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SHAKSPERE AND MARY FITTON.

BY F. J. FURNIVALL.

**T**HE welcome publication by Lady Newdegate of the Letters and Documents at Arbury from, to, and about Anne and Mary Fytton, from 1574 to 1618,<sup>1</sup> has happily revived the discussion of who are the subjects of Shakspeare's Sonnets, the man right fair, and the woman colour'd ill :

Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still :  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.

To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.

And, whether that my angel be turned fiend,  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell ;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another's hell.

Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

SONNET CXLIV.

This Sonnet and the 138th first appeared, with some changes, in *The Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599, while in 1598 Francis Meres, in his *Palladis Tamia*, spoke of Shakspeare's " sugared Sonnets "

<sup>1</sup> Gossip from a Muniment Room, being Passages in the Lives of Anne and Mary Fytton. Transcribed and edited by Lady Newdigate-Newdegate. (London : D. Nutt, 1897).

among his private friends.<sup>1</sup> It is to these years, then, that we naturally turn, to see if any folk of higher birth and station than the poet can be found, who fit the allusions that he makes to them. Of higher birth and station I say, for this is implied, as regards the young man, in almost every sonnet to him; and as regards the woman, her skill in music, her attractiveness, her power over Shakspeare and his friend, force us to fancy her an educated woman of the upper class.

The main clue to the youth who inspired Shakspeare to write his Sonnets, is given in the Dedication to the first edition of them in 1609, by T. T., the man who got G. Eld to print them, and William Aspley to sell them. The Dedication runs, putting modern stops: "To the onlie Begetter of these issuing Sonnets, Mr. W. H., all Happinesse, and that Eternitie promised by our ever-living Poet, wisheth the well-wishing Adventurer in setting forth." Now, clearly this means that Thorpe asserted that the man to whom Shakspeare promised eternity in his Sonnets was Mr. W. H., who begot them, who caused Shakspeare to write them.<sup>2</sup> And the only W. H. of high station whom we know to have cared for Shakspeare is William Herbert, who was born on April 8, 1580, came to live in London in the spring of 1598, and became the third Earl of Pembroke on the death of his father on January 19, 1601. To William Herbert and his brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery, the First Folio of Shakspeare's works was dedicated by Shakspeare's followers, Heminge and Condell, in 1623, and they say that these lords had shown Shakspeare "much favour," and liked his plays.<sup>3</sup> Thorpe dedicated other books to William Herbert, Lord Pembroke, in an elaborate and fulsome style; but if Shakspeare's Sonnets were dedicated to this nobleman, Thorpe would naturally use a blind like "Mr. W. H.," inasmuch as the poems disclosed the young lord's successful intrigue with the older Shakspeare's mistress. The first twenty-six Sonnets are addressed to a beautiful, fair young man, and urge him to marry. Now, in the August of 1587, before William Herbert came to London, his father and mother (Sir Philip Sidney's sister) were

<sup>1</sup> He named also the Venus and Adonis, and Lucrece; and of Comedies, the Two Gentlemen of Verona, Errors, Love's Labour's Lost and Won, Midsummer Night's Dream, and Merchant of Venice; of Histories and Tragedies, Richard II., Richard III., Henry IV. (1596-8), K. John, Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet.

<sup>2</sup> The quibbles that "begotten" means also "procurer," the man who got the MS. for Thorpe, and that "that Eternitie promised by our ever-living Poet," means only "eternal fame for thus getting the MS. for publication," are unworthy of discussion.

<sup>3</sup> "Your Lordships have been pleas'd to think these trifles some-thing heeretofore, and have Prosequed both them and their Authour living with so much favour . . . so much were your Lordships' likings of the several parts when they were acted. as. before they were published, the Volume ask'd to be

trying to arrange a marriage between him and Bridget Vere, daughter of the Earl of Oxford, and grand-daughter of Lord Burghley; but nothing came of it. He might well then be entreated to take another wife. But as Whyte writes on August 16, 1600: "I don't find any disposition at all in this gallant young lord to marry." He was after other game. A document in the Record Office states: "One Mrs. Martin . . . tould me that she hath seene preists mary gentlewomen at the Courte, in that tyme when that Mrs. Fytton was in great fauour, and one of her Maiesties maids of honor; and during the time that the Earle of Pembroke favord her, she would put off her head-tire and tucke upp her clothes, and take a large white cloake, and marche as though she had been a man, to meete the said Earle out of the Courte."<sup>1</sup> The result of one of these excursions in July, 1600, was, that Mary Fitton gave birth to a boy in March, 1601.<sup>2</sup> He died soon after.

This Mary Fitton was the second daughter of Sir Edward Fitton, Knight, of Gawsworth, in Cheshire. She was baptised there on June 24, 1578, so that she was a mother before she was twenty-three, while the father of her son was under twenty-one. As soon as Mary's pregnancy was known, the Queen put young Pembroke into the Fleet Prison for a month or less, and then banished him from Court. Mary Fitton was committed to "my Lady Hawkyns" for her bringing to bed, and retired in disgrace, as Pembroke, though he confest his naughtiness, utterly renounced all marriage.

Here, then, is a lady who (1) if she can be connected with Shakspeare; (2) if she is dark,<sup>2</sup> seductive, and musical; (3) if she can be said to have broken her "bed-vow;" and (4) if "W. H." is William Herbert, Lord Pembroke, ~~that~~ may be the lady whom Shakspeare loved.

(1) The link with Shakspeare is the slightest possible, only this, that his comic fellow-actor, Will Kempe, in 1600, dedicated to "Mistris Anne (that is, Mary) Fitton, Mayde of Honour to the most sacred Mayde Royal, Queene Elizabeth," his *Nine Daies Wonder*, an account of his morris-dancing in nine days from London to Norwich. Kempe, we see, knew so little of Mary Fitton as to call her by the name of her long-married sister, Mrs. Anne Newdigate. Why should Shakspeare have

<sup>1</sup> *Shakspeare's Sonnets*. By Thos. Tyler, 1890, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> In the volume of Poems by Pembroke and Sir B. Rudyerd, published by Donne in 1660, there is a very amatory poem by Rudyerd on a beautiful dark woman not enjoyed by him. <sup>3</sup>She had two bastard children in later life, but then married. Her friends stuck to her.

known anything more of her? There is no evidence that he did. (2) Was Mary Fitton dark, seductive, and musical? If the portraits at Arbury, that Lady Newdegate states, on wholly insufficient evidence, to be those of Mary Fitton, Mary was a fair, red-and-white girl, with brown hair, not black, like Shakspeare's dark lady; and there is an end of the matter. But Lady Newdegate has not treated us quite fairly in this matter of the portraits. She has not given a photogravure of the third portrait, on wood, at Arbury, with the inscription: "Countess of Stamford, 2nd daughter of Sir Edward Fitton, Knt.," which she showed Mr. Tyler and me, in 1891, as one of Mary Fitton,<sup>1</sup> and which is like enough to the other two portraits of Mary to be one of the same person,<sup>2</sup> though it no doubt is that of Miss Mildred Maxey, who sent it to the first Lady Anne Newdigate at Arbury: "I have, sweete sister, lefte my pecter at my brothers loging for you. I think it not worth the trobbel in having it com downe, for it should have bine drane in a canfis, and this is a borde; but if my brother Cooke had bine in the tone,<sup>3</sup> I wold [have] taken order with him for it; but I know if you do send to him, he will send it you in a case."

If Lady Newdegate, Mr. Tyler and I were right in accepting this portrait as Mary Fitton's in 1891, and Lady N. is right in changing her mind and saying now that it is Mildred Maxey's, may we not believe that all three portraits are those of Miss Maxey? Mr. Tyler has no doubt that they are.<sup>4</sup> The Mildred portrait is certainly like, though not quite the same as, those claimed as Mary Fitton's; it is of a fair, red-and-white girl, with brown hair like Mary's, and, too, with her dark, blue-grey eyes. Moreover, the hair of Mary's statue in Gawsworth Church seems once to have been coloured black: the colour can only be seen now in the interstices of the coils of hair, but assuredly it looks black. One cannot accept as conclusive the evidence of the Arbury portraits supposed to be those of Mary Fitton.

That Mary was seductive we have sufficient proof in her selection to act and dance at Court, in her intrigues with Pembroke, Lougher, and Leveson, and her complete capture of old Sir William Knollys. As to her music we know nothing, save that she danced.

<sup>1</sup> See my letter in *The Academy*, 21st March, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Had a photogravure been given of this third portrait, every reader could have judged for himself.

<sup>3</sup> Town.

<sup>4</sup> He remarks that in the double portrait the Fitton badge, the pansy, is on Anne Newdigate's dress only, while a carnation is on the so-called Mary's, in her ruff, and she but holds a pansy, with other flowers, in her hand.

(3) Can Mary Fitton be said to have broken her "bed-vow," by her connection—if she ever had any—with Shakspeare? She cannot have been married in 1598-1601, nor, says Mrs. Stopes, can she have had, as Maid of Honour at Court, any separate parlour to receive Shakspeare or any visitor in, and play to him. But Mr. Archer has made the ingenious suggestion that, as Lady Newdegate's book shows her to have had some engagement or understanding (which she did not keep) to marry old Sir William Knollys as soon as his old wife died,<sup>1</sup> this informal troth-pledge may have been treated as a bed-vow, and may also explain the third "Will in overplus" of Sonnet 135, beyond Will Herbert and Will Shakspeare:—

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy "Will,"

And "Will" to boot, and "Will" in overplus.

No doubt Shakspeare would have enjoyed calling an amorous old billy-goat "Will in overplus," but the epithet is too doubtful to base any theory on. Mary Fitton went to Pembroke "out of the Court!" Did she go to the actor Shakspeare, too? Is it likely? "Bed-vow" ought surely to imply a married woman; and as yet, none such has turned up among the harem of Pembroke's mistresses. Clarendon tells us (*Hist.*, i., 79) that he was all his life immoderately given up to women, and indulged himself in pleasures of all kinds, almost in all excesses.

(4) Was "W. H." William Herbert, Lord Pembroke? Some indications, as noted above, besides others not noticed here, point to him as Shakspeare's young Sonnet-friend; but there are several against this view. (See Mr. Gollancz's Introduction to the Temple Edition of the Sonnets, p. xiv.-xvi., though they are not strongly founded.<sup>2</sup>) Now I want to notice another here. We have seen that if two of the Arbury portraits, reproduced by Lady Newdegate, are to be trusted, the Sonnet-lady, who ought to

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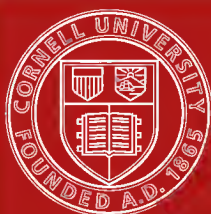
<sup>1</sup> The old gentleman is most amusing in his desire to be rid of his old bramble and briar.

<sup>2</sup> Shakspeare's recourse to the words and phrases of his early plays was natural when he was writing to a young fellow of eighteen. To put the grand, penetrative and weighty Sonnet on Luet, No. 129, before 1600-1, is surely a mis-judgment. If young Herbert is the Sonnet-man, he would, when fresh from the country, have rushed eagerly into friendship with the attractive Shakspeare, who would introduce him to his dark lady. The *Passionate Pilgrim* Sonnet of 1599 (No. 144, above), shows that the seduction of the youth by her was then in progress, though not complete—both were of a coming-on disposition—and it would go on till she threw over the old poet for the young noble. As to Shakspeare's love for Herbert giving "the lie" to his professions of devotion in the *Adonis* and *Lucrece* to Southampton, a great deal may have happened in four years. There is no evidence that Southampton kept up his alliance with Shakspeare after 1594. He had plenty of other folk and work to look after; and we can't tie an enthusiastic young poet down to his dedications for his whole life. If Shakspeare hadn't turned up Southampton before that nobleman joined in Essex's rebellion in 1601, he surely did so then.

be dark and black-haired, is fair and brown-haired. So, if the so-called Muytens portrait of Pembroke, a half-length, at Wilton, can be relied on, he, the fair Sonnet-youth, was swarthy and black-haired. But here again comes the question, Is this portrait trustworthy? It has been only a few years in possession of the family. Lord Pembroke bought it but a few years ago from a dealer in the North. It had no pedigree; and, though labelled as by "Mytens," there is no link to connect it with the portrait by "Mittens" of William Herbert, the third Earl, seemingly ordered for Charles I. in 1627 and paid for in 1633, as shown by the last entry in F. Devon's Issues of the Exchequer in James I. time. When I first saw this portrait one dark evening by candlelight, I thought it might represent a man who might have been fair in youth; but on studying it more closely since by daylight, I hold Lord Pembroke right in saying that the original of it must have been "swarthy," with black hair. The full-length portrait of William Herbert at Wilton was painted by Vandyke from the statue at Oxford, and its colours cannot, of course, be trusted; but it is not that of a fair man.

The conclusion of the whole matter then is, that though the suggestion of William Herbert and Mary Fitton as the man and woman of the Sonnets is the best yet made, there is nothing like proof or good evidence that they are the folk we want, and there is at least much evidence against them. Their value is, that they are types of the persons we are in search of; and even those jocose, cart-before-the-horse people who insist that W. H. was H. W., Henry Wriothsley, Lord Southampton, ought to join the rest of us Shakspeare students in thanking Mr. Tyler, Mr. Harrison, Lady Newdegate, and all others who have helped in the investigation of this Herbert-Fitton problem. No doubt amiable monomaniacs will go on proclaiming solutions of the Sonnet-puzzle till the Day of Doom. The sane student will be content to hold (1) that in the Sonnets Shakspeare *did* unlock his heart—that they reveal the depths and heights of the great soul which wrote his plays; (2) that his fair male friend and his dark, naughty, woman-love have not yet been identified, and probably never will be; (3) that for knowledge of Shakspeare, this identification is needless, however interesting it would be. What we want the Sonnets for, and what we get in them, is Shakspeare himself, unbid by any character in a play.





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