral H. H. Holland. He was with us in spirit, and his enthusiasm has not abated.

Another satisfactory feature of the Dinner was that it attracted some welcome press publicity. A paragraph appeared in the *News Chronicle* and half a column in the *Daily Telegraph*. The latter was a report of a telephonic interview with the Editor. Happily its contents went far afield. Extracts appeared in the *St. John's Evening Telegram* (Newfoundland), and in three New Zealand papers.

The Shakespeare Fellowship has also recently added some most valuable members. Dr. J. R. Mez, of Ruvigliana (Switzerland) has joined. This is largely due to the good service of our member—no longer resident in England—Mr. H. E. Herlitschka, a devoted Oxfordian. Dr. Mez has translated Mr. Charlton Ogburn's brochure, *The Renaissance Man of England*, into German. He hopes also to translate the Fellowship's pamphlet and Thomas Looney's book. Further, he has broadcast on the Swiss Radio,

and had an article featured in the *Swiss Radio Times*, with a portrait of de Vere on the cover. He has been replied to by one Dr. Leise, but Dr. Mez is to be allowed a rejoinder in September. What an example to our obscurantist B.B.C.!

Dr. Mez—who has been visited by Mrs. Robins—has also introduced two other members. One of these is the Duca L. S. Camerini—"one of the most cultured and refined gentlemen of Italy" who, in his palace, has a library of fifty thousand volumes.

Another addition to membership is equally welcome. Readers will remember that the debate with Mrs. Helena Normanton, K.C., came about as the result of an advertisement in the Personal Column of *The Times*, asking for an advocate of the Stratfordian faith. Only one other reply was received. This was from Mr. Geoffrey Ashe, a Surrey schoolmaster and literary lecturer. He now writes:

"I was not able to get to the subsequent meeting, but the pamphlet intrigued and excited me far more than a Baconian stuff I had seen, and I took up my Shakespeare studies again, with a view to re-examining the whole question. The result was that I soon felt bound, in my lectures on English Literature, to speak of the Shakespeare heretics more respectfully. As I first wrote to you in the character of a Stratfordian champion, it seems only fair to tell you now that orthodoxy no longer impresses me as defensible."

Mr. Ashe adds that he has some difficulties about accepting the Oxford case. The Editor assured him that there were no articles of belief to sign by members of the Fellowship, as we were an investigating society, and he has agreed to join us.

In April the Editor addressed the Oxford University Heretics Club on "Who was Shakespeare?" The attendance was much smaller than at the corresponding society at Cambridge, but the meeting was regarded as a success, and there was a report in *Isis*, the organ of the University.

In July, Mrs. Robins visited Birmingham to speak at a luncheon held under the auspices of the local branch of the English Speaking Union. This had come about through the influence of the late Sir Henry Lawrence. There were about sixty present, and the questions and discussion were friendly.

Of course, there are setbacks. Two years ago the then Editor of the *Encyclopaedia Americana* accepted from the Editor of the *News-Letter* (and duly paid for) an article on Shakespeare heresy, proclaiming de Vere as entitled to Shakespeare's crown. The Editor evinced that he was a sceptic, but anti-Baconian. Alas, the new Editor, in forwarding proofs of our long article on London, wrote as follows:

"I regret that your excellent and challenging article on "Authorship of Shakespeare" is one that we do not feel able to add to our text at present. So few among our American academic Shakespearean scholars will even give serious consideration to your Earl of Oxford theory, though I realise that you have a very distinguished and increasing group of heretics in England."

Then there is disappointment regarding a proposed

memorial plaque at Hackney. The L.C.C. decline to have one on the wall of Brooke House, and the Hackney Borough Council to place one on the tower of St. Austine's Church, where de Vere was first buried. Much time was spent upon this noble endeavour, particularly by Mrs. Robins. We have also to thank the Town Clerk of Hackney for the sympathy shown, and Miss Charlotte Osborn and Mr. H. Cutner for preparing handsome designs. Happily, no publicity was given to this abortive effort to get erected a tangible memorial of our "Shakespeare," although the *Hackney Gazette* had paragraphs about the Quatercentenary.

On the balance, however, much progress can be recorded.

ANOTHER BUSY PROFESSOR!

The third volume of *Shakespeare Survey* (Cambridge University Press, 12s. 6d.) has been published. This admirable annual is worth having, regardless of the question of authorship. In this matter it is hardly necessary to say that no heretic will abandon hope of entering here, for none will have been foolish enough to expect it!

To the orthodox suppression is the better part of valour. To some people this is shocking. Our late President, Lt.-Col. M. W. Douglas, tells us that a well-known editor wrote him as follows:

"I have read with great interest the contributions to *Truth*. They must awaken interest in a section which probably have never given the question any real attention. But what has always seemed to me so un-English is this deliberate iron-curtaining of all discussion. It is an act of fear, and self-condemns the Stratfordians. Most historic problems and persons are freely discussed nowadays and old opinions revised. Why not this one?"

The first article is entitled "Studies in the Life and Environment of Shakespeare since 1900" and is by Prof. C. J. Sisson. He refers to "Betterton's famous pilgrimage to Stratford to gather material for *Rowe's Life*," and says it "set an example for later biographers." Yet, presumably, Prof. Sisson accepts the suggestion that the exemplary Betterton was so careless that he allowed his friend Rowe to produce a picture of the Stratford bust quite different from the one that was there, and to repeat the false illustration in a second edition! Probably he has not read Anthony Powell's edition of *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, and does not know that a hitherto unpublished note of the latter's on the Shakespeare monument confirms those who maintain that it has been altered.

"Mrs. C. C. Stopes and E. I. Fripp published a number of books, miscellanies of information, from 1901 to 1930."

We wish that the Professor had told his readers that Fripp mentions that Shakespeare's own company visited Stratford for the first time six years after his death and were not allowed to demonstrate the genius of their fellow-townsmen on a Stratford stage, but were paid to clear out! No first folio or quarto has ever been found in Stratford! Mrs. Stopes too. Does

Prof. Sisson know that that lady avowed that she wrote her biography of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, in the hope of finding evidence of his friendship with Shakespeare, and found none? We have twice mentioned this in letters to the *Times Literary Supplement*, in consequence of the sickening reiteration of the alleged friendship. Neither letter was published. Another example of the iron curtain!

Commonsense on Shakespeare, happily, will occasionally creep even into a Professor's mind! We are glad, therefore, of the admission that, although it is assumed that Shakspeare left Stratford about 1587, there is no evidence of his being in London before 1592. We welcome also the avowal that "scholars are now beginning to date his first plays as early as in 1588." Here we think of Prof. Cairncross and Dr. Leslie Hotson, who wants to date the sonnets a little later than Cairncross dates *Hamlet*. This must be disturbing to some minds, who would fain retain the Stratfordian faith. There are others who, willing to believe that the Stratford boy, like Pope, "lisped in numbers," will find no difficulty in assuming that some of his masterpieces came in the course of killing a calf as a callow butcher's boy.

Referring to the researches of Prof. C. W. Wallace and Dr. Hotson, Prof. Sisson says: "The harvest may appear slight for so much labour, but the search is tempting." This is most true. It is about as valuable as finding a mouse in a haystack. In the North Library of the British Museum we were once approached by a gentleman who had a commission from one of the well-known American Johnsonians, Pottle or Tinkler. It was to ascertain the identity of the Keeper of the Lions in the Tower of London who was one of the guests at a dinner at which James Boswell was present. This would have thrown about as much light upon Boswell as histories of Thomas Russell and William Gardiner throw upon the authorship of the "Shakespeare" plays. The passing of the Professors would certainly diminish the gaiety of the sceptics. The Wallaces and the Hotsons can find their man engaged in many things, but *never is he writing or giving rise to a suspicion in his friends that he is doing it*. The Professor expects "other workers to enter the field," but candidly says "it may be doubted whether much information is likely to be gained with direct bearing upon Shakespeare." This is true also, for the good reason that no contemporary of the Stratford man ever attached to him the same importance that professors do. Our author does not mind mentioning the *impresa* made for the Earl of Rutland—"a patron of the theatre." We thank the professor for the phrase quoted. Literary gentlemen may have other hobbies. Far be it from us to suggest that, because a man fritters away his time on trifling ornaments, he could not have written great plays. We wonder though that the "patron of the theatre" liked to employ the time of a literary genius in this way. It might better have been used in staging some of the great works which were so mysteriously unknown until the First Folio was published seven years after the death of the alleged author.

Referring to the Stratford bust, Prof. Sisson says "no evidence has been adduced against the essential

authenticity." As we have shown, the writer is not up to date on this subject. "Mr. Spielmann's monograph *Shakespeare's Portraiture* (1924) . . . is on the whole unchallenged except by uninformed opinion." Doubtless, "uninformed opinion" is any that differs from the academic one! This makes it the more surprising that the professors are so unwilling to expose the ignorance of the uninformed on a public platform. Perhaps the "quality of mercy" makes them refrain!

We get a "picture of a hard-reading man of letters." Yet he left no books, and none has been found that he owned. Prof. Sisson mentions G. B. Harrison's *Elizabethan Journals (1591-1603)*—he has overlooked apparently the Jacobean one. They are, as he says, "in a form resembling a personal diary of daily matters of importance, derived from a far-reaching study of contemporary printed books, memoirs, and State Papers." We challenge Prof. Sisson to quote a single extract from these valuable volumes that shows that the author of the Shakespeare plays had any relations with Stratford or that anybody believed he had. We want not only a name but an address, Professor!

We are glad that he says, "To dismiss the Sonnets as a series of *pastiches* with no relation to the thoughts and feelings of their writer, could not fail to evoke protest and resistance."

To readers of the *News-Letter* the following passage is the most challenging:

"In the general movement of thought to-day the conception of Shakespeare as artist bids fair to obliterate the native 'wood-notes wild' which attract sentimental idolatry and romance, or the journeyman of the stage oblivious to art. The extreme of such free speculation, *unimpeded by common sense as by exact knowledge*, is the unhappy ambition to replace the life of *William Shakespeare as author of his own works* by the 'life of some other improbable and impossible writer, whether Bacon, Fulke Greville, the Earl of Oxford or the Earl of Derby, as urged in intricate argument, resting upon imaginary allusions or cyphers, in an endless series of books, by a succession of writers such as Percy Allen or Abel Lefranc, to cite two names of higher repute than most, in the present century. J. M. Robertson took the trouble to dismiss one branch of the heresy in his conclusive *The Baconian Heresy: A Confutation* (1913).

In the course of a letter to Prof. Sisson we quoted the second of the two passages in italics and commented as follows on the second one: "How better could you reveal your prejudice than in this cliché. As one of the speakers said at our dinner—I think it was Collin Brooks—the professors say in effect when we open our lips let no sceptical dog bark. I am sure you would not like to have this quoted on a platform in your presence. It is like saying 'Your Worship, I am convinced you will agree that the prisoner was entitled to the books found in his possession, and not the bookseller, as his name was in them. I shall submit no evidence.'"

The Professor reveals a remarkable disingenuousness, when he says that Chettle knew Shakespeare

personally! Does he persuade his innocent pupils at University College, who hang upon his lips as Northcliffe Professor of English Literature, that Chettle mentioned Shakespeare? If so, shame upon him as a deceiver.

One more word. The Professor considers the signature on the deposition in the Public Record Office as "written freely and naturally." How happy it is not to be—"cabin'd, cribb'd, confun'd, bound in"—a Professorial Chair, so that you have to write this stuff. We hope Professor Sisson's pupils will go and see the signature.

We challenged the Professor to appear on a Shakespeare platform to justify his views. Of course he is too busy!! We told him that we were tempted to add a postscript to our epistle "'Too busy'—answer taken as written." We are prepared to go to University College and defend our views against the Professor's in his absence, if he cannot be there. There will be no response. I dare not will wait upon I would!

One last word. We are grateful for the reference to J. M. Robertson's book, published in 1913. We said in our letter to the Professor: "It invites the justifiable inference that since that date the heretics have had it all their own way." Moreover, Prof. Sisson seems to be unaware of the subsequent work of Sir George Greenwood, *Is there a Shakespeare Problem?* published three years later. We always have the last word, even if the Professors in their flight do not hear it! The orthodox do not read our books. It is easier to imagine our arguments! It is the only way to "answer" us.

The Professor will go on believing in the god of Stratford. He is paid to do so, as much as any priest is paid to defend the god of his religion.

THE PLIGHT OF THE PROFESSORS

The Editor has published the fifth edition of his booklet on the George Inn, Southwark, and has included the following:

"FOREWORD TO FIFTH EDITION.

Southwark has associations with three of the greatest English writers: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens.

Shakespeare—to myself Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford—never resided in Southwark, but no doubt some of the plays were first performed on the Bankside. My disbelief in the Stratford myth is confirmed by the pusillanimity of the professors. Dr. Ifor Evans, Dover Wilson, C. J. Sisson, Allardyce Nicoll, all decline debate, as do Ivor Brown, J. B. Priestley, and Canon T. P. Stevens. Dr. Evans publicly stated that it would take a year's vacation to find answers to the questions I should ask—a clear indication that he has no reasons for his faith. Allardyce Nicoll informed the Shakespeare Club that what they did not know about Shakespeare was astronomically greater than what they did know, and yet he knows that he wrote the plays! A letter of mine in the leading Stratford paper offering debate had no response. Neither the Chief Librarian of

Birmingham nor the Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University could find an exponent of the myth, prepared to face attack. So neither the so-called birthplace and the largest city in 'Shakespeare's county' can provide a defender! . . . If any Stratfordian can screw his courage to the sticking-place, I am ready!"

A copy was sent to each of the gentlemen named. Replies were not expected. Canon Stevens, however, gratefully acknowledge receipt, as also did Prof. C. J. Sisson. The latter said: "I shall keep it in my room in College and lend it to my pupils." The Editor in the course of a reply said:

"I must admire your courage in being willing to have it known by your pupils that you are not prepared to accept a challenge to debate on the Shakespeare question—the excuse of not having time is too silly to make. It would have shocked me in my youth to find that a professor of literature dare not stand up to defend his belief in the Stratford Shakespeare."

The Editor could, indeed, wish that he had found the late Sir Israel Gollancz, under whom he sat nearly thirty years ago, equally craven. It would so have perturbed him he would have gone prying into the position of the heretic, and might have abandoned his Stratfordian faith—based upon ignorance—twelve years before he did. There was no further correspondence. Probably Prof. Sisson has changed his opinion about circulating the booklet!

In view of the iron curtain in editorial offices in this country, it is refreshing to find more open-mindedness elsewhere. In the *New Yorker* of 8th April, 1950, there was a review of books on Shakespeare by Hamilton Basso. Those under consideration were *The Real Shakespeare*, by William Bliss; *A Life of Shakespeare*, by Hesketh Pearson; *Shakespeare*, by Ivor Brown; *Shakespeare of London*, by Marchette Chute; *Sergeant Shakespeare*, by Duff Cooper; *Shakespeare Identified*, by J. Thomas Looney.

It is amazing that the writer should acclaim the highly imaginative book of Hesketh Pearson as "the best short life of Shakespeare there is," particularly as it runs to 192 pages and Mr. Basso applauds Mr. Bliss because he "sensibly points out that the facts about his subject can be written on a half sheet of notepaper." It is, however, delightful to read the two concluding paragraphs:

"At this point, I think we had better let Mr. Looney take the stand. His *Shakespeare Identified* was first published in England in 1920, and brought out in this country a short time later. It now appears in a revised edition, with an introduction by William McFee and a tribute to Mr. Looney by Charles Wisner Barrell. Mr. Looney's contention—put forward in nearly five hundred sober, modest, heavily documented pages—is that Shakespeare wasn't Shakespeare at all. Not the Shakespeare, in any case, that Mr. Bliss, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Brown, Mr. Pearson, and Miss Chute take for granted. It is his belief that the man who wrote the plays, poems, and sonnets was Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford—and if anybody in the class is on the verge of cackling, I

earnestly urge him not to. Mr. Looney is no crank. He is an earnest, level-headed man who has spent years trying to solve the world's most baffling literary puzzle. I don't say that he has solved it, mind you. There are gaps in his argument and more than one flaw. But if the case were brought to court, it is hard to see how Mr. Looney could lose. The various 'mysteries' that surround Shakespeare—why is there such a lack of information about him, where did he get his education, how did he acquire his plainly first-hand knowledge of courtly practice and behaviour, whence came his obviously intimate acquaintance with Italy, why did he never bother to publish his plays, and a hundred other matters—are mysteries no longer if the man we know as Shakespeare was really Edward de Vere.

I shan't examine Mr. Looney's argument in detail, and I shall offer no opinion on the correctness or incorrectness of Mr. Looney's theory. I shall say only that it is far and away the most enthralling piece of detection I have ever encountered, and that I will never again believe in the conventional representation of Shakespeare; there has to be more to it than *that*. I feel, too, that Mr. Looney's volume has rather cavalierly been neglected. What Professor Frederic Taber Cooper, of Columbia University, said when it first appeared still holds good: 'Here at last is a sane, dignified, arresting contribution to the much abused and sadly discredited Shakespeare controversy. . . . Every right-minded scholar who seriously cares for the welfare of letters in the bigger sense should face the problem that this book presents and argue it to a finish.'

"POPULAR FALLACIES"

There has been published a fourth edition of a most interesting and valuable book under the above title. It first appeared in 1892. It is "A Book of Common Errors: Explained and Corrected with copious References to Authorities." It is regrettable that the author, Mr. A. S. E. Ackermann, has not sifted his authorities more carefully. He seems to have accepted anybody who overturned a long-held belief without satisfying himself that there was justification for what he suggests is the newer and truer view.

In one case, however, he seems oblivious of the fact that there are any new views, namely, about Shakespeare, to whom he devotes less than a page! Under this head one would have expected to find a lot. Even if one passes the matter of authorship, there are such questions as: Did Shakespeare poach at Charlecote? Was Shallow's original Sir Thomas Lucy? Did Chettle refer to Shakespeare? The one question broached is "That Shakespeare, the Poet, sold Malt at Stratford and got into litigation about it with one of his Customers." On this reference is made to *The Times* of 8th May, 1915, in which appeared an article by Prof. C. W. Wallace and a leader thereon. They were to the effect that the maltster was not the poet. There was a passage in the leading article that Shakespeare heretics should enter on their tablets.

"The maltster was not Shakespeare the poet at all, but another man of the same (or very nearly the same) name. Well, unless Shakespeare the poet dealt in malt by deputy it seems that Wallace is right. A man could not deal in malt and bring petty actions in Stratford-upon-Avon while he was doing all that high and mighty work among kings and queens in London. We must say good-bye to our Shakespeare's practical connection with good English beer—and that is particular saddening at this present moment of time."

Alas for Prof. Wallace, *The Times* leader writer, and Mr. Ackermann, this plea is not maintained even at Stratford, for the catalogue of the "Birthplace" Museum includes a "Noate of Corne and Malte" owned by Shakspere in 1598. An illustration of the document is included. Moreover, Sir Edmund Chambers has never suggested any mistake in identification. Another Shakespeare error—not connected with authorship—is on page 417. There the reader is informed that the lines "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" were introduced by Colley Cibber at the Drury Lane Theatre, the sole authority being a book on Piccadilly by one Arthur Dasent! They are in the First Folio. The same error was once made by a speaker at the Charles Lamb Society.

DR. ABRAHAM FELDMAN

In the *News-Letter* for April, 1950, we quoted Dr. Abraham Feldman, of Temple University, writing in *Notes and Queries*, on Chettle's *Kind-Harts Dreame*. We have had two delightful letters from him. He is an avowed Oxfordian, as we had already discovered. He is no longer at Temple University; he is Ph.D. at Pennsylvania. We hope to publish extracts from Dr. Feldman's letters in our next issue. There was a reply to him in *Notes and Queries*, but this only resulted in another reader coming to the Oxfordian's support, and the rest was silence.

COMMENTS ON DR. LESLIE HOTSON'S "SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS DATED, AND OTHER ESSAYS"

By J. SHERA ATKINSON

Dr. Leslie Hotson's book, published in 1949, contains a good deal of matter of interest to Oxfordians.

We have space only to discuss the first essay, "Shakespeare's Sonnets dated." In it Dr. Hotson seeks to establish that at least the first 126 of the Sonnets were written by the time Will Shaksper was 25 years old (i.e. by 1589), so that his poetic powers must have reached maturity at that early age, a revolutionary conclusion, as Dr. Hotson says, which "dwarfs all else". Many of them may have been written by that date, and Oxfordians agree that the poet's powers were then nearing—if they had not already reached—maturity (Edward de Vere was 40 in 1590); but it is surely asking too much even of the credulity of orthodox Stratfordians to suggest

that they could have been written by a young man of 25. The internal evidence of sonnet after sonnet points to the writer having reached a mature age.

Dr. Hotson takes three sonnets, Nos. 107, 123 and 124.

Sonnet 107 contains the line "The Mortall Moone hath her eclipse indur'de," and he claims that this refers to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, it having advanced up the Channel in a crescent moon formation. His arguments, however, are quite unconvincing, and the line quoted probably refers, as has generally been supposed, to the death in 1603 of Queen Elizabeth, who was frequently referred to as Cynthia (the moon Goddess).*

Sonnet 123, addressed to Time, says "Thy pyramyds buylt up with newer might, To me are nothing novell, nothing strange." Dr. Hotson claims that the "pyramyds" referred to were the four age-old obelisks, brought to Rome by the Caesars, three of which had fallen and lain buried, and all four of which were re-erected by Pope Sixtus V in 1586 to 1589.

Sonnet 124, Dr. Hotson says, contrasts the strong sure structure of Shakespeare's love for his friend with the pitiful insecurity of some prince, some "childe of state" subject to "accident," who "suffers in smiling pomp" and "falls under the blow of thrall'd discontent." He considers it refers to Henri III of France, who after suffering shameful deprivation of his royal power and regaining it by murder, himself fell under the blow of an assassin in 1589.

If Sonnet 123 and 124 thus refer to happenings in Rome and France, it is obvious that Edward de Vere would be more likely than the Stratford youth to find them of interest. He had travelled through Italy, probably visiting Rome. He had visited the French Court in Paris on his way across France and was personally acquainted with Henri III. So, too, if No. 107 did refer to the Armada: he had provided, equipped, and commanded a ship in the fleet which defeated it. Dr. Hotson, wisely from the point of view of his argument, makes no attempt to show how the Stratford youth came to be interested in the events abroad which he argues were portrayed in Sonnets 123 and 124. If he is right about the date of the Sonnets, and Professor Cairncross is right that the play *Hamlet* was written before 1588, we suggest it must be obvious that they were written by a man who was then much older than 25.

It is hardly conceivable that Dr. Hotson can have considered the Sonnets as a whole; had he done so he would have realised that they could not have been written by a young man of 25 or less. Confining our attention (as he does) to the first 126, it is clear from a number of them that the writer had reached or passed middle life, and regarded himself as past the prime of life. Thus in No. 2: "When fortie winters shall beseiage thy brow," etc., implies that the writer himself had passed forty winters. Among others, the following further Sonnets all bear the imprint of age addressing youth: No. 22: "My

glasse shall not perswade me I am ould"; No. 33: "Even so my sunne one early morne did shine"; No. 60: "Like as the waves make towards the pibled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end"; No. 62: "But when my glasse shewes me my selfe indeed: Beated and chopt with tand antiquitie"; No. 63: "Against my love shall be as I am now, with time's injurious hand chrusht and ore-worne . . . when his youthful morne hath travaild on to Age's steepie night"; No. 66: "Tyr'd with all these for restfull death I cry" (the sonnet expresses the disillusionment and disappointment of an elderly man whose ideals and ambitions have come to grief); No. 71: "No Longer mourne for me when I am dead"; No. 72: "O least the world should taske you to recite What merit liv'd in me that you should love, After my death (deare love) forget me quite"; No. 73: "In me thou seest the twi-light of such day, As after sun-set fadeth in the West." How could these have been framed by a youth of 25 or less?

Dr. Hotson has also discreetly turned a blind eye to sonnets which are inexplicable if Will Shaksper wrote them, but point directly to de Vere as their author. For instance, No. 125, "Wer't ought to me I bore the canopy, With my extern the outward honoring," Oxford, as hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain, appears to have been one of the bearers of the canopy over Elizabeth when she returned thanks at St. Pauls for the defeat of the Armada. Again, No. 59: "Oh that record could with a back-ward looke, Even of five hundreth courses of the Sunne, show me your image in some antique booke . . . That I might see what the old world could say, To this composed wonder of your frame, Whether we are mended, or where better they, or whether revolution be the same." If the Stratford man were pondering on his own ancestors of 500 years back—which is unlikely—or those of the person to whom the Sonnet was addressed, why that particular date? But Edward de Vere's own ancestor, Aubrey de Vere, almost exactly 500 years before (to be precise, in the year 1098) was before Antioch, fighting in the First Crusade, and legend has it that a bright star there lighted and stayed on his standard—the origin of the five-pointed star on the Vere coat-of-arms. Sonnet No. 59 is most apposite if that were the writer's background.

Consider also the following, not explicable if the Stratford man were the author, but fitting known facts in the life of de Vere. No. 29: "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes, I all alone beweepe my out-cast state"; No. 37: "So I, made lame by Fortune's dearest spight"; No. 74: "The coward conquest of a wretches knife"; No. 110: "Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there, and made my-selfe a motley to the view"; No. 111: "Oh for my sake do you with Fortune chide, The guiltie goddess of my harmfull deeds, That did not better for my life provide, Then publick meanes which publick manners breeds. Thence comes it that my name receives a brand, And almost thence my nature is subdu'd To what it workes in, like the Dyer's hand"; and No. 121: "Or on my frailties why are frailer spies; which in their wils count bad what I think good? Noe, I am that I am, and they

* Since the above was written several letters published in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 16th June, 1950, and later issues, have advanced cogent arguments against Dr. Hotson's conclusions.

that levell at my abuses reckon up their owne, I may be straight though they them-selves be bevel."

It would be easy to pursue at much greater length the thesis that it is not possible to link the sonnets with Will Shaksper, while they contain abundant indications which would fit in with the authorship of de Vere. Dr. G. H. Rendall's *Personal Clues in Shakespeare Poems and Sonnets* contains much of interest on this subject.

It is possible that Dr. Hotson may be right about the date of writing of Sonnets 123 and 124, but there is no ground for inferring as he does that the preceding Sonnets were also written by that date. The probability is that they were written (by their real author) at various dates over a period of years, by no means necessarily in the same order as that in which they were first printed in the 1609 Quarto. That again is too large a subject to pursue farther here. The Sonnets were not written for publication but for showing to personal friends.

Dr. Hotson proceeds to draw the inference that during the so-called "lost years" of the life of his Shakespeare about which nothing is known—1585 to 1592—he was doing literary work of the highest importance: that he had written most of the Sonnets by 1589: that his stage career began by 1586.

He concludes from this that the "fair youth" of the Sonnets could not have been the Earl of Southampton (only 13 in 1586), or the Earl of Pembroke (then only 6), since they were too young to be urged to marry.

Dr. Hotson believes the Dedication of the Sonnets to "Mr. W. H." to have been written by the publisher in 1609, and that "Mr. W. H." was the "fair youth"; and says, "It is high time to lay away the . . . story about Shakespeare's imaginary intimacies with the nobility . . . it was an ignorant fallacy gotten by Bardolater out of snobbery. Mr. W. H. meant . . . a gentleman or an esquire with those initials, generally known (i.e. in 1609) as the friend of Shakespeare, who twenty-odd years earlier inspired the writing of the Sonnets." Dr. Hotson intimates that he will shortly reveal his own candidate for the position.

It is refreshing to have Dr. Hotson characterising as ignorance and snobbery the views of, for instance, such an orthodox stalwart as Dr. Dover Wilson, in his *Essential Shakespeare*.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Hotson in his earlier book, *I William Shakespeare*, was very ready to discover "imaginary intimacies" between Will Shaksper and persons of position.

We suggest that it is time orthodox Stratfordians either admitted that they are merely guessing or else got together and arrange between themselves how they will decide that Will Shaksper spent the "lost years." Dr. Dover Wilson sends him to Titchfield as tutor to the Earl of Southampton, and, in 1591, to Italy in company with him. Sir Duff Cooper sends him to the low countries in the Earl of Leicester's forces; others put him in a lawyer's office to account for his knowledge of law. On his part, Dr. Hotson starts him on his stage career by 1586, while Professor Cairncross makes him complete the writing of *Hamlet* (and, by inference, many

of the less mature plays) by 1588. *Hamlet* is the twenty-second play in Sir Edmund Chambers' chronological list.

Here we may mention that Dr. Hotson takes the opportunity of sneering at "anti-Stratfordians." Quoting Logan Pearsall Smith he says: "For listen! the fanatic followers of no less than five ghostly Elizabethan Earls are shouting at each other, the two bands of Pembrokiens and Southamptonites each vociferating that their Lord was the inspirer of the sonnets, while three other bands proclaim the more glorious boast . . . that Lord Derby, or Lord Rutland, or Lord Oxford, was the author of them . . . and then, faint and far, as the wind shifts, we hear the ululations of those vaster herds of Baconian believers, as they plunge squeaking down the Gadarene slope of their delusion."

In another of the essays he writes: "You will agree that many modern maniacs have written on Shakespeare, but not one of them has produced a single fact." He does not, it is thought, count *himself* as a modern maniac, but we should not be far from the truth if we stated that none of the new facts *he* has produced in his books throw any light on the question, "Who wrote the Plays and Poems?" and most of them are of small value for any purpose of Shakespearean study. While if, as we think, he intends to characterise as fanatics and maniacs such writers as J. T. Looney, Mr. Percy Allen, Admiral Holland and Dr. Rendall, he is only displaying his lack of acquaintance with their work and with the formidable factual case they have built up in support of Edward de Vere's authorship. As the late Dr. Gilbert Slater wrote, in reference to that case, in his discussion of the evidence with regard to "Shakespeare's" identity (*Seven Shakespeares*, 1931): "If I could, I would now present the case against this theory, but I cannot. To the best of my knowledge no reply to the Oxfordians has been published nor can I make out any substantial adverse case myself." There has still been no reply.

Erratum.—In the article "Polonius" on p. 6 of our issue of April last, about the middle of the second column, read "eulogy" in place of "analogy."

THE B.B.C. TALK

By WILLIAM KENT

Professor C. J. Sisson informed me that his friend, Giles E. Dawson, had broadcast on the question, "Who wrote Shakespeare?" I told the Professor that I had not heard it, but understood it was on the same old lines. The arguments had been answered a dozen times, but as the orthodox did not read our books they did not know it. The publication in *The Listener* entirely justified my assumption.

Mr. Dawson notes that "literary historians of standing have paid scant attention to these theories, seldom taking the trouble to refute them." Oh, simple Simon Dawson! As well might you say that no Protestant clergyman attempts to refute the claims of Rome. Literary historians are almost invariably professors, and a professor can no more disavow belief in the god of Stratford than an Anglican

clergyman can accept the rule of the Holy Father. It is wisest to ignore what you cannot answer. In this connection it is apt to quote a passage in a recent *Spectator*. The writer was C. E. Vulliamy, reviewing F. D. Kendrick's *British Antiquity* :

"One has to remember, as Mr. Kendrick shows very clearly, that the belief in Brutus and Arthur was not merely a popular superstition; it was held in all sobriety by scholars of eminence."

Referring to Shakspeare's education, Mr. Dawson says: "We know only that Stratford possessed an uncommonly good school." Do we know that? One fact that is relevant is that it changed its headmaster three times in about ten years, which is not what one expects from a school of high reputation. Moreover, Foster Watson's book, *English Grammar Schools to 1660*—a volume of five hundred pages—contains no reference to the one at Stratford, although the author must well have known that the orthodox Shakespearean was thirsting for some eulogy of it.

Here is again the sapient Dawson as a smart Alec.

"The standard reply of the doubters . . . is that no records exist which prove that the young Shakespeare ever spent a day in the Stratford Grammar School. This is true. Nor can it be proved that he ever ate roast mutton for his dinner."

So, according to Mr. Dawson, a man's diet is of no less importance than his education. Who would trouble to record that an old acquaintance once ate mutton, unless he had been an avowed vegetarian like Bernard Shaw, and could be stigmatised as a hypocrite. It is, however, rather difficult to understand that school-fellows and schoolmasters at Stratford, when the fame of the plays was acclaimed, did not produce some reminiscences that have come down to us.

Jonson was "his friend," yet Ben wrote not a word about him when he died and remained silent about "Shakespeare" for six years after. He then produced a puff such as would be solicited from the leading dramatist of his time.

Most amazingly, Mr. Dawson, referring to John Davies' epigram in *The Scourge of Folly*, says, "Though this epigram appears prominently enough in the allusion books, it is never mentioned by the dissenters." Sir George Greenwood devotes five pages to it in *Is there a Shakespeare Problem* and Mr. Percy Allen discussed it at length in *The Case for Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, as Shakespeare*. The latter pertinently says: "The passage, as a whole, suggests that Shake-speare, considered as an actor was indeed a 'king among the meaner sort,' which the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, playing an occasional lead at the Globe, would certainly have been." Moreover, Mr. Allen called attention to the couplet in *Wit's Recreation* (1640) :

"Shake-speare, we must be silent in our praise :

'Cause our encomiums will but blast thy bays."
Perhaps Mr. ~~Witt~~ never mentions this! Why silence about the Stratford actor if he wrote the plays?

There is a long disquisition about the spelling of

the name of the Stratford man differing from that on the title-page. This is mere dust in the balance. It certainly assists the sceptics, not the Stratford faithful, but who would reject their god if this alone was the obstacle? Mr. Dawson is like one who in a bout of fisticuffs, failing to get a blow home, thinks he may have knocked a little dust off his opponent's coat. "When an author's name appears on the title-page of a literary work, when he can be shown to have been generally reputed in his day as the author, and when no contemporary counter claim is known, literary historians accept such evidence as conclusive." I challenge Mr. Dawson to show that any contemporary of Shakspeare of *Stratford* believed that he had written the plays. He cites one only and Davies gave no address. Why, too, would the publisher decline to print the author's name as he wrote it?

The following passage I was tempted to include in "Gems of Mythology" :

"Can you not picture poor thick pated Will Shakespeare, who could they tell us, scarce write his own name, walking into the tiring room one morning? He tosses down a well written manuscript with, 'Here lads, I've writ a new play for the company.' Everyone from Dick Burbage to the boy who swept the yard would have enjoyed his laugh. But when their fellow sticks to his story, as of course he had to do, it would not have been a fortnight before a rival company produced a witty satire on the marvellous country actor who wrote plays by the Devil's aid, since by himself he could not write two lines. For surely Shakespeare's incapacity for writing plays must have been at least as obvious to his associates as it is now to his decriers."

Decrying implies a cry. Mr. Dawson cannot show that Shakspeare of Stratford ever cried out that he had created immortal plays. I think if he knew we believed he did, he might quote one of them: "Lord, what fools these mortals be."

"I do not flatter myself that arguments such as mine will effect conversions." I am glad Mr. Dawson has such moderate hopes. They will have the opposite effect. As I said in a letter which was published in *The Listener*, in lecturing I have almost entirely ignored what Mr. Dawson considers the sceptics' case. It is the old policy—a blind eye to the real arguments and the heretics' books. They make the Stratfordian so uncomfortable. Let him ignore our writings and invent our arguments!

Can the reader not picture the gulls who listen to Mr. Dawson and take it all in, knowing the B.B.C. will permit of no reply from us? There is, too, for the same gulls, a film now on show, *The Upstart Crow*. The producer admitted that we knew little about Shakespeare, though later he seemed to know quite a lot. He did mention that there were other claimants, so perhaps a little scepticism will be sown in minds hitherto innocent of doubt; but, once more, the solution was Genius! Remarkable to relate, although pictures are shown of four claimants, Bacon, Raleigh, Essex and Sidney (whoever proposed the

latter?—he died in 1586 at the age of 32) there was no mention of Oxford. I have probed the producer about this seemingly extraordinary ignorance and will report results!

A POUND OF FLESH

By R. RIDGILL TROUT

The Merchant of Venice has been discussed almost *ad nauseam*, but few appear to know the true story. Edward de Vere had returned to England in 1576-7. Drake, in 1579, had plundered Valparaiso. In 1581 he had returned, and was knighted by the Queen at Deptford. In command of a fleet, he was given letters of marque and sailed for the New World in 1585-6. It was on this voyage that he plundered San Domingo. It was news of this, received in Rome in a letter to a private merchant, which unwittingly created a character in Shakespeare which will never die: that of Shylock. Whether some of the Italian friends of Oxford wrote him of the occurrence or who brought the news may never be found out. In 1586 Shakspeare had not even commenced to hold horses at the theatre door, and as the play was acted in 1594, it is almost certain that it had been written some time earlier.

The news of San Domingo reached Paul Secchi, a merchant who had large concerns there, in 1585-6. These concerns were insured with a Jew, Sampson Ceneda. The Jew thought the information false and, in a passion, said: "I'll wager a pound of my flesh it is a lie." Secchi, hot tempered, replied: "If you like I'll lay you 1,000 crowns against a pound of your flesh it is true." The Jew accepted the wager, the substance of which was "that if Secchi won, he himself should cut the flesh with a sharp knife from whatever part of the Jew's body he pleased." The news of Drake's success was confirmed by advices from the West Indies. Secchi had solemnly sworn he was determined to cut a pound of flesh from that part of his body which it is unnecessary to mention. Ceneda went to the governor and begged he would interpose in the affair and use his authority to prevail with Secchi to accept 1,000 pistoles instead.

The governor referred the matter to the Pope (Sixtus V) who sent for them both and said: "When contracts are made, it is just that they are fulfilled, as we intend this shall be. Take a knife, therefore, Secchi, and cut a pound of flesh from any part you please of the Jew's body. We would advise you, however, to be careful, for if you cut but a scruple or a grain more or less than your due, you shall certainly be hanged. Go and bring hither a knife and a pair of scales and let it be done in our presence." The merchant trembled like an aspen leaf and, throwing himself at His Holiness' feet, protested "it was far from his thoughts to insist upon the performance of the contract!" And being asked by the Pope what he demanded: "Nothing, holy father, but your benediction and that the articles may be torn in pieces." Then, turning to the Jew, he asked "what he had to say and whether he was content?" The Jew answered "he thought himself extremely happy to come off at so easy a rate

and that he was perfectly content." "But we are not content," replied Sixtus, nor is there sufficient satisfaction made to our laws; we desire to know what authority you have to lay such wagers. The subjects of princes are the property of the State, and have no right to dispose of their bodies nor any part of them, without the express consent of their sovereigns."

Both were sent to prison and the governor ordered to proceed against them with severity that others might be deterred. The governor, wishing to please Sixtus and willing to know what sort of punishment should be inflicted said: "Without doubt they had been guilty of a great crime and thought they should be fined 1,000 crowns." "To be fined 1,000 crowns!" answered Sixtus; "Do you think that sufficient? What! Shall any of our subjects presume to dispose of his life without our permission? Is it not evident that the Jew has actually sold his life by consenting to have a pound of flesh cut from his body? Is not this direct suicide? And is not the merchant guilty of premeditated murder in making a contract which he knew would mean his death? Shall two such villains be excused for a simple fine? Let them be hanged." However, to deter others they were condemned to the galleys or to pay 2,000 crowns each.

This story was originally told by Leti, the Italian historian, who came to England in 1680, was well received by Charles II, and was to be made his historiographer, but later went to Amsterdam. His work was translated into French, and was read in a French translation by Ellis Farnsworth in 1752, who rewrote and translated the *Life of Sixtus V* (Dublin, 1779) from which the foregoing is taken. It is, therefore, unlikely that Rowe or any of the early biographers of Shakespeare had read or even heard of the story. As Leti was born in 1630 the inference is that the story had been brought first-hand from Italy shortly after the episode occurred.

Whilst the two stories vary, it is at once obvious that whoever wrote "the Merchant" had full knowledge of it, and that it certainly was not the man from Stratford, who did not arrive in London until 1586-7.

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