

THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP

Quarterly

The Shakespeare Fellowship was founded in London in 1922 under the presidency of Sir George Greenwood.

VOL. IX

AUTUMN, 1948

NO. 3

“In deed as in name—Vere nobilis for he was W . . . (?) . . .”

Shakespearean Master of Revels Discusses the Oxford Mystery In Partly Burned Manuscript, Now Fully Transcribed

AMONG THE ELIZABETHAN and Jacobean manuscripts gathered by Sir Robert Cotton, the antiquary, were private papers of Sir George Buck who served in the office of the Revels during the last decade of Elizabeth. In 1606 Buck succeeded Edmund Tylney, his uncle, as Master of the Revels, keeping this place until a short time before his death in 1622.

Through the Stationers' Company, Buck or his deputy licensed five of the Shakespeare plays for publication, but all of the records of the Revels Office relating to play *production* during Buck's administration have disappeared entirely.

In 1731, when the Cotton Library and manuscript collection was at Ashburnham House, London, it was seriously damaged by fire. Among the manuscripts salvaged were some in Buck's handwriting. One page consists of rough notes in which the Master of the Revels endeavors to sum up his personal impressions of the poetical Earl of Oxford. About one-fourth of the writing on this sheet has been charred away. The sentences and words still legible are most interesting, however, and serve to deepen the regret of students of Lord Oxford's career that Buck was not able to leave us a more complete commentary on the strange genius whose *familiar acquaintance* he says had been *vouchsafed me*. As the official authority on the drama of his time, every comment now identifiable as from Buck's pen on playwrights of his day would be of unusual value to historians. But it is now apparent that Oxford is the only Elizabethan playwright of record whose personality this

Master of the Revels sought to explain and defend in surviving memoranda.

It will be observed, moreover, that Buck weighs every word he sets down here with extreme care, adds and rejects words and phrases, leaves unfinished a name dangerous to many, records another beginning with a capital *W* which the fire erases, and in general struggles hard to explain (without too much revealing) the one great playwright of the era whose loss of property and political prestige has always been shrouded in mystery.

That Buck, who was himself a poet and historian of mark, feels an intense admiration for the man Edward de Vere which outweighs his pity for the ruined nobleman, is apparent. His partially destroyed commentary was first reproduced sixteen years ago in *Thomas Lodge and Other Elizabethans* by C. J. Sisson and Mark Eccles. In the chapter headed “Sir George Buc and the Office of the King's Revels,” Dr. Eccles reproduces a good photoengraving of the manuscript, which is now owned by the British Museum. His printed transcription of the Oxford commentary, however, consists of little more than half of Buck's lines. These appear in such typographical clutter as to confuse much of their sense.

In compiling the present transcription with the assistance of specialists in Elizabethan chirography at the New York Public Library, we have adopted a simplified system in rendering the Buck notes into type. Thus, each group of triple dots signifies a charred portion of the script. Words partially

destroyed are contiguous to these dots. Where Buck has crossed out a word or a phrase in favor of another, we designate the rejected characters in a rounded bracket immediately following. Words or letters obviously required to complete sense are also given in rounded brackets. The elongated brackets represent Buck's own enclosures.

Near the top and center of this partially burned sheet, the numeral 3 appears, indicating that the Master of the Revels had written at least two other pages of commentary on the great and unfortunate Elizabethan poet nobleman. These were undoubtedly entirely consumed in the fire of 1731. Our transcription runs as follows:

3.

fully begotten by himselfe in much .
 lases tyme that great & stately . . .
 the opulent & friendly patro(n) . . .
 and was very (struck out but restored)
 sodenly . . .
 consumed [como sal en agua . . .
 say in the Refran] but not by the fault
 lord Harys (Howard's) but rather by the
 sale of the
 qmaur. (word contracted) for certaynly
 the erl was a
 magnificent & a very (s.o.b.r.) learned &
 religious . . .

& so worthy in every way, as I haue heard some
 graue & . . .

(d) iscret & honorable persons [who knew the erl
 from his y (outh) . . .
 & could very well iudge of the hopefullness & . . .
 tow (ard) lynes of young men] say & affirme he
 was much more like (ly) . . .
 to raise & acquire a new erldome then to dis (s.o.)
 . . .
 decay & loose an old erldome. yet this erldome
 was * * *

(Buck's own dots after erldome was, witness his
 disinclination to record the grim facts of Ox-
 ford's financial insolvency.)
 . . . in a word he was a . . .
 in deed as in name - - - Vere nobilis for he was
 W . . .

(In the charred right-hand margin, interlined
 below the missing word beginning with W, appears
 the rounded remnant of another capitalized letter
 which may have stood for S. It therefore seems
 quite possible that the now partially destroyed line
 above may originally have read: in deed as in
 name - - - Vere nobilis for he was William Shake-

spere. One thing at least is certain. No authority
 in England would then be more likely to appreciate
 the "noble Truth" of Oxford's creative deeds as
 "William Shakespeare" than Master of the Revels
 Buck. His script continues:)

& truly noble.& a most noble Vere (note pun.) I
 spea (k) . . .

. . . what I know, for he vouchsafed me his familiar
 ac (quaintance) . . .

(A variant interlineation after know reads: haueing
 had the honour of, etc.)

It seems strange that Dr. Eccles does not include
 a transcription of the last line of this manuscript in
 his printed version, for in the light of Buck's fore-
 going efforts to explain how the earldom under
 Oxford suffered notable loss of property and pres-
 tige, these nine words are of surpassing sig-
 nificance:

And whereas I and all that overthrew a Stately

Although the sentence begins with a capital A
 and is unfinished - - proving the continuance of
 Buck's apology for the poet Earl on succeeding
 pages, now hopelessly lost - - the personal ele-
 ment in the thought carries on from Buck's statement
 that he was on terms of **familiar acquaintance** with
 Oxford. Also, the word **Stately**, meaning *noble* or
grand, is obviously a reference to the same earl-
 dom of Oxford which Buck likewise designates in
 the second line of his script. Yet does this make
 sense? How could Buck himself be associated with
 persons or circumstances responsible for Lord
 Oxford's overthrow as a great aristocrat?

The answer is, Buck had been one of a group
 of Elizabethan writers and dramatists to whose
 support Oxford had contributed with lavish gen-
 erosity until his financial break-up, about 1585.
 In the third and fourth lines here, Buck refers to
 the disasters that **very sodenly** overcame this **opu-
 lent & friendly patron**. As early as 1582 we find
 Buck's name on the first sonnet of commendation
 printed in Thomas Watson's *Passionate Century of
 Love*. This collection of poems, frequently men-
 tioned as a forerunner of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, is
 dedicated to Oxford, who unquestionably paid for
 its publication. Watson intimates that the Earl
 helped edit the volume. Two famous dramatists,
 John Lyly and George Peele, also contributed com-
 mendatory verses, together with Matthew Royden,
 Thomas Acheley, and C. Downhalus. As it is now
 known from excellent testimony that Watson was
 a prolific writer for the stage, while Oxford's
 (Continued on page 24)

John Lyly as Both Oxford's and Shakespeare's "Honest Steward"

By CHARLES WISNER BARRELL

I do proclaim

*One honest man—mistake me not—but one;
No more, I pray.—and he's a steward . . .
Methinks thou art more honest now than wise:
For by oppressing and betraying me,
Thou mightst have sooner got another service:
For many so arrive at second masters,
Upon their first lord's neck.*

Timon of Athens, IV. 3. 500.

WHILE THE EARL OF OXFORD was convalescing from the effects of his duel with Anne Vavasor's uncle in the spring of 1582, suspicion seems to have been raised in his mind regarding the personal loyalty of his secretary-steward, John Lyly. Very likely rumors had been started by the Earl's enemies to cause dissension in his household. On the other hand, evidence indicating Oxford's constitutional lack of good judgment in all matters relating to the protection of his own material interests is so voluminous that it becomes apparent no secretary or steward could handle his affairs without getting into hot water sooner or later. In this instance it seems that Lyly had been blamed for the deplorable condition of the Earl's accounts.

The situation can be gathered from a letter in John Lyly's hand, addressed to Lord Burghley and endorsed "July 1582" by one of Burghley's secretaries.¹

It is evident from Lyly's correspondence with the Lord Treasurer during the 1570's that Burghley had originally recommended the author of *Euphues* to Oxford for employment. Due to this circumstance, it would be quite natural for Lyly to seek Burghley's advice in trying to straighten out a serious misunderstanding with his temperamental master. In partially modernized spelling, the letter reads as follows:

To ye right honorable, ye L. Burleigh, L. high Tresorer of England.

My dutie (right honorable) in most humble manner remembered.

It hath pleased my Lord (Oxford) upon what color I cannot tell, certain I am upon no cause,

to be displeased with me, the grief whereof is more than the loss can be. But seeing I am to live in the world, for that an honest servant must be such as Caesar would have his wife, not only free from sin, but from suspicion. And for that I wish nothing more than to commit all my ways to your wisdom, and the devises of others to your judgment, I here yield both my self and my soul, the one to be tried by your honor, the other by the justice of god. And I doubt not by my dealings being sifted, the world shall find white meal, where others thought to shew coarse bran. It may be many things will be objected (to), but that any thing can be proved I doubt; I know your L(ordship) will soon smell devises from simplicity, truth from treachery, factions from just service. And god is my witness, before whom I speak, and before whom for my speech I shall answer, that all my thoughts concerning my L(ord Oxford) have been ever reverent, and almost religious. How I have dealt god knoweth and my Lady (of Oxford) can conjecture, so faithfully as I am as unspotted for dishonesty, as a suckling from theft. This conscience of mine maketh me presume to stand all trials, either of accounts. or counsell, in the one I never used falsehood, nor in the other dissembling. My most humble suit therefore unto your L(ordship) is that my accusations² be not smothered and I choked in the smoke, but that they may be tried in

¹Reproduced from the Lansdowne MSS. in *The Complete Works of John Lyly* by R. Warwick Bond, Vol. I, pps. 28-29.

²I.e., the accusations against Lyly.

the fire and I will stand to the heat. And my only comfort is, that he that is wise shall judge truth, whose nakedness shall manifest her nobleness. But I will not trouble your honorable ears with so many idle words only this upon my knees I ask, that your L(ordship) will vouchsafe to talk with me, and in all things will I shew my self so honest, that my disgrace shall bring to your L(ordship) as great marvel, as it hath done to me grief, and so thoroughly will I satisfy every objection, that your L(ordship) shall think me faithful, though unfortunate. That your honor rest p'suaded of mine honest mind, and my Lady (of Oxford) of my true service, that all things may be tried to the uttermost, is my desire, and the only reward I crave for my just, (ay just I dare term it) service. And thus in all humility submitting my Cause to your wisdom and my Conscience to the trial. I commit your L(ordship) to the Almightye.

Yor most dutifullie to command

Ihon Lyly

for that I am for some days going into the country if your L(ordship) be not at leisure to admit me to your speech, at my return I will give my most dutiful attendance, at which time, it may be my honesty may join with your L(ordship's) wisdom and both prevent, that neither would allow. In the mean season what color soever be alleged, if I be not honest to my L(ord Oxford) and so mean to be during his pleasure, I desire but your L(ordship's) secret opinion, for as I know my L(ord Oxford) to be most honorable, so I beseech god in time he be not abused. Loth I am to be a prophet, and to be a witch I loath.

Most dutiful to command

Ihon Lyly

Whether or not the Lord Treasurer adjudicated these differences between his playwright son-in-law and the latter's playwright secretary we do not know. Lyly declares his eagerness "*to stand all trials, either of accounts or counsell;*" is sure that an audit of his "*dealings*" will convince "*my Lady (of Oxford) of my true service*" and goes on to "*beseech god in time he (Oxford) be not abused.*" These statements might indicate that Lyly had opposed some one of the Earl's extravagant schemes for raising ready money, which may have seemed speciously alluring to Lady Oxford at the time. Moreover, the reference to "counsell" suggests that Lyly had very likely aroused the Earl's

resentment by speaking his mind too plainly.

But the misunderstandings between the two men were evidently only temporary affairs, for we know that Lyly continued for many more years in Oxford's service, either as his secretary or as stage manager of the company of boy actors who appeared at the Blackfriars Theatre and at Court under the Earl's patronage.

The fact that Oxford's secretary was able to clear himself of all imputations of disloyalty to his master's interests is further witnessed by a grant of land which Lord Oxford made to Lyly in 1584. The annual income from this property is listed at 30 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence—not an insignificant sum when we consider that the purchasing power of Elizabethan money is estimated at ten to twelve times its modern equivalent. The conveyance, made out in Lyly's name, states that it has been drawn "*in consideration of the good and faithful service that the said John Lyly hath heretofore done unto the said Earl.*"³ During the same year of 1584, Oxford also turned over to Lyly the lease of the Blackfriars Theatre.

Throughout the period of which we are writing, the Earl's financial situation was becoming more precarious as importunate creditors forced him to divest himself of control over his ancient estates. The crisis finally came in 1586, when his acceptance of a pension from the Crown was virtually an admission of bankruptcy.

In view of these subsequent events, let us look again at John Lyly's letter of July, 1582, with its insistence upon his "faithful" and "just" service to his spendthrift Lord who has evidently resented the secretary-steward's conservatism in the matter of "accounts" and Lyly's "counsell," given "with-out dissembling."

Once more we find a series of circumstances of vital import in the private life of Edward de Vere, the playwriting Earl of Oxford, reproduced with amazing fidelity in a work of "William Shakespeare's." We have only to turn to *Timon of Athens*, that strange study of misanthropy growing out of thoughtless generosity and extravagance, to discover the Bard's painfully intense preoccupation with the same emotional reactions that must have given Lord Oxford food for reflection following his financial break-up. In *Timon*, significantly enough, is to be found a dramatized version of Oxford's differences with his honest and plain-

³See Feuillerat's *John Lyly*, p. 536.

speaking servant, Lyly, who can be identified immediately as Timon's steward, Flavius.

Act Two, Scene Two, of the play finds Flavius bringing the matter of unpaid accounts to his master's attention, after an unpleasant session with Timon's creditors:

Timon

You make me marvel; wherefore, ere this time,
Had you not fully laid my state before me,
That I might so have rated my expense
As I had leave of means?

Flavius

You would not hear me,
At many leisures I proposed.

Timon

Go to:

Perchance some single vantages you took,
When my indisposition put you back;
And that unaptness made your minister
Thus to excuse yourself.

Flavius

O my good lord,

At many times I brought in my accounts.
Laid them before you; you would throw them off,
And say, you found them in mine honesty.
When for some trifling present you have bid me
Return so much, I have shook my head and wept;
Yea, 'gainst the authority of manners pray'd you
To hold your hand more close: I did endure
Not seldom nor no slight checks, when I have
Prompted you in the ebb of your estate
And your great flow of debts. My loved lord.
Though you hear now, too late!—yet now's a
time—

The greatest of your having lacks a half
To pay your present debts.

Timon

Let all my land be sold.⁴

Flavius

'Tis all engaged, some forfeited and gone,
And what remains will hardly stop the mouth
Of present dues: the future comes apace:
What shall defend the interim? and at length
How goes our reckoning?

Timon

To Lacedaemon did my land extend.

⁴See Ward, p. 110. Oxford's letter to Burghley from Siena, Jan. 3rd, 1576, urging Burghley "to sell any portion of my land" or "more of my land where your Lordship shall think fittest, to disburden me of my debts." One of several such expressions.

Flavius

O my good Lord, the world is but a word:
Were it all yours to give it in a breath,
How quickly were it gone!

Timon

You tell me true.

Flavius

If you suspect my husbandry or falsehood,
Call me before the exactest auditors,
And set me on the proof. So the gods bless me,
When all our offices have been oppress'd
With riotous feeders, when our vaults have wept
With drunken spilth of wine, when every room
Hath blazed with lights and bray'd with minstrelsy,
I have retired me to a wakeful couch,
And set mine eyes at flow.

.

Timon

Come, sermon me no further;
No villanous bounty yet hath pass'd my heart;
Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given.
Why dost thou weep? Canst thou the conscience
lack,
To think I shall lack friends?

.

Flavius

Assurance bless your thoughts!

Who can read these passages without sensing a realistic presentation of Oxford as Timon and of Lyly in the role of the honest and outspoken steward, blamed for circumstances over which he has no control?

Not only is the general situation between master and servant, as outlined by Lyly in his letter to the Lord Treasurer, the same as that presented in the play; but under pressure of identical emotional stress, the reactions of John Lyly are echoed in the words of Flavius.

This conscience of mine maketh me presume to stand all trials, either of accounts, or counsell, in the one I never used falsehood, nor in the other dissembling . . . that all things may be tried to the uttermost is my desire *Lyly*.

If you suspect my husbandry or falsehood,
Call me before the exactest auditors,
And set me on the proof.—*Flavius*.

In fact, throughout the play, the attitude of candid but reverent loyalty which the steward

expresses toward Timon, despite undeserved rebuffs and suspicions, as the master plunges headlong down the primrose path to ruin, is so similar to Lyly's attitude toward Oxford under like circumstances that it seems plain the characterization of Flavius may have been designed as a tribute to the literary Earl's famous retainer.

One honest man, (proclaims Timon) but one;
No more, I say,—and he's a steward.

.
Flavius

That which I show, Heaven knows, is merely love,
Duty and zeal to your unmatched mind.

It is a notable fact that no record exists of any production of *Timon of Athens* during the Shakespearean Age. Neither was the play printed before its appearance in the First Folio. The almost unrelieved pessimism of the work, its all too realistic presentment of the degeneration of a noble mind, given over to thoughtless pleasure and beset by parasites and calculating time-servers, has worried so many Shakespearean editors that several of them have concluded that this very unpleasant play must be *non-Shakespearean*. Yet this cannot be, for *Timon* contains ample measure of the Bard's characteristic effects. The fact that its terrific cynicism cannot be made to coincide with the artificially-tailored legend of the optimistic and thrifty citizen of Stratford-on-Avon, "warbling his native wood-notes wild," should not militate against the authenticity of the play—however much it militates against the authenticity of Willm Shakspeare as its author.

Dr. Henry N. Hudson gives us the logical line of reasoning to follow in his introduction to the Era Edition of *Timon* when he refers the writing of the play "to a time when, for some unknown cause, the Poet's mind seems to have dwelt, with a melancholy, self-brooding earnestness, among the darker issues of human life and passion . . . For the subject is certainly ill-adapted to dramatic uses. And this lack of anything in the matter that should have determined the Poet's choice to it may well lead us to suspect that *the determining cause lay in himself.*"⁵

Shrewdly observed! And the only appropriate comment seems to be that the voluminous documentation of the playwriting Earl of Oxford's private life is explicit in informing us that he

⁵My italics. C.W.B.

experienced the same alterations in fortune, due to many of the same causes, that brought Lord Timon low. No known Elizabethan dramatist could say with more feeling than Edward de Vere, after he had lost control of the vast properties that had once been his:

Now Lord Timon's happy hours are done and past, and his estate shrinks from him.

Again we find that "Shakespeare's" work is basically autobiographical—much too realistically autobiographical ever to have been publicly acknowledged by the actual creator.

John Lyly's expression, in the letter to Burghlev, of his personal feeling toward the strange, temperamental genius who employed him, bears repetition at this point.

. . . all my thoughts concerning my L(ord of Oxford) have been ever reverent, and almost religious.

Bearing in mind that this is one literary man speaking of another, these words clearly prefigure a general attitude assumed by other writers of the period toward the man who was Shakespeare to call forth Ben Jonson's oft-quoted remark in the next generation:

*. . . I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any.*⁶

Capt. B. M. Ward⁷ gives many excellent and logical reasons for his belief that the playwriting nobleman whose own talents as a writer of stage comedy are on record,⁸ was an active collaborator with his long-time "servant," John Lyly, in the writing of the Court comedies upon which Lyly's fame as a dramatist rests. While these arguments are convincing and gain in weight as our knowledge of Lord Oxford's character and activities increases, they are too extensive to be repeated here. To those who wish to pursue the subject, it should be significant enough to point out that all six of the comedies that were finally published under Lyly's name in 1632—twenty-six years after his death—were originally printed in Elizabethan days without attribution of authorship. And this despite the fact that John Lyly had signed both of his immensely popular *Euphues* allegories

⁶Jonson. *Timber, or Discoveries*: "De Shakespeare nostrat."

⁷The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, pps. 274-79.

⁸Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598).

which had set a new style in light literature. As one of the most talked-of writers of his era, his name would have been of recognized value on any publication. *Yet it was conspicuously omitted from these early quarto editions of the comedies.* Moreover, none of the songs, such as "Cupid and Campaspe" and the "Song of the Fairies" from *Endymion*, which are now considered among the outstanding features of the plays, were included in any printings of these comedies until Edward Blount brought out his collected edition bearing Lyly's name in 1632. (Blount, incidentally, was one of the men most actively concerned in the printing of "Mr. William Shakespeare's" First Folio.) These facts argue that Lyly could not claim full credit as author of the Court comedies during his own or Lord Oxford's lifetime, although it would have been to his advantage as a professional writer to have done so. Furthermore, when Gabriel Harvey in his *Pierce's Supererogation* (1593), tells of his early acquaintance with Lyly at the Savoy Palace, where the playwright was serving as Oxford's secretary, and had also written his popular novels, the pundit broadly intimates that Lyly was really a mask for more productive brains. Certain it is that Harvey is referring to some form of literary creation, and not to experiments in poultry culture, in stating that "*young Euphues hatched the eggs that his elder friends laid. . . would God Lilly had always been Euphues. . .*"

What, indeed, would be more natural than that Oxford with his outstanding talents as poet and comedian, musician and tilt-yard showman, should take an active hand with his secretary-stage manager in composing comedies primarily designed for Court audiences? It is also the most logical explanation of the well authenticated creative links connecting the comedies now known as "Lyly's" and those now known as "Shakespeare's." The names of these two pioneers in the difficult art of high Elizabethan comedy have been indissolubly linked in the minds of drama students since 1871, at least, when W. L. Rushton published his convincing analysis of *Shakespeare's Euphuism*. Professor Warwick Bond, Sir Sidney Lee and others have amplified Rushton's evidence. But Ben Jonson's conjunction of the two dramatists is most interesting of all.

Jonson's testimony appears in his poetic address "*To the Memory of my Beloved, the author,*" in the 1623 First Folio. Herein he explicitly states that Shakespeare was the outstanding luminary

among the 1580-92 group of Elizabethan playwrights to which Lyly indisputably belongs. Says Jonson of the author of the First Folio:

For if I thought my judgment were of years.

I should commit thee surely with thy peers.
And tell, how far thou didst our Lilv out-shine.

Or sporting Kid,⁹ or Marlowe's mighty line.

In other words, from a strictly chronological viewpoint, and in direct comparison with his creative compeers, Shakespeare's radiance is unrivalled.

But—wait a moment. Jonson is giving us a very important piece of testimony in these lines. Authorities agree that all of Lyly's Court comedies were produced before 1590. Moreover, Marlowe was murdered June first, 1593, while Thomas Kyd—inactive for some time before his death, being under ban of suspected heresy—was buried in 1594. The best work of all three dramatists can be assigned to the 1580's. So, if Jonson's Shakespeare is to be *committed surely* with these playwrights chronologically, it is immediately apparent that he is *not* the citizen of Stratford-on-Avon (born 1564).

Why not? Because approved Stratfordian conjecture assures us that the elusive William considered Lyly, Kyd and Marlowe his "masters." cribbed from all three freely, and had just begun to create plays of his own when Marlowe and Kyd made their exit. The Stratfordian dramatic chronology covers the period *between 1594 and 1612*. It must of necessity meet the exigencies of William of Stratford's lifespan.

But here we find that *Ben Jonson notably disagrees* with Stratfordian authority.

It is too bad for the Stratfordian and Baconian myth-makers that Jonson took this occasion to be so devastatingly explicit in his 1623 lines to the Elizabethan *Starre of Poets*. Moreover, his factual realism is corroborated by the conclusions to be drawn from the scientifically-based studies of the piratically garbled versions of the Shakespeare plays which began to flood the bookstalls about 1591. These studies prove that the original masterpieces thus stolen actually go back to the productive heyday of Lyly, Kyd and Marlowe. This revolutionary circumstance cannot be emphasized too strongly. *Ben Jonson provides the contemporary testimony which verifies the bibliographical*

⁹Note that in characterizing Kyd as *sporting*, Jonson indicates a writer of comedy, rather than a tragic playwright, as others rate Kyd.

and textual labors of Greg, Rhodes, Sykes, Alexander, Cairncross and Hart. The best First Folio authority and the keenest and most scientifically honest modern brains that have been applied to the problem of the Shakespearean creative chronology are thus at one. The overwhelming bulk of the great plays were composed at periods earlier than the most liberal Stratford canon may tolerate.

By the same token, the whole Stratfordian creative scaffolding, ingeniously erected on the Great Perhaps, comes tumbling down!

The real Shakespeare's finest plays, according to Jonson's reckoning, had been written, produced and approved by the judicious in direct comparison with the best that Lvlly, Kyd and Marlowe could offer. And the era, we repeat, was prior to 1592.

As a matter of fact, it seems unquestionable that Jonson had means of knowing the actual Shakespearean creative chronology better than any modern writer who has labored the problem. Ben was also a shrewd and fearless critic of his contemporaries. In composing his considered opinion of the genius behind the First Folio, he had some thirty years' experience in the field of literature and the drama to guide him. He knew all the great writers of his day as well as any man in England could have known them. It is impossible to doubt his ability to rate their comparative abilities, decade by decade.

Viewing them in retrospect, then, if the supposititious Stratfordian creative chronology were the correct one, it would be absurd for Jonson to overlook the great figures of the 1594-1612 period for comparative purposes in favor of the then antiquated Lvlly and a journeyman hack such as Thomas Kyd's signed offerings prove him to have been. On the horizon of critical memory much more worthy peers of a 1594-1612 Shakespeare are apparent in *Beaumont and Fletcher*. Jonson's refusal to include either dramatist within the scope of his comparative judgment of years thus tends to strengthen and reaffirm the realistic force of his testimony.

(Continued from page 18)

dramatic genius is featured by Meres, we thus find George Buck's name early in life associated on the one hand with that of the playwright Earl, and on the other with a representative group of Oxford's proteges. A veritable regiment of these sought and obtained Oxford's patronage during

his years of prosperity, including many eminent scholars, and dramatists and poets such as Churchyard, Lvlly, Munday, Greene, Nash, Watson, Marlowe, Kyd and Spenser: not to mention composers such as Byrd and Farmer, theatrical managers such as Hunnis and Evans, together with various troupes of the most talented actors of the period. In fact, the Earl's generosity to creative workers is definitely known to have outrun his means, though it hardly deserves the obtuse sneer which Lee accords it in the *Dict. Nat. Biog.* when he says: "Oxford had squandered some part of his fortune upon men of letters whose bohemian mode of life attracted him."

Here we find Sir George Buck, Shakespearean Master of the Revels, sadly recording the Earl's waste of money, but in a truly Noble cause, and for reasons wherein Buck holds himself partly responsible. Their mutual connection with the drama would account for this. Finally, it should be noted that, beginning with the phrase in a word he was a . . . Sir George has criss-crossed out every line of his script to the bottom of the page. Despite this, all uncharred words are fairly legible. Buck evidently decided that he had told too much about the playwright nobleman whose strange career stirred him to conscience-smitten admiration.

THE SHAKESPEARE FELLOWSHIP
QUARTERLY

VOL. IX

AUTUMN, 1948

No. 3

President

Louis P. Bénézet, A.M., Pd.D.

Vice-Presidents

James Stewart Cushman

Flodden W. Heron

T. Henry Foster

Mrs. Elsie Greene Holden

Secretary and Treasurer

Charles Wisner Barrell

Official organ of The Shakespeare Fellowship in the U.S.A., the QUARTERLY is the only publication now printed which is devoted chiefly to the perpetuation of documentary evidence that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604) was the real creative personality behind the plays and poems of "Mr. William Shakespeare."

Meetings of The Shakespeare Fellowship for educational and allied purposes will occasionally be held, in which members will be asked to cooperate. Membership dues are \$2.50 per year—U.S.A. money—which sum includes one year's subscription to the QUARTERLY. Special rates of subscription to the publication which do not include membership in The Fellowship may be arranged for student groups and libraries.

The Shakespeare Fellowship executives will act as an editorial board for the publication of the QUARTERLY, which will appear four times a year, i.e., in January, April, July and October.

The Editors

The Shakespeare Fellowship
Quarterly

Telephone
PLaza 5-1127

17 East 48th Street,
New York 17, N. Y.