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The Proposed Identification of William Shakespeare as Edward De Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford

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THE PROPOSED IDENTIFICATION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AS
EDWARD DE VERE, SEVENTEENTH EARL OF OXFORD

By

Basil Fenelon Holt

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department
of English, University of Loyola, in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

June
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VITA

The author of this thesis was born in a small town of some 1700 people called Umtata in the Union of South Africa. His first schooling was at home and at a school in England which he attended while on a visit to that country with his parents. From the age of nine he was sent away to boarding-school and thus went through the Boys' Public School, Umtata, Selborne College, East London, and the South African Bible Institute for the training of ministers in Capetown. He also took a year's work with Wolsey Hall, Oxford, in England.

A minister of the Disciples of Christ, he was for a while in charge of their work in South Africa, and was also for two years minister of the First Christian Church of Johannesburg, the principal church of that communion in the country. Coming to the U.S.A. in 1930, he travelled all over the States, speaking at conventions and conducting meetings in some of the largest churches of the Disciples in this country. He was minister of the First Christian Church, Angola, Indiana, for five and a half years, and then accepted a position as teacher in Johnson Bible College near Knoxville, Tennessee. He is at present minister of the First Christian Church of Maywood, Illinois.

He has continued his studies in this country at Butler University, Indianapolis, and at the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, obtaining from the latter institution the degree of Th.B. in 1943. In the same year, he became a

Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of Great Britain. Simultaneously with his studies for the M.A. at Loyola, he has pursued courses at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary leading to the B. D. degree, which he is also due to receive this year. (1945)

Mr. Holt has published numerous articles in religious and secular journals and also the following books: WHAT TIME IS IT? (1936, 239 pp); VISIONS FROM THE VAAL (1929, 204 pp.); OLD TESTAMENT TYPES (1940, 34 pp); and CHRISTIAN NURTURE (1943, 127 pp); besides several small booklets.

Mr. Holt has travelled in England, France, Switzerland and Italy, as well as in North America and in Africa. He is of English and Italian parentage.

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford theory of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, which ascribes them to Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, was the discovery of an Englishman named J. Thomas Looney. He had for several years in succession been called upon to teach, among other things, Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. The close familiarity thus induced with the mind of the author of this play led him to doubt the traditional view. The author must have travelled in Italy, must have had no great respect for money and business methods, must have been a lover of music- characteristics which did not seem to fit into the scheme of life of the Stratford man.

The method by which Mr. Looney arrived at his discovery is traced in the third chapter of this thesis. He reached his conclusion during the first World War, and first submitted a statement of it to his brother-in-law, Mr. M. Gompertz, B.A., Head Master of the County High School, Leytonstone. He intended publishing a full statement of it after the cessation of hostilities. But this being found impracticable, he took steps, both to ensure that the results achieved should not be lost and also to safeguard his priority of discovery, by announcing it to Sir Frederick Kenyon, Librarian of the British Museum, and by depositing in his keeping a sealed envelope containing a full disclosure of the matter. No one came forward with the same solution, however, before he published it, which was in 1920 in a

book called "Shakespeare Identified," issued by Cecil Palmer in England and by the Frederick A. Stokes Company of New York in this country. The volume, containing over 450 pages, led to the formation of a "Shakespeare Fellowship" for the purpose of advancing the De Vere claims, and enlisted the endorsement and cooperation of at least some outstanding scholars, including Dr. Gilbert Slater of Oxford and Dr. Geroge H. Rendall, Head Master of Charterhouse School. Through the years some forty to fifty volumes have been written on the subject, and the Oxford hypothesis bids fair to rival if not to out-strip the Baconian one.

Others, however, are not at all favorably impressed. Dr. R.S.Crane, head of the English department in the University of Chicago, writes me: "I read some of the works of the 'Oxford' school a dozen years or more ago, and they left me with a feeling of complete skepticism and an impression that the methods of proof used by Mr. Looney and his associates were entirely arbitrary and in some cases fantastic." ¹

Upon first reading Mr. Looney's work I was very favorably impressed with it. Further, deeper study, however, left me no longer halting between two opinions, and by the time I came to write this thesis I had rejected the Oxford theory altogether in favor of the traditional view. Some of my reasons are set forth in the pages that follow.

1 Letter dated Chicago, February 21, 1945

Following Mr. Looney's own method, I use the spelling "Shakspere" to indicate the known Stratford-London actor and businessman, and reserve the longer form, "Shakespeare" for the author of the dramas, whoever he may have been. In quotations, of course, whatever spelling was used by the author quoted is retained. ²

² Details concerning Mr. Looney in this Introduction are taken from the preface and the opening pages of his own book.

THE PROPOSED IDENTIFICATION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
AS EDWARD DE VERE, SEVENTEENTH EARL OF OXFORD.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRATFORDIAN VIEW CRITICIZED.

Mr. Looney begins his criticism by an assertion of the range of knowledge which the author of the plays must have possessed, and which he feels could not have been possessed by William Shakspeare of Stratford.

(1) "The plays of Shakespeare," he says, "display an expert knowledge of law such as William Shakspeare could hardly be expected to possess"; "the author of the plays possessed a first-hand knowledge of the classics, including a knowledge of passages which would not come into a schoolboy's curriculum"; the author, furthermore, "possessed a knowledge of idiomatic French, and most probably a reading familiarity with the Italian language, such as William Shakspeare could not have learned at Stratford; and what is perhaps of as great importance as anything else, he employed as the habitual vehicle of his mind an English of the highest educated type completely free from provincialism of any kind." ¹

Contrast with this the great disadvantage in William Shakspeare's upbringing. According to Halliwell - Phillipps, dirt and ignorance were outstanding features of the social life

¹ J. Thomas Looney, "Shakespeare" Identified. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1920), pp. 14,15.

2.

of Stratford, which was in a much more backward condition in those days than the pretty, rural village with which tourists are familiar today. ² His parents were both illiterate, and were forced to place their "marks" on documents in lieu of signatures; and his father's first appearance in the records of the place is as an offender, fined for having allowed a quantity of filth to accumulate before his dwelling. As for education, there is no evidence whatever that Shakspeare, as a boy, ever attended school, and, considering the illiteracy of his parents, the requirement of the Stratford school, that a boy had to be able to read and to write before admission, must have been hard to meet. Mr. Looney scouts the suggestion that he acquired this knowledge from other boys.³

The only conditions which could have compensated in any degree for such initial disabilities as those from which William Shakspeare suffered would have been a plentiful supply of books and ample facilities for a thorough study of them. ⁴

But, so far from this having been possible, Stratford is spoken of as "a bookless neighborhood." (Halliwell-Phillipps). Nor is it likely that Shakspeare can have owned a private library, such libraries being of the rarest occurrence in those days. His son-in-law, Dr. Hall, did possess what he called his "study of books," which would probably have included any that might have formerly belonged to Shakspeare; but if it did include any such Shakspeareana Dr. Hall did not mention the fact. ⁵

2. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines of the Life of Shakspeare. (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1907) pp 23-25.

3. Looney, p. 16.

4. Ibid, p. 18.

5. Ibid, p. 18.

3.

Moreover, had Shakspeare thus lifted himself by his own exertions out of the morass of ignorance which surrounded him, Mr. Looney thinks that such a youth must of necessity have been sufficiently marked off from his fellows, that they would have taken note of him. "No single record or even tradition of his early life is, however, suggestive of the student, or of a youth intellectually distinguished from those about him." 6

(2) Mr. Looney's next objection is based upon the three periods into which William Shakspeare's life is divided by the Stratfordian. The first is that of his childhood and youth in Stratford to which we have just referred; the second is the London period, when he was an actor and when he is supposed to have written the grandest literature ever produced in England; the third is composed of the last eighteen years of his life, spent in retirement as a country gentleman of considerable affluence back in Stratford.

With the literary fame he is supposed to have won, how can we explain the reversion to the non-intellectual record of his closing Stratford period? For it is as destitute of an aftermath of literary glory as the first period was devoid of promise. Having, it is supposed, by virtue of an immeasurable genius forced himself out of an unrefined and illiterate milieu into the very forefront of the literary and intellectual world, he returns whilst still in his prime, and probably whilst still relatively a young man, to his original surroundings. For the last eighteen years of his life he has himself described as "William Shakspeare, of Stratford-upon-Avon"; yet, with so prolonged a residence there, such intellectual gifts as he is supposed to have possessed, such force of character as would have been necessary to raise him in the first instance, he passes his life amongst a mere handful of people without leaving the slightest impress of his eminent powers or the most trifling fruits of his attainments and educational emancipation upon anyone or anything

in Stratford. In the busy crowded life of London it is possible to conceal both the defects and qualities of personality, and men may easily pass there for what they are not; but one man of exceptional intellectual powers, improved by an extraordinary feat of self-culture, could hardly fail to leave a very strong impression of himself on a small community of people, mostly uneducated, such as then formed the population of Stratford. When, then, we are told that that man was living at one time at the rate of £1000 a year (£8000 of today) - and Sir Sidney Lee sees nothing improbable in the tradition - the idea that such a man could live in such a place, in such a style, and leave no trace of his distinguished powers and interests in the records of the community is the kind of story which, we are convinced, practical men will refuse to believe once they are fairly confronted with it. ⁷

He returns to this "bookless neighborhood" one of the most enlightened men in England, yet Rumour, which by its inventions has helped to fill in so much of his "biography," does not connect him with a single book or bookish occupation. With his mind presumably still teeming with ideas he suddenly relinquished all literary interests, so far as any record of such interests goes, engaged in no enterprise for the intellectual cultivation of his fifteen hundred fellow-villagers, and never even tried (great actor-dramatist that he is supposed to have been) to get up a play for their entertainment.

Nor is this due to the complete absence of any records for this part of his life. On the contrary

.....there are records of his purchasing land, houses and tithes; of his carrying on business as a maltster; of his money-lending transactions; of his prosecution of people for small debts at a time when according to Sir Sidney Lee his yearly income would be about £600 (or £4,800 in money of today). We have particulars of his store of corn; of his making an orchard; 'a well-authenticated tradition that he planted a mulberry tree with his own hands'; but not the slightest record of anything suggestive of what are supposed

7 Ibid., p.22.

51
to have been his dominating interests. On the contrary he appears, even in his choice of a home, quite regardless of those things that press upon the senses and sensibilities of esthetic natures. For in picturing his last moments Halliwell-Phillips refers to 'the wretched sanitary conditions surrounding his residence,' and adds, 'If truth and not romance is to be invoked, were the woodbine and sweet honeysuckle within reach of the poet's deathbed, their fragrance would have been neutralized by their vicinity to middens, fetid water-courses, mud walls and piggeries.' 8

It is to these conditions that Halliwell-Phillips attributes the death of Shakspeare, rather than to a drinking-bout.

As Mr. Looney sets more store by this contrast between the supposed middle period of Shakspeare with the periods that preceded and followed it, I append one more quotation from him on the subject.

Sofar as the transition from stage to stage is concerned, few would deny that if William Shakspeare who had been brought up at Stratford, who was forced into marriage at the age of eighteen with a woman eight years his senior, and who on the birth of twins deserted his wife, 9 produced at the age of twenty-nine a lengthy and elaborate poem in the most polished English of the period, evincing a large and accurate knowledge of the classics, and later the superb Shakespearean drama, he accomplished one of the greatest if not actually the greatest work of self-development and self-realization that genius has ever enabled any man to perform. On the other hand, if, after having performed so miraculous a work, this same genius retired to Stratford to devote himself to houses, lands, orchards, money and malt, leaving no traces of a single intellectual or literary interest, he achieved without a doubt the greatest work of self-stultification in the annals of mankind. It is difficult to believe that with such a beginning he could have attained to such heights as he is supposed to have done, it is more difficult to believe that with such glorious achievements in his middle period he could have fallen to the level of his closing period; and in time it will be fully recognized

8 Ibid., pp.24-25, *Cf. Halliwell-Phillips, p. 267, and Sir Sidney Lee, "A Life of William Shakespeare." (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1915) pp. 312,315.

9 See these allegations confuted in Joseph Quincy Adams, A Life of William Shakespeare. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1923) Chaps. V and VI.

that it is impossible to believe that the same man could have accomplished two such stupendous and mutually nullifying feats. Briefly, the first and last periods at Stratford are too much in harmony with one another, and two antagonistic to the supposed middle period for all three to be credible.¹⁰

(3) The third objection is based on the complete absence of any autograph letters of Shakspeare, or of any record of his ever having addressed a single letter to anyone on any subject.

According to every Stratfordian authority he lived and worked for many years in London whilst directing a mass of important business in Stratford. Then he lived for many years in retirement in Stratford whilst plays from his pen were making their appearance in London. In all, he followed this divided plan of life for nearly twenty years (1597 - 1616); a plan which, if ever in this world a man's affairs called for letters, must have entailed a large amount of correspondence, had he been able to write; yet not the faintest suggestion of his having written a letter exists either in authentic record or in the most imaginative tradition. ¹¹

(4) Shakespere's Will. Not till the very close of his life do we have a document from Shakspeare, and then we get the famous will signed "By me William Shakspeare." And here Mr. Looney observes with astonishment, that no reference whatever is made to his immortal works or their future publication. He was evidently looking far into the future, for he makes provision for his "heires males... to the second sonne ... and the third sonne ... and the fourth sonne ... and the fifth sonne" etc., "and for default to the right heires of the saied William Shackspeare, for ever." Yet this supposed author of the greatest of our literary treasures bestows not one thought upon them and their future preservation. The greater part of the plays had never yet appeared in print.

10 J. Thomas Looney, op cit., pp 36-37.

11 Ibid., p.23.

They were drifting about in the careless hands of actors and theatre-managers, in imminent danger of being for ever lost. Whilst he was arranging for the distribution of his wealth, would it not have been simply natural for him to arrange that a portion of it should be expended upon the proper publication of his dramas? Yet from first to last, in his will, there is no token of the slightest interest on the testator's part either in the sixteen plays of his which had already been printed, or in the twenty that had not yet been published, or in any other literary venture; which is quite in keeping with what we know of Shakspeare in his first and last periods, but not at all in keeping, thinks Mr. Looney, with the idea that during the middle period he had expended all his energies on the writing and acting of these glorious plays. ¹²

Nor is this omission in the will due to the fact that he had previously made arrangements for the publication of his dramas. The introductory pieces to the First Folio edition, indicating how the plays finally came to be published, prove that he had not done so. And, while on the subject of the First Folio, Mr. Looney points to the circumstance of "the entire absence of any mention either of his executors or a single member of his much-cared for family amongst the ten names appearing in connection with the publication," which Mr. Looney regards as revealing "the same completely negative relationship of everything Stratfordian towards the Shakespearean literature." ¹³

12 Ibid., pp.25,26.
 13 Ibid., p.28.

This same apathy towards the printing of his plays was manifest from the beginning. Sir Sidney Lee is quoted as asserting that he had no hand in the publication of any of the plays attributed to him, but instead he submitted without any complaint to their wholesale piracy and to the ascription to him of works that were not his own.¹⁴ This absence of all participation in the publication of his plays is described by Mr. Looney as "certainly a huge gap in his literary records."

The same general human experience that compels us to accept facts for which we cannot adequately account, compels us also to reject, on pain of irrationality, what is inherently self-contradictory, or at complete variance with the otherwise invariable course of events. It is thus that the common sense of mankind instinctively repudiates a moral contradiction as incredible. Such we hold is the belief in the Stratford man; the belief that the author of the finest literature lets others do just as they please during his own lifetime in the matter of publishing his works but does nothing himself. 'It is questionable,' says Sir Sidney Lee, 'whether any were published under his supervision.' He is thus represented as creating and casting forth his immortal works with all the indifference of a mere spawning process, and turning his attention to houses, land, malt and money at the very moment when the printed issue of these great triumphs of his own creative spirit begins. This is the fundamental incredibility which along with ... a succession of other incredibilities ought to dissolve completely the Stratfordian hypothesis, once it has become possible to put a more reasonable hypothesis in its place.¹⁵

Another objection based on the will is that Ben Jonson is not once mentioned in it, nor is he made the recipient of any legacy. Since the Stratfordians regard him as the one literary contemporary with whom Shakspeare was on intimate terms, and suppose him to be referring to the Stratford man in his subsequent tribute, in which he writes of having loved Shakespeare "on this

14 Ibid., p.39. cf. Lee, pp.544,548.

15 Ibid., p.49.

9
side of idolatry as much as any," Mr. Looney says it is strange that he should have been completely omitted from a will which bequeaths "a number of memorial rings and other mementos to friends."
16

Finally Mr. Looney scrutinizes the will as to its actual language, but finds there no trace of any genius or Shakespearean craftsmanship. Because of Shakespeare's knowledge of law and interest in its subtleties and technicalities, he thinks it certain that he would participate in the drawing up of such a document. Yet the will in question is just such as might have been framed by any professional lawyer. The only part in which the personality of the testator might have been discovered is the preamble, which Looney proceeds to quote as follows; -

In the name of God, amen! I, William Shackspeare, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the country of Warr.gent. in perfect health and memorie, God be prayesd, doe make and ordayne this my last will and testament in manner and forme following, that ys to saye, First, I commend my soule into the handes of God my Creator, hoping and assuredlie beleeving, through thonellie merittes of Jesus Christe my Saviour, to be made partaker of lyfe everlastinge, and my bodie to the earth whereof it ys made.

After remarking that the remainder is purely business, Mr. Looney comments: "From the first word of this document to the last there is not the faintest trace either of the intellect or of the literary style of the man who wrote the great dramas." 17

(5) Shakspere's penmanship. Only six signatures of William Shakspere are known, and three of them are on the sheets of his will the text of which was written by professional lawyers. These signatures look like illiterate scrawls, as almost everyone

16 Ibid., p. 28.
17 Ibid., pp. 30-31. Cf. Halliwell-Phillipps, p. 253.

has remarked who has seen one of them reproduced beneath a portrait of the great dramatist. In fact Mr. Looney seems to doubt if William Shakspeare ever could write properly. For all these years he had lived in Stratford, buying and selling, prosecuting debtors, putting out money to usury, indulging in deals involving the equivalent of thousands of pounds in present value, resulting in documents on which are preserved the signatures or "marks" of the people with whom he dealt, yet no single signature of Shakspeare has ever been discovered in connection with these Stratford dealings. The only signatures of his that we have are these three on his will and three others we shall describe presently. Moreover Halliwell-Phillipps shows, that, in the first draft of the will, arrangements had been made for Shakspeare to affix his seal, not his signature at all. Subsequently the word "seal" was deleted, and the word "hand" substituted for it. This, taken together with the fact that on no previous document has a Shakspeare signature been found, seems to indicate that the lawyer or lawyers had been quite unprepared to find that Shakspeare would want to (or even be able to) sign his will. 18

The other three signatures are one written in London in 1612 (of which Sir E. Maunde Thompson says that it is clearly the work of an able penman) and two others in connection with his purchase of a house in Blackfriars in 1613.

What do these six signatures reveal to us? Of the three on the will Mr. Looney says two are so wretchedly written as to

18 Ibid., pp.31,32,33. Cf.Halliwell-Phillipps,pp.253,256.

resemble the scrawl of a child or the work of an illiterate man trying to learn to write his own name. Nor will he permit the explanation that the writer was severely ill, because the opening words of the will assert plainly that he has perfect health and memory. But the third and fuller signature, "By me William Shackspere," presents a problem. For the first three words, "By me William," are extremely well-written, in the opinion of Mr. Looney, who describes them as an "example of expert penmanship," and are in striking contrast to the surname which follows, and which is as illegible as in the other instances. It looks suspiciously as though two different hands had been at work here.¹⁹

Of the other three signatures, that written in London in 1612 is said by Sir E. Mannde Thompson to be the work of an able penman. The second one, he says, might be taken to have been written by an uncultivated man, but the explanation may be that it was written in a fit of nervousness. The third signature he attributes to "wilful perversity," for it is written in a manner so different from all the others as to render it useless for the purpose of examination by an expert on handwriting.²⁰

And so we may sum up the whole of the writing that has come to us from the hand of one who is supposed to have been the greatest of our English writers. All we have are six signatures in no way connected with any literary matter. All these were executed in the last years of his life, after his great literary tasks were finished; and are so written that when examined by our leading expert on the subject, who is quite orthodox in his views of authorship, they look as if they might have been the work of six different men. At the same

19 Ibid., pp.32-33.
 20 Ibid., p.34.

time there is amongst this writing some that appears like the effort of an uneducated person, and only one signature (1612) of any real value for the study of penmanship. To this we would add as an unshakable personal conviction, supported by the opinions of many to whose judgment we have appealed, that the signatures bear witness to his having had the assistance of others in the act of signing his own name. The general conclusion to which these signatures point is that William Shakspeare was not an adept at handling a pen, and that he had the help of others in trying to conceal the fact. 21

Further corroboration is found in the fact that the actual deed of purchase of the Blackfriars property bears only Shakspeare's "seal," not his "hand." This document is now in America; but there is in the Guildhall library in London a document regarded by Halliwell-Phillipps as a duplicate of this, on which appears the signature which Sir E. Maunde Thompson says may have been the work of an uneducated man. 22

(6) The next objection to Shakspeare as the author of the plays is based on the circumstances attending his death. "The supposed poet-actor, the greatest of his race, passed away in affluence but without any contemporary notice." 23

Edmund Spenser, who, in contrast to Shakspeare, died in poverty and starvation, was nevertheless buried with honors in Westminster Abbey at the charge of the Earl of Essex. Burbage, the actor, was so popular that sorrow for his death over-shadowed the funeral of the Queen about the same time (the wife of James I). But Shakspeare died "unwept, unhonored and unsung." The Earl of Southampton, his patron, evinced no interest apparently. For

21 Ibid., pp.34-35.

22 Ibid., p.35.Cf.Halliwell-Phillipps, p.239.

23 Ibid., p.37.

seven years, except for the monument in the church at Stratford, this silence continues deep as the grave itself.

Of a piece with this is the paucity of references to the supposed great playwright of Stratford during his own lifetime. Greene's famous attack on him as an "upstart crow" is "the only thing that can be described as a reliable personal reference to William Shakspere in the whole course of his life."²⁴ In the subsequent apology of Chettle, the publisher, there is, however, no mention of a protest having come from the man attacked, but only from "divers of worship" who had registered protests on his behalf. So that it is clear that Shakspere was merely the "front" for some important and influential person whom writers and their publishers could not afford to ignore.²⁵

When, later, Venus and Lucrece were published as by Shakespeare, we get some references to the poems such as any reader might make and some references to Shakespeare as the writer, but with nothing whatever to reveal the identity of the man. Even then there are but three references in the period before the actual publication of the plays. They are as follows: ²⁶

Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistering grape,
And Shake-speare paints poor Lucrece rape. ²⁷(1594)

24 Ibid., p. 49.

25 Ibid., pp.49-50.

26 Ibid., p.50.

27 G. B. Harrison, editor, Willobie His Avisa (London: John Lane, 1926) p.19.

All praise worthy Lucrecia: Sweet Shak - speare.²⁸ (1595)
 And Shakespeare, thou whose hony flowing vaine
 Whose Venus, and whose Lucrece (sweet and chast)
 Thy Name in fame's immortall Booke have plac't.²⁹ (1598)

From 1598 (when dramas first began to be published with Shakespeare's name to them) we begin to get references to Shakespeare as a playwright. He is just mentioned in the Palladis Tamia of Francis Meres (1598). In the following year there is another literary reference in which, besides Venus and Lucrece, Romeo and Richard (II or III) are referred to. In 1600 the name again occurs in a list of poets of Queen Elizabeth's reign. In 1600 someone calls on Jonson, Greene and Shakespeare for verses in honor of Elizabeth; and the name occurs again in a literary reference to the play of Hamlet. In 1603 or 1605 it is seen in another listing of contemporary poets. And, finally, in the Returre From Parnassus (1606) he receives special mention as the author of Venus and Lucrece, with the added comment that he is of those who "pen plaies."

Such is the character of all contemporary references which the industry of Halliwell-Phillipps has brought together: references, that is to say, of people who knew 'Shakespeare' in print, but who have nothing to tell us about William Shakspeare in the flesh.³⁰

(7) The next objection is based on the exceeding vagueness, not to say mystery, that surrounds his middle period in London,

28 Polimanteia, (Cambridge, 1595). Reproduced in Alexander B. Grosart's Elizabethan England in Gentle and Simple Life. (Printed for the Subscribers, 1881.)
 29 Richard Barnfield, Lady Pecunia, or The Praise of Money. (London: Printed by W.I., 1605) p.38.
 30 Looney, pp. 51, 52.

creating at the least a suspicion that it is no more than an empty postulate made necessary by the assumed authorship of the plays. Modern Stratfordians date this middle period at about 1592 - 1612, allowing some twenty years, as otherwise there would not be a sufficient length of time for the production of so many plays. But

...we have no positive knowledge of his being in London before 1592: the year of Greene's attack....And we have no record of actual residence in London after 1596, when 'according to a memorandum by Alleyn he lodged near the Bear Garden in Southwark'....The definitely assured London period appears then to be shrinking from twenty to a mere matter of four years (1592 - 1596), during which there is not a single record of his personal activities beyond the appearance of his name in a list of actors, but evidently much mystery as to his actual whereabouts. ³¹

In the spring of 1597, Shakspeare bought New Place in Stratford, and, according to Halliwell-Phillipps, "there is no doubt that...henceforward (this is) to be accepted as his established residence." ³² From now he is described as "William Shakspeare of Stratford - upon-Avon," and there is not only no proof that he was anywhere domiciled in London after 1597, but "irrefutable and continuous proofs" of his residency in Stratford from this time forward. ³³ But it was just as this juncture that the plays began to appear; which leads to the assumption on Mr. Looney's part, that Shakspeare "was sent off to Stratford to be out of the way at the time when the literary public was being interested in the plays," ³⁴ so that the Shakspeare whom they were being led

31 Ibid., pp.42-43.
 32 Halliwell-Phillipps, p.134.
 33 Looney, p.41.
 34 Ibid., p.45.

to believe in as the author of the plays might be too far away from the milieu of literary London for anyone to investigate him and discover his general unfitness for the role.

(8) Shakspeare as actor. As an actor and shareholder in various theaters, he is supposed to have been exceptionally distinguished, one of the principal members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, whose appearance at Court at Christmas of 1594 with some of the most famous actors of the day may even have been due to personal favor of the great Queen Elizabeth herself.

There was not a single theatrical company of those times which did not make professional visits through nearly all the English counties, and, in the hope of finding traces of Shakspeare on his provincial tours, Halliwell-Phillipps personally examined the municipal records of no fewer than forty-six important towns and cities in all parts of the country, as far north as Newcastle - on - Tyne, and including Stratford - on - Avon itself.

In no single instance (he says) have I at present found in any municipal records a notice of the poet himself; but curious material of an unsuspected nature respecting his company and theatrical surroundings has been discovered. 35

Since then the number of "extant archives" so examined has been extended to "some seventy", but still without result so far as finding any trace of Shakspeare as an actor in the provinces is concerned. We must therefore turn to his record on the stage in London.

Mrs. Stopes, in a note in her book, Burbage and Shakes - peare, records "The performances of the Burbage company at Court for eighty years." From 1597 to the year of Shakspere's death, 1616, inclusive, there are separate entries for every year except one. Several actors are mentioned - Heminge, Burbage, Cowley, Bryan and Pope - but "not once does the name of William Shakspere occur in all these accounts." 36

Furthermore Mrs. Stopes says of the books of the Lord Chamberlain's company, that they also give much information concerning plays and players, but unfortunately they are missing for precisely "the most important years of Shakespearean history." The one volume of these books that has been preserved says nothing of any acting by Shakspere but merely records that, like others, he received a grant of cloth in connection with the coronation procession. 37

"The only thing," says Mr. Looney, "that can be called an official record of active participation in the performance of the Lord Chamberlain's Company" is the following entry discovered by Halliwell-Phillipps in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber:

To William Kempe, William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, servants to the Lord Chamberlaine, upon the councelles warrant dated at Whitehall xv to Marcij, 1594, for twoe several comedies or enterludes showed by them before her Majestie in Christmas tyme laste paste viz. upon St. Stephens days and innocentes days...in all 20. 38

36 Looney, p.58.
 37 Ibid., p.59.
 38 Ibid., p.57.

Yet Mrs. Stopes gives the information that this particular account was "drawn up after date by Mary Countess of Southampton, after the decease of her second husband Sir Thomas Henneage, who had left his accounts rather in a muddle." The entry says nothing of plays nor the parts taken in them. The several person-ages mentioned are called simply "servants" of the Lord Chamberlain, not 'actors'. So that even if we accept it as being in proper order as an official document, it is possible to assume that Shakspeare was paid as the supposed author of the said "comedies or enterludes." 39

Of non-official records of Shakspeare's acting we have two, His name stands first in the list of those who took part in the first performance of Ben Jonson's Every Man In His Humour (1598); and it appears again at the head of the second of two columns of actors' names in the original edition of Jonson's Sejanus (1605).

These two appearances of his name are the only things that might be called records of his acting during the whole period of his fame; the first at its beginning, and the second, according to several authorities at its close...whilst the writer responsible for the appearance of his name in these instances is the same as lent the sanction of his name to the deliberate inaccuracies of the First Folio. 40

Mr. Looney calls attention to certain other striking absences of the name of Shakspeare in connection with the Lord Chamberlain's company. When the company became implicated in the Essex Rebellion one of its members, Augustine Phillips, was examined and made a statement on oath formally attested with his

39 Ibid., p. 57.

40 Ibid., p.60. Cf. Ben Jonson, The Workes of Benjamin Jonson. (London: Printed by W. Stansby, 1616.)

signature. But though it involved the play Richard II, no mention of Shakspeare as either writer or actor is made.⁴¹

Nor is he mentioned in connection with the attendance of the company on the Spanish Ambassador at Somerset House in August, 1604, when "Augustine Phillips and John Hemynges for th' allowance of themselves and tenne of their fellows" received the sum of twenty-one pounds, twelve shillings; nor in connection with the litigation in 1612 in which "John Hemings, Richard Burbage and Henry Condall" figure as representatives of the company; nor on the occasion of the installation of Henry as Prince of Wales, when the services of the company were enlisted and Anthony Munday as writer and Richard Burbage and John Rice as actors are spoken of in the official records.⁴²

In contrast with the meagreness of these contemporary records we find his name appearing in the 1623 folio edition, seven years after his decease, at the head of the list of "the principall actors in all these plays," which, Mr. Looney thinks, "confirms the bogus character of the whole of the editorial pretensions of that work."⁴³

41 Ibid., p.61.
42 Ibid., p.61.
43 Ibid., p.62

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF MR. LOONEY'S OBJECTIONS

The first thing that strikes one about most of these objections of Mr. Looney is their negative quality. He does not bring forward one bit of positive evidence that Shakspeare did not write the plays. Instead he assumes that if William Shakspeare was the author, certain things should have been said or done by him or by others in connection with him, and since these things were not said or done in the manner expected, William Shakspeare cannot have written the plays. Thus he says there is no mention of the fact that Shakspeare ever went to school; Dr. Hall does not say that his "study of books" contained any volumes of Shakspeare's; there is no record of his early life to show that he was precocious; he does not apparently continue to write plays after his return to Stratford from London; there are no autograph letters or manuscripts of his extant; there are no contemporary notices of his death; there are no records of his having acted in the provinces; and his name does not appear on several documents relative to the Lord Chamberlain's company in London - therefore William Shakspeare cannot have been the author of the plays.

This is the argument from silence with a vengeance. But the argument from silence is notoriously weak; and to attempt to overturn the faith of three centuries by such an appeal to negatives is inevitably to court mistrust in one's effort. For aught we know there may be a dozen good reasons why each of these things did not occur as we should expect them to have done. Life

is full of examples of the hasty formation of judgments which must later be revised, because certain non-occurrences turn out to be due to causes other than those we originally assigned to them.

Nor will it do to assert that, individually, many of these objections may not have great force, but cumulatively they become irresistible. If the separate links of a chain are weak, whence should the chain as a whole acquire its strength? Let us, therefore, examine these objections one by one.

(1) The first objection is on the ground of the knowledge and culture exhibited in the plays contrasted with the environment of Stratford and the scant opportunities it offered. But this can easily be overdone. Stratford was not all "dirt and ignorance."

The regions about Stratford were in truth among the most beautiful in England, with dark primeval forests, "murmuring streams," and "pastures with their green mantles so embroidered with flowers that," to a contemporary observer, "it seemed another Eden." ¹

These are precisely the surroundings calculated to minister to a man's growth in culture and breadth of outlook, supposing him to have been possessed in the first place of a poet's soul and a reasonable access to the thoughts of others through the printed page.

And what of that last? What of the opportunities offered

¹ Joseph Quincy Adams, A Life of William Shakespeare, p.37. See also E.K.Chambers, William Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930) Vol. I, p.9.

by the Stratford school, especially to a lad of genius? Shaks-
pere's best biographer says:

The local free grammar school had been in existence at least as early as 1424; in 1477 its master was able to boast the university degree of Bachelor of Arts; and in 1553, under the royal patronage of Edward VI, it was reorganized as "The King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon," with an endow - ment, and a special provision that its master should receive a salary of not less than £20 per annum. This handsome sal - ary (it was double that paid to the Master of Eton) enabled the citizens of Stratford to secure the best teachers, and to build up a school that compared favorably with those of Worcester, Coventry and even larger towns. ²

In Shakspeare's time the masters were all graduates of Ox-
ford, and most of them were Fellows as well. ³ The discipline was most rigorous, hours of study being in other similar schools usually eight hours a day or longer, with the teachers present-
ing lessons with a book in one hand and a rod in the other. The curriculum included reading, writing, Latin (besides grammar and translation, a reading knowledge of Aesop's Fables, Cato's Max -
ims, the Eclogues of Mantuanus, Ovid, Horace, Cicero, Terence, Seneca, Plautus and Sallust), English Bible and Greek. ⁴

To these subjects Roger Ascham adds "some sciences, namely, music, arithmetic and geometry." ⁵ If William Shakspeare, after all this, could not manage to be a pretty well-educated man, we may indeed admit that he was too great a dunce to have been the author of the plays. Nor can it be reasonably doubted that,

2 Adams, p.48.

3 Ibid., pp.48,49.

4 Ibid., Chapter IV, Chambers doubts the Greek. See Chambers, op cit, p.11.

5 Roger Ascham, "The Schoolmaster," Elizabethan Verse and Prose. George Reuben Potter, editor. (New York: Holt and Com -
pany, 1928), p.295.

living in Stratford, he attended its school, at any rate for a number of years. Men everywhere, under the influence of the Renaissance, had begun to set a high value upon education. Ascham, in the work just cited, says that all men desired their children to speak Latin. It does not seem likely that John Shakespeare, who had risen to affluence and become High Bailiff and then Chief Alderman of Stratford, would not have the same desire to see his eldest son educated, especially when he reflected on the lack of learning under which he himself labored, if, indeed, he was as unlearned as anti-Stratfordians claim that he was.

The beautiful scenery and the excellent school of Stratford were not the only advantages the place offered to the young poet. Mr. Looney makes altogether too much of the statement of Halliwell-Phillipps, that this was a "bookless neighborhood." That may be true in a very general way; but Adams, who cites Mrs. Stopes as having "shown that Stratford was by no means a bookless place," says himself:

How many books he had access to outside the school we do not know. Doubtless not many in his own home, or in the home of his father's most intimate friends. On the other hand, from his schoolmasters, from his vicar, and from the homes of the better educated, he could, were he so disposed, have borrowed books on various subjects, particularly chronicles, the Latin classics, a few romances, and innumerable theological treatises.⁷

6 Mrs. C.C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Environment (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914) pp.55-61.

7 Adams, p.60.

Nor must we forget the places rich in historic tradition and romantic legend, which were within easy reach of Stratford: Coventry, with its well-preserved walls, beautiful spires, and legends; Warwick Castle (only seven miles away) centre of the War of the Roses, residence of Richard Nevill, Earl of Warwick, whom Shakespeare in III Henry VI, III, iii, 157 makes Queen Margaret call "impudent and shameless Warwick, proud setter up and puller down of kings;" and (not to mention others) especially Kenilworth with its famous castle, home of the Earl of Leicester, who in 1575 (Shakspeare was then a boy of twelve) there entertained Queen Elizabeth in sumptuous style with open-air pageants and such noise of cannon and display of fireworks as might be heard and seen thirty miles away. Stratford was only ten miles away, as the crow flies. No wonder many scholars think the inspiration of Oberon's vision in A Midsummer Night's Dream came from the scenes which Shakspeare remembered having seen as a boy at Kenilworth.⁸

Lastly, Shakspeare may have received much of his future bent from witnessing the dramatic entertainments which were the chief form of public amusement. In Coventry the mystery plays annually presented by the trade guilds were so important that "in the seventeenth century mystery plays in general were vulgarly called Coventry plays."⁹ One of these in which King Herod was the leading character so impressed the future dramatist, apparently,

8 Ibid., pp. 39-41.
 9 Ibid., p. 43.

that he alludes to "Herod of Jewry" over and over again in his plays. ¹⁰ But besides these folk-performances the newer drama was coming to the country-places from London. Visits of London companies to Stratford began when Shakspeare's father was High Bailiff of the place, in 1568. These were hospitably received and played in the Guildhall, usually giving their first performance before the High Bailiff, or Mayor, and the city officials together with their families and guests. Among those who thus visited Stratford during Shakspeare's childhood and boyhood were the Queen's Players, the Earl of Worcester's, the Earl of Leicester's, and the Earl of Warwick's. ¹¹

Mr. Looney's assumption, that, if Shakspeare had been a genius, he would have been sufficiently marked off from other boys for them to have noticed it and recorded it, is, like so many other of his assumptions, prely gratuitous. Instances are not wanting of men of capability who were indistinguishable from their fellows in early life, just as they are not wanting of men who were prodigies in childhood but came to nothing in after years. In fact, even the logic of his statement, that if Shakspeare had been remarkable as a boy he would have been noticed by the other boys, may be called in question. Lytton Strachey writing of Thomas Novell Beddoes says:

10 Ibid., p.44.

11 Ibid., pp.45-47. Cf. Halliwell-Phillipps, pp. 39-51.

The genius at school is usually a disappointing figure, for, as a rule, one must be commonplace to be a successful boy. In that preposterous world, to be remarkable is to be overlooked; and nothing less vivid than the white-hot blaze of a Shelley will bring with it even a distinguished martyrdom. 12

(2) Next Mr. Looney dilates on the contrast between the first and the last periods of Shakspere's life in comparison with the middle or London period. He talks of the almost unbelievable nature of the self-development necessary on Shakspere's part to lift himself out of the morass of ignorance and dirt that was his environment in Stratford to the intellectual heights represented in the production of the plays; and proclaims it quite impossible to believe in his relapse after the glorious London period into the completely non-literary pursuits and general obscurity of his final period back in Stratford.

Now, as we have already shown, it was by no means such a morass of ignorance from which he had to raise himself in Stratford. A very good schooling was accessible to him, together with a rich environment of historical and legendary places, dramatic exhibitions, and the books of friends. In fact, "that John Shakespeare on one occasion, at least, bought a book is shown by Mrs. Stopes." 13

Nor must we be misled by Jonson's famous phrase about Shakspere's "small Latin and less Greek." Jonson was a very conceited man, arrogant and jealous, who seems to have been envious

12 Lytton Strachey, Books and Characters. (New York:Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922) p.241.

13 Adams, op. cit., p. 60. Cf. Mrs. C.C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Environment, p.61.

of Shakspere's success, at least at first. Moreover, while Shakspere had never had a university education, Jonson studied at Cambridge and later was created an M.A. of Oxford. He was a great pedant, who spoiled his plays by overloading them with his Graeco-Latin erudition.¹⁴ Such a man might well be found to consider the Latin and Greek attainments of others contemptuously, as being "small" in comparison with his own. But Adams, on the other hand, speaks more than once of Shakspere's mastery of Latin, and thinks that, after finding himself in London, "in an atmosphere surcharged with the Renaissance literature of the Continent," he must inevitably have acquired "a reading knowledge of French and Italian."¹⁵

Then there is Beeston's testimony that Shakspere was for a time a schoolteacher before going up to London. William Beeston, as an eminent Elizabethan theatrical manager in London while Shakspere was there and son of Christopher Beeston, a member of the London company which Shakspere joined, had ample opportunity to know the circumstances of the great dramatist's life. He told Aubrey concerning Shakspere the following: "Though, as Ben Jonson says of him, that he had but little Latin and less Greek, he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country."¹⁶

¹⁴ W. Robertson Nicoll and Thomas Seecombe, A History of English Literature (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1907) pp. 264-273; Emile Legouis and Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York: Macmillan, 1929) p. 461.

¹⁵ Adams, op cit., pp. 56, 57, 93, 145.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

Dr. Adams gives strong reasons for accepting this statement as authentic,¹⁷ which is accepted also by Sir William Robertson Nicoll and Thomas Seccombe,¹⁸ by Thomas Marc Parrott,¹⁹ and by many others.

If all these things are true (and the evidence seems to me better than any that Mr. Looney cites to the contrary) then there is no great hiatus between Shakspeare's first and second periods. As Adams says, "The transformation of a schoolteacher into a man of letters is common in the history of literature."²⁰

As for the difference between Shakspeare's second and third periods, much of this, again, may be only apparent. If Mr. Lytton Strachey may be believed, some of Shakespeare's plays were written after he returned to Stratford. He says this view is based upon one important fact which has fundamentally affected the whole of the modern criticism of Shakespeare, namely, the discovery and reduction to a coherent law of the chronological order of the plays, so long the object of vague speculation and of random guesses. Speaking of the traditional idea that Shakespeare's final period was one of peace and quiet in Stratford, he says:

The group of works which has given rise to this theory of ultimate serenity was probably entirely composed after Shakespeare's final retirement from London, and his establishment at New Place. It consists of three plays - Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest - and three fragments - the Shakespearean parts of Pericles, Henry VIII, and The Two Noble Kinsmen.²¹

17 Ibid., pp.90-96
18 Op cit., p.215.
19 Thomas Marc Parrott, William Shakespeare, A Handbook (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.) pp.20-21.
20 Adams, op cit., p.96.
21 Lytton Strachey, op cit., pp. 51,54.

In that case, Shakspere's final period was not destitute of literary work. And, let it be noted, this view of the late authorship of the plays and fragments mentioned was not born of a desire to support "the Stratford theory," but came independently as a result of the discovery of the true chronological order of Shakespeare's works.

It is a wonder Mr. Looney did not quote, in favor of his views, M. Taine, who likewise expressed surprise at the character of Shakspere's final period: "Strange close (he says); one which at first sign resembles more that of a shopkeeper than of a poet." ²² But M. Taine goes on to suggest possible reasons for this third period:-

Must we attribute it to that English instinct which places happiness in the light of a country gentleman and a landlord with a good rentroll, well connected, surrounded by comforts, who quietly enjoys his undoubted respectability, his domestic authority, and his country standing? Or rather was Shakespeare, like Voltaire, a common sense man, though of an imaginative brain, keeping a sound judgment under the sparkling of his genius, prudent from scepticism, saving through a desire for independence and capable, after going the round of human ideas, of deciding with Candide, that the best thing one can do in this world is "to cultivate one's garden"? I had rather think, as his full and solid head suggests, that by the mere force of his overflowing imagination he escaped, like Goethe, the perils of an overflowing imagination; that in depicting passion, he succeeded, like Goethe, in deadening passion; that the fire did not break out in his conduct because it found issue in his poetry; that his theatre kept pure his life; and that, having passed, by sympathy, through every kind of folly and wretchedness that is incident to human existence, he was able to settle down amidst them with a calm and melancholic smile, listening, for the sake of relaxation, to the aerial music of the fancies in which he revelled. ²³

22 H. A. Taine, History of English Literature (New York: Howard E. Altemus, 1908), Vol. II, p.66.

23 Ibid., pp.66-67.

To all of which we may add further, that his retirement may have been due to a breakdown in his health, which required him to relinquish his heavy duties as actor, theatre-manager and playwright, and seek the recuperating influence of country air somewhere away from London. 24

Nor need the way in which the village records contain mention of his business transactions, while they do not speak of his literary pursuits, occasion surprise. This may simply be due to the fact that the records, themselves being of a business nature, would naturally mention a man's business affairs rather than his literary doings. Only literary or dramatic affairs of the first magnitude, which involved commercial transactions with the village fathers (like the visit of a company of metropolitan players) would be recorded, but hardly the writings of a retired actor, however proud his fellow-villagers might be of him. Why should we expect, amid the bills and receipts, the records of tax payers and tax defaulters, a line stating, "Oure neighboore Wm. Shaxspere hath writ a play yclept Cymbeline"?

Finally, in regard to this matter, we may point out the parallel case of the second-greatest poet in English literature (or should we say the third-greatest?) John Milton. What a coincidence that Milton's life, too, should be "a drama in three acts," 25 and that in his case as in Shakspeare's, the beginning and the end of his career should be at utter variance with

24 Adams, op cit., p.440; Parrott, op cit., p.59.

25 Mark Pattison, Milton, English Men of Letters. (New York Harper and Brothers, 1880), p.13.

its middle period. For Milton, to begin with, was a student and a poet, first at Cambridge and then at Horton, writing the Ode To The Nativity, L'Allegro and II Penseroso, Lycidas and Comus, and deliberately regarding himself as sent of God to fulfil a great task as a poet. Then he suddenly dropped all this, and for twenty years never wrote another line of verse. Instead he poured forth pamphlet after pamphlet of bitter controversy, not unmixed with scurrilous abuse, in which he championed the cause of Cromwell and the Puritans against King and Church. Then this as suddenly ceased, to be succeeded by a period of retirement and of the writing of poetry more glorious even than that of the first period - Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes.

Now, borrowing the style of Mr. Looney, we may say: It is difficult to believe in such an act of self-stultification as is implied in Milton's abandonment of poetry and his descent from the high level of his first period to the coarse level of his second period; it is more difficult to believe that, after occupying this low level for so many years, he can have suddenly raised himself to the dizzy heights of creative art represented by Paradise Lost and the other works of his third period; and it is quite impossible to believe that the same man can have accomplished two such stupendous and mutually nullifying feats. But, if we thus judge, we shall blunder. For the Milton of the controversial period was, in fact, the same as the Milton of the other two periods; and the hand that wrote in glowing verse the Hymn To The

Nativity and the sublime strains of Paradise Lost, wrote also, in forthright prose to Salmasius: "What the devil is it to you what the English do among themselves?" 26

(3) The third objection I have already answered in what I have said above about the argument from silence. Why there should be no autograph letters extant of Shakspere, nor even any contemporary allusions to his having written a letter, I do not know. But neither does anyone else really know. Surmise is futile. The explanation is probably quite simple, if we but knew it.

(4) Shakspere's Will. The first objection in regard to this is based upon the complete omission of all reference to the publication of the dramas, and Mr. Looney's astonishment increases upon discovering that this was characteristic of Shakspere's attitude throughout his career. He made no provision whatever for the publication of the immortal works which were the chief products of his genius.

But the answer is quite simple. The plays were not Shakspere's to print. According to the custom of those times, the works of a playwright did not belong to the author, but to the company of which he was a member, and by which he was paid.

When Shakespeare sold his manuscripts to the company he parted with all right in them, and the company, regarding them as its own property upon which its income depended, was unwilling to let them be printed...And how deeply concerned actors in general were to forestall the publication of their manuscripts is shown in the Articles of Agreement signed by the members of the Company of the Revels at

26 Malcolm W. Wallace, Milton's Prose. (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p.xxiv.

Whitefrairs in 1608. One clause of the agreement reads: "That no man of the said company shall at any time put into print, any manner of play-book now in use, or that here - after shall be sold unto them, upon the penalty and for - feiture of forty pounds sterling, or the loss of his place and share of all things amongst them." The reason for a company's great anxiety to prevent the printing of its manuscripts is obvious. Representing a substantial outlay of money, they constituted the company's stock-in-trade; and so long as they could be enjoyed only in the theatre, ²⁷ enabled the actors to draw thither the London public.

The only reason that any of Shakespeare's plays was published at all during his lifetime was because pirated and grossly corrupt editions were brought out by others, and, therefore, authorized editions were printed as a corrective to these.

Another reason why Shakspeare did not interest himself in the publication of his plays was, doubtless, the low literary estimate in which dramatic productions were then held, unless they were written in deliberate imitation of Greek or Latin models. How far Shakspeare shared this view we cannot tell. But it is noticeable that, while his poems Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece have dedicatory epistles prefixed to them by his hand, and the publisher Thomas Thorpe made a dedication of the Sonnets to "W.H., their onlie-begetter," not one of the plays carries a dedication of any kind. And when finally, in 1623, his friends gathered together his dramas in the First Folio edition, dedicated to the two Earls of Pembroke and of Montgomery, they "felt it necessary to put his plays in the category of 'meanest things,' beneath their lordships' serious attention: 'We cannot but know

27 Adams, op cit., pp.510-511.

their dignity greater than to descend to the reading of these trifles.' " 28

Sir Thomas Bodley stipulated that no plays should be admitted into the Bodleian collection. "The more I think upon it the more it doth distaste me that such kind of books should be vouchsafed a room in so noble a library." 29

In a word plays were entertainments, of utilitarian value to a company that lived by their production, and of recreational value to the audience that applauded them; but no one thought of them as literature reflecting glory on their authors. Why then should Shakspeare have provided for the publication of his plays? He probably had no more idea than anyone else of the immense literary fame that awaited them and him in the future. Many scholars think he alluded to his plays when he wrote: -

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. 30

Another objection based on Shakspeare's will is that he did not mention Ben Jonson in it. Here is the argument from silence again. How should we know why Ben was omitted? Perhaps it was due merely to oversight, the will having been hastily altered at the end and signed, apparently with the utmost difficulty, when Shakspeare was very ill. Or perhaps Shakspeare actually felt resentful towards Jonson just then, if his fatal illness was brought

28 Ibid., p.493.
29 Ibid., p.493.
30 Sonnet LXXII.

on by a drinking-bout inspired by a visit to Stratford of Jonson and Drayton; and part of the generosity of Jonson's tribute to Shakspeare in the First Folio may have been due to remorse at feeling that he had unwittingly caused his friend's death. In fact, as usual with the argument from silence, there may have been a dozen reasons beyond our ability to conjecture now.

The words "in perfect health," at the beginning of the will, cannot be taken too literally as precluding the possibility of illness. In legal parlance, especially in those days of considerable looseness in legal matters, this need have meant little more than that the person was in sufficient possession of his wits to make a valid will. Naturally lawyers and their clients were not unwilling to stretch the truth a little rather than imperil the validity of a document of this nature. Besides the circumstances under which the will had been drawn up were peculiar. It had originally been drafted by Francis Collins, lawyer of Warwick, some months, or perhaps even over a year before the poet's death. Then Shakspeare, influenced by the sudden marriage of one of his daughters on February 10, 1616, desired to make a new will. On March 25th, however, his condition was so critical that there was not time to draw up a new will. Francis Collins, therefore, hastily summoned from Warwick, decided to rewrite the first sheet which referred mostly to Judith, the aforesaid daughter, and to make such alterations in the rest of the will as the poet might dictate. It is evidence of the hurry in which the work was done, that Collins copied the month "January" from

the first page of the original will, and then had to score through it and substitute "March."

Then he rapidly copied the opening lines, including the stereotyped words "in perfect health and memory, God be praised." The presence of these words shows either that Collins was in an agitated frame of mind, and working under unfavorable conditions, or that he felt that, since he was not making a brand-new will but merely altering an earlier one, he ought to preserve the statement as lending greater authority to the document as a whole. ³¹

This accounts for the difference in the signatures on the three sheets. The one at the end of the last sheet, "By me William Shackspere," was written first (perhaps at the time of the original drafting of the will, when the testator was indeed "in perfect health.") But the other two, subscribed to take care of the re-written and amended pages, were written now in his last illness and by their shaky nature indicate that he was in fact a dying man. ³²

Lastly, Mr. Looney complains of the very un-Shakespearean sound of the language in this will.

The entire document is just such as a lawyer, in the ordinary way of business, would have drawn up for any other man...From the first word...to the last there is not the faintest trace either of the intellect or of the literary style of the man who wrote the great dramas. ³³

Mr. Looney thinks this all the more remarkable, because, if "Shakespeare" was as interested in law as his plays seem to indicate, he must of necessity have taken a direct part in drawing

³¹ Adams, op cit., pp.462-463. Cf.Halliwell-Phillipps, pp. 212,213.
³² Ibid., pp. 461,469
³³ Looney, op cit., pp. 30-31.

up a document of this kind. But if the document was drawn up at the bedside of Shakspere while he lay dying, this would not be so.

Even if the instrument had been written entirely by the testator himself, what reason would there be to expect, that, in a list of bequests of money, furniture, houses, memorial rings, there should appear traces of the "craftmanship" exhibited by the same man in great works of conscious art? One might as well say that there ought to be an element of mystery in the will of an author of "detective" stories or a certain musical element about the will of a composer. After all what does Mr. Looney expect of poor Shakspere on his deathbed? That he should have be-queathed his "second-best bed" to his wife in blank verse? Or that he should have pressed rings on the fingers of his fellow-actors with all the lyricism of "Where the bee sucks there suck I"?

(5) Shakspere's penmanship. As evidence of Shakspere's inability to write, Mr. Looney cites the fact that no signature of his in connection with his dealings at Stratford has ever been found, despite the circumstances that

For all these years he had lived in Stratford, buying and selling, lending money, prosecuting debtors, dealing in single transactions involving the turnover of sums of money equivalent to thousands of pounds in modern values, resulting in the preservation of the signatures of "marks" of people with whom he dealt....³⁴

But this proves too much. No document containing Shakspere's "mark" has ever been found either. If Shakspere could

34 Ibid., p.31.

not write, presumably he affixed his mark to documents, as the rest of the illiterates did. Why, then, have none of these been discovered?

As for the statement that in the first draft of the will provision had been made for Shakspere's "seal" and then this had been crossed out and "hand" substituted - that proves little. Francis Collins must have had to draw up many wills for people who could not write. Perhaps he had drafted one just preceding this of Shakspere's. Then when he drew up this one he inadvertently put the word "seal" in it also. But, suddenly recollecting that this client could write, he scored through the word, and wrote "hand" instead.

With regard to the six signatures of Shakspere³⁵ this is emphatically a matter for the opinion of experts in calligraphy. The mere conjectures of men like Looney and the present writer, who are not expert in this field, are idle. Confining ourselves, therefore, to the testimony of Sir E. Maunde Thompson, who spent a long official life in the service of the trustees of the British Museum, we note first that much of the "wavy" appearance of Shakspere's signature is due to the fact that he had been taught to write in the old English script.

In the course of the sixteenth century the handwriting of the educated classes in England was undergoing a radical change. The old native style - a rugged and tortuous style - was gradually giving place to the new Italian hand, founded on the reformed style of the calligraphers of the Italian Renaissance, the beauty and simplicity of which ensured in the end its general acceptance.

³⁵ A seventh is believed to have been discovered on the title-page of an old book published in 1568, and now in the possession of the Folger Library in Washington. Vide Publishers' Weekly, 142:1278, September 26, 1942.

At the time when Shakspere was at school, the new hand had made its way in England so far that the more highly educated were masters of it as well as of the native hand; they could write in either style. But progress is always slower in the provinces than in the capital, and the evidence of extant specimens of Shakespeare's actual contemporaries shows that the writing-masters of Stratford were still teaching the old English hand, and that hand alone. It was not until later in the century that they appeared to have adopted the Italian hand (see Shakespeare's England, pp. 294-6). The strange probability that Shakespeare never learned the Italian style thus re-enforces the fact that his surviving signatures, written in the last years of his life, are (with a single modification, which will be afterwards explained) in the old English script. ³⁶

With this information in his possession no one should continue to speak of Shakspere's "scrawl."

I must not here repeat all the details of Thompson's analysis of these signatures. To do so would be to transcribe most of his scholarly monograph on the subject. Suffice it to say that in the light of his expert knowledge and experience as England's foremost paleographer, he had subjected this writing to a most thorough scrutiny, letter by letter and, indeed, stroke by stroke, without finding any reason to deny that they are all by the same man, or that that man was an able writer. The deviations and inferiorities in the various signatures, he thinks, can be fully accounted for by the following circumstances: -

- (a) Sickness of the writer.

Although Shakespeare lived for nearly a month longer, till the 23rd, April, there can be no question that at the date of the execution of the will he was sorely stricken; of this the imperfections in the handwriting of the signatures afford ample evidence. ³⁷

³⁶ Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, Shakespeare's Handwriting. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916) pp. 2,3.

³⁷ Ibid., p.11.

39.

Sir Edward Thompson thinks the phrase "in perfect health" was true of the testator when the will was drafted; but though drafted earlier the execution of it was deferred. When finally this was done, in haste, on the poet's death-bed, the phrase was not changed. But all the signatures were written on the same occasion, though the last ("by me William Shakspeare") he thinks was written first, accounting for its superiority over the other two. He differs in this small detail from those who hold that the last signature was written at the time the will was first drafted, the other two being added on his death-bed to validate the altered pages. 38

(b) Use of abbreviations. The six signatures show the following variations: (1) Willm Shakp (2) William Shaksper (3) Wm.Shakspe (4) William Shakspere (5) Willm Shakspere (6) By me William Shakspeare. 39

(c) Crowding of the letters. Two of these signatures (the "Blackfriars" signatures) are on legal documents relating to his property in London. Shakspere evidently imagined, as a layman might, that he was obliged in the case of such documents to confine his signature "within the bounds of the parchment label which is inserted in the foot of the deed to carry the seal, and not to allow it to run over onto the parchment of the deed itself." 40 In executing the first of these two signatures, therefore, he has written his name in two lines, the surname under the

38 Ibid., pp. 11-13.

39 Ibid., pp.4,5.

40 Ibid., p.5.

Christian name; and in the second, remembering what difficulty he had experienced the day previous, he has adopted an unexpected style

...forming each of the letters of his surnames deliberately and separately (except the a and k, which are linked) and by modifying their shapes from the usual cursive to a restrained and formally set character. 41

In No. (1) under (b) above we have the most important of Shakspere's signatures. It was discovered in 1910 by Dr. C. W. Wallace of the University of Nebraska in the Public Record Office in London. It is appended to a deposition in a lawsuit brought by a certain Stephen Bellott against his father-in-law, Christopher Montjoy, with whom Shakspere lodged in the city of London about 1604. The deposition is dated May 11, 1612. This signature differs from the other five in that it was neither written in sickness, like those on the will, nor under the constraint of limited space, like the "Blackfriars" signatures.

In this signature to Shakespeare's deposition we see a strong handwriting altogether devoid of hesitation or restraint, the writer wielding the pen with the unconscious ease that betokens perfect command of the instrument and an ability for swift formation of the letters. He is plainly in the enjoyment of full bodily health. There is no indication here of any fault with the nervous system. Still there is no reason to put forward any claim to precise calligraphy, such as would be looked for in the writing of a highly trained hand....With this signature before our eyes we easily recognize that Shakespeare was quite equal to the task of committing his thoughts to paper with adequate speed, and without feeling the mechanical labor which clogs the process of a feeble hand. 42

41 Ibid., p.7.
42 Ibid., pp.9,10.

41.

Before leaving this matter of the signatures we would draw attention to a somewhat unfair usage made by Looney of some words of Sir E. Thompson. The latter says:-

In the case of the signature to the Blackfriars mortgage deed the value of its evidence for determining the general character of Shakespeare's handwriting is still further depreciated by the writer's adoption (one might almost accuse him of a wilful perversity!) of an unexpected style. 43

Then he goes on to speak of the deliberate formation of the letters in an upright, stiff style in order to fit them into the limited space on the label.

Mr. Looney's comment on this is: -

The third (signature) is done in a style so entirely different from the others that he (i.e. Thompson) considers it useless for the purpose of expert examination of the handwriting: this he seems disposed to attribute to "wilful perversity." 44

We doubt whether anyone, not prejudiced, would place so literal a construction upon the parenthetical sentence in the above passage from Sir E. Maunde Thompson. It will be noticed that he closes the parenthesis with an exclamation mark, as if to indicate that of course he does not mean this remark to be taken too seriously.

But it seems that we may no longer be confined to these signatures for examples of Shakspeare's penmanship, but may actually possess a considerable MS of the great dramatist. This is in the form of a revision of part of a play, Sir Thomas More, written, in the main, by the Elizabethan playwright, Anthony Munday, and is contained in the Harleian MS 7368 in the British

43. Ibid., p.7.

44. Looney, op cit., p.34.

Museum.

Of the twenty paper leaves of which it is now composed, thirteen are in the autograph of the author. The rest (seven leaves), together with two small sheets originally pasted down to two pages of the original M.S., but now lifted from them are contributions by five different hands, and contain additional matter intended to take the place of, or supplement, passages which have been excised or marked for deletion in the author's M.S. Two of these leaves, now numbered 8 and 9, contain, in three pages (the verse of 9 being left blank), an addition which has been adjudged by critics, on account of the high merit of its composition, to be worthy of being pronounced the work of Shakespeare, and to be in his autograph. 45

Sir Edward Thompson confines himself to paleographical tests, comparing every letter of Shakspere's signature with the same letters as they occur in this section of the Harleian MS. He concludes as follows: "Personally we feel confident that in this addition to the play Sir Thomas More we have indeed the handwriting of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE." 46

(6) We come to the matter of the silence of his contemporaries concerning Shakspere's life and death. The argument from silence again! But it is based on the assumption that he

45 Thompson, op cit., p.30. Professor Adams points out the following parallels: "What's a watrie parsnip to a good heart? trash, trash...our infection will make the city shake, which partly comes through the eating of parsnips. Clown. True and pumpions together." (More, II.9-16). "This unwholesome humidity, this gross watery pumpion" (Merry Wives, III,iii,43); "like ravenous fishes" (More, I, p.86), "as ravenous fishes" (Henry VIII, I,ii,70); "spurn you like dogs" (More, I,135), "I spurn thee like a cur" (J.Caesar, III, i,46), "And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur" (M.of Ven., I,iii,119); "Your mountainish (i.e.barbarous) humanity" (More, I,140), "Ha, thou mountain, foreigner!" (Merry Wives, I,i,164. (Adams, op cit., p.498). See J. Dover Wilson, News Sheet of the Bibliographical Society, January, 1919; Percy Simpson, The Library, 1917, VIII, 79; James Spedding, Notes and Queries, 4th Series, X, September 21st, 1872.

46. Ibid., p.54.

was of great literary repute in his own lifetime. That his plays were popular is undoubted, but, as we have seen, plays were considered worthless and even disreputable by the literati and the cognoscenti of those days. Had the great volume of Spenser's work been in drama instead of lyrical verse, he probably would not have been buried in Westminster Abbey either.

As showing how one may accept this silence about Shaks - pere without seeing in it any reason to deny his authorship of the plays, I append the following passage from Emerson: -

There is somewhat touching in the madness with which the passing age mischooses the object on which all candles shine and all eyes are turned; the care with which it registers every trifle touching Queen Elizabeth and King James, and the Essexes, Leicesters, Burleighs and Buckinghams, and lets pass without a single valuable note the founder of another dynasty which alone will cause the Tudor dynasty to be remembered - the man who carries the Saxon race in him by the inspiration which feeds him, and on whose thoughts the foremost people of the world are now for some ages to be nourished, and minds to receive this and not another bias. A popular player, - nobody suspected he was the poet of the human race; and the secret was kept as faithfully from poets and intellectual men as from courtiers and frivolous people. Bacon, who took the inventory of the human understanding for his times, never mentioned his name. Ben Jonson, though we have strained his few words of regard and panegyric, had no suspicion of the elastic fame whose first vibrations he was attempting. He no doubt thought the praise he has conceded to him generous and esteemed himself, out of all question, the better poet of the two.

If it need wit to know wit, according to the proverb, Shakespeare's time should be capable of recognizing it. Sir Henry Wotton was born four years after Shakespeare, and died twenty-three years after him; and I find, among his correspondents and acquaintances, the following persons: Theodore Beza, Isaac Casaubon, Sir Philip Sidney, The Earl of Essex, Lord Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh, John Milton, Sir Henry Vane, Isaac Walton, Dr. Donne, Abraham Cowley, Bellarmine, Charles Cotton, John Pym, John Hales, Kepler, Vieta, Albericus, Gentilis, Paul, Sarpi, Arminius;

with all of whom exists some token of his having communicated, without enumerating many others whom doubtless he saw, - Shakespeare, Spenser, Jonson, Beaumont, Massinger, the two Huberts, Marlowe, Chapman and the rest. Since the constellation of great men who appeared in Greece in the time of Pericles, there was never any such society; - yet their genius failed them to find out the best head in the universe. Our poet's mask was impenetrable. You cannot see the mountain near. It took a century to make it suspected, and not until two centuries had passed, after his death, did any criticism which we think adequate begin to appear. 47

Think of the most extraordinary of all instances of this blindness of contemporary history to the greatness of one of its personalities. We hesitate to introduce here the most sacred of names, but, if it be possible, think for a moment of Jesus as simply the greatest of men. Did the innumerable writers, poets, orators, governors and other officials of the Roman Empire think it worth while to chronicle His doings? Were they in the least aware that in one of their provinces had lived and died a Jewish teacher Who would completely change the course of history? Even when His followers had over-run the empire and penetrated the palace of Caesar itself, the references to Him personally in Tacitus, Suetonius and the rest do not exceed half-a-dozen, and these of the most meager or contemptuous sort. A great archaeologist says it was considered, amongst Greek of men of letters about 160-240 A.D., "a solecism to use such a vulgar and barbarian word as Χριστιανός." 48 And yet, in the words of a famous

47 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare; or The Poet," Representative Men. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Riverside Edition, 1897), pp.193-4.

48 Sir William Ramsay, The Church And The Roman Empire (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 264.

45.

historian, whose agnosticism makes him an impartial witness in this matter: -

...the simple record of three short years of active life (i.e. the ministry of Christ) has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. 49

Why, then, should it occasion surprise if Shakspere's genius was unrecognized in his lifetime and his demise elicited little comment?

It is very likely that Looney does less than justice to the references to Shakespeare by his contemporaries, or in contemporary editions of his separate plays. Adams gives thirty or more such references. Of course Mr. Looney would say of most of them what he says of those given by Halliwell-Phillipps, that they are mere literary references such as any one might make to an author, and do not identify him personally. But how else should even the personal acquaintance of a poet refer to a passage in his works, unless he were egotistical enough to go out of his way each time to mention that he enjoyed direct acquaintanceship with the author? There is no reason to assume that the many who thus referred to Shakespeare in his lifetime knew him only through his works.

What alternative does Mr. Looney offer for our belief? It is this: That the plays and poems were really written by Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford; that because it would be infra dig. for an aristocrat to emerge as a playwright, a second-rate actor of

49 W.E.H. Lecky, History of European Morals (London: Watts and Co., 1924) II, p.4.

a London theatrical company was chosen to be the ostensible author; that this man, William Shakspere, an illiterate boor, agreed to the arrangement, no doubt for a financial consideration, and periodically presented his company with a play of extraordinary merit which usually attained great popularity; that the members of this theatrical company evinced no surprise at the wonderful talent thus exhibited by one of their humbler members; that when the time came for the publication of the plays in London, Shakspere was bundled off to Stratford to live in seclusion; that there his fellow-townsmen - many of whom paid visits to London and heard of the amazing vogue his plays had made no comment, or else they had been taken into confidence and all agreed to respect De Vere's secret; and, after the deaths of both Shakspere and De Vere, Heminge, Condell, Ben Jonson and others all conspired to crystallize the imposture forever in a sumptuous Folio edition of the plays, attributed to William Shakspere of Stratford-on-Avon, with a portrait and commemorative poems all complete.

With a preposterous series of assumptions we have here! How improbable that a secret involving so many persons should have been kept inviolate until now!

(7) Mr. Looney avers that there is no evidence that Shakspere was in London for more than four years or so, ending with 1596 or 1597, and that after 1597, when publication of the plays began in real earnest, Shakspere was evidently domiciled at Stratford, whereas the nature of the plays requires their author

47

to have been living in London.

We have spoken of the great reliance Looney places on the argument from silence as a weakness in his testimony. Here we must instance another weakness - his inclination to rely on circumstantial evidence of too slight a sort.

In 1597 Shakspeare purchased New Place in his old home village, and is described in a return as a householder in Chapel Street, 1597--98, and as having a large quantity of corn and malt at New Place. ⁵⁰ This becomes his recognized country residence, and henceforth he describes himself and is described by others as "William Shakespeare, of Stratford-on-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gentleman." ⁵¹ Such details as these, together with a certain vagueness about Shakspeare's residence in London, which, of course, Looney magnifies, are seized upon to prove (?) that Shakspeare must have been resident in Stratford and not in London after 1597.

But this is a non sequitur. Shakespeare's family may have been lodged in New Place while he lived in London carrying on his work, and whence he periodically visited Stratford. Adams quotes the record of Aubrey, that "he was wont to go to his native country once a year," and adds that "doubtless he found occasion for numerous shorter visits." ⁵²

⁵⁰ Halliwell-Phillipps, p.113.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.113,253.

⁵² Adams, p.255.

Nor is the evidence wanting of Shakspere's residence in London after 1597. In January 1598 a letter from Abraham Sturley, a prominent citizen of Stratford, to his brother-in-law Richard Quiney, in London, implies that Shakspere is living in the latter place, and urges Quiney to get in touch with him and urge him to purchase the tithes of Stratford.⁵³ Nine months later Quiney was again in London, and borrowed thirty pounds from Shakspere in the city and received two more Stratford letters implying Shakspere's residence there.⁵⁴ In 1598, also, Shakspere played in London in Ben Jonson's Every Man In His Humour.⁵⁵ In 1603 under patent of the new king, James I, "William Shakspeare" receives special mention among players at the Globe Theatre.⁵⁶ In the spring of 1604 Shakspere heads a list of the leading members of the King's Company (as the former Lord Chamberlain's Company was now called), who received presents of "red cloth...against His Majesties Royall Proceeding through the citie;" and in the fall of the same year he and eleven other members of the King's Company by royal command waited on the special ambassadors from Spain and Austria, and resided for the purpose at Somerset house.⁵⁷

In 1612 Shakspere is haled into court as a witness in the marital case of one Stephen Bellett and his wife Mary Mountjoy,

53 Halliwell-Phillips, p.137.

54 Ibid., pp. 138-142.

55 Adams, p.275.

56 Ibid., p.357.

57 Ernest Law, Shakespeare as a Groom of the Chamber (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914), pp.8,15-26.

and Shakspere's part in the proceedings shows him to have lodged with Mary Mountjoy's parents in Silver Street near the heart of the city, "apparently from 1601-02 until 1606-07, or during the golden period of his career as playwright." 58

Surely this is evidence enough of his living in London well beyond 1597!

(8) In the last of these principal objections of Mr.Looney his use of the argumēt from silence comes to a climax. There is no mention of Shakspere's name in the municipal records concerning the provincial tours of what is supposed to have been his company; nor is he mentioned in half-a-dozen other affairs in which his company figured in the city and in connection with which the names of actors supposedly less important than he, do appear.

Ergo, William Shakspere cannot have been a great actor, if he was an actor at all, and the whole business of his connection with the London stage is largely, if not altogether, mythical.

Over against these inferences have to be set such indubitable facts as these:-

The name of Shakspere stands first on the list of those who took part in the original performance of Jonson's Every Man In His Humour. When Jonson published the Folio edition of his plays, he placed on a special page of Every Man In His Humour this statement:

This Comoedie was first
Acted in the yeere
1598

By the then L. Chamberlayne
his Servants

The principall Comoedians were	
Will. Shakespeare	Ric. Burbage
Aug. Philips	Joh. Hemings
Hen. Condell	Tho. Pope
Will. Slye	Chr. Beeston
Will. Kempe	Joh. Duke

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Shakspere also took a prominent part in the production of another Jonson play, Sejanus, and his name is placed at the head of the second column of actors' names:

This Tragoedie was first
acted, in the yeere
1603

By the King's Maiesties
Servants

The principall Tragoedians were	
Ric. Burbage	Will Shakespeare
Aug. Philips	Joh. Heminges
Will. Sly	Hen. Condell
Ioh. Lowin	Alex. Cooke

60

Again, as we have seen, James I on coming to the throne issued a Patent licensing the Lord Chamberlain's men henceforth to act under his own patronage, and singled out nine actors for special mention from among "the rest of their associates" as follows: -

- Lawrence Fletcher
- William Shakespeare
- Richard Burbage
- Augustine Philips
- John Heminges
- Henry Condell
- William Slye
- Robert Armin
- Richard Cowley

61

59 The Workes of Benjamin Jonson (London:1616).
60 Ibid.
61 Adams, p.357.

Then in 1604 we have the grant of red cloth to provide liveries for the King's Men to participate in the Royal Procession into London. And here, once more, the name of "William Shakes - peare" appears at the head of a list of nine such players specially mentioned.⁶²

In the face of such facts, of what avail is it to say, that it is very strange that Shakspeare, having been mentioned this often as a prominent actor, was not mentioned several times more? Why he was not mentioned in this connection, or in that, to which Mr. Looney refers, we may not know. But we do know that he was mentioned as above. And someone has wisely observed, that we should never suffer what we know to be disturbed by what we know not; and that, where an assertion is founded on fact, objections to it are nothing, for the one is based upon our knowledge and the other upon our ignorance.

Mr. Looney's answer to these facts is to affirm, or perhaps we should say to insinuate, his belief that Jonson inserted Shakspeare's name deceitfully into the Dramatis Personae of his two plays, as he believes him and the others to have perpetrated a forgery in the First Folio edition (positions made necessary only by the exigencies of an anti-Stratford theory); and to inquire, in regard to the other appearances of Shakspeare's name,

How does it happen, in view of the total silence of the records of the Lord Chamberlain's company during all the years, both before and after, that his name was inserted twice in one year (1603) [it was in 1603 and 1604] in the business formalities of the company. ⁶³

62 Law, p.8.

63 Looney, op cit., p.63, CF. pp.60-62

Before closing this part of my thesis I must mention some other general weaknesses in Mr. Looney's method of argument.

i. He is quite biased. He asserts unequivocally that Shakspeare was forced into marriage with Anne Hathaway and that on the birth of her twins he deserted her - both moot points, as every student of Shakspeare's life knows.⁶⁴ But it is to the interest of Mr. Looney's theory to make the Stratford man appear in the worst light possible, just as it is to its interest to uphold De Vere and justify his every action. Again Ben Jonson must be portrayed as a master of duplicity and prevarication, some words of Sir Sidney Lee about the First Folio being pressed to quite unwarrantable lengths in this connection.⁶⁵ Once more, everything Sir Sidney Lee says about De Vere in his life of him in the Dictionary of National Biography is seized upon as gospel truth by Mr. Looney, because it bolsters his theory. But the same Sir Sidney Lee is summarily dismissed if he appears as a witness for the Stratford Shakspeare as author of the plays.⁶⁶

ii. He is inconsistent. In trying to prove that after 1597 Shakspeare lived in Stratford and not in London, where the plays supposed to be his were just then being published, he lists some nine or ten transactions of Shakspeare's in Stratford, and says: "In a personal record from which so much is missing we may justly assume that what we know of his dealings in Stratford

64 Ibid., p.36.

65 Ibid., pp.27-28,30,63,358.

66 Ibid., pp.27,39,44,54-55,70,111-112,124,316-17,etc.

forms only a small part of his activities there." ⁶⁷ But why may we not make as generous an assumption for his activities in London during this same period? There are at least as many evidences of Shakspeare's activity in London during these years as of his activity in Stratford; and why should not they, together with the convenient assumption that they form but a part of the whole, suffice to establish his residence there? Answer: Because this would not suit the De Vere hypothesis.

Again, in one part of his work Mr. Looney cites a lack of interest in the personalities of authors in the Elizabethan Age as the reason why the secret of De Vere's authorship was so well kept; yet on another page lack of contemporary reference to Shakspeare's personality is regarded as a grave omission! ⁶⁸

Once more, Mr. Looney says:

If William Shakspeare were not a mere mask for another writer, perhaps some Stratfordian will tell us what else he could have done, or left undone, to make it appear that such was the part he was playing? ⁶⁹

But William Shakspeare can hardly have been much of a mask for a literary man, even to his contemporaries, for he was a country bumpkin, illiterate, unable to write his own name without assistance, totally without culture - at least according to the supporters of the Oxford claims. Who that knew such a man can have supposed for a moment that he was capable of such works as Venus and Adonis, the Sonnets, and Hamlet? Surely De Vere would have had the sense to choose for his mask some literary hack like

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.47-48, 52,64,70.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.53.

George Wilkins or Anthony Munday, who at least bore the semblance of an author.

iii. He is self-contradictory. Speaking of the lack of any evidence of Shakspearean correspondence, he says: -

We do not mean merely that no autograph letter has been preserved, but there is no mention of any letter, no trace of a single phrase or word reported as having been addressed to anyone during all these years, as a personal message from what we are asked to believe was the most facile pen in England. ⁷⁰

And again:

The magnitude of this omission of real contemporary reference to the personality of the man can only be appreciated by those who, for any special purpose, have had to search into the collections of Elizabethan documents that have been published, or who know anything of the immense amount of personal details, concerning the most unimportant of people, preserved in our various local histories. Such a silence seems only explicable on the assumption that the utmost care was taken to keep the man out of sight. ⁷¹

Then, lo and behold, on a page between those on which the above quotations appear, we get this information:

In Shakspeare's day, however, according to Halliwell-Phillipps, "no interest was taken in the events of the lives of authors ...non-political correspondence was rarely preserved, (and) elaborate diaries were not the fashion." ⁷² Italics mine.

iv. He is occasionally downright inaccurate. For instance he affirms of Shakspeare's will: "One entry alone in the will connects the testator with his London career..." ⁷³ (Alluding to the gift of memorial rings to Heminges and Condell). This is not true. There is an extended reference to Shakspeare's Blackfriars

70 Ibid., p.23.
71 Ibid., p.52.
72 Ibid., p.47.
73 Ibid., p.27.

22.
property in London as among the bequests made by the dramatist to his eldest daughter, Susanna Hall. 74

Mr. Looney seems to forget his position in regard to this whole matter. For almost three hundred years one view preempted the field of Shakespearean study, viz., that William Shakspere of Stratford and the Shakespeare of the dramas are one and the same person. In favor of that view is so much evidence that no one thought to question it very seriously until the nineteenth century. It is still the view of the great majority of Shakespearean scholars. The onus of proof, therefore, lies heavily on him who would dislodge this well-established conviction, and to effect such a dislodgment he must do far more than raise objections to the evidence and point out the long-acknowledge mysteries shrouding the person of Shakspere. He must produce incontrovertible proof that Shakspere is not the author of the plays that bear his name, and that someone else is. This we cannot feel that Mr. Looney has done. We are almost tempted to write over his argument the Latin epigram which he places at the head of his first chapter, criticizing the Stratford theory: Ex nihilo nihil fit.

CHAPTER III

MR. LOONEY'S METHODS AND CONCLUSIONS

A writer on the subject thus explains the way Mr. Looney came to his conclusions: -

The method Mr. Looney adopted was similar to that used by Scotland Yard when called upon to investigate a burglary or a forgery. It was (1) to tabulate the indications which the works supply of the probable characteristics of the author, (2) to select one outstanding feature as a clue, (3) to discover some man who satisfied this test, (4) to see if that man possess the other distinguishing characteristics tabulated, (5) if so, to investigate his life, his actions and his personality, in order to see if they were reflected in Shakespeare's works, (6) if they were, to look for and apply further possible tests, (7) and lastly, to ascertain what personal connections there were between the newly-discovered author and previously reputed authors."¹

Examining the works of Shakespeare Mr. Looney comes to the conclusion that their author must have possessed the following characteristics: -

1. A matured man of recognized genius.
2. Apparently eccentric and mysterious.
3. Of intense sensibility - a man apart.
4. Unconventional.
5. Not adequately appreciated.
6. Of pronounced and known literary tastes.
7. An enthusiast in the world of drama.
8. A lyric poet of recognized talent.
9. Of superior education - classical - the habitual associate of educated people.
10. A man with Feudal connections.
11. A member of the higher aristocracy.
12. Connected with Lancastrian supporters.
13. An enthusiast for Italy.
14. A follower of sport (including falconry).
15. A lover of music.
16. Loose and improvident in money matters.
17. Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to woman.
18. Of probably Catholic leanings, but touched with scepticism.

¹ Gilbert Slater, Seven Shakespeares. (London: Cecil Palmer, n.d.)
2. Looney, op cit., pp. 92, 103.

Mr. Looney displays considerable ingenuity in working out these conclusions, though some of his arguments appear to us to be rather weak. We question very much whether a great deal of confidence can be placed in attempts to divine the personal characteristics of an author from his published works. Who would suppose, for instance, from a perusal of the simple sentiments of the Elegy In a Country Churchyard, that the author of that poem was one of the most learned men of his time? He mentions Milton and Cromwell, but only in such a way as might be done by any person of average knowledge. What would be the natural conclusion as to the author of Hyperion and Endymion, the Ode To A Grecian Urn and To Psyche? That he was a university scholar with a knowledge of Greek. Yet Keats, we know, got such schooling as he possessed from a private school, and, though he learned Latin well enough to read Ovid, he never learned Greek at all. Dr. Adams thinks the attempt to construct the character and circumstances of Shakespeare from his plays is particularly injudicious. He says:

One cannot say enough in condemnation of that specious type of scholarship which seeks to disclose the life of so practical a man and objective a poet as Shakespeare by a close examination of his plays. No doubt he put much of himself into his work, as every artist must do, and especially the dramatist; but he drew from his great store of wisdom and sympathy, not from his temporary moods and petty troubles. 3

It is too much to assume, as Looney does, that because of the favorable portrayal of Antonio, the easy-going money-lender, and his friend, the borrower and spendthrift, Bassanio, Shakespeare

3 Adams, op cit., p.354.

was himself shiftless in financial affairs. One might as well argue from Macbeth, that the author of the play was not averse to a quiet, little assassination, now and then. Nor do we think that so much can be made of Shakespeare as an Italian enthusiast, who must have personally visited Italy, because of the realism of the Italian atmosphere and descriptions in some of his plays. Shakespeare lived and wrote at the height of the English Renaissance, when "an Italian enthusiasm" was the vogue in England, and many men were making "the grand tour." Shakspeare at the Mermaid Tavern and other places would hear enough about Italy to be able to describe many of its scenes with accuracy, and from this source as well as from reading his favorite authors, Ovid and Boccaccio, he would be able to derive all the atmosphere referred to.

Take two arguments advanced to show that Shakespeare must have been an aristocrat, and therefore could not have been the humble Shakspeare of Stratford. First, his wide range of terms borrowed from such aristocratic sports as falconry and the chase. But this could equally well be turned to the advantage of the Stratford theory, by showing that the boy Shakspeare, growing up in a rural village of Warwickshire, would have ample opportunities for becoming au fait with the sports of the country lords and ladies without being an aristocrat himself, just as a modern American schoolboy often becomes familiar with all the terminology of some admired sport like boxing, though he may never become a professional pugilist himself. The other argument is

that Shakespeare is forever portraying the nobility, and when he does so, invariably does it with success, while his ordinary "citizens" are the ones among his characters that are wooden and strut the stage like automata. ⁴ This is largely a subjective argument; and besides it is outrageously exaggerated. Shakespeare, we may be permitted to say, has some very wooden kings and aristocrats (King John, for one), but he has to his credit a whole host of plebians of a very engaging sort: Bottom the weaver, of whom Mr. Strachey says, that he "was the first of Shakespeare's masterpieces of characterisation," ⁵ Dogberry, Touchstone, Launcelot Gobbo, Christopher Sly, Justice Shallow, Jack Cade, the two Dromios of A Comedy of Errors, and many more. And what of his villains: Shylock, Caliban, and Iago? Are they wooden? Shakespeare of course lays great emphasis on the aristocracy, as was natural to one who wrote in the Renaissance, when such importance was attached to the court, but as foils for his aristocrats he has created, too, a great number of very live commoners.

Mr. Looney's next step was to select one outstanding feature among these characteristics as a clue to the identity of the author. He selected lyrical talent, and tells us why.

"If there had been any likelihood of his having left other dramas under his own name, this would certainly have been the best line to follow. A little reflection, however, soon convinced me that not much was to be hoped for in this direction; for already the experts have been able to discriminate to a very large extent between what is really his and

⁴ Looney, op cit., p.94.

⁵ Strachey, op cit., p.68.

what is not his, in writings that for centuries, had been regarded as pure Shakespearean work; and this process is going on progressively as the distinctive qualities of his work are brought more clearly perceived. Consequently had whole plays of his existed somewhere it is natural to suppose that they would have been recognized before now. 6

But with lyric poetry it was different. The author of the plays was evidently one of the foremost lyricists of his time. To a greater extent than any other body of drama, possibly, his plays are enriched with lyrical verse; whilst his purely lyrical work, his sonnets, the Venus and Adonis and other lyric poems, place him in the forefront of English lyrical poets.

Moreover, while this author might have concealed his connection with long, involved dramas under a nom-de-plume like "William Shakespeare" so as to be unknown to his contemporaries as a playwright, it is hardly likely that he could so successfully have concealed his prowess as a lyric poet. For lyrics are spontaneous products, frequently thrown off in the white heat of composition and with a certain abandon on the part of their author, so that it is extremely unlikely that a facile writer of great quantities of such verse should never let his authorship of at least a few poems become known among his contemporaries and friends. At the same time we cannot expect to find the body of lyrics which appears under his own name to be very large, for, considering the quantity he has already put out as Shakespeare, he would have had to live two lifetimes if he published anything like an equal amount under his own name.

When Mr. Looney had arrived at this point in his deliberations, the next thing was to search carefully through anthologies of Elizabethan verse for such a lyricist. Turning to a book of sixteenth-century verse, he went carefully through it, marking off each piece which he found written in the stanza-form employed by Shakespeare in his Venus and Adonis. He found much fewer than he had expected. These he read through several times, familiarizing himself with their style and matter, and rejecting first one and then another as being unsuitable. At last but two remained. As one of these was anonymous, he was finally left with but a single poem. This was the one entitled Fair Fools by De Vere. It is thus given by Dr. Grosart.

If women could be fair and yet not fond,
 Or that their love were firm not fickle, still,
 I would not marvel that they make men bond,
 By service long to purchase their good will,
 But when I see how frail those creatures are,
 I muse that men forget themselves so far.

To mark the choice they make, and how they change,
 How oft from Phoebus do they flee to Pan,
 Unsettled still like haggards wild they range,
 These gentle birds that fly from man to man,
 Who would not scorn and shake them from the fist
 And let them fly, fair fools, which way they list?

Yet for disport we fawn and flatter both,
 To pass the time when nothing else can please,
 And train them to our lure with subtle oath,
 Till, weary of their wiles, ourselves we ease;
 And then we say, when we their fancy try,
 To play with fools, Oh what a fool was I. 7

This poem broke upon Mr. Looney's consciousness with a glad

surprize, full as his mind was of the cadences of Venus and Adonis, which he had been rereading. Here, he felt, was the author whom he sought as the real "Shakespeare."

In addition to the identity in the form of the stanza with that of "Venus and Adonis" there was the same succinctness of expression, the same compactness and cohesion of ideas, the same smoothness of diction, the same idiomatic wording which we associate with "Shakespeare"; there was the characteristic simile of the hawks, and finally that peculiar touch in relation to women that I had noted in the sonnets.⁸

Having convinced himself thus far, Mr. Looney's next step was to discover everything possible about De Vere to see if he fulfilled the other conditions already postulated of the author of the plays. He relied upon several authorities, he tells us, including Sir Sidney Lee, in the Dictionary of National Biography, Martin Hume's book on Lord Burleigh,⁹ and, for original sources, The Hatfield Manuscripts and Calendars of State Papers.

From these works Mr. Looney learned, that Edward de Vere was born at Earl's Colne in Essex in 1550, the only son of John de Vere, the sixteenth Earl of Oxford. His father dying when he was twelve years old, he became a royal ward, and as Cecil, afterwards Lord Burleigh, was master of the court, young De Vere became an inmate of his house in the Strand. Here he was placed under the tutelage of his uncle Arthur Golding, the translator of Ovid, became thoroughly grounded in French and Latin, and also learned to dance, ride and shoot. Later this excellent private tuition was supplemented by some time spent, first at Queen's

⁸ Looney, op cit., p.110.

⁹ Martin A.S.Hume, Life of Lord Burghley (London:Longmans, Green and Company, 1898).

College, then at St. John's College, Cambridge. He received degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities at some period in his life, though the circumstances are obscure.

In 1571 De Vere came of age and took his seat in the House of Lords, and also distinguished himself in the eyes of Queen Elizabeth at an important joust at Westminster. She gave her consent to his marriage that same year to Anne, the daughter of Lord Burleigh, and herself honored the ceremony by attending in great pomp. The union, however, did not prove a happy one.

De Vere now sought to receive some appointment at the hands of the Queen, and asked Burleigh more than once to use his influence to that end. He particularly desired to visit some of the European countries. All overtures failing, however, while men of lower rank, notably Sidney, received appointment after appointment which took them to the continent, De Vere in 1574 resolved to take matters into his own hands, and, without consent of the authorities, left England to fulfil his desire for travel. Before he had proceeded beyond the Low Countries he was apprehended and brought home. By this he gave much offence to the Queen. However, she must have forgiven him, for in the following year he was at last given permission to go abroad, and he reached Venice by way of Milan. But even this tour was shortened by his being recalled to England by Burleigh.

Now came a crisis in his career. De Vere forsook his wife under mysterious circumstances. Burleigh, apparently, had persecuted De Vere and tyrannized over him, ever since he had come

to his house as a royal ward, when a boy. He had first promised his daughter in marriage to Sidney, and then the contract had been cancelled and she had been given to De Vere, apparently because he was much the richer man. Now Burleigh sought to defame his son-in-law's character by saying that he had brought about the separation between him and his daughter because of De Vere's dissolute life. Mr. Looney thinks the reason was really the two-fold one of Oxford's feeling that Anne was constantly siding with her father against himself and persistent reports, true or otherwise, that Anne was unfaithful to her marital vows.

Here we may pause to add to Mr. Looney's findings some testimony from another source. In an old book dealing with the times of Queen Elizabeth we came upon a letter from one, Sir Walter Mildmay, to Lord Burleigh, which alludes to De Vere. The letter is dated July 27, 1574. Mildmay evidently believes the report of De Vere's dissipation. He writes:

Of my Lord of Oxford's return i.e. from travel on the continent I am glad to heare. I trust this little journey will make him love home the better hereafter. It were great pytie he should not go strayt, there be so many good things in hym, to serve God and his Prince. 10

But, of course, Mr. Looney would parry this by saying that the writer of the letter was in all probability prejudiced. Burleigh evidently did not succeed in quelling the proud, independent spirit of his son-in-law, but he seems to have managed to injure his reputation greatly, so that he suffered the loss of

10 Thomas Wright, Queen Elizabeth and her Times. (London: Henry Colburn, 1838). Two Volumes, I, 507.

his good name - which, naturally, invites recollection of Shakespeare's "Who steals my purse steals trash, et."

Lord Oxford continued to frequent the court and had a famous quarrel, which seems to have been initiated by Sidney, and in the course of which Oxford struck back by hurling at Sidney the epithet of "puppy." Sidney was very angry and vented his wrath on everyone, not even excepting the Queen. She ordered him to apologize to the Earl of Oxford. This incident is supposed to have sent Sidney off into self-chosen solitude to write the Arcadia.

The same book by Thomas Wright, from which we have already quoted, carries a letter by Sir Philip Sidney to Sir Christopher Hatton under date of the 28th. August 1579. In it Sidney says:

As for the matter depending between the Earle of Oxford and me, certaynle Sir, howsoever I might have forgiven hym, I should never have forgiven myself, if I had layne under so proud an injury as he would have laid upon me, neither can anything under the sunne make me repente it, nor any misery make me go one halfe word back from it. ^{ll}

From about this time until 1590 the Earl of Oxford went in largely for dramatic activities, and maintained a company of players. He quitted domestic and court life, and lived a Bohemian existence which he shared with literary men and play-actors. This, considering the contempt in which actors and men of letters were held in those days, would further damage his reputation. It appears to have been fully recognized at the time, that some of the plays staged by his company were largely, and

ll Ibid., II, 101.

others entirely, of his own writing, says Mr. Looney. 12 But these plays are generally regarded as having been lost, whereas, of course, it is the contention of those who hold the Oxford theory, that they survive as Shakespeare's Plays.

Edward de Vere had been publicly disgraced by the rumors connected with his separation from his wife, and by the cunning persecution of Lord Burleigh, and now, further, by his Bohemian associations and dramatic activities. Even so late as 1598 in an Act of Parliament actors were numbered with "Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars."13 It is this public disgrace and contemptuously resting on him which Oxfordians regard as reflected in the following passages from the Sonnets of Shakespeare:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
.....

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it.

My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.

Alas, tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view.

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand.

Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow. 14

As a further reason for seeking anonymity we have the fact alluded to by Mr. Looney, that De Vere was seeking to get re-habilitated at court.

12 Looney, op cit., p. 257.
13 Adams, op cit., p.245.
14 Sonnets LXXI, LXXII, CX, CXI, CXII.

When plays were being published under Shakespeare's name, Oxford was seeking to regain favour with the Queen and setting family influences to work to obtain for himself the position of governor of Wales. Needless to say to have appeared at the time in the role of dramatic author would have been completely fatal to any chances he may have had, for in those days "dramatic authorship was considered hardly respectable." And Oxford especially, having incurred his disgrace in the first instance by deserting the court for a Bohemian association with actors and playwrighters, could only hope to recover his social position and secure an appropriate official appointment, by being seen as little as possible in such connections. 15

Not much remains to be recorded concerning Edward de Vere's life. When Mary was executed by Elizabeth's order, he seems to have been sympathetic to Mary and unpopular with the party in power. He took part in the trial of the Earl of Essex in 1601. As Earl of Oxford he was Lord Great Chamberlain of England, and took part in the coronation of James I. In 1604 he died, and was buried in Hackney Church. 16

Among the items in the life and character of the Earl of Oxford, relied upon by those who seek support of their theory that he was really the author of the Shakespearean literature, are the following:

1. He was a great lyric poet. They quote such testimony as that of Sir Sidney Lee: "A sufficient number of his poems is extant to corroborate Webbe's comment, that he was the best of the courtier poets of the early days of Queen Elizabeth." 17

15 Looney, op cit., p. 176.

16 For the facts here given of De Vere's life see B.M.Ward, The Life of Edward de Vere. (London: John Murray, 1928); and Looney, op cit., pp. 172-344.

17 Sir Sidney Lee, "Edward de Vere," Dictionary of National Biography, edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. (London, 1901).

2. He was an aristocrat. His family was one of the oldest in England, its founder being one Aubrey de Vere, who came to England with William the Conqueror, He himself stood high at court, and having been brought up as a royal ward, would enjoy the familiarity with courts and pageants which the plays exhibit.

3. His family were Lancastrian in sympathy. At the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses, John de Vere, twelfth Earl of Oxford, became a loyal supporter of the Lancastrian cause. In the early part of the reign of Edward IV he was executed for corresponding with the defeated Queen Margaret. Now in the four plays of Shakespeare which deal with the Wars of the Roses, viz. Henry VI, Parts I, II and III, and Richard III, the first two parts of Henry VI, we are assured, were not written by Shakespeare, nor even the first half of Henry VI, Part III. The last half of that play, however, together with the whole of Richard III, was from Shakespeare's hand. And it is remarkable, that while the twelfth Earl of Oxford is unmentioned in the non-Shakespearean parts of these plays, it is precisely in the parts that scholarship attests as having been written by "Shakespeare" that Oxford appears.

Here again we must pause in the argument to ask some question on the other side. If De Vere's purpose was to conceal his authorship, was it not unwise of him to reveal his hand in the manner just indicated. He was trying to regain royal favor which he had forfeited largely through consorting with stage-actors and playwrights; he must therefore be very careful not to let it be known that these present plays were his; yet he inserts such

evidences of his authorship that Mr. Looney, three hundred years after, is able to detect them quite easily. Is it not fair to assume that his contemporaries likewise might detect them?

This applies still more to the autobiographical touches in the Sonnets alluded to above. Says Mr. Looney:

The important point for us is that he has by his sonnets disclosed the fact that he, "Shakespeare," was one who was concealing his real name, and that the motive he gives, adequate or not, is one which unmistakably would apply to the Earl of Oxford, and would not apply in the same literal sense to any one else to whom it has been sought to attribute the Shakespeare dramas. [*Italics mine.*] 18

But if so, all this must have been even more "unmistakable" to his contemporaries. For they, too, knew (as the letter quoted above from Sir Walter Mildmay indicates) those reversals of fortune in De Vere's career to which these allusions are supposed to point. How then could his authorship of the sonnets be so long concealed?

And while we are on this matter, why should De Vere have wished to deny the authorship of poems like Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece and most of the sonnets, anyway? That a somewhat snobbish aristocrat should have desired his dramas to appear under an assumed name is explained by the disrepute in which dramatic composition was held at that time. But there was not the same reason for denying literary composition of such worth as was demonstrated in these poems. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Thomas, Lord Vaux, Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke all wrote poetry to which they boldly affixed their names.

De Vere himself did so in the case of those poems of his that appear in Dr. Grosart's collection. Why then this reluctance to be known as the author of these superb pieces?

But let us return to trace those characteristics of De Vere's life which seem, to Mr. Looney, and his followers, to indicate him as identical with "Shakespeare."

4. He had an enthusiasm for Italy. This is shown by his importuning the Queen to be allowed to visit the continent, and by his going to Italy when she finally gave her permission.

5. He had an enthusiasm for sport. Few as his poems are, they are full of familiar Shakespearean allusions to the haggard hawk, the stricken deer, the hare, the greyhound, the mastiff, the fowling nets and the practice of bush-beating.

6. He was highly educated - being the holder of degrees from both of the great English universities. He thus possessed the range of knowledge indicated by the plays, or it may be assumed that he did.

7. He had an enthusiasm for the drama. This is evident from his maintaining a company of players and consorting with actors and playwrights.

8. He was a man of pronounced musical tastes. The matter is twice referred to in Sir Sidney Lee's article.

9. He was out of sympathy with conventional life. This, of course, appears from his forsaking Queen Elizabeth's court for a Bohemian existence with disreputable actors and authors.

10. Finally, he was loose in money matters. Originally wealthy he squandered his lands and money lavishly, a good deal of it, apparently, on literary men and actors, until he eventually found himself in straitened circumstances.

Such are the claims of Edward de Vere to the highest throne in the literary universe. Mr. Looney's labors have been indefatigable and learned. No stone has been left unturned to bring to light every scrap of evidence that might strengthen the Oxford theory. Yet the same defects appear here as in the earlier parts of his work, - inference, subjective arguments based on personal feeling and bias, reliance upon trifling matters, contradictions.

In a section of the Cambridge History of English Literature in the course of a reference to the collection of poems called The Phoenix' Nest, there is the following remark: "The Earl of Oxford has a charming lyric." ¹⁹ Mr. Looney pounces on this with avidity. "Most of the other contributors are simply enumerated," he observes. "Oxford, however it will be noticed, is singled out for a special compliment." ²⁰ One wonders whether the writer in the Cambridge History was really weighing his words with the assiduity that this implies.

Again, Mr. Looney brings together from Courthope's History of English Poetry sundry excerpts, including the following: "He Edward de Vere was not only witty himself but the cause of wit

¹⁹ The Cambridge History of English Literature, A.W.Ward and A.R.Waller, editors. (New York and Cambridge: The Macmillan Company, 1933), IV, 135.

²⁰ Looney, op cit., p.121.

in others." ²¹ Whereupon Mr. Looney comments: "It is interesting to notice in passing that he is described in words that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Falstaff: 'I am not only witty in myself but the cause that wit is in others!' " ²² But how does the fact, that a scholar of today, writing about Edward de Vere, uses a Shakespearean phrase, indicate what Mr. Looney is trying to prove - the Oxford theory? All that the excerpt demonstrates is that Dr. Courthope knew his Shakespeare. And seeing that he was Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford, that is not remarkable!

As another example of that inconsistency to which attention has already been drawn, note the following: We are told, first of all, that the author of the plays must have been an aristocrat, because his work shows a predilection for the nobility, an ability to portray them and a corresponding incapacity for the characterization of members of the lower and middle classes. From which it is argued that "Shakespeare," which is to say Edward de Vere, can have had no personal acquaintance with, nor sympathy for, any but his own class. But later on Mr. Looney tries to establish De Vere's claims to be Shakespeare, on the score of eccentricity and unconventionality, by insisting that, so far from preferring the society of the nobles in Elizabeth's court, he forsook them with disdain in exchange "for his Bohemian literary and play-acting associates" of the London middle and

²¹ William J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (New York and London, 1895-1910), II pp.312-13.

²² Looney, op cit., p. 122

lower classes, among whom apparently he freely moved!

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S PORTRAITS

Another line of argument relied upon by Oxfordians is concerned with a comparison of the portraits of Shakespeare with those of Edward de Vere.

The earliest known portrait of Shakespeare is the Droeshout engraving. This appeared originally in the First Folio, that is to say seven years after the death of him whom it is supposed to represent. It is quite different from the representation of him on the Stratford bust, which was set up in the village where he was personally known. Moreover the engraver Droeshout was born just the year before Shakspeare's supposed retirement in 1604, and was but fifteen when Shakspeare died. This has made the question of what he had to work on, when he made this picture of Shakspeare, a very important one.

Now the picture of Edward de Vere in Welbeck Abbey immediately suggests many features of the Droeshout Shakspeare, notably the thin black line of moustache which runs across the upper lip leaving a space between the moustache and the lip itself. This feature Mr. Looney was unable to find in any other of many contemporary portraits of various personages, which he examined. "In addition there were the same facial proportions, the same arching of the eyebrows, the identical pose (three-quarter face), the same direction of gaze, about an equal amount of bust, the chief difference being that one is turned to the right and the

other to the left; altogether there was quite sufficient to suggest that, when the two could be brought together, a very strong case might be made out for Droeshout having worked from this portrait of Edward de Vere, making modifications according to instructions. For Oxford was only twenty-five when the portrait was painted, and, of course, it was necessary to represent Shakespeare as an older man. This would explain the peculiar Tom Pinch-like combination of youthfulness and age that is one of the puzzling features of the Droeshout engraving." ¹

More sensational still is the Grafton portrait, which is supposed to show Shakespeare at twenty-four. This is within a year of being the same age as Oxford in the portrait of the latter at Welbeck Abbey (property of the Duke of Portland). And in this Grafton portrait the thin line of moustache is again in evidence, together with all the features previously noticed as possessed in common by the Droeshout engraving and the De Vere portrait. Moreover, in regard to those points wherein the older features of the Droeshout picture differed from Edward de Vere, this Grafton portrait agrees with the latter.

To this some startling facts have to be added. First, that the young man in the Grafton picture is dressed as an aristocrat, which the Stratfordians find hard to explain. Also the portrait has been tampered with. Beneath the 4 of his age there had been a 3, or at least so the advocates of the Oxford theory aver, and what looks like another 3 appears under the 8 in the date. "Now

¹ Looney, op cit., p.456.

as the Earl of Oxford would be twenty-three in the year 1573 these two alterations are two out of the three precise alterations which would be necessary to make the age and date in a portrait of Edward de Vere agree with the particulars for William Shakspere of Stratford." 2

In answer to this we must point out that the Grafton picture is by no means proved to be an authentic picture of William Shakespeare. It was discovered in 1907 at Darlington in England, and was purchased and presented to the John Rylands Library of Manchester by Mr. Thomas Kay. 3 The late Dr. John Semple Smart of the University of Glasgow greatly admired it, and wished it genuine, for it embodied his ideas of the youthful Shakespeare. But he never asserted that it was a portrait of the great dramatist. Mr. W. Mac Neile Dixon, Regius Professor of English Literature in the University of Glasgow, says; "It cannot be claimed with any certainty as an authentic portrait of the dramatist." 4

The argument from a comparison of Shakespeare portraits with those of De Vere has been carried much further in a recent article by an enthusiastic Oxfordian, Mr. Charles Wisner Barrell. 5 Mr. Barrell was of the opinion that the modern methods of infra-red and X-ray photography might be able to shed some light on

2 Ibid., p.457.
3 Thomas Kay, The Story of the Grafton Portrait of William Shakespeare. (London:Partridge and Company, 1914).
4 John Semple Smart, Shakespeare, Truth And Tradition. (London:Edward Arnold and Company, 1928), p.12.
5 Charles Wisner Barrell, "Identifying Shakespeare," Scientific American, 162:4-8, 43-45, January 1940.

the question. He, therefore, obtained permission to photograph by these methods the head-and-bust panel, known as the Janssen portrait of Shakespeare, in the possession of the Folger Library in Washington, D.C.; the three-quarter length canvas known as the Ashbourne portrait, also owned by the Folger Library; and the half-length panel of Shakespeare in Hampton Court Palace in Great Britain. The portrait of Edward de Vere in Welbeck Abbey, owned by the Duke of Portland, and another, owned by the Duke of St. Albans, were used for comparison.

Mr. Barrell asserts unequivocally that the portraits supposedly of Shakespeare all turn out to be retouched paintings of the Earl of Oxford. The evidence, he thinks, points to the alterations having been made at a remote period and by the same hand in all three of the Shakespeare portraits. He claims the following changes have been made in order to convert original de Vere portraits into the likeness of the Shakspeare effigy in Trinity Church in Stratford.

1. On Shakespeare's left thumb in the Ashbourne portrait is a signet ring or thumb seal, which Mr. Barrell says has been treated to a daubing of thick orange gold paint, similar to two or three other items in the picture, which makes these quite out of harmony with the whole. Under this the X-ray photograph reveals certain markings which, he believes originally represented a boar's head. And the boar is the same armorial device which the Earl of Oxford is seen to be wearing in the St. Albans portrait of him.

2. Shakespeare has been given a very high forehead by simply raising the De Vere forehead an inch or two and retouching the hair so as to produce an appearance of partial baldness.

3. The infra-red dissection of the neck-ruff is similarly revealing - at least to Mr. Barrell. It shows that the man in the portrait originally wore a much wider and more aristocratic ruff than the narrow and flimsier one which now appears in the Shakespeare portraits. The outline of the original ruff can still be seen as brought out by scientific photography. It was almost twice the size of the ruff afterwards substituted for it, and was, says Mr. Barrell, of the same fluted pattern as those worn by the elder statesmen of Elizabeth's day. Of course such a ruff would be entirely impossible around the neck of an illiterate, ex-butcher's apprentice in Stratford, and would therefore be one of the first things to be painted out by anyone interested in converting a portrait of Edward de Vere into a likeness of Shakspeare.

4. In his right hand in the Ashbourne portrait Shakespeare holds a book, and in the center of its cover appears "a masque of tragedy and crossed spears." This is painted in the orange gold paint already mentioned, and is raised above the surrounding surface. Apparently it, too, is to be regarded as a later addition for purposes of deception.

5. The inscription on this portrait, "Aetatis Suae..47 Anno 1611," struck H.H.Spielman, Shakespearean art authority of the Encyclopedia Britannica, as questionable, says Mr. Barrell,

who adds that it is in the same orange gold paint used for the raised daubs on the book cover and the disguised thumb ring. X-ray photographs of the inscription area indicate, to the Oxfordians at least, that the lettering originally was far different. This original writing was scraped out, so violently in some places as to perforate the canvas. But the ghostly remnants of the original letters may be discerned by the careful eye. Still more exciting is the appearance of what seems to be a crest beneath the inscription. And below the crest, again, in the X-ray photograph is what seems to be "a full shield of arms, surrounded by decorative mantling and a scroll that evidently once bore a family motto." ⁶ As a sort of appendage to the whole the artist had added his monogram which looks like "C.K."

As to the crest which seems to Mr. Barrell to be visible beneath the inscription, he says that it is really a double crest, consisting on the left of a leopard or a lion pencilled in black, and on the right of a griffin in white outline. We are bound to say, however, that this is very hard to discern in the photograph reproduced with his article. Mr. Barrell believes this to be the crest of the Trenthams of Rocester Abbey, one of whom, Elizabeth Trentham, became Edward de Vere's second wife about 1592. It was a common custom for knights and others in mediaeval times to honor their ladies by reproducing their crests on portraits in this way instead of the husbands' own.

6 Ibid., p.44.

The initials "C.K.," conventionalized, are believed by Mr. Barrell to be those of Cornelius Ketel, the great Dutch portrait painter who was born in 1548 and died in 1616. In a contemporary account of him published by his friend and fellow-artist, Van Mander, in 1604, Mr. Barrell found this: "Ketel also made a portrait of the Duke of Oxford (Edward de Vere), the High Chancellor (Sir Christopher Hatton), and of many other important members of nobility, with their wives and children." 7

An article such as that which we have been quoting was bound to attract much attention. Appearing in a magazine like the Scientific American, as the article did, it was to be taken for granted that the scientific angle of the matter, involving technicalities like infra-red rays, was above suspicion. Consequently we are not surprised to learn from the May issue of the journal, that versions of the story contained in Mr. Barrell's article were published in some two thousand newspapers and magazines throughout the United States and Canada, and that newspaper columnists like the redoubtable Walter Winchell, expressed themselves as duly impressed. The same article asserts that among advocates of the Oxford theory since the publication of Mr. Looney's book are, or were, Dr. Gilbert Slater of Oxford University, Dr. Gerald H. Rendall, former Headmaster of Charterhouse School; Sir Geoffrey Callender, historian of the Tudor Navy, who was knighted for his writings on the Elizabethan period, Dr. Sigmund Freud, and the novelist John Galsworthy. 8

7 Ibid., p.45.

8 Scientific American, 162:264, 299-300, May, 1940.

Despite all this we found ourselves unable to believe that evidence such as this, if genuine, should not have produced more stir in the world of definitely Shakespearean scholarship. And we found it hard to see in the smudges and patches brought to light by Mr. Barrell's X-ray photography the things in each case which he seemed to see without trouble. We were reminded of the childish game of trying to construct pictures out of the flitting shadows on a wall or in the flames of an open fire. One or two of the examples given seemed to have some merit. But others, such as that of the boar's head which supposedly appears on the thumb-seal, seemed far-fetched.

Accordingly we wrote two letters - one to the editor of Scientific American inquiring if there had been anything further written by Mr. Barrell on the subject, and one to the Director of the Folger Foundation in Washington. In the reply received from Mr. Albert G. Ingalls, Associate Editor of Scientific American, appeared the following statement.

There was a refutation of Barrell's article, by Oscar James Campbell, in the Atlantic some time after, and it made me wonder whether scientific people such as we are, ought really to dabble in things literary, after all!

This seemed to indicate that everything was not right with Mr. Barrell's findings. Searching for the article, referred to by Mr. Ingalls as having been written in refutation of Mr. Barrell's views, we found it, not in the Atlantic, however, but in Harper's Magazine.¹⁰ The author, Dr. Oscar James Campbell,

⁹ Letter dated February 6, 1945. Quoted by permission.

¹⁰ Oscar James Campbell, "Shakespeare Himself," Harper's Magazine, 181:172-185, July, 1940.

graduate of Harvard and also of various European universities, was professor of English at the University of Wisconsin and, since 1936, at Columbia University. Dr. Campbell accepts the evidence for the alteration of the portraits, but denies altogether that this proves that Edward de Vere wrote the plays.

Mr. Barrell's evidence is so clear and so cogent that it is impossible to question seriously the truth of his main contention. It seems probable that at some time before the middle of the nineteenth century an unknown painter altered a number of details in a portrait of the Earl of Oxford in order to pass it off as a likeness of William Shakespeare.¹⁰

But it is illogical to assume that because somebody altered the Ashbourne portrait from a likeness of Edward de Vere to one of William Shakspere, that, therefore, Edward de Vere must have written the plays so long attributed to the latter.

The fact seems to be that when, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, enthusiasm for Shakespeare was raised to idolatry, many of the devout were willing to pay a large sum for any sort of likeness of their divinity. Yet almost no one was able to distinguish between a genuine portrait of Shakespeare and a fraud. Such conditions are certain to tempt the unscrupulous; so it is not surprising that various art dealers in London hired hacks to doctor sixteenth-century portraits into some resemblance to the Stratford bust. This illicit trade seems to have lasted into the nineteenth century. The Ashbourne portrait is almost certainly one of those spurious works. That it proves to have been originally a portrait of the Earl of Oxford painted by a distinguished artist is an interesting fact; we now know that by the middle of the nineteenth century [the Ashbourne portrait only came to light in 1847] a faked likeness of Shakespeare had a much greater market value than a portrait of one of the proudest earls of Elizabethan England. But interesting though it may be, the discovery has no bearing at all upon the question of Edward de Vere's authorship of Shakespeare's plays. 11

11 Ibid., p. 173.

Needless to say this interpretation of the matter is stoutly denied by the promoters of the Oxford theory. And according to Dr. Campbell, "Mr. Barrell belongs to an association formed to prove that the noble earl wrote all the works attributed to Shakespeare." ¹² We learn further from Dr. Campbell that no competent authority believes in the authenticity of the Ashbourne portrait. All regard it as belonging in the category described by the late H.H.Spielman as containing "portraits of persons known or unknown which have been fraudulently faked into a resemblance of Shakespeare." ¹³

The letter from the Folger Library director, coming as it does from one of the most respected of Shakespearean scholars and the author of our best modern Life of Shakespeare, is worth quoting in full.

(C o p y)

THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY
WASHINGTON

Administered by the Trustees of Amherst College

Office of the Director

February 7, 1945

My dear Mr. Holt:

It is true that a certain Mr. Barrell, a strong advocate of the Oxford authorship of Shakespeare's plays, came to the Folger and made some photographs, which he said were X-ray photographs, of the Ashbourne and Janssen portraits. I examined his photographs with the greatest possible care, and neither I nor any of the scholarly staff of the Folger could see what Mr. Barrell claimed he could see in those photographs. The portraits were very old, and had been mended from time to time by the application of lead paint. The

¹² Ibid.; p. 173:
¹³ Ibid.; p. 173:

photographs, as a result, showed scores of black spots from such mended patches, and Mr. Barrell's fertile imagination wove them into griffins and the like, which he interpreted as representing the Oxford coat of arms.

When I could not see what he claimed to be able to see, he took the negatives away and drew upon them with graphite the figures he thought he saw. # I told him that this was faking evidence, and I refused him permission to reproduce the photographs. Although he had promised not to reproduce the photographs without the written permission of the Folger, he proceeded to do so. The value of the evidence he presents I must let you judge for yourself.

Very truly yours,
(Sgd.) Joseph Q. Adams

Director

The Reverend Basil Holt
811 South Sixth Avenue
Maywood, Illinois

JQA:iw

#He claimed that he was merely "strengthening" the lines of the figures!

We do not know how Mr. Barrell would regard the above letter but to us its strictures appear rather devastating. We turn now to investigate some other things in Mr. Barrell's article.

He boldly repeats the assertion first made by Mr. Looney, and since uniformly reasserted by Oxfordians generally, that Francis Meres in the Palladis Tamis, published in 1598, describes the Earl of Oxford as "the best for comedy among us." 14 Now the facts are these. Meres in the work referred to devotes a section to "A comparative discourse of our English Poets with the Greeke, Latin and Italian Poets." In this he has a list drawn up and introduced with the words, "The best for Comedy among us."

14 Charles Wisner Barrell, op cit., p.7.

Meres, apparently out of regard for etiquette, has placed first on the list the names of the high-born Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. But this is succeeded by the names of fifteen other persons, including William Shakespeare. It is rare to find an Oxford partisan stating otherwise than that Meres says, "The best for comedy among us is Edward Earle of Oxford." No mention of the fifteen others to whom Meres attributes equal honour, and no mention of the fact that Shakespeare himself was one of them! If this proves that De Vere was one of the best for comedy, it proves equally as much for Shakespeare, who, in our view, was Willm. Shakspeare of Stratford, Gent. Nor does the matter rest there - if Oxfordians would be fair enough to tell the whole story. For on the same page Meres lists "those who are best for Tragedies." In this list we find the name of Shakespeare, but not that of Edward de Vere. Furthermore Francis Meres selects Shakespeare alone, out of all the English playwrights whom he mentions, for a tribute of special praise. He says: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedie among the Latines so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the Stage." This leads Dr. Campbell to make the following comment:

Meres' opinion as to the relative merits of Oxford and Shakespeare would seem to be clear and equally clear his certainty as to the separate identity of the two men. His testimony, which the Oxfordians are never weary of quoting and perverting for the purpose of their argument, proves the exact opposite of their contention. ¹⁵

CHAPTER V

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The witness of Ben Jonson is perhaps the strongest evidence for the traditional view of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. In his lines written to stand over against the Droeshout engraving in the First Folio he asserts:

This figure that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut,
Wherein the graver had a strife
With nature to out-do the life.
Oh could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brass as he hath hit
His face, the print would then surpass
All that was ever writ in brass.
But since he cannot, reader, look
Not on his picture, but his book. 1

Then there is his well known commendatory ode, To The Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us.

Dr. Gerald H. Rendall, Head Master of Charterhouse school in England, sets himself to deal with this matter in a booklet of some twenty-three pages. He avers that Jonson was evidently employed by William, third Earl of Pembroke, and Philip, Earl of Montgomery, to whom the Folio was dedicated, in order that he might deliberately throw dust in the eyes of readers by ascribing the plays to Shakspeare of Stratford, whom he very well knew not to be the real author. Hence Jonson's lines To The Reader and the Ode use the names "Shakespeare" and "Avon" instead of "Edward de Vere" and "Oxford." In support of this contention evidence is adduced to show that Heminge and Condell did not have the ability

1 Potter, Elizabethan Verse and Prose, op cit., p.248/

requisite to have written the Address To The Great Variety Of Readers, nor the Dedicatory Epistles to the two Earls, and that these show evidence that they also were by Jonson. Moreover the great cost of this Folio could never have been met by Heminge and Condell nor by Jaggard the publisher, who died shortly before its issue, especially as it appeared in Queen Anne's time, when Shakespeare's plays for the time being were "outmoded by new types of comedy, and interest centered in the spectacular developments of the Masque."

The interest of the two Earls in putting afoot and financing the venture was that both were connected with the Earl of Oxford. Pembroke had been engaged to De Vere's daughter, Bridget, and Montgomery had married another of his daughters, Susan. Moreover the two men were sons of Mary, Countess of Pembroke, "Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother," who had connection with De Vere himself. ²

The more one thinks about all this the more impossible it becomes to receive this theory that the First Folio was one huge fake. The coincidences referred to by Dr. Rendall are remarkable, as coincidences often are, but they do not constitute proof that De Vere and not Shakspeare wrote the plays. Ben Jonson was then the first poet and dramatist in England. He had his faults, but they were not those of dishonesty and deceit. He was a bluff, honest fellow, who could have a tavern brawl, or get deep in his

² G.H.Rendall, Ben Jonson and the First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's Plays. (Benham and Company, Ltd., Colchester, England, 1939).

cups, but he was not the sort of man to stoop to base subterfuge to oblige a couple of earls - not sturdy, independent Ben Jonson! And his witness to the Stratford Shakspeare is detailed and unequivocal. He had known the author of the plays for years; indeed he says, "I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side of idola~~try~~ as much as any." ³ His own plays had been produced by the same company that produced Shakespeare's, and Shakspeare of Stratford had acted in them. And he leaves us no doubt but that for him Shakespeare is the Stratford man.

Look, how the father's face
Lives in his issue; even so the race
Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines
In his well-turned and true-filled lines;
In each of which he seems to shake a lance
As brandished at the eyes of Ignorance.
Sweet Swan of Avon, what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear;
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James. ⁴

This language is too simple and artless to be the language of guile. The plays that were presented at Whitehall, Greenwich and Richmond before Elizabeth and James I were the plays of the poet of Stratford; and Jonson sees no incompatibility between Shakspeare's "mind and manners" and the contents and style of the works attributed to him.

Heminge and Condell were equally well-informed and equally explicit on the matter. They were members of the company in which Shakspeare himself acted, and which produced the great dramas. They

³ Quoted in Smart, op cit., p.114.

⁴ Potter, op cit., p.249.

had been connected with this company for years. They could not help but know who wrote the famous histories, tragedies and comedies. And they unhesitatingly ascribe these works to Shakspeare. "We have but collected them," they say, "and done an office to the dead, to procure his orphans guardians, without ambition of self-profit or fame, only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellowalive as was our Shakespeare." ⁵ It is natural to assume that these words were written in sincerity and mean exactly what they say.

There is a fourth witness connected with the First Folio, Leonard Digges, a learned man of University College, Oxford, and an admirer of the poet, contributes his meed of praise in lines, not to be recommended very highly as poetry perhaps, but important as evidence.

Shakespeare, at length thy pious fellows give
 The world thy works; thy works by which outlive
 Thy tomb thy name must: when that stone is rent,
 And time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
 Here we alive shall view thee still. ⁶

Here again is plain assertion that the immortal works in question were written by a "fellow" of Heminge and Condell and in the same theatrical company, and one whose tomb might be seen in Stratford.

Dr. Smart says:

With such knowledge of Shakespeare's personality as we now possess we cannot argue that Heming and Condell, Jonson and Digges must be wrong. They are themselves the source of our information, the very fountainhead. They are the touchstone

⁵ Smart, *op cit.*, p.114.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

by which the probability of all statements about Shakespeare made at a later date must be tested. It is manifest that Heming, Condell, Jonson and Digges did not think of him as a dull and illiterate man of rustic extraction: they thought of him as a delightful companion and a poet of the highest genius; they said so in terms which cannot be misunderstood. We cannot set our opinion of Shakespeare against theirs; for they were his friends and contemporaries, and no man now living in the world has ever seen his face or heard his voice.

It is useless to contend that Shakespeare's authorship is inconsistent with stories that were told long after his death and impressions about him which may be entertained at the present day. Contemporary evidence is the only thing that matters; and if the stories and impressions fail to accord with it, so much the worse for the stories and impressions. 7

In the last days of the famous theatrical company which had been Shakspeare's, in the time of Charles I, an enterprising publisher obtained the permission of the company to publish the plays belonging to them written by Beaumont and Fletcher. These were issued in a folio volume in 1647, dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, who was the survivor of the two noble men to whom Heming and Condell had dedicated the Shakespeare Folio in 1623. They remind the earl of this fact, and beseech him to give the same patronage to Beaumont and Fletcher which he and his elder brother had previously given to "the flowing compositions of the then expired Sweet Swan of Avon, Shakespeare." This dedication bears among other signatures those of John Lowin and Joseph Taylor, two senior actors who still remembered the golden days of the company and who were now its leaders. Upon the Stratfordian view this is all straightforward and simple. These men were telling the truth. But upon any one of the anti-Stratfordian theories,

7 Ibid., p.117.

they too were involved in duplicity. Like the members of the company in Shakspeare's own day, who must have known the secret of the authorship; like Andrew Wise, Cuthbert Burby, and some eight: other publishers who issued editions of single plays attributed to Shakespeare during his own lifetime; like Francis Meres, who even refers to certain sonnets circulating in manuscript form as Shakespeare's; and like goodness only knows how many others, who were all so closely associated with the mysterious author that they must have known the truth or have been very likely to stumble on it at any moment - so these men, John Lowin and Joseph Taylor, though like every other leading member of their company they must have known that Shakspeare was an imposter, keep up the deception and attribute the plays to him, "the then expired Sweet Swan of Avon, Shakespeare." And this when Edward de Vere had been dead for over forty years; when justice to his memory would have suggested that now at last he should receive the praise due to him for his wonderful accomplishment; and when the sensation of such a revelation would have brought everlasting fame and glory to Lowin and Taylor themselves. Despite all this, be it repeated, these men elected to carry on an old hoax in which they had no immediate interest. Hoc credat Judaeus Apelles!

All these anti-Stratfordian theories, Baconian, Oxfordian, and the rest go back to one fundamental assumption: That Shakspeare was an illiterate boor, the child of illiterate parents who

Could not even write their names, living in the midst of an environment of ignorance and dirt, in one of the most backward villages of England; and that such a man was not equal to the production of the works that go by his name.

But this point of view has long since been rejected by competent Shakespearean scholars. Says Dr. Campbell:

It is a curious fact that none of the anti-Stratfordians is aware of recent developments in Shakespeare scholarship. They all base their arguments on "facts" and points of view that were long ago discredited by all competent historians of Elizabethan literature.⁸

For example, it is now known that the placing of a cross on a document as a man's "mark" was not at all a sign of illiteracy in the sixteenth century. Crosses, as signatures, were first used as religious symbols. As representations of the Holy Cross they afforded proof that those who used them were giving religious sanctity to the ceremony of affixing their names. They were thus equivalent to oaths. Far from being the last resort of illiterate men, we find the custom of signing with the mark of the cross used in the old English charters by bishops, abbots and even by kings. In Stratford itself we find one, Adrian Quiney, placing a mark in the records in lieu of signature, just as John Shakspeare himself; and yet we know that this Adrian Quiney could write, for we possess several letters written by him to his son Richard, when the latter was in London. In one of them he asks that the key of the

⁸ Oscar James Campbell, op cit., p. 178.

study be sent home, in order that he may seek there for certain documents. 9

There is even some positive evidence that John Shakspere himself could write. The financial report of John Taylor and John Shakspere was entered in the Stratford records in January, 1564. The clerk who entered it states; "John Taylor and John Shakespeare have made a true and lawful account for their time being Chamberlains." Apparently they did the work unusually well, for we find them keeping the accounts for another year, in spite of the fact that two other men were now chamberlains. This certainly seems to mean that John Taylor and John Shakspere for two years kept careful accounts for the town of Stratford in their own handwriting. 10

According to Dr. Campbell well-informed scholars would now agree that, instead of the imaginary portrait given by Oxfordians of a bucolic Shakspere, a true account of his career would be somewhat as follows:

William Shakespeare was born in an important industrial and commercial town in the prosperous English Midlands. His father was one of the leaders in the business and political life of this community. His skill as a processor of leather brought him a small fortune. Almost inevitably the son of a man of so much importance in Stratford attended its excellent grammar school. There he would learn, as Shakespeare undoubtedly did, to read Latin easily and probably begin the study of

9 Ibid., p.176. Cf. Smart, op cit., pp.42-44. Dr. Smart says that Halliwell-Phillipps, whom so many anti-Stratfordians blindly follow, founded his theory of illiteracy at Stratford upon "one fact alone," that of these "marks" in the town records.

10 Ibid., p. 176. Smart, pp.45-46.

Greek. It is not too much to assume that a lad of Shakes -
 peare's keenness was apt in his studies and found them more
 congenial than one of the village crafts. At any rate he
 decided not to enter his father's business and not to appren-
 tice himself to another trade. Instead, he took a position
 as a schoolmaster in a neighboring village. He had already
 become interested in new developments taking place in the
 vigorous young drama of the 1580's, and the leisure he could
 steal from his duties as a pedagogue he devoted to writing
 plays. When he had finished two dramas to his satisfaction,
 a comedy in imitation of Plautus and a bloody tragedy in
 the approved Senecan manner, he took them up to London in
 the hope of selling them to one of the companies playing
 there. The actors, finding them to their liking, bought
 and produced both works. Indēed, they were so favorably
 impressed with these first heirs of his dramatic invention
 that they attached Shakespeare to their company. He be -
 came an assistant to their "bookkeeper," an official who com -
 bined the duties of librarian, prompter and producer. This
 position gave Shakespeare all the practical experience a play -
 wright could have wished. It enabled him to find out what
 Elizabethan audiences wanted and what parts the members of
 his company liked best to take. His next plays showed how
 well he had learned these lessons. In "Henry VI, Part I,"
 he wrote the kind of patriotic drum-and-trumpet play that
 was just then enormously popular. His "Two Gentlemen of
 Verona" was a comedy in the familiar Italianate manner, with
 a good fat part in it for Will Kempe, the clown of the com -
 pany and its most famous member. He pleased the actors so
 well that by 1592 Robert Greene complained that the young
 Warwickshire schoolmaster was taking the bread from the
 mouths of the University men engaged in making their liv -
 ing by writing for the stage. ¹¹

The best that can be said for the Oxford theory, we believe,
 is that of all the various anti-Stratford theories it is the least
 grotesque and impossible. If it were proved that William Shakspeare
 did not write the plays, so that it became necessary to find a sub-
 stitute for him, Edward de Vere would seem more likely to fill the
 place than most others. But it is precisely that, which has not
 been proved. Recent scholarship seems to establish the truth of
 the traditional view more firmly than ever. As far as we are con-

11 Ibid., pp.178-179.

cerned the world's proudest literary laurels still rest on the brow of "William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon Avon, in the county of Warwick, gentleman."

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Basil Fenelon Holt has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 14, 1945
Date

James J. Young
Signature of Adviser