

News-Letter

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"Shakespeare": A Missing Author

Part II

In fixing the Shakespeare plays on to one who was not the author, steps would naturally be taken to give such semblance of genuineness as was possible to the deception, and to furnish the pretender with appropriate credentials: something that might seem to account for his producing work so distinctive in character. The danger of false credentials, however, always lies in the impossibility of making them complete. Gaps are inevitable; and when these become exposed conviction of fraud is overwhelming.

The credentials presented in Shakspeare's case were (I) a leading place in the principal company of actors; called, in Elizabeth's reign, the Lord Chamberlain's players, and, on the accession of James, the King's company; (II) the personal testimony of Ben Jonson, the most commanding figure in drama during the late Shakespearean period.

(1) At the time of the change of dynasty advantage was taken of the rearrangement to insert the name "Shakespeare" at the head of two copies, slightly varied in the order of names, of a list of nine players submitted for official approval, one for their licences, the other for a coronation gift of cloth; the licences were not, however, to become immediately operative. This, although the first *bona fide* appearance of the name in such a connection, occurs at about the time when, according to Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, and other recognised authorities, Shakspeare was on the point of retiring to Stratford.

Twelve years later, Ben Jonson, in publishing a folio edition of his own plays, again placed the

name prominently in two lists of members of the same company who had performed in these plays many years before. These two lists were published in the actual year of Shakspeare's death, 1616.

Finally, in 1623, in the "Shakespeare" First Folio the name takes precedence over the other "principall actors in all these Playes."

In all these cases the name is given in foremost positions, in specially drawn up lists of the company—never standing alone. The published lists are in two identical situations: the Jonson and Shakespeare folios respectively. They were not published until many years after the performances, and they refer to actors of bygone days, some of whom were already dead. This manner of dramatic commemoration is moreover altogether exceptional: probably unparalleled in published plays; suggesting that the sole object was to place on record the name Shakespeare as a leading actor. Here the name stands associated with famous names like Burbage and Kemp, in keeping with the extraordinary fact that nothing Shakespearean, either in the matter of printed plays or of play-acting, was ever put forward contemporarily associated with any other but the royal players: a glory enjoyed by no other man.

If, therefore, these references are to William Shakspeare of Stratford, a very deliberate attempt was made to pass him down to posterity as one of the most eminent players of the age.

Again the question of an effective test arises. As actors were not then the class of people about whom biographies were written, the likelihood that, cen-

turies later, tests would or could be applied to the claim, would hardly occur to anyone. Modern research into formal play-acting records and scattered references in literature, diaries and letters, has, however, revealed rich mines of information, the piecing together of which has given interesting scope to ingenuity and imagination. Consequently, figures like Burbage and Kemp—the two names with which Shakespeare's is constantly associated—have emerged as living personalities in dramatic history. On the other hand, it is safe to say that Shakspeare, as a known actor on the Elizabethan stage, has no existence whatever. Some kind of obscure connection with the theatre business was probably arranged for him, his personality being kept severely out of evidence; but Shakspeare as a popular figure on the boards, has been relegated beyond recall to the domain of pure fiction.

The municipal archives of no less than seventy towns and cities have been carefully inspected, and although much interesting information respecting the company and its members has been brought to light, never once has the name of Shakespeare been discovered.

The Lord Chamberlain's books, which would certainly have preserved some exact information respecting the company's court performances, have, mysteriously but significantly, been destroyed for just those years that cover the Shakespeare period—the most vital in its history.

The Treasurer of the Chamber's accounts, which record money payments made to the actors, are silent respecting him for the whole of the time during which plays purporting to come from his pen were being published.

Most striking of all, however, is the single occasion upon which his name appears in the earlier accounts. Three years before "Shakespeare" appears in print as a dramatist (15 March 1595)—about the time therefore when it was becoming known as that of an exceptionally clever poet—he is recorded to have received, along with the actors Burbage and Kemp, payment for performances by the company, "before her Majestie in Christmas tyme last past" (Christmas 1594).

In so prominent and auspicious a way he enters upon the Elizabethan stage, taking at once a position such as his two talented co-payees had required years to reach. This entry has, however, other unusual and suspicious features. (a) It is inserted*

in a strange break in the accounts of no less than eight years: all other particulars being lost, presumably destroyed. (b) It was not made at the date recorded (March 1595) nor by the official then in charge, but at some time after his death, which took place in the following October, and by his widow, the Dowager Countess of Southampton, the mother of the young man to whom the Shakespeare poems had been dedicated. (c) It introduces a new series of items, which show that *when the company required payment for specified performances* the normal business course of having one regular payee was followed. During the entire Shakespeare period their responsible agent was John Heming, who occasionally associated with himself, probably as a kind of surety, a second actor, but never one of these three; this is the only occasion upon which the unlikely course was adopted of having three payees named, whilst none of them afterwards appeared in this identical connection.

From every conceivable point of view this particular entry is exceptional and irregular. As evidence in support of William Shakspeare's play-acting claims it possesses about the maximum of disqualifications, and in a law suit would be ruled out immediately. The ante-dating of testimony, a perilous expedient at any time, is quite fatal when written up by an interested party after the decease of the responsible agent. In this case, however, it does serve to drive home the fact that, whilst William Shakspeare was most certainly not an eminent Elizabethan actor, a great deal of ingenuity and foresight was exercised to palm him off as one upon future generations. In charity we may suppose that an abortive attempt may at one time have been made to turn him out a real actor. But why the great fiction of his success?

Jonson had tried this vocation, but when he became a leading playwright he did not include his own name in lists of actors; and certainly Shakespeare's literary reputation had nothing to gain from these exaggerated claims. Beneath it all evidently lay some deeper purpose: to furnish doubtless a basis for the larger but more vulnerable play-writing pretensions. By a natural recoil, however, the quashing of the unreal credentials, betraying a deliberate imposture, involves the whole case in a collapse, complete and irreparable.

II. It remains, then, to consider the other credential, the witness of Ben Jonson.

To understand Jonson's part in the business the leading facts of his career must first be grasped.

*See "Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage," by Mrs. Stopes, p. 251.

His permanent connection with the Lord Chamberlain's company was established by the performance of his play, "Every Man in his Humour," in the year 1598—the identical year of the first issue of plays attributed to "Shakespeare," performed by the same actors—and his association with the company remained unbroken at the time of Shakspeare's death in 1616.

During the greater part of these eighteen years, that is, until Shakspeare's final withdrawal to Stratford, so uncertainly dated, the two men would be, on orthodox assumptions, in frequent cooperation; for Shakespeare is never, in the plays or records, attached to any other troupe. On the other hand, if anything in the nature of an authorship imposture was being arranged, Jonson would have to be taken into confidence and his cooperation or connivance secured. There were, therefore, only two alternative lines upon which Jonson could have been working: either honest dramatic cooperation with Shakspeare, or cooperation with others in a scheme for concealing the true author of the Shakespeare plays; and the question of which of these he was actually doing must be decided on the evidence of the facts.

Two features of Jonson's personality must first be borne in mind. The first is the strongly aggressive and egoistic temperament shown throughout life. Not only did this keep him constantly in the public eye but forced into view those who had dealings with him whether as friends or foes. To know Jonson was therefore to be known in Jonson's world. The second was his special fondness and aptitude for writing complimentary verses to the people about him, and obituary notices of them when they died. As one biographer remarks: "There are no epitaphs like Jonson's."

The biography of Jonson during these eventful eighteen years is, consequently, a very real and living thing. We follow his movements; we see the people with whom he associated; we share his griefs; we listen to his quarrels; and the one to whom we are most indebted for information is Jonson himself. As another biographer puts it: we are "not driven with the Shakspearians to conjectural reconstruction from the shards of records and anecdote. Even his personality stands forth fresh and convincing beside the blurred portrait of . . . Shakespeare. . . ."

We venture to say that we have here presented one of the most glaring paradoxes in literary history. Jonson himself "stands forth fresh and con-

vincing" on a living background of literary personalities called forth by his own forceful presence; on the other hand, the one with whom he is presumed to have been on intimate terms and in most prolonged and active intercourse, never appears by his side, or even in the surrounding crowd. Though liberal in the use of his pen, and voluble in speech, no single recorded word of Jonson's so much as recognised the existence of his great colleague whilst they were presumably working together; and at no time did letters pass between them.

Most extraordinary of all is Ben's concurrence in the universal silence with which the entire literary public passed over Shakspeare's death in 1616; for it was in this year that Jonson brought out that folio edition of his own plays in which the name Shakespeare is inserted in the actors' lists. Yet, not a word of Jonson's suggested that the great actor-playwright and poet had just passed away; no epiphany, elegy, or complimentary verse came from the most profuse expert of the times in such matters. The whole world was allowed to remain ignorant of Shakspeare's death, and a full seven years passed before the silence was broken by the first literary tributes. These were in the Shakespeare folio of 1623.

Between the publication of the Jonson and Shakespeare folios, however, another event, with vital bearings upon these matters, took place.

In 1619 Jonson stayed for some time with the Scotch poet and scholar, William Drummond of Hawthornden. During this visit he talked much of himself and of leading personalities in literary and public life. By a strange chance his host was moved to keep a full account of the great man's talk; and thus the substance of it has been preserved, probably for all time. Most important of all, Ben gave a lengthy and detailed account of his own career, laying bare with extraordinary freedom even the darker patches of his private life, and introducing personal reminiscences of men like Francis Bacon, Inigo Jones, Sir Walter Raleigh, Marston and Camden.* Never once, however, in giving these autobiographical confidences did he so much as refer to Shakespeare the dramatist or Shakspeare of Stratford: making no allusion therefore to the death three years before.

"Shakespeare" literature had already been be-

*See "Ben Jonson's Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden," by R. F. Patterson, D. Litt., 1923 (pp. 22-34).

fore the world for twenty-six years (1593-1619) and with a man of Drummond's literary tastes some discussion of it was inevitable, particularly as the rest of their talk turned mainly upon books and authors. Even here Jonson seems to have been curt if not deliberately evasive. "Shakspear wanted arte" was his first observation; and "Shakespeare" (in *Winter's Tale*) has a shipwreck in Bohemia "wher ther is no sea neer by 100 miles." These two summary and not too friendly criticisms of the work were all that was elicited in a confidential chat. Of other writers Jonson narrated incidents and current gossip, and furnishes a picture, coloured vividly by self-importance, of the literary life of his day. The outstanding fact in these conversations, however, is that he told a circumstantial story of his own career without introducing any kind of reference to Shakespeare, living or dead.

We now come to the point at which Jonson enters as chief witness for William Shakspere. During all the years that the latter had resided at Stratford, and the seven years that had elapsed since his death, he had never been associated there with play-writing. Judged by its variant spellings, his name seems to have been pronounced locally: Shaxper or Shagsper; whilst the name William Shakspeare was itself not so uncommon then as it now is. The first indications of a Stratford connection were given publicly in the First Folio of 1623, and the slight references there made were not calculated to arouse much local interest. That had to wait for another half century.

Our immediate concern, however, is with Jonson as chief usher to the folio. We shall not discuss the possible *doubles ententes* with which, in this capacity, he may have chosen his words; but shall accept what he says at its full face value as a tribute intended for the reputed author. His exact words are: "To the memory of my beloved the Author." Certainly no more unqualified profession of affectionate regard can be found in all that poetry of friendship wherein his best work lies; yet the verses which follow this address are noticeably artificial and quite lacking in true personal ring. Indeed, he forgets even to simulate the regret and glow of emotion announced at the start. All the inspiration which personal attachments gave to his pen at other times, and does so much to redeem his writings from commonplace, deserts him at this critical moment. Albeit, we accept his first avowal as it stands, and add to it a later statement that he "loved the man and do honour his memory"—a simple para-

phrase of the earlier phrase. Sincere or otherwise, the obvious intention was to proclaim an ardent friendship by way of personal testimony to the announced author.

The words quoted, with all that they imply of bygone comradeship, must first be contrasted with the very striking fact that, four years before this, he related to Drummond at considerable length, the story of his own literary career without so much as mentioning Shakespeare (or Shakspere). Read, moreover, as genuine tributes to Shakspere of Stratford, it is certain that, both men being such eminent writers, the retirement to Stratford would involve no real breach, and Jonson could not remain for any length of time in ignorance of his "beloved's" death. Is it in any way possible, then, to reconcile so warm and lasting a friendship with the previous twenty-five years' silence (1598-1623) of so self-assertive a talker and writer as Jonson; with the obituary neglect of so remarkable a poet of epitaph and personal epigram; or with the complete absence of letters from so ready and graceful an epistolist?

Faced with the two alternatives of whether Jonson actually cooperated for many years with Shakspere in the activities of the royal companies of actors, or, at a later time, cooperated with others in carrying out a scheme of concealed authorship, there can be no doubt, on a review of the facts, as to where the choice must lie. Quite obviously it was all a made-up business and Jonson did what was expected of him.

Behind him, as is well known, there were always powerful social influences that he was compelled to respect. His dramatic compositions, as he admits, had brought him little profit. He had been supported for years by Lord Albany; he had received generous gifts from the Earl of Pembroke; and his recent appointment as poet-laureate had brought him welcome material relief. Unflinchingly truculent with literary antagonists, he was ever complacent if not servile towards those who were socially eminent or politically powerful. The capacity for setting his sails to prevailing winds was a valuable asset to a man forced to live by his wits, and made him as fit a tool as could have been found for those entrusted with completing the scheme of Shakespeare publication begun thirty years before by the poet himself.

We need not concern ourselves with Jonson's later references to "Shakespeare"; the questions of how much of these applied merely to the writings.

how much was intended for Shakspeare, and how much for some unknown writer, may fittingly be left to literary disputants. But the more that is made of them, as references to Shakspeare of Stratford, the more do they bring into relief the earlier Jonsonian silences, and confirm our conclusions.

The only hypothesis, it seems, that will fit all the facts is that, in deference to the behests of people whose wishes were to him commands, he lent his name to a great literary fiction, and had to adjust all his subsequent utterances to the secret. The 1623 folio gave to the Shakespeare literature such an importance that Jonson, as the great doyen and dictator of letters, could not preserve silence without exciting suspicion; and importunate enquiries from a new generation of playwrights and litterateurs must often have proved embarrassing. With our present knowledge we are able to detect the flaws in the scheme, but its success during more than two centuries shows that Jonson did not play his part amiss. He might, no doubt, have done better, had the undertaking matured earlier; or if he had suspected that Drummond was making a record of his talk, and could have foreseen that this would be called in as evidence three centuries later. Such, however, are the fatal gaps that invariably turn up in concocted evidence and complete the ruin of failing causes.

All the departments and aspects of truth must of necessity harmonize; and it is therefore not surprising to find that, closely examined, the play-acting credentials and the testimony of Ben Jonson are marked by the same self-contradictory features shown by the aristocratic implications. Into any other of the numerous departments of the case against Shakspeare we cannot now go; much as we should have liked specially to show how the Sonnets* contain direct confirmation of our central contention. The point is, that, viewed under any aspect, the same disturbing inconsistencies are revealed; the only solution of which is that William Shakspeare of Stratford did not write the "Shakspeare" plays.

The story, then, which emerges from the facts considered, is that there lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth a highly cultured dramatist in close and prolonged intercourse with the nobility round the throne, who wrote primarily for the entertainment of the court, and had considerable influence with

those who controlled its amusements. Having decided upon giving some of this work to the world in permanent literary form, he resolved at the same time, and, for reasons of his own, to suppress his own name. To hide his identity more effectually he arranged to have his work eventually attributed to another man, William Shaksper of Stratford on Avon, whose name lent itself to a punning corruption as "Shake-speare"; which, sometimes with the hyphen, sometimes without it, he used as his *nom-de-plume*. In furtherance of the plan there was given to this Stratford person a less incongruous social position and some appropriate but fictitious credentials. Until, however, the worst dangers of publicity were past, the man himself was kept away from the kind of people who might have detected the imposition: everything that might have indicated who or where he was, being carefully avoided until seven years after his death.

Whatever others may have known or suspected of the true state of affairs, loyalty or indifference secured their silence; and by the time that public attention was turned towards Stratford all first hand knowledge had been lost of the elusive gentleman with a coat-of-arms who had been domiciled at New Place, but whose lawyer, the Town Clerk, had lived in his house and conducted his business.

Thus the authorship of the plays—a doubtful honour in those days to people in certain walks of life—was fastened upon a man who had not written them, but to whom the attribution was, even then, a distinct gain. With the passing of time came a fuller recognition of their value, winning for the greatest of these dramas a place in the world's esteem such as the poet himself could never have anticipated, and attaching to the authorship a distinction of which a person of any rank would certainly be proud. Meantime, for three centuries, the writer himself remained hidden, and a quite insignificant man received a world's adulation.

Such is the first chapter of a story, as strange as fiction, which will one day doubtless find a permanent place amongst the more prosaic annals of literature. Immediately, however, a sense of the full significance of one unparalleled fact is needed—that we possess a set of invaluable dramas, a literature in itself, quite divorced from its producer: plays without their author.

Somewhere, therefore, in that far away time, which modern research is bringing back to life, there lived and laboured strenuously, if somewhat

*Some striking forecasts of more recent studies, marked by keen sympathetic insight, are given in the late Judge Jesse Johnson's "Testimony of the Sonnets" (N. Y. 1899).

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Louis P. Bén  zet, A.M., Ph.D.

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Occasional meetings of the American Branch will be held, for which special notices will be sent to members. Dues for membership in the American Branch are \$2.50 per year, which sum includes one year's subscription to the NEWS-LETTER.

The officers of the American Branch will act as an editorial board for the publication of the NEWS-LETTER, which will appear every other month, or six times a year.

News items, comments by readers and articles of interest to all students of Shakespeare and of the acknowledged mystery that surrounds the authorship of the plays and poems, are desired. Such material must be of reasonable brevity. No compensation can be made to writers beyond the sincere thanks of the Editorial Board. Articles and letters will express the opinions of their authors, not necessarily of the editors. They may be sent to Charles Wisner Barrell, 17 East 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

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secretly, in the purlieus of Queen Elizabeth's court, one of the greatest dramatic geniuses known amongst men, divorced for centuries afterwards from his writings: an author without his plays.

The research workers in those fields can therefore set themselves no more honourable task than to draw him from his obscurity and re-unite him to his creations in the mind and affections of mankind.

J. Thomas Looney

Growing Interest

That interest in the Oxford theory of Shakespeare authorship is increasing steadily is shown by the demand for lectures on the subject at various schools and colleges.

On Wednesday, February 26th, Mr. James Stewart Cushman gave an address before the students of the Kent School in Connecticut. Not only were the boys interested in this theory, which gives life to their study of Shakespeare, but members of the faculty and teaching staff were equally interested.

On Saturday, April 5th, Professor Louis P. Bén  zet is scheduled to speak on the subject, "The Real Author of Shakespeare's Plays." This lecture is one of a series to be given in Boston by contemporary writers from February 8 to May 24, 1941, arranged by the Boston University School of Education under the direction of Professor Everett L. Cetchell. The outline of the course, which gives brief biographies of the various speakers, has the following to say about Professor Bén  zet: "The author of several important books, Dr. Bén  zet is Professor of Education at Dartmouth College. He has recently come before the public as President of the American Branch of Great Britain's Shakespeare Fellowship, an association of those students and writers who attribute the poems and the bulk of the dramas not to the Bard of Avon but to the hitherto unsung Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. The story, as Professor Bén  zet tells it to college audiences, is a fascinating, plausible, and to most of his auditors, a convincing tale."

Books and Flames

As in London's Great Fire of 1666, the loss of books was one of the serious aspects of the conflagration, due to the fact that the book trade of that day was centered about St. Paul's, so December's great fire injured the book trade of our day because of its centralized location. Simpkin Marshall, of Paternoster Row, lost 3,000,000 books. The goodwill of this book distributing firm has since been bought by the Publishers' Association and, instead of stocks being held centrally, orders sent to the Book Centre, Limited, successor to Simpkin Marshall, will be passed on to the publishers who will hold their stock in their less centralized locations.

We are grieved to report that Mr. Looney is one of the victims of this fire, the entire remaining stock of his "Shakespeare" Identified having been lost in the holocaust. It is unnecessary to add that Mr. Looney has the deepest sympathy of all members of the Shakespeare Fellowship and that all of us have a sense of personal loss because of our high regard for that epoch-making book.

Shakespeare's Birthday

Mr. and Mrs. James Stewart Cushman will entertain the members of the Shakespeare Fellowship on Wednesday, April 23rd, at their New York home, 815 Fifth Avenue.

The occasion will commemorate the 391st anniversary of the birth of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, better known by his *nom de plume*, William Shakespeare.

According to the old calendar in force at the time of his birth, Edward de Vere was born on April 12, 1550, but the change of eleven days in the calendar which took place on the Continent in 1582 and some time later in England, makes his anniversary fall on April 23rd.

It is an interesting fact that this is the day so long celebrated as the birthday of William Shakspeare of Stratford, long believed to be the author of the famous Shakespeare plays. Recent research, however, shows how impossible it was for this provincial lad to have absorbed the culture, the broad knowledge, and the familiarity with courts, which were as natural to the author as the air he breathed.

That these two birth-dates should fall together is a remarkable coincidence. Or is it a coincidence? The more we study the lives of these two men, the more inclined we are to believe that details of the Stratford man's life were made to conform to a plan which would make him appear with some realism as the poet-dramatist, just as portraits of Edward de Vere were altered to reappear as "Shakespeare."

Writing for the stage in Queen Elizabeth's day was not the honorable profession it has since become. While he advanced it enormously, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, could not make it acceptable to a large portion of the population, for that was the time of the great rise of Puritanism, and the Puritans hated the stage and the drama with an undying hatred.

It is, then, with confidence in the recognition of the true author of the greatest plays ever known in any land that the Shakespeare Fellowship celebrates the birth of Edward de Vere and commemorates it by the meeting on April 23rd.

We are again deeply indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Cushman for their hospitality in opening their lovely home to the Shakespeare Fellowship, for which occasion an attractive program will be arranged.

Shakespearean Research

Though England is the country where scholars naturally prefer to examine old records in the hope of discovering documents which will throw new light on the fascinating problem of the authorship of the Shakespeare plays, we may ask, do the present war conditions, with England's repositories closed, bring an end to research?

The answer is, No! We have only to read in *The Huntington Library Quarterly* for January, 1941, the account of the Renaissance Conference held at the Huntington Library last August to learn how rich this country is in books and manuscripts of the Elizabethan period. This period is especially well represented at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D. C.

While England was saddened by the loss of such valuable manuscripts as the Ellesmere, the Stowe, and the Hastings papers at the time Mr. Huntington purchased them, it must now be a matter for rejoicing that they are in so safe a place, far from the destruction that has overcome in recent months that formerly favored country.

Among the scholars in attendance at the Renaissance Conference was Professor Virgil B. Heltzel, who called attention to the importance of studying minor Elizabethan writers: "For minor writers usually throw more light than their great contemporaries on the actual culture of the time. They seldom write in advance of their time, and they usually soak up the ideas in vogue at the moment, and so are often in a different category from that of their timeless contemporaries." This thought was put in a somewhat different way by Dr. Lily B. Campbell, who also spoke at the Conference, when she said, "To understand the Elizabethan Shakespeare you must understand the way in which the Elizabethans looked at things, and you must understand what they meant by the words they used to express their ideas."

Dr. Louis B. Wright told the Conference about the resources of the Folger Shakespeare Library, where he had spent the previous year reading. While the original collection of books, he said, centered about Shakespeare, Elizabethan drama, and works associated with the drama, Mr. Folger's plan has been so liberally interpreted that a great Elizabethan library of general interest has been assembled.

In order to study the plays of Shakespeare as they should be studied, a broader scope than dramatic literature is essential. Science, law, religion, philosophy, medicine, music, plant-life, Greek and Latin classics, and other special subjects are touched upon in the plays. Reading in all these lines for the purpose of tracing Shakespeare's sources for ideas, expressed in the plays has been done, but the field is a wide one and there is yet more ground to be covered.

Students of the Oxford theory of Shakespeare authorship know that the entire field must be largely reworked since conclusions in many lines, arrived at under the Stratford theory, will have to be revised. This is particularly true of those works examined by a student whose mind has been overshadowed by his preconceived picture of a man whose youth was spent at Stratford-on-Avon. The student of broader gauge perceptions must often be perplexed when he finds a passage in one of the plays that is an almost literal translation from some Greek writer whose works were not translated into English until after the play was published. Such inexplicable passages cannot be reconciled with what we know of William Shaksper of Stratford. They are no longer inexplicable when we consider the educational and cultural life of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and his record as a dramatic writer.

A valuable project for the Shakespeare Fellowship would be the establishment of a research fund for the purpose of keeping a capable student at one or both of the great Elizabethan libraries in this country, one who would specialize in the study of works which might throw more light on Lord Oxford's authorship. Little more than twenty years' time has been spent on this theory and by only a few scholars. This comparatively small amount of research has yielded enormous results.

Many scholars have for more than two hundred years been studying the Shakespeare plays closely and, in the way of tracing sources and emending puzzling passages, often due to printers' errors, have done invaluable work. It is only when they attempt to attach the broad learning evidenced by the plays to the Stratford actor that they fail to convince the sceptical.

The author of the plays was necessarily a person of great knowledge and worldly experience, a person surrounded by cultural influences from earliest childhood, and the records of Elizabeth's time show no one except the Earl of Oxford so eminently fitted for the part. That he chose to have the plays pub-

lished under a *nom de plume* was due to the convention of Elizabeth's time which forbade a nobleman to publish writings under his own name. This unwritten law was especially applicable to one who was Lord Great Chamberlain of England. Many a man of less importance, from that day to this, has chosen to let his writings appear before the reading world under some other name than his own.

Statements against the character of Lord Oxford were set in motion in his lifetime by enemies who feared the power of his pen, enemies who also feared his influence with his father-in-law, Lord Treasurer Burghley, often called *Regnum Cecilianum*, who wielded the greatest political power in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Such charges as were made by these men have been largely disproved. The men who made them turned out to be traitors to the Queen, several of them fleeing to foreign countries to live upon pensions from the Spanish King. This very fact should be taken into consideration by those who have read the accusations against Lord Oxford. Instead of being blamed for acts he never committed, he should be commended for his help in uncovering the machinations of traitors.

Lord Oxford was a favorite of the Queen, he was a patron of important playing companies, and he had a high reputation as a dramatic author. He had in his service for many years such well-known writers as John Lyly, Anthony Munday, Thomas Watson, and others, whose association with him should be studied more carefully. Considering these facts, it is amazing that university scholars have not investigated his life and writings as they have many less important individuals of that day.

Whatever the prejudices for or against the theory of Oxford authorship of the Shakespeare plays, the activities of Edward de Vere in the field of dramatic literature, recognized as highly important by contemporary critics, should be given the thorough study that can only be given by a number of unbiased minds examining with minute care the history, the literature, and the drama of the Elizabethan era.

The Bibliographical Society of London recently published the result of Dr. W. W. Greg's collation of the twelve variants of the 1608 quarto of *King Lear*, which bears the publisher's address, "at the signe of the Pide Bull neere St. Austins Gate." Upon this work of painstaking scholarship a truer text of *King Lear* than has yet appeared will be based.

Castle Hedingham

In a few moments I shall be a trespasser. A board at the entrance of this overgrown hedge-alley states that it is private property. But, I'll risk it, for, up here, standing stark and gaunt, is all that is left of a castle, built by the de Veres during the reign of King Stephen, grandson of William the Norman.

The first full sight of it gives you the feeling as would the prison you wish to evade. All else gone, the keep stands, solitary, where cattle feed, but where once, within the surrounding walls, were dwelling houses, barracks, workshops, stores, the mill, the barracks, stables, bakehouse, dairy, brewery—all that went to make-up a self-contained community, over which reigned those feudal lords, the Earls of Oxford.

For hundreds of years it was the proudest home in England. Each successive Earl was the proudest and wealthiest of all peers, subject to the King. Queen Maud, wife of Stephen, died here. It was besieged and taken by the French in King John's time. Henry VII paid a visit to his friend, the 13th Earl, who had helped him to win the Battle of Bosworth, and fined him £10,000 for parading too many retainers in livery to do him honour. Here, too, came Elizabeth, miserly granddaughter of that miser and ungrateful King. And there was born, in 1550, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, the Man Who Wrote Shakespeare.

In these mediaeval surroundings, this son of a hundred earls was the happiest boy in the land. He adored an adoring father, to whom, in *Hamlet*, he paid that reverent tribute. In this castle the Earl kept and stage-managed a troupe of players. In the majestic, and galleried chamber, three stories up, father and son watched the perfecting of plays which were performed for the amusement and instruction of guests and retainers—brief chronicles of the times.

In this chamber, too, he was taught fencing and dancing and lots of Latin, French and Italian. Below, instructed by the Master of the Horse, he became an accomplished horseman. He took part in athletic games within the castle walls, a generous space of three acres. Beyond, for miles, all round the compass, were numerous baronies rendering the services of twenty-eight knights whom the Earl would command, together with some hundreds of footmen, in times of emergency. Over the border in Suffolk, nearby, was one of their manor homes in

that nearly unspoilt mid-English weaving town of Lavenham, the Guildhall of which was founded by a de Vere—a gorgeous piece of history in wood and stone.

Below, a few hundred yards distant, is the church built by the first Earl, son of the builder of the castle. Here, too, are more stories of the de Veres in stone.

But I forget all these accessories as I walk round and round this Norman fortress sixty feet square, a hundred feet high, lonely sentinel over the forgotten de Veres and this story. For, what do we know about them, these proudest men of the realm?

Very little, and some of that is suspect, for the so-called historians have made a hash of a story which might have equalled anything told by Scott and Macaulay.

In one "history" I have read that the 17th Earl, to spite his father-in-law, Lord Burghley, devastated the place, making it uninhabitable. That would be about 1576. Another "history" states that about ninety years later, the buildings were demolished to avoid their being used to accommodate Dutch prisoners of war. Another story says that Burghley chiselled the Earl out of the property because of family squabbles, Oxford having put his wife away. Yet I read somewhere else that Oxford handed over the property for the use of his children shortly before he married his second wife, in 1591, when he settled in the village of Stoke Newington, not far from the Theatre in Shoreditch. What am I to make of all this contradictory trash? No wonder Henry Ford said that "history is bunk."

Another, and terrific, charge against these historians, contemporary and those who followed, is that they never discovered, or, if they knew, ignored, the fact that this misunderstood, maligned and persecuted Earl, this recluse, was the man whose poems and plays were "not for an age, but for all time." True, he imposed secrecy on himself and his associates, which they respected, even when they published his plays nineteen years after his death.

But truth is no respecter of people's wishes. Outside his own circle, while he lived, they gossiped about his being a poet and the best writer of comedy of the day; and I'll bet that some knew also that he was the writer of histories and tragedies which were to become immortal. To them, however, these were merely brief chronicles of their time!

Ben Jonson knew, and so did old Greene and a few other hack writers; but they knew also that it would not pay them to talk. Play-writing was not a

respectable craft; and for the senior Earl in England to write for the stage was nearly as bad as if he practised witchcraft.

The fools. Still, that was the custom of the times, and as there were no newspapers, and liberty of speech was not yet, they held their tongues, and let it go as that.

But, what of the people in and around Castle Hedingham? Didn't they know that this haughty and morose lord, he who had quarrelled and fought with everybody from the Queen to Knuyett, was spending most of his time here writing plays, into which he poured his venom and his soul?

They must have known, and for generations after his death, and the castle a wreck, stories by the score were told o' nights about the writings and what became of them. But the best that the Essex historians could do was to retail vicious and indecent tales about him.

A hoodoo followed Edward de Vere through life to his grave—and after. But I shall not weep for him. He had a better chance to live well, do good, and die happy, than had the vassals who served him in this majestic home. 'Tis true he became a fatherless lad at twelve, a royal ward, and a bond-slave of Burghley. 'Tis true that everything seemed to go wrong after he reached his majority and unwillingly married the girl, then had the misfortune to be wooed by the Queen whose hereditary Great Chamberlain he was, because he was handsome, and an accomplished musician, dancer, versifier, linguist, and scholar. Because, too, he was an actor and devised entertainment at court.

To these enviable qualifications he added his feudal pride, an aggressive temper, quick to quarrel, even with his Queen, who tied him to her skirts. He was also afflicted with the wanderlust which she and Burghley thwarted.

Yet, here, to Hedingham, a home envied by the Plantagenets, one might suppose he could have come, and like his well-loved father been in actual fact "King of the Castle." But, like Byron, Carlyle, Tennyson, geniuses who followed him, he was impossible.

These are some of the thoughts that surge as I wander afield, turning again and again to gaze with a feeling akin to awe at the grim and sphinx-like keep. I try to picture what all this was like when this impossible fellow de Vere was lord of all. Here was, maybe, the tilt-yard in which he worked off steam; and there most likely was the tennis court, and along there the archery field. Over there was the

field for athletics—wrestling, football, foot-racing, dancing.

Back to the Keep, I climb to the galleried chamber and pass from one recess to another trying to determine in which was the table on which he did his stuff.

All so puzzling—aggravating—and fascinating!
F. D. Bone

Notes on Twelfth Night

With the leading parts in *Twelfth Night* being carried by the distinguished players, Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans, Shakespeare's popular comedy has enjoyed a long run at the St. James Theatre, New York. Certain novel features have been introduced, as for instance, the use of a moderated cockney accent by Malvolio; Fabian as a cook; the hiding behind portable boxed shrubs by the mischievous eavesdroppers listening to Malvolio read the forged letter.

The successful run of this play, so recently ended, has naturally placed emphasis on the reading of it, to freshen the memory before attending a performance, or, having attended, for the purpose of finding wherein the play as acted differed from one's earlier conception of it.

The notes which follow have nothing to do with the play as performed but, because of the recent production, it seems timely to present them.

That the comedy was written much earlier than is conceded by Stratfordians is indicated by topical allusions found in it. The approximate date is supplied by Francis Peck in his *Desiderata Curiosa*, wherein he proposes to publish a manuscript which he calls "a pleasant conceit of Vere, Earl of Oxford, discontented at the rising of a mean [ordinary] gentleman in the English Court, circa 1580." It is to be regretted that Peck failed to keep his promise, but the rise of Christopher Hatton at this time points to him as the person referred to, while "the pleasant conceit" would seem to be none other than the burlesque of Hatton in *Twelfth Night*. For ten years previously, Hatton had done all he could to wreck Oxford, a younger man, in the estimation of the Queen, with but little success.

The pompous strutting of the steward Malvolio and his lovelorn attitude towards the Countess Olivia caricature the behavior towards Queen Elizabeth of Christopher Hatton, Captain of the Queen's Bodyguard, whose hopes of preferment at court were greatly strengthened by the success of his speculation in Drake's voyage which culminated

in September, 1580. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the signature to the forged letter, *The Fortunate Unhappy*, is the English form of Hatton's well-known "posy," *Fortunatus infelix*.

In a dialogue with Fabian, Sir Toby asks, "Wouldst thou not be glad to have the niggardly rascally sheep-biter come by some notable shame?" This is surely an allusion to a letter written by Hatton to the Queen in which he says, "Reserve it to the Sheep, he hath no tooth to bite." Elizabeth had nicknames for many of her courtiers, as, for example, Hatton—Sheep or Mutton; Oxford—Boar (in allusion to his crest); Burghley—Spirit.

Orsino's sending Viola to the Countess Olivia to do his wooing for him finds its parallel in the sending by Alençon, Prince of France, of his envoy, the Count de Simier, to conduct his wooing for the hand of Queen Elizabeth. Simier at once became a great favorite of Elizabeth, as did Viola of Olivia. When Malvolio begins to read the forged letter, he exclaims, "By my life, this is my lady's hand; these be her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's. It is in contempt of question, her hand." There have been many guesses at the meaning of these letters, but the first three are surely taken from the title Count, referring to Simier, to whom the Queen frequently wrote while he was at the English Court (and afterwards), and the last one to the initial of Prince, for she also wrote letters to the French Prince, the Duke of Alençon, through the same period.

In the forged letter appears the line, "M, O, A, I, doth sway my life." Malvolio finds these letters in his own name, but is puzzled because they are not in the proper order. It remained for Admiral H. H. Holland to solve their meaning, a brilliant solution of a teasing problem: MONTAIGNE. The *Essays* of Montaigne were published in France in 1580 and they at once made him famous. Copies of this first edition would have found their way into England. Lord Burghley's agents had orders to send him any important new publication appearing on the Continent, and in his father-in-law's library Lord Oxford could have seen it, even if he did not secure a copy himself. A book so widely acclaimed was probably seen promptly by Queen Elizabeth and read by many of her Court, especially as the French marriage negotiations were at this time very much to the fore, and, due to this fact, the French language, both written and spoken, was enjoying a special vogue.

The names Sebastian and Antonio were topical in

1580. King Sebastian of Portugal died in 1578, for whom, as a brother sovereign, Elizabeth would don mourning, an allusion to which is found in Olivia's mourning for her brother. Following Sebastian's death, Antonio, natural son of John II of Portugal, made claim for Portugal's throne, for years receiving French and English assistance against the demands of Spain. He was, however, in dire trouble in 1580, for a Fugger News-Letter written in December relates his defeat and imprisonment at Valladolid.

The names of the deceased King and the Pretender must have been further impressed upon the minds of Londoners by the names of several distinguished Spanish and Italian prisoners brought to London and held for ransom after the siege of the Castle of Smerwick, which fell to the English in November 1579. Among these prisoners were Signor Sebastiano de San Josepho, General of the Italians, Don Antonio Ortago of Biscaya, Signor Fabian Lucas, and Josefo Fabian. Not only do we find Sebastian and Antonio among the prisoners, but two Fabians as well. The plot of the play no doubt comes from Bandello's Italian novel, as commentators agree, but the names are topical.

Two ships mentioned in *Twelfth Night* were particularly active about 1580. In V.i. the First Officer says to Duke Orsino:

Orsino, this is that Antonio
That took the Phoenix and her fraught from
Candy:
And this is he that did the Tiger board
When your young nephew Titus lost his leg.

According to an article in *The Review of English Studies* (Oct. 1931), "The corporation records of Lyme Regis for 1577 show that the Earl of Bedford was instructed to inquire into the doings of a ship called the *Phoenix of London*, which had arrived at the Cobb 'in warlike manner'; in other words, as was so often the case, to take measures if he could against piracy. Such matters came under the jurisdiction of the Earl of Bedford who was Lieutenant of the Western Counties—Dorset, Devon, and Cornwall." Whether the *Phoenix* became one of the fleet with which Lord Grey of Wilton attacked the Castle of Smerwick in 1579, for the purpose of repelling the Papal Invasion of Ireland, is not known, but Stow's *Annales* reports the *Tiger* as one of these ships. "Tiger" has been a favorite name for a ship from time immemorial, but it seems more than probable that the *Tiger* of the fleet under Lord Grey of Wilton in 1579 was the same ship

which carried Ralph Fitch and others on a voyage through the Mediterranean to Aleppo in 1583, or at least as near to Aleppo as water would take them and by caravan the rest of the way, a report of which is given in *Hakluyt's Voyages*. Thus it will be seen, the *Tiger* was very much in the public eye both before and after 1580.

While outside the limits of our subject, it is interesting to follow the history of the *Tiger* a little later. A reference to this ship is found in *Macbeth* (I. iii), when the First Witch says, "Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master of the *Tiger*." As allusions suggest that this tragedy was written about 1589, the dramatist would have been reminded of the voyage of 1583 by the publication in 1589 of *Hakluyt's Voyages*. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Frobisher hoisted his flag on the *Tiger* and sailed up and down the Flemish coast, capturing wheat-laden ships bound for Spain for the purpose of feeding England's starving navy men, while foreign merchants who had the monopoly of importing grain into England were bombarding the Admiralty Court with complaints. These reports would also have been ringing in the ears of the dramatist while he was writing *Macbeth*.

Letters from England

Mr. Percy Allen writes from Somerset, in part, as follows: "I read all the articles [in the News-Letter] with great interest, and have duly added to my now voluminous notes on the Shakespeare plays several topical allusions which were unknown to me, in *Twelfth Night*, *Winter's Tale*, and one or two other plays—notes taken from your article on the Topicalities. I have got through much of this annotation work during the six months I have been here and have now almost complete Oxfordian notes (though they are always being added to), not only of the Shakespeare plays, but of many of those of Jonson, Chapman, and Lyly, as well as many other notes on the Folio verses, and other allusions to Shakespeare by contemporaries and others, as quoted in Sir Edmund Chambers' two-volume work on Shakespeare. From these notes one could annotate and edit at any time an 'Oxford' edition of the plays—a work that must be done one of these days." . . . "Concerning the war, this country appears, at the moment, to be doing pretty well; much better than could have been anticipated after the collapse of France, though the U-boats are and will continue to be a very great danger. The Axis powers, however, are in for an increasingly bad time. We shall

gradually master them in the air; and in Europe and the near East, they will find their hands increasingly full. Mussolini, I am convinced, was certain that Greece would not show fight, but would abjectly go the way of Denmark. I think that in France also, and in the French Empire, any attempt by the Vichy government to appease Germany by signing away portions of France and Africa to Italy and Germany will arouse much opposition among the French peoples, and may strengthen de Gaulle's movement. Great things will happen in the spring. . . . The English-speaking nations of the world, working in harmony, cannot be beaten by the Axis powers, whose ultimate resources are less than ours, quite apart from any question of morale."

The following paragraph from Captain F. D. Bone's recent letter gives much encouragement to the editors of the NEWS-LETTER: "One of the few unalloyed pleasures which come to me these days is your News-Letter. For me, on arrival, it means one or two evenings of pleasant reading and speculation on the ever fascinating question, 'Who Wrote Shakespeare?'" My own convictions have been considerably strengthened since I was privileged to become a member of the American Branch, and, although this unholy war has badly disturbed the activities of our Fellowship in London, I still hold on to my reading, and am all the more thankful to get the News-Letter from New York."

It is with great pleasure that we publish on another page Captain Bone's account of his visit to Castle Hedingham, Lord Oxford's boyhood home.

Our New Member

A new and enthusiastic member of the Shakespeare Fellowship is Miss Elizabeth R. Davidson of Washington, D. C., for thirty-three years an Assistant Librarian of the Library of Congress. Miss Davidson has long been a convert to the Oxford theory of Shakespeare authorship and, in a recent paper on "The Folger Shakespeare Library," read before the Columbia Delphian Chapter, of which she is also a member, she said, "Years and years may pass before Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is universally acknowledged and acclaimed as the author of these imperishable plays and poems . . . and before the Folger Library has a re-dedication . . . to the Right Man! Instead, there it is, a beautiful white marble structure, erected . . . to the man who held the horses of 'Quality' and loved his tips."