

## THE LATEST SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE IDENTIFIED in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford I. Thomas Looney (Palmer.)

We live in great days. The mysteries of the world are one by one yielding to the unconquerable mind of man. The discovery of the philosopher's stone, the conquest of the air, the annihilation of evil and death by Christian science are some of its more recent trophies. And now Mr. Thomas Looney, out of what he confesses to be his "colossal ignorance" of Elizabethan lore has identified the writer of the plays, which, for three hundred years, we allowed all the learned doctors to persuade as had been written by Shakespeare. Sometimes it happens so, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings. How it happened to Mr. Thomas Looney was as follows. Repeated readings of the "Merchant of Venice" had forced upon him the thought that nothing in the play corresponded to the outlook of an ill-educated, untravelled, money-making country fellow from Stratford. Here was a playwright full of law and learning, very much at home in Italy, with a complete contempt for gold. His attempts to reassure himself only turned the Stratfordian William into a more and more unsuitable peg on which to hang the plays. Every line of the plays bespeaks an aristocrat, one who in all sorts of unconscious ways failed to understand lower, or even middle-class people, who instinctively betrayed breeding at every turn, even in such externals as skill in dancing, hunting, horsemanship, court procedure, knowledge of French and Latin, of Paris and Italy. There has always

been a bad misfit between the author of the plays and the historical William. The writer's magnanimity, his breadth of view, his carelessness about money, all fit in very badly with the pettifogging spirit and greed of land which belong to the scanty tale of the Stratfordian worthy. In fact Mr. Looney soon discovered that there was practically no case for W. Shakespeare, and that the authorship of the world's greatest literary achievement was going abegging. The striking resemblance of an Elizabethan lyric by one Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, roused his interest in this possible candidate for the world's crown of glory, and from the moment that his fingers touched this clue, his search became one of the most exciting and enthralling games that it has ever been a man's lot to play on earth.

The Earl of Oxford, it soon appeared, had written not one but many lyrics with the most astounding resemblance to "Lacrece and Venus and Adonis." The language, the idiosyncracies, the experience of the one poet have an incontrovertible likeness to those of the other, and to no other Elizabethan lyricist. Oxford's dates fit in exactly with the periods of "Shakespeare's" known activity and retirement. "Shakespeare" was entirely passive in respect of the publications which took place under his name, but all publication stopped dead for several years after Oxford's death in 1604. Ovid is the Latin poet to whom all critics agree "Shakespeare" was most indebted, and he used Golding's translation more than the original. Arthur Golding was Oxford's tutor, and was at the time studying for the bar, with an interest in the law which he obviously handed on to his pupil. The conspiracy of silence which enveloped William Shakespeare in life and death calls for explanation. When he died not a single word of

regret, not a single obituary notice appeared, though there was loud lamentation for Spencer and other literary contemporaries, and even for Burbage whose funeral overshadowed that of the queen. How is the ignoring of the world's greatest poet to be accounted for? Spencer was buried in Westminster Abbey; not the smallest reference was made to Shakespeare's death. No manuscripts of the plays were found. This genius, who must have foreseen that doubts as to the genuineness of his claims would almost certainly arise, deliberately reduced to a minimum all the evidence that could have established them. There is here the kind of obscurity that only wilful anonymity could have brought about. The Earl of Oxford is known to have retired into mysterious and eccentric retirement during exactly the period of the great "Shakespearian" outflow.

It is impossible to do Mr. Looney justice in a summary, since the effect of his argument is cumulative and in dribblets is easily reduced to absurdity. On the other hand he does himself such ample justice that a little less from a reviewer cannot impair his sublime consciousness of having achieved "not merely a rational or contemporary event, but a world-event of permanent importance destined to leave a mark as enduring as human literature, or the human race itself. . . . In the brief moment between two Immensities Destiny has honoured us with this particular task." Even our old familiar William does not come out of it so badly, since from having been the most stupendous dramatist, he has become the most stupendous fraud in history. He deceived not some of the people some of the time, but all the people all the time.