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"Shake-speare's" Own Secret Drama

**Discovery of Hidden Facts in the Private Life
of Edward de Vere, Proves Him Author of the
Bard's Sonnets.**

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(Part Five)

Our presentation of evidence has, I believe, made it plain that the long-sensed human background of "Shake-speare's" autobiographical *Sonnets* is to be found in the life history of Edward de Vere, the poet Earl of Oxford (1550-1604). It is a fact, established beyond all question, that Oxford was known throughout the heyday of the Elizabethan literary Renaissance as an outstanding playwright, "most excellent" "in the rare devices of poetry," and also, significantly enough, as one whose important creative work could not be associated openly with his own name or title.

Through contemporary documentation, studied in parallel with the realistic characterizations in the mysterious sonnet-diary, we have identified the leading *dramatis personae* of the poems as follows:

The Poet himself, publicly designated as "Shake-speare": Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford.

The "Dark Lady," described as the Poet's wayward mistress: Anne Vavasor (1560/62-1658*), known to have been Oxford's innamorata and the mother of his illegitimate son; during 1580/81 one of the Gentlewomen of the Bed Chamber in Queen Elizabeth's household. Matching the characterization of the Poet's paramour at every point, unlike any other claimant for this doubtful "honor" previously put forward by students of the sonnets, Anne Vavasor can be proven by her painted portraits to have actually been a dark-haired, dark-

eyed siren, curiously lacking in most of the conventionally accepted standards of feminine beauty.

The handsome young nobleman who in seventeen of the poems is urged to consummate a marriage in which the Poet displays a deep, personal interest and produce an heir "for love of me": Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton (1573-1624), who, particularly during his seventeenth year, was being importuned by various of his relatives and known associates to consent to a marriage contract with the young Lady Elizabeth Vere, eldest daughter of the literary Earl of Oxford.

The "fair, kind and true" youth who "bears name of single one" with the Poet, though their relationship must not be publicly "acknowledged" lest the Poet's "bewailed guilt" bring "shame" upon this boy, his beloved "other self": Edward Vere the younger, illegitimate son of Edward de Vere and Anne Vavasor, born March, 1581; later knighted for military prowess; killed in action, August 18, 1629, at the siege of Bar le Duc in Flanders.

My study of the evidence up to this point indicates that at least forty-one and perhaps forty-five of these personal poems feature Anne Vavasor and circumstances that grew out of her equivocal relationship to the poet Earl of Oxford.

A second group of fifty-one of the sonnets can be identified with Oxford's interest in his illegitimate son. Authenticated records of Edward Vere the younger prove him to have been fully entitled to the love and praise that is showered upon him in the paternal abundance of these immortal measures. He was indeed "fair, kind and true," a hero who

*Through an error in transcription, the date of Anne Vavasor's death was given as 1653 on page 31 of the April issue of the NEWS-LETTER. It should really be 1658. Particulars of her burial and of the disposal of her estate will be printed in a later issue.

gave his life in one of the historic struggles for human freedom. That young Vere was of a forthright and affectionate disposition is witnessed by his own correspondence.

Among the Sidney papers in the *Manuscripts of Lord de Lisle and Dudley* (Vol. iii, p. 49), is a letter bearing date of August 14, 1603, written from Gertruydenberg in the Lowlands. Lord Oxford's son is listed as one of the English captains who took part in the Battle of Gertruydenberg which is graphically described in this letter. The epistle begins, "Kind father" and is subscribed, "Your most affectionate kind loving son, Ed: Vere."

The editor of the Sidney papers states that this letter was intended for Sir William Browne, one of the veteran military leaders of the day and a relative of Mary Browne, mother of the Earl of Southampton. This may be true, but as Browne's name does not appear on the letter, it may very well be that the communication was passed on to him by the Earl of Oxford who originally received it. In any case, the opening and closing phrases in Captain Vere's handwriting are not only an index to his personality but are realistically reminiscent of "Shake-speare's" words addressed "To one, of one, still such, and ever so," in Sonnet 105:

Kind is my love today, tomorrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;
Therefore my verse to constancy confined,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
'Fair, kind and true,' is all my argument.

A further interesting "coincidence" in connection with Captain Vere's letter to his "Kind father" is his mention of one "Lieutenant Poynes" by whose hand he had originally hoped the communication would be delivered.

Now the name Poynes or Poinis is by no means a common one. Members of this family gained notice during the Elizabethan period largely through their association with the Veres in the Lowland Wars. And in the Shakespearean plays of *Henry IV* we find the same unusual name of Poynes bestowed upon one of the swashbuckling companions of Prince Hal and Falstaff. So one "coincidence" leads to another throughout the whole interlocking chain of evidence that connects the Veres with the Shakespearean mystery.

Those sonnets in which Edward Vere the younger is either addressed outright or in which he can be clearly discerned as the Poet's chief concern can be listed as follows:

Nos. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 55,

59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 81, 96, 97, 100, 101, 105, 126, 133, 134 and 144.

Some of these, notably Nos. 67, 133 and 134, describe both the son and his mother, and Anne Vavasor is sharply upbraided for depriving the Poet of his boy's companionship. That she did this for the well-calculated purpose of forcing some advantage from the Earl of Oxford no one who studies her features and her recorded exploits can for a moment doubt. We have reprinted Sonnet 67 in a previous chapter. Let us now consider Sonnets 133 and 134:

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me;
Is't not enough to torture me alone,
But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be?
Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,
And my next self thou harder hast engrossed:
Of him, myself, and thee, I am forsaken,
A torment thrice threefold thus to be crossed:
Prison my heart in thy steel bosom's ward,
But then my friend's heart let my poor heart bail;
Who'er keeps me, let my heart be his guard;
Thou canst not then use rigor in my jail.

And yet thou wilt; for I, being pent in thee,
Perforce am thine and all that is in me.

So now I have confess'd that he is thine
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will,
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore, to be my comfort still:
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
For thou art covetous and he is kind;
He learn'd but surety-like to write for me,
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
Thou usurer, that put'st forth all to use,
And sue a friend come debtor for my sake;
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.

Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me:
He pays the whole, and yet am I not free.

A casual reading of the above lines might leave one with the impression that they represent the Poet's reaction to his mistress' efforts to ensnare some young mutual acquaintance. That was my own first conclusion. But I was wrong. The term "friend" cannot be defined here in the loose sense that we employ it nowadays. This word meant even more than "lover" throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. It was used to define one of very close, even of blood relationship, such as Hamlet's sworn brother-in-arms, Horatio. "Son and my friend," says Ben Jonson in one of his well known Epigrams. Finally, in looking over the *Letters of Lord Chester-*

field* to his (illegitimate) son, I found that in many of these celebrated missives the nobleman addresses the young man as "My friend" or "My dear friend."

The ninth line in Sonnet 134 tells us that the calculating mistress-mother is standing on her legal right to retain possession of her illegitimate offspring. "*The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take. . .*" Certainly a remarkable phrase and magnificently realistic poetry! For under English law, until comparatively recent times, the mother of a child born out of wedlock was expected to assume sole responsibility for its care. Here we have the father complaining bitterly because this savagely unjust law is being used against his own all too human yearnings.

Could the gripping emotional intensity of the situation sketched so plainly here have originated in an idle versifier's dabbings in "literary exercises," as Sir Sidney Lee and his orthodox followers have contended? With the documented histories of the poet Earl of Oxford, his dark, unscrupulous mistress and their illegitimate son before us, we can register an emphatic negative. These poems represent the stuff of life. We can take it for a moral certainty that Oxford is the real "Shake-speare" and that his "sweet'st friend," "my next self," "that other mine" that he begs to have restored "to be my comfort still" is none other than the handsome son on whom Anne Vavasor carefully exerts the tyranny of motherhood whenever it suits her own material purposes.

Oxford could obviously do nothing to prevent this without openly advertising the beloved boy as a bastard; and it is an historical fact that the literary Earl so steadfastly refrained from doing this that Edward Vere the younger's true genealogical status has in a sense remained quite as great a mystery as has the authorship of the *Sonnets* and the other Shakespearean works. This circumstance is recommended to the attention of those scholastic scoffers who have taken it upon themselves to distort and belittle Oxfordian research.

If, in spite of his passionate pride in this gifted youth, Lord Oxford could successfully conceal from the general public his paternal relationship to Edward Vere, it follows by all the laws of logic that the same poetical peer could just as success-

fully conceal his creative responsibility for the plays and poems upon which the impress of his personality are also indelibly stamped.

The third extensive sequence of sonnets, numbering some thirty-seven, appears to have been inspired by Oxford's interest in Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, first as a prospective son-in-law, capable of producing a legitimate heir of the Vere blood, an office in which Oxford himself had failed most tragically up to 1593. The seventeen marriage-promotion sonnets with which Thorpe's volume opens sketch this aspect of the Oxford-Southampton relationship circumstantially. Later, when the proposed match between Southampton and Elizabeth Vere fell through, the poet Earl (most unconventional nobleman of Elizabethan annals), appears to have adopted the publicity-loving Apollo of Southampton as the "godfather" of his pen-name, "William Shakespeare," and the ostensible patron of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, the two sensationally popular books of poetry issued in 1593 and 1594.

The name "William Shakespeare" first appeared in English letters on the dedicatory page of *Venus and Adonis*, appended to a letter addressed "To the Right Honorable Henrie Wriothesley, Earle of Southampton and Baron of Titchfield." Many critics have sensed a strain of assumed humility in this historic document. One sentence is of particular interest in that it is plainly susceptible of more than one meaning. "But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a god-father. . . ." As ordinarily read, "the first heir of my invention" would seem to refer to the poem, *Venus and Adonis*. But modern Shakespearean research has proved beyond all argument that many of the plays, including *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry V*, *I Henry VI*, and a number of others listed by Dr. Cairncross in *The Problem of Hamlet*, were all produced anonymously before *Venus and Adonis* appeared in 1593. At the same time, these early works were credited to the Bard in the 1623 First Folio. He therefore had many "heirs" to his artistic "invention" before *Venus and Adonis* was published in 1593. This being the case, what purpose would be served by the Poet addressing Southampton with so palpable a falsehood?

The logical explanation would seem to be that when the author of *Venus and Adonis* speaks of "my invention" he is referring not to his poetical inspiration but to the invention of the pseudonym, "William Shakespeare" to which Southampton is being asked to stand "god-father"; for everybody

*In passing, it should be noted that Philip Dormer, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, was a direct descendant of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford; one of many distinguished writers, scholars and men of creative talent in whose veins these qualities of the Vere blood persisted. Conversely, no member of the Shakspeare family of Stratford can be shown to have displayed in succeeding generations any outstanding aptitude for the creative arts.

knows that the chief duty of a god-father from time immemorial has been to sponsor a name at a christening ceremony.

Oxford's private letters, covering the 1590's, tell us that he was then extremely hard up, to all intents and purposes bankrupt and desperately eager for any new venture. It would be at exactly such a time that a nobleman of pronounced bohemian impulses and great literary talent (as Oxford himself is categorically designated on both counts by contemporary critics) would seek to turn his inherent abilities to some monetary account. Such situations are known to have occurred throughout the Civil Wars of the 17th century. For several years the bankrupt Duke of Newcastle, a refugee in Belgium under an assumed name, supported his family by working as a horse trainer and afterwards published a book on his experiences. Oxford's letters prove him to have been of the same spirit. Sonnet 21 closes with a significant couplet:

Let them say more that like of hearsay well;
I will not praise that purpose not to sell.

It is not difficult to picture a nobleman of Oxford's remarkable make-up writing these lines. He certainly could not with any sincerity "praise that purpose not to sell,"* (though the violation of such a purpose meant loss of prestige in his own caste) for the simple reason that he was already commercializing his talents through the book-stalls and the public stages.

He could, however, take all necessary pains to

*Sonnet 21 appears in this particular to be a commentary on Edmund Spenser's description in *The Tears of the Muses* (1591), of the learned and high-born comic playwright, "our pleasant Willy," who has been forced into temporary retirement by Puritanical political busybodies, after a long career of leadership in "the painted Theatres":

But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet Nectar flow,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw;
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himself to mockery to sell.

Dryden and many other early Shakespeare students believed that Spenser here describes the man later known as "William Shakespeare." Spenser assuredly uses most of the stock phrases in characterizing "our pleasant Willy" that were applied to "Shakespeare" by his contemporaries: "the man whom Nature's self had made"; the "gentle Spirit" whose pen flowed with "honey," etc. Meres, Barnfield, Weever, Chettle, Jonson, Digges and other Elizabethan commentators echo and re-echo these same phrases. The only difficulty, from the Stratfordian angle, is that Spenser pictures "Willy" as a *veteran aristocrat* in 1591, one who hesitates to "sell" his talents to the mockery-loving public. From the Oxfordian point of view, however, we have Edward de Vere to the life in this characterization. It can be amply proven from other sources that Lord Oxford's literary nickname really was "Willy" or "William." This proof will be given in detail elsewhere.

protect his already sadly damaged social position by employing a living mask or business agent to represent the pseudonym under which these works were issued. This would account for Willm Shakspeare's role in the proceedings. He may have been recommended to Oxford for that purpose by Richard Field, the printer of *Venus and Adonis*, who was himself a native of Stratford-on-Avon and whose father had relations with John Shakspeare. By the same token, none of the sonnets adumbrate the personality of William of Stratford. The laments over loss of good name and social prestige with which these poems abound provide the best evidence in the world that their author was a congenital aristocrat.

O lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to love things nothing
worth.

Sonnet 72.

O for my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand;
Pity me then and wish I were renew'd. . . .

Sonnet 111.

In Oxford's case, such expressions as these are entirely in keeping. Considered as the outpourings of William of Stratford, who had been a butcher's apprentice and a horse-groom, they would be not only insincere but self-stultifying. It is impossible to believe that any man ever rose from the status of common laborer on the godlike wings of creative art, only to bewail *forfeiture of caste* thereby. Except in this one highly questionable instance which the Stratfordians cite, no adequately documented precedent can be found in the history of literature to verify such a point of view. No Willm Shakspeare ever lived who seriously bemoaned loss of face through giving up butchering to produce a *Julius Caesar* and a *Hamlet*.

But when we consider the Earl of Oxford as the writer of these sonnets, the psychological recoil is thoroughly understandable. He was the one English nobleman of the Shakespearean period of outstanding creative ability who, in a material sense, had gone from fortune's wave-crest to the shallows.

Through his own lack of business judgment, his ill-considered generosity and extravagance, plus the underhand work of Sir Christopher Hatton and other designing persons, Oxford's vast holdings throughout the length and breadth of England had been swept away by the time he was forty-two. "He will not leave a farthing of land," Burghley, his father-in-law, wrote frantically in 1587.

At this time Oxford was living on a pension from the Queen, filling some mysterious "office" which seems to have been that of chief purveyor of theatrical entertainment to the Court. There was one consistently able and dynamic directing genius behind the rise of Elizabethan theatrical art. Such a movement does not "just happen." And Oxford's central place in this picture has been graphically sketched for us by Edmund Spenser.

It is a personality of this type, non-acquisitive to the core, one who has lost most of those material advantages which the majority prize above all else, who speaks in so many of the sonnets.

When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That Time will come and take my love away.

Sonnet 64

In choosing the magnificent young Wriothesley of Southampton as "patron" of the two books of poetry issued under his pen-name, Oxford gave his mask "invention" the appearance of a separate entity. He also followed the conventional rule that every worthwhile publication must be dedicated to somebody of prominence to assure its acceptance by the public. Practically all Elizabethan books carried, in addition to the patron's dedication, several pages of commendatory verse or prose, contributed by the author's professional colleagues as personal testimonials to his genius. There was only one great writer of the period who never gave nor received a single one of these commendations throughout his entire career; and that was "William Shakespeare." The reason now seems plain.

Of the thirty-seven sonnets that I identify at this time as written to or about Southampton, several that can be most readily associated with the young nobleman are written in a vein of offhand assurance that argues a complete lack of reverence for any such thing as social preeminence on the part of this spoiled and flattered lordling. Sonnet 82 is an excellent example of what I mean. It seems to indicate that Southampton may have caught the satirical double entendre behind his older friend's publication of *Venus and Adonis* and have raised some personal

objections. In any event, the Poet tells him off very neatly. No commoner, seriously seeking an Elizabethan nobleman's patronage, would conceive of addressing his "protector" in such terms as these:

I grant thou wert not married to my Muse,
And therefore mayst without attainit o'erlook
The dedicated words which writers use
Of their fair subject, blessing every book.
Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,
Finding thy worth a limit past my praise;
And therefore art enforced to seek anew
Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days,
And do so, love; yet when they have devised
What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
Thou truly fair wert truly sympathized
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend;
And their gross painting might be better used
Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused.

Sonnet 82

Sonnet 83 continues this line of semi-critical, semi-paternal and definitely sarcastic commentary on the young "patron's" desire for more, and more highly-colored, publicity.

I never saw that you did painting need,
And therefore to your fair no painting set;
I found, or thought I found, you did exceed
The barren tender of a poet's debt:
And therefore have I slept in your report,
That you yourself, being extant, well might show
How far a modern quill doth come too short,
Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow.
This silence for my sin you did impute,
Which shall be most my glory, being dumb;
For I impair not beauty being mute,
When others would give life and bring a tomb.
There lives more life in one of your fair eyes
Than both your poets can in praise devise.

In 1595 a literary journeyman named Gervase Markham had embellished his popular ballad of *The Tragedy of Sir Richard Grenville* with a dedicatory sonnet to Southampton. And in the same year George Peele, the playwright, had compared "the young Prince of Hamshire" to the long-dead Adonis of British heroes, Bevis of Southampton.

Oxford appears to have had both of these high-flown effusions in mind when he wrote the above lines to his young friend.

Markham's tribute to Southampton is typical of the style in which many Elizabethan commoners eulogized powerful nobles in expectation of honorarium. Note that Sonnet 83 comments specifically upon Markham's exaggerated bombast:

Thou glorious Laurel of the Muses' hill,
 Whose eyes doth crown the most victorious pen,
 Bright Lamp of Vertue, in whose sacred skill,
 Lives all the bliss of ear-enchancing men,
 From graver subjects of thy grave assayes,
 Bend thy courageous thoughts unto these lines,
 The grave from whence mine humble Muse doth
 raise,

True honor's spirit in her rough designs. . .

It doesn't require much critical acumen to see that "Shake-speare's" approach to the "patron" to whom he has addressed

The dedicated words which writers use
 Of their fair subject, blessing every book. . .

is on no such plane of toadying obsequiousness as that expressed in Markham's "strained rhetoric." In fact, Oxford develops a mood of understandable irritation in this sonnet-sequence to "the young Prince of Hampshire," whose appetite for over-seasoned flattery finally gets on the Poet's nerves.

Who is it that says most? Which can say more
 Than this rich praise, that you alone are you?
 In whose confine immuréd is the store
 Which should example where your equal grew.

*You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
 Being fond on praise, which makes your praises
 worse.* Sonnet 84

The records tell us that Southampton was the only literary "patron" personally acknowledged by "Shakespeare." The lines we have quoted are most certainly addressed to one who had performed such a function (ostensibly, at least, in "dedicated words") for the author of the sonnets, as he explicitly states. Yet it is utterly grotesque to assume that William of Stratford, a fortune-seeking penman from the provinces (as we are told) would direct such critical personalities to a high-spirited nobleman whose largess he was seeking. Southampton, on the other hand, would have had the impenitent rogue whipped or put in the stocks without ado!

Oxford, as the true "Shake-speare" seems the only logical explanation to this otherwise inexplicable relationship between Poet and "patron." For although financially decayed, the Lord Chamberlain of England was still the peerless Lord of Language, "poor but free," who could speak his mind fearlessly to any courtier of the realm.

I would set down those sonnets that appear to be concerned most largely with the Earl of Southampton and his activities, as follows:

Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,

16, 17, 35, 40, 41, 42, 53, 54, 59, 69, 82, 83, 84, 94, 95, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108, 120 and 125.

The first seventeen of these have already been discussed as representing Oxford's efforts to promote a marriage between Southampton and the Poet's eldest daughter. Another sequence of the poems, including Nos. 35, 40, 41 and 42 indicate that Southampton had made the acquaintance of Anne Vavasor and that Anne had seduced the young peer, her junior by ten or twelve years, into a passing affair of the senses. This could have occurred during the period prior to 1597, when Southampton became seriously entangled with Elizabeth Vernon, cousin of the Earl of Essex, finally marrying her secretly in the late summer of 1598 to forestall a public scandal. In Sonnet 41 "Shake-speare" indicates that the Dark Lady has taken the initiative in this earlier intrigue:

Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
 Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed;
 And when a woman woos, what woman's son
 Will sourly leave her till she has prevailed?
 Aye me! *but yet thou mightst my seat forbear,*
 And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth,
 Who lead thee in their riot even there
 Where thou art forced to break a twofold truth. . .

The situation parallels that of *Venus and Adonis* too clearly to be another mere "coincidence." Observe also the expression, "*but yet thou mightst my seat forbear. . .*" Southampton and Anne had evidently used Oxford's country retreat as a rendezvous. None but a person of recognized family and position would speak of a residential estate as "my seat." Malone realized this in the 18th century and cut the Gordian knot by changing the words "my seat" to "my sweet" in his edition of the *Sonnets*. Thus have the Poet's own words been garbled to fit the requirements of Stratfordia!

In a digest of this type, complete analysis of the human elements behind these poems cannot be effectively worked out. But for the purpose of pointing up the topical realism with which many of the sonnets are flavored, let us consider No. 107, which is one of the last in the Southampton series and has had many and varied interpretations. Let us see if it is not possible, with the touchstone in hand, to date this composition with considerable logic.

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
 Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,
 Can yet the lease of my true love control,
 Supposed as forfeit to a confin'd doom.
 The mortal Moon hath her eclipse endur'd
 And the sad augurs mock their own presage;

Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
 And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
 Now with the drops of this most balmy time
 My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
 Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
 And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

The topical background here is that which obtained late in March, 1599. The Queen had punished Southampton for his temerity in marrying one of her Maids of Honor, without permission, by confining the Earl in the Fleet Prison. There he remained during the fall of 1598 and part of the winter of 1599.

Just prior to Southampton's disgrace, his acknowledged leader, Essex, had quarreled bitterly with the Queen in the presence of her counsellors. Elizabeth had cursed him for his insolence and vigorously boxed his ears. Losing his head entirely, the favorite had made as if to draw his sword on his aged benefactress.

Anyone but Essex would have been thrown into the Tower, forthwith. As it turned out, "this mad young man" was merely forbidden the Court, and after several months of moping and plotting in private, came back in sufficient favor to win appointment to the command of the largest army that had ever been raised to subdue the Irish rebels.

By achieving this appointment after his personal row with the Queen, Essex appeared in the popular view to have won a signal victory over her. Always the outstanding favorite of the masses, in March, 1599, at the head of his formidable legion, Essex can in all seriousness be described as "eclipsing" the Monarch herself in the general adulation. Sir Robert Cecil and his political junta, meanwhile bided their time. The Cecil party had always opposed Essex in his military ambitions. But we now know that they were secretly delighted to have the troublesome favorite undertake this Irish expedition with his personal followers, leaving the more important direction of political affairs at Westminster to them.

Southampton had for some time been one of Essex's sworn adherents. Temperamentally, they were well matched. Essex had interceded with the Queen in Southampton's behalf. He not only secured the younger peer's release from the "confined doom" of the Fleet, but appointed Southampton to the Generalship of the Horse in his Irish expedition.

So this is the situation on the home front in March, 1599:

All parties at Court have seemingly proclaimed "peace." Essex and Southampton are setting out to "insult o'er dull and speechless tribes" of the Emerald Isle. In the background, the outwardly defeated Cecilian group — ostensibly "incertain" — really "crown themselves assured," for they know that at last they will be able to bend affairs to their own advantage. The Queen, popularly called Cynthia—"the mortal Moon—hath her eclipse endur'd." Essex and his followers are riding high.

Let us now turn to a contemporary document quoted in Strickland's *Life of Elizabeth*. Here we are told that on the 29th of March, when Essex, Southampton and the rest of the cavalcade took their departure, hordes of people followed them for more than four miles out of London, "with blessings and acclamations." But ill-omens soon gave many "sad augurs" the opportunity to "presage" disaster for Essex and his men. "When he left London, the day was calm and fair; but scarcely had he reached Iselden, when a black cloud from the north-east overshadowed the horizon, and a great storm of thunder and lightning, with hail and rain, was regarded, by the superstition of the times, as a portent of impending woe."

The facts, as here set down in their natural sequence, give us a life-like and logical key to the meaning of Sonnet 107. It is a personal commentary on Southampton's fortunes, but with deep political overtones. The writer must have been a person with Oxford's inside knowledge of affairs to be able to express so much in the pregnant subtlety of these fourteen lines.

To recapitulate, I find some one hundred and twenty-nine of the sonnets chiefly concerned with Lord Oxford's reactions to events growing out of his relationship to Anne Vavasor (41), Edward Vere the younger (51), and the "beauteous" but unpredictable Earl of Southampton (37).

This enumeration leaves twenty-five of the poems still to be accounted for. The Oxfordian documentation provides interpretative suggestions justifying the separation of these remaining sonnets into four general lines of creative thought and personal application.

Nos. 56, 66, 121, 123, 124, 129, 146 and, possibly 153 and 154, are philosophical and emotional commentaries on Oxford's own character. Events and situations in which the poet Earl's known associates have participated are also adumbrated. For instance, Sonnet 124 gives us the Poet's reaction to

the Essex Rebellion in which Southampton was a prime mover. And it requires little perspicacity to discern the succubine figure of Anne Vavasor as the motivation for the startling exorcism of fleshly sins so remorsefully intoned in Sonnet 129. In a later chapter we shall take up some of these matters in detail. The documentation that can be reproduced from Oxford's own hand to explain his personal responsibility for Sonnet 121 is alone conclusive enough to identify him for all time with the creation of this amazing diary.

Sonnets 110 and 111 appear to be addressed to some trustworthy and sympathetic friend of the Poet, such as Oxford's uncle and early tutor, Arthur Golding; or perhaps, the Earl's cousin, Lord John Lumley, greatest of all Elizabethan book and art collectors. Lumley is said to have owned a painting of "William Shakespeare," and his contemporary art inventories list a life-size portrait of the Earl of Oxford. Capt. B. M. Ward has suggested that this may have been the original painting of Oxford by Cornelius Ketel which was later transformed into the synthetic "Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare," now owned by the Folger Shakespeare Library. Be that as it may, Oxford and Lumley were close friends, both intimately identified with the creative arts.

Anne Cecil, Oxford's first wife, can be shown, I believe, to have inspired the writing of Sonnets 116, 117, 118, and 119. These will be discussed later.

The ten remaining poems appear to comment upon Oxford's personal relationship to Queen Elizabeth. These are Nos. 78, 79, 80, 85, 86, 87, 102, 122, 128 and perhaps 23.

I do not hold with those Oxfordian writers who have boldly claimed that the literary peer at one time involved himself in a serious love affair with the Virgin Monarch. It was a custom of the age, as Sir Francis Bacon tells us, for all Elizabethan courtiers to assume an ardent, lover-like attitude of exaggerated devotion to the Queen. She, in her turn, was an unfeigned admirer of the manly graces and lavished soft words and intimate caresses upon many men who enjoyed her confidence. Oxford was unquestionably one of these. During his early manhood, as Gilbert Talbot states, "the Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his personage and his dancing and his valiantness than any other." Fulke Greville also describes Oxford in 1579 as "superlative in the Prince's (sic) favour." Other extracts from the Talbot correspondence inform us that Oxford's mother-in-law, Lady Burghley, resented the Queen's monopolization of Oxford's attention. But old Burghley

himself, wise in the ways of the Tudor Court, refused to view the situation seriously. "At all these love matters my Lord Treasurer winketh, and will not meddle in any way."*

As a matter of fact, if Oxford had ever harbored the earnest intention of establishing himself as Elizabeth's unofficial husband, we can be sure he would not have survived her, as he did. Some "accident," engineered by Leicester or Hatton, would have seen to that.

Oxford's own documentation shows that he very early in life grew restive under the Queen's demands on his time as her personal entertainer and dancing partner. At the age of twenty-four he ran away to the Lowlands to escape the monotony of his role at Court. In after years we find him referring to the royal establishment as "that place," and making various excuses in his letters for not attending upon Her Majesty more assiduously.

Elizabeth was Oxford's senior by seventeen years. She was also some thirty-four years older than her last great favorite, Essex. Differences in age seemingly offered no serious bar to her affections. But we must remember that Edward de Vere was quite a different type of man from Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, or Leicester, Hatton or other courtiers of the day who soared high on the Queen's breath. He was neither avaricious nor politically ambitious. Distinctly off-standard—eccentric, if you will—he gives evidence throughout his career of the enthusiasms, depressions, tastes, associations and activities of a creative artist—perhaps the greatest that has ever lived.

Queen Elizabeth herself loved and encouraged literary and dramatic art. She had a keen appreciation of creative values and could express herself with power and distinction, as her extant writings show. In fact, Gloriana lives in history as the head and front of the English Renaissance. It was on this plane that the Queen and Oxford met in sympathetic understanding, not as participants in some surreptitious intrigue.

Sonnet 122 should be of unusual historical interest as it clearly reverberates the personal relationship between these two legendary figures—Elizabeth and "Shake-speare." The background of this sonnet is to be found in Oxford's early prowess as a "spear-shaker" in the lists. "It is a remarkable tribute to Lord Oxford's skill at arms and horsemanship that he was given the prize at the only two great tournaments in which he was a competitor," says Ward.

*Ward's *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, p. 78.

The most spectacular of these contests was held in May, 1571. As a reward for his outstanding work at tilt, tourney and barriers during the three day period of this strenuous affair, the young Earl was presented with a tablet studded with diamonds by the Queen.*

A tablet or tables, as it was also called, was a note-book, usually of ivory leaves. Such a prize would be most appropriate for a poet.

Oxford evidently made practical use of this gift for a time. But he just as evidently gave it away—likely enough to some young woman who also scribbled verses, and coveted the diamonds on the tablet's cover. Sonnet 122 provides us with the poet-peer's explanation for the disappearance of the Queen's gift.

Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
Full charactered with lasting memory,
Which shall above that idle rank remain
Beyond all date, even to eternity.
Or at the least, so long as brain and heart
Have faculty by nature to subsist,
Till each to raz'd oblivion yield his part
Of thee, thy record never can be miss'd:
That poor retention could not so much hold,
Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score;
Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
To trust those tables that receive thee more:
To keep an adjunct to remember thee
Were to import forgetfulness in me.

The first four lines of this sonnet tell us clearly that the writer is a personage of high degree and that his memory of his great friend's gift of tables will outlast his own "idle rank." Nothing could be plainer. Stratfordian editors have, however, found a way out of this embarrassing dilemma. They boldly change the punctuation of the verses as they appear in the original edition of the *Sonnets*, so that the third line reads:

"Which shall above; (sic) that idle rank remain, etc."

In this way the Poet's own characterization of himself is carefully robbed of all meaning. And so it appears today in many popular editions of the *Sonnets*.

Yet even the studied dishonesty of such "scholarship" cannot vitiate the contemporary evidence that identifies the Elizabethan Earl of Oxford as the real author of these highly personal poetical commentaries.

Charles Wisner Barrell

*Segar, *The Book of Honor* (1590), p. 94.

(To be continued)

A Gigantic Task

Research in many fields is being carried on at the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, of which one of the most important is English literature and history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The result of one such piece of work will soon be available to readers. We quote from the Library's Fourteenth Annual Report:

"Mark Eccles, a Huntington Library Research Fellow, has been engaged upon a gigantic task, a biographical dictionary of Elizabethan authors. To lay the foundation for it, he examined sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books and noted what information the writers supplied about themselves and other authors of the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. He read or consulted between a third and a half of the '1640' books in the Huntington Library, confirming, correcting, or adding to the accounts in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and gathering information about authors not included in that work. More recently he has been examining books by the fifty writers most widely read in the second half of the sixteenth century, in preparation for a book on popular Elizabethan authors."

The work of Mark Eccles is already well known in the field of Elizabethan research. His examination of the records concerning the lives of Barnabe Barnes and Sir George Buc resulted in biographies with much new information which were published in 1933 under the editorship of Professor Charles J. Sisson of the University of London, with the general title, *Thomas Lodge and Other Elizabethans*. The following year, Dr. Eccles brought out his *Christopher Marlowe in London*, in which he records new details on the life of the great dramatist. He has also published studies on the lives of Spenser and Middleton.

In an Introduction to the Marlowe book, Professor Leslie Hotson says, "All Dr. Eccles's readers will hail the prizes he has captured from oblivion.

... Discovery is lonely work. Its pains are not to be communicated, its intimate delights cannot be shared."

The Huntington Library Quarterly for April carries an article by Dr. Eccles in which he outlines his method in collecting material from a thousand sources and testing it for truth and accuracy, then summarizes it as concisely as possible for inclusion in his Dictionary. In illustration, Dr. Eccles gives a specimen biography of Sir John Beaumont, brother of the more famous Francis Beaumont.

NEWS-LETTER
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President

Louis P. Bénézet, A.M., Ph.D.

Vice-Presidents

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Mrs. Eva Turner Clark

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Charles Wisner Barrell

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 43rd Street, New York, N. Y.

Encouragement

Despite the absorbing interest in the war, which takes most of the time and thought of all of us, the Oxford theory of Shakespeare authorship marches on. Several items of encouragement to members of the Shakespeare Fellowship show this to be true.

First and foremost, our membership has held up, even increased during times so difficult that it would not have been surprising if it had dwindled. This fact indicates that our society will go forward with leaps and bounds when the war comes to an end.

Most of the larger college libraries have become subscribers to our small periodical, of which each one now has a complete file. This is a recognition

of the value of the NEWS-LETTER and of the theory it supports. College libraries will not be found lagging.

The cordial reception given our speakers at colleges and clubs is evidence of a growing interest in the cause of the Earl of Oxford and the consistency which marks our Shakespeare authorship theory appeals to the listeners. Instead of a lay figure, they find the poet-dramatist a breathing, pulsing man of his times, of all times, a person they can understand.

The recent publicity given the Oxford theory by the famous and popular actor, Mr. Leslie Howard, in his production of the delightfully interesting film, "Mister V," has been of the utmost value in both England and America in acquainting the general public with the first knowledge many of them have had of the Earl of Oxford as Shakespeare.

Last but not least, Mr. Barrell's interpretation of the *Sonnets*, as revealed in recent numbers of the NEWS-LETTER, has attracted deserved commendation and many extra copies of the issues containing his articles have been ordered. The mystery of these enigmatic verses has intrigued innumerable students of the past and they have taxed their ingenuity for a solution. Always they have believed there was something autobiographical about them but never could they reconcile them with the known details of the life of the Stratford man. As a member said recently, "That line in Sonnet 125—'Were 't aught to me I bore the canopy'—is evidence enough that William of Stratford did not write the *Sonnets*." Lord Oxford was one of the two senior Earls who bore the Golden Canopy over the Queen in the procession to St. Paul's to give thanks to God for the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Mr. Barrell has shown again and again that other lines than the one about the "canopy" apply just as convincingly to the personal life history of the Earl of Oxford.

Chronological Item

F. G. Fleay, in his *Shakespeare Manual* (1876), says "the test by broken lines," to which he does not subscribe, preferring the rhyme test, "would make *Lear* far the latest of all the plays."

Mrs. Clark, who bases her chronology on topical allusions, finds *Lear* to be the last of the plays, with one exception, *Henry VIII*, believed by most commentators to have little that is Shakespearean in it.

"Shakspeare, Shakespeare and de Vere"

In the late autumn of 1937, using the title quoted above, I published a booklet of some thirty-five pages, to show that one of the "Fair Youths" referred to in the *Sonnets of Shake-Speare* must be an illegitimate son of the poet, and to call attention to the corroboration that this fact gives to the Oxford theory of the authorship.

I recall with great satisfaction, the letter which I received shortly afterward from Mr. Barrell, in which he stated that he had legal records of the existence of an illegitimate son of the Earl of Oxford, proof of which, in connection with the second "Youth" mentioned in the *Sonnets*, could not be gainsaid by the Stratfordians. This material he has now revealed through the columns of the *News-Letter*.

As his information was accurate and documented, while I was simply interpreting what I read in the poems, I have had to revise two or three points in my hypothesis, although the main theme is corroborated undeniably.

As supplements or appendices to my book I printed a table of the requirements of any candidate for the authorship of the plays and poems,—that he must have been a university-trained student, an aristocrat, a soldier, a musician, a law student, a traveller in Italy, a poet, an associate of Henry Wriothesley, one who had borne the "canopy" over the queen, etc., and a pot-pourri of verses made up of lines from the early writings of Edward de Vere intermixed with corresponding passages from the "Shake-Speare" works.

This mixture contains seventy lines; there are six passages from the works of one author, seven from the other; no passage is longer than eight lines; none shorter than four.

It has been most interesting to see the Shakespeare scholars tackle this problem. I handed the book to a former college instructor in Elizabethan literature, now an editor for a well known publishing firm. He picked it up with an air which said: "This is going to be easy. Just watch me detect the true Shakespeare lines." I had given him the number of lines in each selection, so it should have been doubly easy. He not only failed to pick the Shakespeare passages among the first forty lines; he *exactly reversed them*, attributing de Vere's stanzas to Shakespeare and Shakespeare's to de Vere.

He did a little better on the next part, for he recognized lines from two of the *Sonnets*, but closed

his answer as he began, attributing the last six lines to the wrong author.

An old friend of mine, who has been teaching English for forty years, took my booklet home and made an honest attempt, after careful reading and study, to pick out the Shakespeare passages. I met him afterwards, and he confessed that he had missed three of the first eight and was not sure enough to go on to the end.

But the most surprising test was an interview which I had, four years ago, with a famous professor of literature from one of the nation's oldest and greatest universities, a man whose name is synonymous with literary knowledge and who is quoted from coast to coast.

I read him the pot-pourri. "What do you think of it?" I asked.

"It is beautiful," he replied.

"Where do you place it?" I asked.

"Oh, it is Elizabethan," was his answer.

"Did one man write all of it?" I persisted.

"OH, UNQUESTIONABLY," said he.

"I think so," said I, and I proceeded to tell him the story of the dual authorship.

He was perfectly aghast. "What does Kittredge say to this?" he demanded. "Kittredge won't listen to it," I answered. "A friend of mine tried to obtain an interview with him, but when he learned what it was about, he refused."

The mixture follows. Try it yourself, then let your friends try their luck. I have never yet found anyone who could rank better than 70%, and most people simply throw up their hands and confess that any answer which they might give would be largely guesswork.

Of course I got my idea from reading Mr. Looney's scholarly comparison of the poetry of Edward de Vere with the *Sonnets* and poems, but it struck me that it could be put together in a way that would mystify even the elect. It has!

We must remember, always, that in making this comparison, we are setting the verses of a young court poet alongside the work of the world's greatest literary genius.

Louis P. Bénézet

Editor's Note:

A few copies of "Shakspeare, Shakespeare and de Vere" remain, and one may be obtained at cost (Twelve Cents, plus postage) by addressing the author at 3 Occom Ridge, Hanover, N. H.

(The medley of verse by Edward de Vere and William Shakespeare, so ingeniously arranged by Professor Bénézet, will be found on the following page.)

“Every Word Doth Almost Tell My Name”

The following verses are from the early poems of Edward de Vere, written before he reached the age of twenty-six. Mixed in at odd places are lines from the poems of Shakespeare. Let the lynx-eyed reader spot these interpolations, if he can, not by the use of a Shakespeare concordance, but by the change in diction, style, vocabulary, etc. If he can!

If care or skill could conquer vain desire,
Or reason's reins my strong affections stay:
There should my sighs to quiet breast retire,
And shun such sights as secret thoughts betray;
Uncomely love, which now lurks in my breast
Should cease, my grief by wisdom's power
oppressed.

My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic mad with evermore unrest.
Fain would I sing but fury makes me fret,
And rage hath sworn to seek revenge of wrong;
My mazed mind in malice is so set,
As death shall daunt my deadly dolours long;
Patience perforce is such a pinching pain,
As die I will or suffer wrong again.

For if I should despair, I should go mad,
And in my madness might speak ill of thee:
Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,
Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.
Love is a discord and a strange divorce
Betwixt our sense and rest, by whose power,
As mad with reason, we admit that force
Which wit or labour never may endower.
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
As random from the truth vainly express'd;
For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee
bright

Who art as black as hell and dark as night.
Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common
place?

Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
Who taught thee first to sigh, alas, my heart?
Who taught thy tongue the woeful words of
plaint?

Who filled your eyes with tears of bitter smart?
Who gave thee grief and made thy joys to faint?
Who first did paint with colours pale thy face?
Who first did break thy sleeps of quiet rest?
Above the rest in court who gave thee grace?
Who made thee strive in honour to be best?

Who taught thee how to make me love thee more
The more I hear and see just cause of hate?
O, though I love what others do abhor,
With others thou shouldst not abhor my state:
What worldly wight can hope for heavenly hire,
When only sighs must make his secret moan?
A silent suit doth sold to grace aspire,
My hapless hap doth roll the restless stone.
Yet Phoebe fair disdained the heavens above,
To 'joy on earth her poor Endymion's love.
And shall I live on earth to be her thrall?
And shall I live and serve her all in vain?
And shall I kiss the steps that she lets fall?
And shall I pray the gods to keep the pain
From her that is so cruel still?
No, no, on her work all your will.
And let her feel the power of all your might,
And let her have her most desire with speed,
And let her pine away both day and night,
And let her moan and none lament her need;
And let all those that shall her see,
Despise her state and pity me.
Let him have time to tear his curled hair,
Let him have time against himself to rave,
Let him have time of Time's help to despair,
Let him have time a beggar's orts to crave,
And time to see one that by alms doth live
Disdain to him disdained scraps to give.

Certain lines in the above, taken from a sonnet by Edward de Vere, are found, in a slightly altered version, in a collection of Thomas Watson's poems, published after Watson's death. However, in the Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Poetical MSS. 85.16, the sonnet is ascribed to and signed by the "Earl of Oxenford." For the story of the close connection between the Earl and Watson and their collaboration in the publication of Watson's *Sonnets*, see *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* by Capt B. M. Ward, pp. 194-197.

Whitman Collection

The famous Walt Whitman collection of Mrs. Frank J. Sprague was the principal feature of the Whitman exhibition of books, manuscripts, portraits, prints and memorabilia which was held through June in Philadelphia under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania. Before that, her collection was on view at the Library of Congress in Washington.

Besides her activities in Whitman collecting, Mrs. Sprague is deeply interested in the Oxford theory of Shakespeare authorship, having been among the first in this country to accept Mr. Looney's theory that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was the true author of the Shakespeare plays and poems. Because of her great interest in this subject, her intimate friend, the late Carolyn Wells, bequeathed her entire collection of books on the Oxford theory to Mrs. Sprague.