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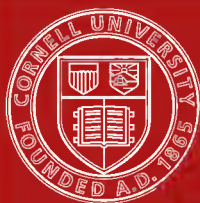
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Shakespeare or Bacon?



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SHAKESPEARE OR BACON?

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SHAKESPEARE OR BACON?

BY

SIR THEODORE MMARTIN, K.C.B.

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SHAKESPEARE OR BACON?

“How one starts at the conjunction of the names of Bacon and Shakespeare! And how strange it seems that no other than a casual conjunction of their names should seem to exist, or should yet have been discovered!” So wrote Sir Henry Taylor (27th August 1870) to Mr James Spedding, adding an expression of his surprise that two of the world’s greatest men should have lived at the same time and in the same city without to all appearance having known each other, or “leaving some mark and token of the knowledge.” In his reply, four days afterwards, Mr Spedding says: “I see nothing surprising in the fact—for I take it to be a fact—that Bacon knew nothing about Shakespeare, and that he knew nothing of Bacon except his political writings and his popular reputation as a rising lawyer, of which there is no reason to suppose that he was

ignorant. Why should Bacon have known more of Shakespeare than you do of Mark Lemon, or Planché, or Morton? . . . I have no reason to think that Bacon had ever seen or read anything of Shakespeare's composition. 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Rape of Lucrece' are the most likely; but one can easily imagine his reading them, and not caring to read anything else by the same hand."¹

The study of a lifetime, devoted with enthusiasm to a scrutiny of the writings and character of Bacon, and guided by the light of a fine critical faculty and a profound acquaintance with not only Shakespeare but with every great English writer of the era of Elizabeth and James, gives to these words of Mr Spedding a weight beyond that of any writer of mark who has dealt with this question before or since. No one can say of him, that he did not know the literary characteristics of both Bacon and Shakespeare with all conceivable thoroughness. Neither can it be questioned, that he of all men is entitled to speak with authority not only of what Bacon could do or could not do as an author, but also of what was possible for him to have done, consistently with the occupations and necessities of his life. This being so, when he states his convic-

¹ Sir Henry Taylor's Correspondence, pp. 306, 307. London: 1888.

tion that in all probability Bacon never read, nor even cared to read, the poems and dramas ascribed to Shakespeare, the mass of intelligent and cultivated students of our great poet will be disposed to adopt his opinion as conclusive. Who so likely as he to know what were Bacon's gifts, what his literary tastes, or to find in his austere and unemotional temperament no affinity to, or even sympathy with, the genius to which we owe the poems and the dramas which, as time has proved, were the noblest outcome of the literary activity of his age ?

Nevertheless a creed directly at variance with that of Mr Spedding has sprung up in these last years. Its adherents, if not numerous, are at all events energetic, and so adventurous in assertion that they have created uneasiness in the minds of many who, loving Shakespeare, have yet never made themselves familiar with the ascertained facts of his life. To bring these facts and the general argument as to his right to the authorship—acknowledged in his lifetime, and ever since—shortly before readers of this class, seemed not undesirable, enabling them, as it will do, to justify the faith that is in them as to the Shakespearian authorship of the poems, the sonnets, and the plays. For very many, such an essay is of course superfluous ; and the Baconian heresy, they may think, might well be

allowed to wear itself out, like other heresies, from inherent weakness. But there is a large class who, having no foundation for their belief but inherited tradition, will not be sorry to learn on how sure a basis that belief may be rested. For them the following pages are written.

Bacon, in his second and last will, dated 19th December 1625, made an appeal to the charitable judgment of after times in these words—"For my name and memory I leave it to men's charitable speeches, and to foreign nations, and the next ages." He might well do so. The doubtful incidents of a shifty and in some particulars by no means exemplary life he might fairly suppose would be but little known to foreign nations and to men of future centuries. Time, to use his own words in a letter to Sir Humphrey May in 1625, would "have turned envy to pity;" and what was blameworthy in his life would, in any case, be judged lightly by posterity, in their gratitude for the treasures of profound observation and thought with which his name would be identified. "It is reason," as he writes in his essay "Of Nobility," that "the memory of men's virtues remain to their posterity, and their

faults die with themselves." Bacon died a few months after making his will, on the 9th of April 1626.

No author probably ever set greater store upon the produce of his brain, or was at more pains to see that it was neither mangled nor misrepresented by careless printing or editing. Neither is there the slightest reason to believe that he did not take good care,—nay, on the contrary, that he was not at especial pains to ensure,—that the world should be informed of everything he had written, which he deemed worthy to be preserved. Observe what care he took of his writings in the sentences of his will next to those above quoted. "*As to that durable part of my memory, which consisteth in my works and writings, I desire my executors, and especially Sir John Constable and my very good friend Mr Bosville, to take care that of all my writings, both of English and of Latin, there may be books fair bound, and placed in the King's library, and in the library of the University of Cambridge, and in the library of Trinity College, where myself was bred, and in the library of the University of Oxonford, and in the library of my Lord of Canterbury, and in the library of Eaton.*"¹

Two years before Bacon made his final will, the first or 1623 folio of Shakespeare's plays was published,

¹ Spedding's *Life and Letters of Bacon*, vol. vii. p. 539.

with the following title-page: "*Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies; Published according to the True Originall Copies. London: Printed by Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount. 1623.*" It was a portly volume of nearly a thousand pages, and must have taken many months, probably the best part of a year, to set up in types and get printed off. The printing of similar folios in those days was marked by anything but exemplary accuracy. But this volume abounds to such excess in typographical flaws of every kind, that the only conclusion in regard to it which can be drawn is, that the printing was not superintended by any one competent to discharge the duty of the printing-house "reader" of the present day, but was suffered to appear with "all the imperfections on its head," which distinguish "proof-sheets" as they issue from the hands of careless or illiterate compositors. Most clearly the proof-sheets of this volume had never been read by any man of literary skill, still less by any man capable of rectifying a blundered text. In this respect the book offers a marked contrast to the text of Bacon's Works, printed in his own time, which were revised and re-revised till they were brought up to a finished perfection.¹

¹ In partial proof of this, it is only necessary to refer to the Notes appended by Mr Aldis Wright to his admirable edition of the Essays,

Down to the year 1856 the world was content to accept as truth the statement of the folio of 1623, that it contained the plays of Mr William Shakespeare "according to the true original copies." To the two preceding centuries and a half the marvel of Shakespeare's genius had been more or less vividly apparent. His contemporaries had acknowledged it; and as the years went on, and under reverent study that marvel became more deeply felt, men were content to find the solution of it in the fact, that the birth of these masterpieces of dramatic writing was due—only in a higher degree—to the same heaven-sent inspiration to which great sculptors, painters, warriors, and statesmen owe their pre-eminence. How often has it been seen that men of genius, without the long and painful culture of school teaching, have, amid the bustle of active life, by promiscuous reading, by intercourse with their fellow-men, by quick and almost unconscious intuition, acquired with marvellous ease great stores of knowledge, which they have brought to bear upon and to illustrate the conceptions of their imagination and fancy! Knowing this, men would not set a limit to "the gifts that God gives," or see anything more strange in the prodigality

published by Macmillan & Co. in 1862. So sensitive about accuracy and finish was Bacon, that he transcribed, altering as he wrote, his 'Novum Organum' twelve, and his 'Advancement of Learning' seven times.

of power in observation, in feeling, in humour, in thought, and in expression, as shown by the son of the Stratford-on-Avon wool-stapler, than in the kindred manifestations of genius in men as lowly born, and as little favoured in point of education as he, of which biographical records furnish countless instances.¹

But in 1856, or thereabouts, a new light dawned upon certain people, to whom the ways of genius were a stumbling-block. The plays, they conceived, could not have been written by a man of lowly origin, of scanty education, a struggling actor, who had the prosaic virtue of looking carefully after his pounds, shillings, and pence, and who, moreover, was content to retire, in the fulness of his fame, with a moderate competence, to the small country town where he was born, and to leave his plays to shift for themselves with posterity, in seemingly perfect indifference whether they were printed or not printed, remembered or buried

¹ For example,—Giotto, a shepherd boy; Leonardo da Vinci, the illegitimate son of a common notary; Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker; Ben Jonson, posthumous son of a clergyman, but brought up by a bricklayer stepfather; Massinger, the son of a nobleman's servant; Burns, the son of a small farmer; Keats, an apothecary's apprentice, and the son of a livery-stable-keeper; Turner, a barber's son. The list may be extended indefinitely of men who, with all external odds against them, have triumphed far beyond those who had all these odds in their favour.

in oblivion. This virtue of modesty and carelessness of fame is so unlike the characteristic of "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease," at all times, and especially in these our days—it is so hard to be understood by people possessed by small literary ambitions, that it was natural it should be regarded by them as utterly incomprehensible. So they set themselves to look elsewhere for the true author. Shakespeare lived amid a crowd of great dramatic writers—Peele, Marlowe, Greene, Jonson, Dekker, Lyly, Marston, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, and others. But we know their works; and to ascribe "Othello," "Macbeth," "Romeo and Juliet," "Julius Cæsar," "King Lear," or the other great plays, to any of them, would have been ridiculous. Outside this circle, therefore, the search had to be made; but outside it there was no choice. Only Francis Bacon towered pre-eminently above his literary contemporaries. He, and he only, therefore, could have written the immortal dramas! And so the world was called upon to forego its old belief in the marvel that one man had written Shakespeare's plays, and to adopt a creed which implied a marvel far greater still, adding these plays as it did to the other massive and voluminous acknowledged works of Francis, Lord Verulam—in themselves enough, and more than enough,

to have absorbed the leisure and exhausted the energies of the most vigorous intellect. The great jurist, statesman, philosopher, and natural historian of his age was, according to this new doctrine, also the greatest dramatist of any age !

Who has the merit of being first in the field with this astounding discovery is not very clear. America claims to have been first in the person of Mr J. C. Hart, who, in his book 'The Romance of Yachting,' published at New York in 1848, is said to have thrown a doubt on Shakespeare's authorship. England, however, was not far behind; for in September 1856, a Mr William Henry Smith propounded similar doubts in a letter to Lord Ellesmere, sometime President of the then Shakespeare Society, which, as the copy before us bears, was modestly printed for private circulation. Mr Smith had really little else to say for his theory beyond his own personal impression that Shakespeare, by birth, education, and pursuits, was not the kind of man to write the plays; while Bacon had "all the necessary qualifications—a mind well stored by study and enlarged by travel, with a comprehensive knowledge of nature, men, and books." But if Bacon wrote the plays, why did he not say so? Mr Smith's answer to this very obvious question was

the wholly gratuitous assumption, that to have been known to write plays, or to have business relations with actors, would have been ruinous to Bacon's prospects at the Bar and in Parliament; and that, being driven into the avocation of dramatist by the necessity of eking out his income, he got Shakespeare to lend his name as a blind to the real authorship! To be a great dramatic writer, and yet to go through life without being suspected of the gifts that go to make one, would to ordinary minds seem to be as impossible as to be born with the genius of a Phidias or a Titian, and not to show it. But such a thing as the irrepressible impulse of dramatic genius to find expression in its only possible medium is not even suggested by Mr Smith as among Bacon's motives. He claims for him, indeed, "great dramatic talent," on the strength of the very flimsy masques and pageants in which Bacon is known to have had a share, and of some vague record, that "he could assume the most different characters, and speak the language proper to each with a facility which was perfectly natural"—a gift which might have produced a Charles Matthews, senior, and is in itself by no means uncommon, but which would go but a very little way towards the invention of a single scene of even the weakest of the Shakespearian plays.

Strangely enough, Mr Smith, unable apparently to foresee to what his argument led, appealed to the first folio in proof of his assumption. "Bacon," he writes, "was disgraced in 1621, and immediately set himself to collect and revise his literary works." "Immediately" is rather a strong assertion, but he no doubt very soon busied himself in literary and scientific work. He finished his 'Life of Henry VII.,' and set to work upon the completion and translation into Latin of his 'Advancement of Learning,' which appeared in October 1623 as 'De Augmentis Scientiarum.'¹ In the same year he published his 'History of the Winds' and his 'Treatise on Death and Life.' At this time, as his correspondence proves, he was busy with anything but poetry or play-books.² In March 1622 he offered to draw up a digest of the law, a project which he had long cherished, and showed the greatest anxiety to get

¹ "Modern language will, at one time or another," he wrote to Mr Tobie Matthews in June 1623, "play the bankrupt with books; and since I have lost much time with this age, I shall be glad, as God will give me leave, to recover it with posterity." Surely this is about the very last thought that would be uppermost in a mind that had conceived such plays as Shakespeare's, and was then passing, or had just passed, the first folio through the press.

² As to how Bacon was occupied in 1622, see his letter to the Bishop of Winchester, Spedding's 'Life and Works of Bacon,' vol. vii. p. 371 *et seq.*, and his letter to Father Redemptor Baranzano (*ibid.*, p. 375 *et seq.*)

back into active political life. He was, moreover, in wretched health, but at the same time intent on making progress with his 'Instauratio Magna,' with all the eagerness of a man who feared that his life would be cut short before he could accomplish the chief object of his ambition. All his occupations during 1622-23, during which the first Shakespeare folio was at press, are thus fully accounted for.

"But," continues Mr Smith, "in 1623 a folio of thirty-six plays (including some, and excluding others, which had always been reputed Shakespeare's) was published." And then he asks, in the triumphant emphasis of italics, "Who but the author himself could have exercised this power of discrimination?" As if the researches of Shakespearian students had not demonstrated to a certainty, that one of the chief defects of the folio was the absence of this very "power of discrimination," which, if duly exercised, would, besides giving us a sound text, have shown which of these plays were all Shakespeare's, and which had only been worked up into their present form, upon the slight or clumsy fabric of some inferior hand.

It is characteristic of the inexact and illogical kind of mind which had persuaded itself of the soundness of a theory based on such trivial data, that Mr Smith

accepted without verification the "remarkable words," as he calls them, to be found in Bacon's will. "My name and memory I leave to foreign nations; and to my own countrymen, *after some time be passed over,*"—language which, it may be presumed, in the light of the use which has since been made of it, was held by Mr Smith to point to some revelation of great work done by Bacon, which should be divulged to the world, "after some time had passed over." Unluckily for this theory, the words in italics do not exist in the will.¹ Nevertheless, followers in Mr Smith's wake have found them so convenient for their theory, that they repeat the misquotation, and ignore the actual words of Bacon's last will, to which reference has already been made.

Mr Smith seems never to have perceived that, if Bacon were indeed the author of the plays, and revised the first folio, or, as we should say, saw it through the press, he was guilty of inconceivable carelessness in letting it go forth with thousands of mortal blunders in the text, "the least a death" to prosody, poetry, and

¹ Bacon made two wills, one in 1621 after his impeachment, and one in 1625; but in neither do the words quoted in italics appear. The words of the will of 1621 are, "I bequeath my name to the next ages and to foreign nations."

sound printing.¹ The man, in short, who rewrote and retouched over and over even so relatively small a book as his *Essays*, was content to leave innumerable blunders in passages of the finest poetry and the choicest humour in all literature! What wonder if Shakespearian scholars, indeed the world generally, met the preposterous assumption with the words of Horace—

“*Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi*”!

Neither were they disposed to alter their opinion, when America in the same year, 1856, sent forth an apostle to preach the same new doctrine in the person of a Miss Delia Bacon, to whom years of study of Shakespeare's works had revealed in them “a continuous inner current of the philosophy of Sir Walter Raleigh, and the imperishable thoughts of Lord Bacon.” This was Miss Bacon's first opinion. It seems to have been modified when she came to grapple more closely with the subject in a portentous volume of 582 pages octavo—‘*The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded, 1857*’—in which, dropping Sir Walter Raleigh out of the discussion, she ascribed the whole honour and glory of the thirty-seven plays to her namesake. Poor

¹ The typographical errors alone have been computed to amount to nearly 20,000.

Miss Bacon died a victim to her own belief. She had pondered over it until her brain gave way, and she went to her grave possessed by her monomania. Of course she had followers. What crazy enthusiast has not? for there is a charm to a certain order of minds in running counter to the established creeds of ordinary mortals. Her mantle was not suffered to fall neglected. She was quickly succeeded by a more vigorous, but even more long-winded preacher of the same doctrine, in Judge Nathaniel Holmes of Kentucky, who spent 696 octavo pages in demonstrating that Shakespeare was utterly incapable of writing either poetry or plays, being nothing but an illiterate stroller, who could scarcely write his own name, who had no ambition but to make money, and was not very scrupulous as to how he made it; while Bacon was endowed with every quality, natural and acquired, which was requisite for the composition of the famous plays. Like Mr Smith, Judge Holmes deals largely in assumptions—such, for example, as that “it is historically known that Lord Bacon wrote plays and poems.” How “historically known” he does not say, as neither by his contemporaries nor by the collectors of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry is he credited with that faculty. He left behind him, it is true, a frost-bitten metrical version of

seven of the Psalms, written within a year or two of his death, which scarcely rises to the Sternhold and Hopkins level, published, when he was quite broken in health, in 1624; and one small poem, "The Retired Courtier," not without beauty, and a paraphrased translation from the Greek, have also been assigned to him on doubtful authority.¹

Very different from the doctrine of Mr Holmes was the view taken by Mr James Spedding, who, by his fine literary taste and deep study of Shakespeare, as well as by the intimate knowledge of Bacon's mind and modes of thought and expression gained in editing his works, was entitled, as already said, to speak upon the subject with authority. Judge Holmes had courted his judgment, and this was his answer:—

"To ask me to believe that Bacon was the author of these plays, is like asking me to believe that Lord Brougham was the author, not only of Dickens's works, but of Thackeray's and Tennyson's besides. That the author of 'Pickwick' was Charles Dickens I know upon no better authority than that upon which I know that the author of 'Hamlet' was a man called William Shakespeare. And in what respect is the one more difficult to believe than the other? . . . If

¹ In the Appendix (p. 63) will be found specimens of these Psalms, and also the only poems which have been assumed, but never proved, to have been written by Bacon.

you had fixed upon anybody else rather than Bacon as the true author—anybody of whom I know nothing—I should have been scarcely less incredulous. But if there were any reason for supposing that the real author was somebody else, I think I am in a condition to say that, whoever it was, it was not Francis Bacon. The difficulties which such a supposition would involve would be innumerable and altogether insurmountable.”¹

Such a judgment from such a man is death to all the arguments drawn by Mr Holmes and others from fanciful parallelisms or analogies between passages in Bacon's writings and passages in the Shakespeare dramas. No man in England or elsewhere was more thoroughly conversant than Mr Spedding with the works of both Bacon and Shakespeare, or more capable of bringing a sound critical judgment to bear upon the distinctive literary qualities of each. But even if this were not so, it is notorious that arguments of this sort, frequently resorted to as they are to support charges of plagiarism, are utterly deceptive. Great ideas are the common property of great minds, especially if, being contemporaries, the men who clothe them in words are living in the same general atmosphere of thought and daily using the same vocabulary. How, indeed, should

¹ 'Authorship of Shakespeare,' by N. Holmes, ed. 1886, vol. ii., App., pp. 613, 617.

it be otherwise? The same incidents, the same phenomena, the same conditions of social development, the same human characteristics, are daily and hourly furnishing to them the same stimulus to their imagination, the same materials for thought. Literary history does undoubtedly present some remarkable instances of authors expressing the same feeling or the same thought in closely analogous language. But we venture to say that every competent judge who will so "slander his leisure" as to wade through the so-called parallelisms cited by Miss Bacon, Mr Holmes, Mr Smith, Mrs Pott, and other victims of the Baconian delusion, will come to the conclusion that they are mostly far-fetched and not unfrequently overstrained to the point of absurdity. It would be quite as reasonable to maintain on such evidence that Bacon borrowed from Shakespeare, as that Shakespeare and Bacon were one.

It is obviously essential for the Baconians to set out with the assumption that Shakespeare was an illiterate boor. They say as much as that he was so from the first and remained so to the last, and say it in language extravagant and coarse in proportion to the utter recklessness of assumption from which it springs. He was a butcher's boy, they tell us; he could only have been some two years at school; he was a sordid money-

lender; and so completely had his nature become, "like the dyer's hand, subdued to what it [had once] worked in," that when he returned, at near fifty, to Stratford, he resumed with delight the trade of butcher, wool-stapler, and usurer. The ascertained facts of Shakespeare's life are few. Still some facts there are which cannot be disputed, and which give the lie to this scandalous assumption.

Shakespeare came of a good stock on both father and mother's side. They held a good position in Stratford, and if at a later period they became poor, they were undoubtedly in easy circumstances during the boyhood of Shakespeare. There was in Stratford an excellent grammar-school, to which they were certain to have sent their son, when he reached the age, about six, at which boys were usually entered there. What the course of study pursued at this and similar schools was is well known, and was pointed out in an admirable series of papers by the late Professor Spencer Baynes on "What Shakespeare learnt at School" in 'Fraser's Magazine' in 1879-80.¹ It was very much the same as that of the Edinburgh High School in the days of our youth, and brought a boy up, by the time he

¹ The subject was again treated by Mr Baynes in his masterly paper on Shakespeare in the last edition of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

reached the age of twelve, to the reading of such writers as Ovid, Cicero, and Virgil in Latin, and the New Testament and some of the orators and tragedians in Greek. To send their children to the school was within the means of all but the poorest, which John Shakespeare and Mary Arden unquestionably were not; and all that is known of them justifies the conclusion that it is inconceivable they should have allowed their son to want any advantage common to boys of his class. Every presumption is in favour of the view that they would not be behind their neighbours in a matter of this sort. John Shakespeare, a leading burgess, who had held high office in the local government of Stratford, would never have exposed himself to the reproach of his fellow-townsmen for neglecting the education of his children. Desperate, indeed, are the straits to which the Baconian theorists are driven, when, without a particle of evidence, they deny to Shakespeare the advantages within the reach of the sons of the humblest householder in Stratford.

The next clearly ascertained fact which bears upon this part of the question is the publication of the "Venus and Adonis," when Shakespeare was in his twenty-ninth year. Only in the previous year does he come clearly into notice as a rising dramatist

and poet, there being, as admitted by his best biographer, Mr Halliwell-Phillips,¹ nothing known of his history between his twenty-third and twenty-eighth year, — an interval that Mr Halliwell-Phillips very reasonably considers “must have been the chief period of Shakespeare’s literary education,” which, when he left Stratford, could not, he thinks, have been otherwise than imperfect.

Imperfect truly it might be, as indeed, in a certain sense, of what education can it be said that it is not imperfect? But who can doubt that between the age of fourteen, when Shakespeare’s schooling probably came to an end, and the time he went to London, he was imbibing stores of observation and knowledge at every pore, not from books only, but from the men and women round him, from the sights and sounds of a

¹ Let us here acknowledge the debt that all students of Shakespeare owe to Mr J. O. Halliwell-Phillips for the invaluable information which he has brought together in the two volumes of his ‘*Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*,’ of which the sixth edition, published by Messrs Longmans in 1886, contains every ascertained fact concerning Shakespeare, his family, fortune, and pursuits. The book is a model of painstaking inquiry, and contains no conclusions that are not based upon judicial proof. We are not aware whether Mr Halliwell-Phillips has published his views upon the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy; but that he regards the proposition that Bacon wrote the plays, and the arguments on which it is founded, as “lunacy,” we have direct means of knowing.

country life, and from the impulses that come to a thoughtful and poetic mind in the solitude of its quiet hours. Then it was, no doubt, that he grew familiar with the woods, the brooks, the streams, the flowers, the legends, the quaint local phrases, the songs, the oddities of character, the sense of maidenly and matronly charm, the visions of higher and better things, that enrich the dreams of young imagination, and which were afterwards to fill his pages with a boundless wealth of suggestion and of illustration. Then, too, he would be learning to apply this knowledge to what he had gathered from his favourite books. This would be the time, in short, when he was "making himself," as it was said of Sir Walter Scott that he did, in the days before the Wizard of the North revealed his magic to the world in the poems and the novels which after middle age he poured out in marvellous profusion.

Such, we know, was the view taken by Professor Baynes, whose experience had satisfied him how true it is, that it is not at school but by his own self-imposed studies afterwards that a man is educated, and who so far differs from Mr Halliwell-Phillips as to maintain, that before Shakespeare left Stratford he had probably written the "Venus and Adonis," quoting in

support of his view the language of the dedication to the Earl of Southampton, in which Shakespeare speaks of it as "the first heir of his invention." It might be so, for Shakespeare was twenty-one when he was forced to leave Stratford; and, weighted although the "Venus and Adonis" is with thought as well as passion, the genius which produced the dramas might even at that early age have conceived and written it. But however this may be, the poem shows a knowledge of what Ovid had written upon the same theme, in a poem of which there existed at that time no English translation, which could not have been accidental, any more than the language in which that knowledge was expressed could have been within the command of an uneducated man. Moreover, that Shakespeare knew Latin, when or however acquired matters little, is conclusively proved by his placing as motto upon the title-page the following lines from Ovid's *Elegies*, the very selection of which showed that, at this early date, he set the calling of a poet above all ordinary objects of ambition:—

"Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua."

May it not also be fairly argued, from the very selec-

tion of the subject, as well as from the manner in which it is treated, that the youthful poet's mind had already caught the classical tone, which he could only have done through a considerable familiarity with some at least of the Latin writers? When we remember what Keats was able to do in his "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and his "Hyperion," despite his "small Latin and less Greek," it is no wonder if Shakespeare turned his limited knowledge of these languages to the excellent account he did, and satisfied the scholarly men of his time that he was well entitled to choose for "the first heir of his invention" the motto, which it would have been impertinence in a writer to select who had not a fair knowledge of the language in which it was written.

That they were satisfied of this, is tolerably evident, for the success of the poem was immediate. Edition followed edition, and by 1602 five had been printed. In 1594 the "Lucrece," also dedicated to Lord Southampton, appeared, and ran into several editions. This poem, like the "Venus and Adonis," bears internal proofs of familiarity with what had been written by Ovid on the same theme. Unless, therefore, it can be shown that Shakespeare, who claimed the authorship on the title-pages, did not write either poem, the charge of want of education must fall to the ground. But

how can this be shown in the face of the fact that his was by this time a familiar name among literary men in London, some of whom would have been glad enough to expose so glaring an imposture, while by several of them his merits were recognised in such epithets as "honey-tongued Shakespeare" (John Weever, 1595), "mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare" (Francis Meres, 1598); and while "his sugared sonnets," then unpublished, but which had probably for many years been "circulating among his private friends," were acknowledged by Meres as adding fresh lustre to a name that had already been coupled with many popular plays—"Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice," "King John," and "Romeo and Juliet" among the number?¹

Now it is to be borne in mind that Meres, from

¹ "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare. Witness his 'Venus and Adonis'; his 'Lucrece'; his sugared sonnets among his private friends, &c. As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. . . . As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus's tongue if they would speak Latin, so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English."—(Meres's 'Palladis Tamia.')

Meres's "fine filed phrase" reminds us of Ben Jonson, when he speaks of Shakespeare's "well turned and true filed lines."

whose "Palladis Tamia" we quote, was familiar not only with what was being done in contemporary literature, but also with many of the authors of the day. Not otherwise could he have gained his intimate knowledge of several works, which had not been published when he wrote, as well as of some which were never published at all. Many of the living poets of repute, it is obvious, were personally known to him, and about those who were not so known he was just the man to seek out every piece of information within his reach. Again and again he recurs to the name of Shakespeare in a strain which proves how deep was the interest he took both in the poet and his works. Possibly he was a personal friend, but at least he had no doubt, from what he knew and heard, that William Shakespeare the actor was the author of the plays as well as of the poems with which his name was connected.

That Shakespeare's success as a furbisher-up of plays, which wanted the magic of his hand to turn their dross to gold, had, even before 1593, excited the jealousy of at least one rival dramatist, is shown by the language of Robert Greene in his "Groat's Worth of Wit, bought with a Million of Repentance." Greene died in 1592, leaving this tract behind him in manuscript. In it the

brilliant and at one time popular dramatist, sinking in abject poverty into the grave, had poured out the bitterness of his heart at seeing the players making a rich harvest by acting pieces, while the authors of them, like himself, were in poverty. His grudge against Shakespeare was apparently intensified by the fact, that the young man from Stratford not only acted in plays, but wrote them, or, at least, had worked them up for the stage.

“There is an upstart Crow,” he writes, “beautified with our feathers” (alluding apparently to plays originally written by Greene and Marlowe, of which Shakespeare had somehow or other made use), “that with his *Tyger’s heart wrapt in a player’s hide*” (a parody of “Oh, Tyger’s heart wrapt in a woman’s hide”—Shakespeare’s ‘Henry VI,’ part iii., act 1 sc. 4) “supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shakescene in a countrie.”

A few months after Greene’s death, in the same year, 1592, the tract was published by his friend Henry Chettle. It had given great offence to the “play-makers” attacked in it; and as Greene could not be attacked in return, Chettle, as sponsor for his tract, found himself in the awkward position of having to

bear the responsibility for Greene's invective. Marlowe, to all appearance, and Shakespeare certainly, considered themselves especially wronged; and to the latter Chettle felt bound to make an apology, in an "Address to the Gentlemen Readers," published in December 1592, along with his "Kind-Hart's Dreame."

"With neither of them that take offence," he writes, "was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I never be" (a very natural resolution, considering what a Bohemian Marlowe was). "The other, whome at that time I did not so much spare as since I wish I had, for that as I have moderated the heate of living writers, and might have used my owne discretion (especially in such a case), the Author being dead, that I did not I am as sorry as if the originall fault had been my fault, because myselfe have seene his demeanour no lesse civill than he excellent in the quality he professes. *Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.*"

It is therefore clear beyond all question, that so early as 1592 Shakespeare had made a name for himself both as actor and as author, "excellent in the quality he professed," viz., acting, and noted for "facetious grace," or as we should now write, "graceful facility," in writing. The latter gift must have made him a most valu-

able member of the theatrical company to which he belonged, and its possession was what, it is only reasonable to suppose, procured for him his rapid advancement in the theatre. To polish up indifferent dialogue, to write in effective speeches for his brother actors, to recast inartistic plots, was work that must have been constantly wanted in the theatre; and it is obviously work which was frequently done by Shakespeare in those early days. It was, moreover, a kind of work that must often have been wanted in a hurry. It would never have been intrusted to him unless his qualifications for it had been obvious. Would any man have dared to undertake such work who had to trust to another man to do it for him? And if he did undertake it, must not his brother actors have quickly found out whether the work was his own or not? For much of it must have had to be done under their own eye, possibly within the theatre itself, conceived upon the impulse of that quickness of invention, and executed with that fluent facility, which a host of concurrent testimony shows that his brother poets and actors ascribed to Shakespeare as a distinguishing characteristic. Who can justly doubt that Webster, in the preface to his "Victoria Corombona" (1612), was only speaking of what was as apparent to all these as it was

to Webster himself, when he alluded to "the right happy and copious industry of Mr Shakespéare" ?

And yet the Baconians ask us to believe that not any of the plays of which he was the recognised author could have been written by him ! Has it ever occurred to them to reflect how inevitably a man reveals the character and tendencies of his mind in his easy talk with the friends who know him well, and whom he trusts ? Sir Walter Scott, anxious though he was to keep secret even from his intimates the fact that he wrote the Waverley Novels, could not, as we know, help betraying it to such of them as were capable of drawing a conclusion from the copious anecdotes and distinctive humour with which his familiar conversation overflowed. Can it be supposed, then, if Shakespéare were the uncultured boor the Baconians assume him to have been, that he would not have been found out by his talk ? Even in Goldsmith's case, Garrick's well-known line—

“ He wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll,”—

had in it more of playful sarcasm than of truth ; for are there not upon record many sayings of his which were quite up to the level of the current talk of the Literary Club ? But whatever his talk, Goldsmith at

any rate was known by his friends to "write like an angel"; and if Shakespeare could not write what he professed that he wrote, it is as certain as any deduction from probabilities can be, that he could not have made his way as he did among the poets and dramatists of the day. Have the Baconians ever tried to picture to themselves what was the position of Shakespeare the actor and accepted dramatic writer in a theatre of those days? By necessity he was in daily communion with some of the sharpest and finest intellects of the time. In the theatre itself were men like Burbage, Armin, Taylor, Lowine, Kempe, all well qualified to take the measure of his capacity; while his profession as an actor, as well as his pretensions as a writer of poetry and drama, must have brought him into close contact, both at the theatre and in their convivial gatherings, with men like Marlowe, Dekker, Chapman, Middleton, Heywood, Drayton, and Ben Jonson. We might as soon believe that a man who pretended that he had written 'Vanity Fair' or 'Esmond,' but had not written them, could have escaped detection in the society of Thackeray's friends, Charles Buller, Tennyson, Venables, or James Spedding, as that Shakespeare, without having written them, could have passed himself off as the author of even "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" or "Love's Labour's Lost"—we

purposely name two of his earliest and weakest plays, —or that any of the brilliant circle of Elizabethan poets would have given credit for ten minutes to such a man as the Baconians picture Shakespeare to have been for the capacity to construct one scene, or to compose ten consecutive lines of the blank verse—the exquisite blank verse—which is to be found in those plays.

Then, as the years flowed on, and the young poet of the “Venus and Adonis” and the “Lucrece,” who had begun dramatic authorship by patching up old and in-artistic plays well known to the public, put in his claim to the nobler dramas which made him, in Ben Jonson’s words, “the wonder of our stage,” is it to be supposed that such rival writers as we have named could have failed to see that it was the actor Shakespeare, their chum and intimate companion, with all his marvellously comprehensive grasp of character, his play of ebullient humour, his unbounded exuberance of fancy and fertility of exquisite expression, and none but he, whose genius, and whose genius alone, breathed throughout the series of dramas which, after 1592, were given to the stage with a prodigality almost startling ?

By 1598, as we learn from Meres’s ‘*Tamias*,’ already cited, Shakespeare had established his claim to predominating excellence in both tragedy and comedy. “For

comedy, witness," says Meres, "his 'Gentlemen of Verona,' his (Comedy of) 'Errors,' his 'Love's Labour Lost,' his 'Love's Labour Wonne' (Much Ado), his 'Midsummer's Night Dream,' and his 'Merchant of Venice'; for tragedy, his 'Richard II.,' 'Richard III.,' 'Henry IV.,' 'King John,' 'Titus Andronicus,' and his 'Romeo and Juliet.'" Within the ensuing twelve years he had added to that noble list the other great plays which will at once leap to every reader's memory. If he had lived for fame, he might well think that by this time he had lived enough for it. But what Florio said of him was probably true, "that he loved better to be a poet than to be called one." Most probably, too, he had warnings within himself that the great fountain of thought, imagination, and feeling, which had hitherto flowed so copiously, was no longer to be relied on. The wine of his poetic life had been drunk, and he was not the man to wrong the public or his own reputation by drawing upon the lees. *Tempus abire tibi est* was the warning that was like enough to have come to a man so wise, as it does evermore come to all thoughtful men. He had made for himself what a man in whom the elements were so temperately mingled was sure to regard as a sufficient fortune; and to go back to his boyhood's home and breathe again the free air of the

old familiar haunts, and share in the simple duties of a well-to-do citizen among the ageing friends of his early youth, was to such a nature a welcome release from the anxieties and the conflicts of the crowded and struggling and feverish life which had been his since he started to seek his fortune in London. He had had enough of the toil and turmoil there, and, like his own Prospero, was glad

“Thence to retire him to his Milan, where
Every third thought should be his grave.”

To London he obviously went after this upon occasion,—partly on business, as we know; partly, it may be presumed, to enjoy the stimulating society of his old actor and literary friends. There he would renew the wit-combats with Ben Jonson, of which Thomas Fuller must have heard from living witnesses of them,—for he could not have been present at them in person,—when he wrote:—

“Which two I behold like a great Spanish Galleon and an English Man-of-War; Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English Man-of-War, lesser in bulk but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.”

Milton, also, though too young to have known Shakespeare, could scarcely fail to have spoken with many who had seen and talked with him. Not else would he have written of him as "my Shakespeare," or as "sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child." And now this well authenticated repute of our poet in the circle where he was best known is to be set aside, and we are asked to believe, with Miss Delia Bacon and her followers, that Ben Jonson, despite the frequent collision of their wits, was unable to discover, what is so palpable to them, that Shakespeare was a liar who throws Mendez Pinto into the shade, and a literary impostor such as the world has never dreamt of!

So far was Jonson from having a doubt as to the works ascribed to Shakespeare being truly his, that in his 'Timber; or, Discoveries upon Men and Matters,' written long after Shakespeare was in his grave, he described him in terms that confirm Fuller's estimate in a remarkable degree:—

"He was (indeed) honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantsie; brave notions and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stop'd: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his power—would the rule of it had been so too. . . . But he redeem'd

his [literary] vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be prayed than to be pardoned."

Who does not see, from this, the Shakespeare, not of the dramas merely but of social intercourse—with his flashes, not of merriment only, but also of pathos and of subtle thought, his flow of anecdote and whim playing like summer lightning amid the general talk of the room, and sometimes provoking the ponderous and irritable Jonson by throwing his sententious and learned talk into the shade? Brilliant talk would seem to have come to Shakespeare as easily as brilliant writing, and he would thus eclipse Jonson in society as he eclipsed him even when dealing with classical themes upon the stage. But the genial player and poet, to whom all concurred in giving the epithet of "gentle," was too good a fellow to deal in the wit that wounds, to presume on his personal popularity, or to view the efforts of a rival author with jealousy. Jonson had good cause to think well of him, for he had not in his early days hesitated to attack Shakespeare in very abusive terms;¹ and yet it was to Shakespeare's active intervention that he owed the production on the stage, by the Lord Chamberlain's company, of which Shakespeare was a member, of the fine play of

¹ See Appendix, p. 68.

“Every Man in his Humour,” which Jonson, then in needy circumstances, had failed to get them to accept. This, and many other acts of good-fellowship, as well as the numberless hours which the talk and fine spirits of his friend had made memorable, were doubtless in Jonson’s mind, when, in a previous passage of the ‘Memorandum’ just quoted, he said of him, remembering how kind, how generous, how free from self-assertion he had been,—“I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatrie as much as any.” And this is the man we are now to be told was the poor coarse-grained creature to which the Baconians would reduce him !

In support of their theory they rest upon the circumstance that, after Shakespeare settled about 1612 in Stratford, no more plays appeared with his name. If there had been anything extraordinary in that circumstance, surely Ben Jonson and his other author friends would have been struck by it. We know that down to the last he was in intimate contact with Jonson and Michael Drayton, who, according to a fairly authenticated tradition, visited him at Stratford about a month before his death. But neither Jonson nor Drayton, nor, what is more material, his player partners and intimates, hint anywhere the slightest surprise that he

ceased, while still in the vigour of his years, to furnish the stage with fresh sources of attraction. Why he so ceased no one can tell, any more than we can tell with certainty why he did not himself see his works through the press. He may very well have intended to do this, so soon as they could be printed without injury to the interests of the theatres to which he had sold them, and to which it was important that they should not be made available to rival theatres, as by publication they would have been.

It must always be remembered, too, that Shakespeare died of a sudden and brief illness, which probably cut short many other projects besides that of having his dramas printed in an authentic form. This view is countenanced by the language of Heminges and Condell in their dedication of the first folio to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, in which they speak of Shakespeare with regret as "not having the fate common with some, to be executor to his owne writings." To them it seems clear enough that he would have brought them out himself, had he lived. "We," they say, "have but collected them, and done an office to the dead to procure his orphanes guardians, *without ambition either of selfe-profit or fame, onely to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare,*

by humble offer of his playes to your most noble patronage." The words of their preface to the volume are even more significant:—

"It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthy to have bene wished, that the author himselfe had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings; but since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his friends the office of their care and pains to have collected and publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diverse stolne and surreptitious copies, maim'd and deform'd by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors that expos'd them; even those are now offer'd to your view cur'd and perfect of their limbes, and all the rest absolute in their numbers as he conceiv'd them; *who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together; and what he thought he uttered with that easinesse, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.*"

Now who are the men who bear this testimony to the fact that Shakespeare's "mind and hand went together," and that composition was to him so easy, that his manuscripts—like Sir Walter Scott's, George Eliot's, or Thackeray's, all great masters of style—were almost without a blot? They were men who had been associated with him for years as brother actors,—men who

must have often heard discussed in his presence what plots were to be selected for new plays, and how they were to be treated,—men who must have again and again marked, with delighted surprise, how he had transformed into something of which his fellows had never dreamed the tales on which such plays as “The Merchant of Venice,” “Cymbeline,” “The Winter’s Tale,” and “As You Like It” were founded,—men who had known him from time to time write in scenes and speeches, sometimes of his own accord, but sometimes as likely at the suggestion of his brother actors, or at a rehearsal in their very presence cut and carve upon a passage to give it more point and finish. They at least knew his autograph, and had seen his “papers.” If he could not even write his own name respectably, as the Baconians contend, they must have known the fact, and would not have ventured to speak of his “papers,” when so many people were alive, who, if the Baconians are right, could have shown up the imposture. Remember, too, that this very volume was dedicated to two noblemen of high culture, the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Montgomery, who knew Shakespeare personally, and, in the language of the Dedication, had treated both his plays “and their author living” with much favour. Were such men likely to have been the victims of a delusion?

It in no way militates against the weight of this argument, that much of the first folio was a reprint merely of some of the plays which had already been printed in quarto. Heminges and Condell might not have intended by what they wrote to suggest that the book was entirely printed from his "papers." Their language may fairly be read merely as a record of the fact that the MSS. of his plays, as originally delivered by him to his "fellows" at the theatre, were not disfigured by the erasures and interlineations with which they were familiar in the MSS. of other dramatic writers.

Ben Jonson, it is true, thought this absence of blots no virtue in his friend. The players, he says, often mentioned it in Shakespeare's honour. "My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. . . . Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter; as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him,—*Cæsar, thou dost me wrong*; he reply'd, —*Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause*; and such like, which were ridiculous." There is a good deal to be said for the sentences excepted to by Jonson (which, by the way, are not in the first folio, nor indeed printed anywhere, though they may very possibly have been in Shakespeare's original MS.); but what Jonson writes is

of importance as showing that the cleanness and freedom from correction of Shakespeare's MSS. were notorious in the theatres to which he had belonged.

Jonson's deliberate thought as to how Shakespeare worked, and that art as well as natural gifts went to the composition of his works, is very clearly stated in the splendid eulogy by him prefixed to the first folio:—

“The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please,
 But antiquated and deserted lye,
 As they were not of Nature's family.
 Yet must I not give Nature all ; thy art,
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part ;
 For though the poet's matter Nature be,
 His art doth give the fashion ! and that he,
 Who casts to write a living line must sweat,
 Such as thine are, and strike the second heat
 Upon the Muses anvil ; turne the same
 And himselfe with it, that he thinkes to frame,
 Or for the laurell he may gaine a scorne,
 For a good poet's made as well as borne.
 AND SUCH WERT THOU !”

Jonson was not the man to write thus without having a basis of fact to go upon. What more natural than that Shakespeare and he should have often talked over passages in their plays, which one or the other thought might be improved ? It may be, that among these pas-

sages were those very sentences in "Julius Cæsar" to which we have seen that Jonson took exception ; for in the first folio ("Julius Cæsar," Act iii. sc. 1) what we read is—

" Know, Cæsar doth not wrong ; nor without cause
Will he be satisfied ;"

—just such a correction as the Shakespeare described by Heminges and Condell would be likely to make upon the spur of the moment, if his attention had been called to the seeming paradox of the words which Jonson says he wrote.

Jonson had probably in his mind's eye many incidents of a similar nature, which satisfied him that all the seeming artlessness of his friend—the "art without art, unparalleled as yet," as the scholarly Leonard Digges called it—was nothing more nor less than that highest triumph of art, that perfection of simplicity and finish, by which art is never suggested. No unprejudiced mind can read what Jonson has written of Shakespeare without having the conviction forced upon him, that Jonson had seen in the man himself living and unmistakeable proofs, that in him was the genius from which sprang both the poetry and the plays which were identified with his name. It is not of the plays alone, but

of the man also as he knew him, that Jonson was thinking, when he wrote the lines opposite the Droeshout portrait in the first folio:—

“ Oh, could he [Droeshout] but have drawne his wit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face, the print would then surpasse
All that was ever writ in brasse.”

And also in the lines—“ To the memory of my beloved the author, Mr William Shakespeare, *and what he hath left us,*” apostrophising him as—

“ Soul of the age !
“ The applause ! delight ! the wonder of our stage !”

And again—

“ If I thought my judgement were of yeeres,”
—that is, that my opinion was to be prized by posterity—

“ I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
And tell how far thou didst our Lily outshine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe’s mighty line.
And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greeke,”

(How does this comport with the Baconians’ theory of the illiterate butcher’s boy ?)

“ From thence to honour thee I would not seeke
For names, but call forth thund’ring Æschilus,
Euripedes, and Sophocles to us,

Paccyvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
 To life again, to hear thy buskin tread
 And shake a stage ; or, when thy sockes were on,
 Leave thee alone, for the comparison
 Of all that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome
 Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
 Triumph, my Britaine ! thou hast one to showe,
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
 He was not of an age, but for all time !”

There spoke out the heart of brave old Ben, remembering how meekly the man with whose friendship he had been blest had borne his honours, and had never made him feel that all Jonson’s “slow endeavouring art,” working even upon classic ground, could not bring him abreast in popularity with the heaven-gifted man who had “small Latin and less Greek.” For so it was in Ben Jonson’s own time, as we learn from the lines of Leonard Digges, who died in 1635 at the University of Oxford, where he led a scholar’s life, when he says,—

“So have I seene, when Cæsar would appeare,
 And on the stage at half-sworde parley were
 Brutus and Cassius, oh, how the audience
 Were ravish’d ! With what wonder they went thence,
 When some new day they would not brook a line
 Of tedious (though well-labour’d) Catiline ;
 Sejanus, too, was irksome ; they prized more
 Honest Iago or the jealous Moore ;

And though the Fox and subtell Alchemist,
Long intermitted, could not quite be missed ;
Though these have shamed all th' ancients, and might raise
Their author's merit with a crowne of bays ;
Yet these sometimes, even at a friend's desire,
Acted, have scarce defray'd the seacoale fire
And doore-keepers ; when, let but Falstaffe come,
Hal, Poins, the rest,—you scarce shall have a roome,
All is so pester'd ; let but Beatrice
And Benedick be seene, loe, in a trice
The cockpit, galleries, boxes, all are full."

Few men like the man who eclipses them in a race, where they think they are especially strong,—authors least of all. But "gentle" Shakespeare subdued the envy even of the rough and somewhat jealous Ben, who in the days when Shakespeare was a stranger to him, had attacked him with a rancour which only one so "gentle" as Shakespeare would have forgotten. But had Ben for a moment seen reason to surmise that the man who had so thoroughly distanced him and all his compeers in the arena of both tragedy and comedy was sailing under false colours, that he was "an upstart crow" wearing feathers not his own, it would not have been left for the Smiths, Bacons, Holmes, and Donnellys of the nineteenth century to throw discredit upon the great name which from 1616 has been held in reverence by all cultivated men.

We have purposely refrained from entering upon any of the arguments from the internal evidence of the works of Shakespeare and Bacon, that Bacon did not and could not have written the marvellous series of plays of which until 1856 the authorship was undisputed. This would open a field far too wide for discussion. Life is short, and a conflict of æsthetic judgments in such matters is, by its very nature, interminable. Without, however, approaching the question from the side of the plays, it may be worth while to glance briefly at the evidence to be found in the Sonnets, that they at least were not from the same hand as penned the famous Essays. That the best of what are usually printed as Shakespeare's sonnets were acknowledged by people who knew him to be his genuine work, admits of no doubt. It was a time when sonnets were in high favour with lovers of poetry, and the writers of them were numerous. We learn from other examples that sonnets, whose authors were well known, used to circulate freely in society, and that, as in Shakespeare's case, having got a reputation, they were put into print by adventurous publishers without the privacy of their authors.¹ Shakespeare's efforts in this

¹ Thus W. Percy, in the "Address to the Reader" published in 1594 with his 'Sonnets to the Fairest Cœlia,' writes, "Whereas I was fully

department of poetry were, as we learn from Meres, well known to be his by his "friends," among whom they had been circulating for years before they were printed by G. Eld for T[homas] T[horpe] in 1609; and none of the Baconians, so far as we are aware, have ever ventured seriously to dispute the fact. To these sonnets, therefore, we may look with confidence as indicating the character of Shakespeare's mind and the distinctive qualities of his literary style,—the very same qualities, be it said in passing, as are conspicuous in the plays. If this be so, then they may be fairly contrasted with what we see of the same qualities in Bacon's more familiar compositions, and so help towards a judgment whether or not they sprang from the same mind.

Look, then, at Bacon's conception of womanhood as we find it in his essays. Is there in it a trace of romance, of the chivalrous reverence, of the passionate aspiration which inevitably find their way into the writings of every poetically-minded man where woman is the theme, and of which the Shakespeare sonnets are full? On the contrary, Bacon's view of woman is essentially commonplace. To him she is, when at her determined to have concealed my sonnets as things privy to myself, yet, of courtesy, having lent them to some, they were secretly committed to the press, and almost finished, before it came to my knowledge."

best, merely the good loyal housewife, the dutiful minister to the desires, the comforts, and the wants of the other sex. For beauty, no doubt, he had some feeling, and spoke well of its "best part" as that "which a picture cannot express"; and in the same essay (that "Of Beauty"), he shows himself not insensible to the charm of grace in motion and demeanour. But the beauty which was mainly present to his mind was that *Beauté du Diable* which fascinates the senses but leaves the heart and the imagination untouched,—the beauty that, to use his own words, "is as summer fruits, and cannot last." No hint shall we anywhere discover of the feeling which finds voice in Shakespeare's 104th Sonnet,—

"To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were, when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems thy beauty still!"

And yet Bacon was not thirty-five years old when his essay "Of Beauty" was published,—a time of life when the enthusiasm of love is perhaps strongest in a man capable of the passion. Keeping this fact in view, surely, if he were the poet we are now asked to believe him to have been, one might expect to find in his essay "Of Love," published at the same time, some of that

glow, some of that fine madness, which has always been found to "possess the poet's brain" under the influence of this theme. But what is it that we do find? "The stage," he says, "is more beholden to Love than the Life of Man." But if this be true of the stage, why is it true? Assuredly, because it is the passion that, for good or evil, more than any other pervades life.

"It is the very centre of the earth,
Drawing all things to it;"¹—

and therefore naturally holds a prominent place upon the stage, whose duty it is "to hold the mirror up to nature." As the essay proceeds, it becomes plain that Bacon had no higher conception of love than as an evanescent material passion. It is, he says, "a weak passion," out of which "great spirits keep,"—a thing that is to be shunned, for it finds its way into "a heart well fortified, if watch be not kept." The devout and grateful humility of a noble love is to him no more than "kneeling before a little idol,"—a making of one's self "subject, though not of the mouth (as beasts are) yet of the eye, which was given for higher purposes,"—a something which men should "sever wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life."

¹ "Troilus and Cressida," Act iv. sc. 2.

Now contrast this with the strain of sentiment which inspires countless passages of the Sonnets, in which hearts without number have found, and even in these unromantic days evermore find delight, as expressing the deepest, the purest, and most cherished feelings of their lives. Then ask if the man who wrote of love as Bacon wrote could have addressed to his mistress such lines as—

“ My spirit is thine, the better part of me ! ”¹

“ So you are to my thoughts as food to life ; ”²

or the Sonnet (the 29th) beginning—

“ When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes ; ”

or that (the 71st) beginning—

“ No longer mourn for me when I am dead ; ”

with its lines of infinite pathos and beauty—

“ For I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking of me then should make you woe.”

Above all, could Bacon have penned that priceless creed of all true lovers (the 116th Sonnet), beginning—

“ Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments,”

and ending—

¹ Sonnet 74.

² Sonnet 75.

“ Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come ;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But hears it out even to the edge of doom,” &c.

From all we know either of Bacon’s life or writings, this and the multitude of similar passages which might be quoted would have come within his censure, as but “the speaking in a perpetual hyperbole, comely in nothing but in love.” But, indeed, how was it possible that a man should write worthily of woman, or of that love which is a love for evermore, who in his essay “Of Marriage and Single Life” could find nothing higher to say of wives than that they “are young men’s mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men’s nurses” ? Idle to say, we are not to judge of a man’s prose by his poetry. Had Bacon been indeed a poet, the feeling of exquisite tenderness, of profound reverence for what is best in woman, which pervades the Sonnets, must perforce have found its way into his writings somewhere. Yet they will be ransacked in vain for any indication of it.¹

But it were idle to pursue the topic further ; still more idle to bring these and other writings of Bacon to the test of a comparison with the plays, and to

¹ See note, “A Baconian on Shakespeare’s Women,” Appendix, p. 69.

contrast his grave, square-cut, antithetical, ponderous, unemotional style, and the absence in them of everything like dramatic imagination and humour, with the exuberance of poetical imagery and illustration, the variety of rhythmical cadence, the exquisitely modulated flow of aptly balanced diction, not to speak of the creative dramatic power, and the buoyant play of irrepressible humour and wit, which brighten even the slightest of the Shakespearian plays. This would demand an essay of itself, which no one competent to write it will deem otherwise than superfluous, until better reason is shown than has yet been shown for setting up Bacon's claim to the imagination which "bodies forth the forms of things unseen," and which would alone have enabled him to conceive and place living before us such beings as Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Jack Falstaff, Imogen, Hermione, Rosalind, and all the other glorious figures of that marvellous gallery.

Our task is of a much humbler kind. We have purposely confined ourselves to a naked statement of facts as to the man Shakespeare, based upon contemporary testimony, and argued from upon the principles which guide the judgment of practical men in all matters, where they have only contemporary evidence from

which to draw their conclusions. On what better evidence than we have cited in regard to Shakespeare, do we believe that Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote the plays coupled with their names, that Horace wrote his Odes, or Tacitus his Germania? From the belief of three centuries the world is not to be shaken by the fine-spun theories of men who, judging by all they write, know nothing of the mysterious ways in which genius works, and who conceive that fine poetry, and a sweep of thought, of invention, and of knowledge of the human heart, vast beyond their limited conceptions, can only issue from the brain of a man trained in the learning of the schools and moving in high society. Something more than conjecture, something more than unwarrantable assumption, must be produced to entitle them even to a hearing, however slight, at this time of day.

But now we are told that the true authorship of the pseudo-Shakespearian works has been established by a great American discoverer, Mr Ignatius Donnelly, a lawyer, ex-member of Congress, and ex-senator of Minnesota, who conceives that he has solved the problem in a work bearing the name of 'The Great Cryptogram: Francis Bacon's Cipher in the so-called Shakespeare Plays.' As if the man who had written

the thirty-six plays of the first folio would have left to the chance of a cryptogram being deciphered three centuries after his death the discovery of the fact that he had written them !

We gather from his book that Mr Donnelly, lawyer though he be, and by his profession bound to have some regard to the laws of evidence, started upon his investigations with the fixed idea that Shakespeare's name was simply a mask for Bacon. He does not commend himself to much consideration when we find that he adopts as gospel, and with a vehemence that wholly discredits his judgment, all the preposterous nonsense of previous Baconians about Shakespeare having had no education, of his having been a tavern-haunter and habitual poacher, a mere money-grubbing usurer, who could not spell his own name, and who was glad to get back to Stratford to his old occupation of butcher and wool-stapler, having had his purse previously well lined by Bacon for having lent the use of his name to a scandalous fraud for some twenty odd years. Neither does he prepossess us in his favour,—although of his sincerity we entertain no doubt,—when he tells us that he was put upon the trail of his vaunted discovery by coming across an elaborate cipher of Bacon's, quoted in 'Every

Boy's Book.' "Then," he says, "followed like a flash this thought, could Bacon have put a cipher in his plays?" On further inquiry, he found, what is very well known, that Bacon had a fancy for cryptographic systems which "elude and exclude the decipherers." Upon this hint Mr Donnelly set to work to find out a cipher in the first folio edition of the plays that was to confirm his preconceived theory, and, of course, he found it to his own satisfaction. If, however, any judgment may be formed as to the results of his hunt from the specimens he has published, a more thorough illustration can scarcely be conceived of the process known as elucidating the *obscurum* by the *obscurius*. There will no doubt be found persons, blessed or cursed, as it may be, with such superabundance of time upon their hands, and with a passion for such a literary wild-goose chase as Mr Donnelly invites them to, that they will follow him through arbitrary mazes of figures and calculations which would drive any ordinary brain mad, and which leads up to conclusions no less fantastic.

On such a chase, however, we do not conceive that Mr Donnelly has a right to ask any one to enter until he can first establish from credible evidence the following propositions: (1) That Bacon did in some clear and unmistakable way set up in his life a claim to the

work which has hitherto been assigned to Shakespeare ; (2) That he was privy to the publication of the first folio ; (3) That he had Heminges and Condell under his thumb, and got them to write what they did write in the Dedication and Preface, with the deliberate purpose of throwing the world off the scent as to the real authorship ; (4) That he suborned Ben Jonson to become a party to the fraud ; (5) That there exists somewhere, and in some definite form under Bacon's hand, a suggestion, no matter how slight, to lead posterity to believe that in due time the composition of the plays would be demonstrated to have been falsely assigned to Shakespeare, and to be due entirely to himself.

When a satisfactory answer is given on these points, then, but not till then, Mr Donnelly may have some excuse for intruding his so-called discovery upon the public. But upon them his two portentous volumes are absolutely silent. It is idle to tell us, as he and his predecessors do, that Bacon had reason during his life to conceal his connection with the stage. It is an assumption without warrant either in fact or probability. If Bacon gave his name to masques, why should he have hesitated to give it to "Macbeth" or "Julius Cæsar"? Moreover, no man who wrote the plays assigned to Shakespeare could have kept

up such an imposture for such a lengthened period, and under the very peculiar circumstances in which these were produced—one of them, “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” written at Queen Elizabeth’s request and produced within a fortnight. But grant that there might be reason for concealment while Bacon was alive, there could be none after his death. He might say of himself then, in the words of his own (?) Macbeth—

“After life’s fitful fever I sleep well,
Nothing can touch me further.”

By that time he would be beyond reach of the anger of either “Eliza or our James,” who, in common with their subjects, shared the general belief in the genius of Shakespeare. How simple a matter, then, would it have been to place upon record, *along with the requisite proofs*—*for clear proof would in any case have been wanted*—that he, and not Shakespeare, wrote the plays! Write them if he did, is it conceivable that he would not have been so proud of their authorship that he would have taken care to place the fact beyond a doubt, and to enjoin his executors to have justice done to his claim?

This he unquestionably did not do, and yet we are

asked to give a hearing to an American lawyer, who, nearly three centuries after Bacon's death, chooses first to imagine that Bacon wrote the immortal plays, and then to assure us that, instead of placing the fact upon record, as any man of common-sense would be sure to place it, he wrapt up his secret in a cryptogram, *of which he did not even leave the key*—a cryptogram distributed in a most mystical and bewildering way through the bad printing of the first folio, and which it was left for Mr Donnelly's laborious and perverted ingenuity to discover!

Mr Donnelly and his proselytes would have us forget that Bacon knew what was evidence, and what was not; far too well to trust to a cryptogram for the establishment of so important a fact as that he was entitled to the fame which he knew the plays in question had won for the Stratford poet. However clear a cryptogram might be, it could not, as he very well knew, possibly amount to more than a mere assertion by an interested witness. On the assumption of fraud on Shakespeare's part, it was a fraud of which Bacon himself was the instigator. He had helped, *ex hypothesi*, to set up Shakespeare's claim, and he of all men must have known that, his own testimony being radically tainted, this claim could only be displaced either by conclus-

ive extraneous evidence, or by the confession of Shakespeare himself.

Again we say, no man has a right, without a sure ground of fact to go upon, to strain our credulity as Mr Donnelly does, or to ask reasonable men to investigate the cumbrous processes by which he works out his "Great Cryptogram" theory. Let Mr Donnelly get over the initial difficulties which we have suggested, and then Shakespearian students will give him a hearing. Till then, they, and all men who recognise that one of life's chief responsibilities is the responsibility for a right use of our time, will be content to abide in the faith of Shakespeare's contemporaries, and of well-nigh three centuries of rational men, that the kindly and modest man, whose mortal remains rest in front of the altar in Stratford Church, was no impostor, but the veritable author of the works for which, as one of its wholly priceless possessions, the civilised world owes to him endless gratitude.

A P P E N D I X.

NOTE TO p. 17.

SPECIMENS OF BACON'S POETRY.

THE only verses which beyond all doubt are known to have been written by Bacon are his versions of seven of the Psalms of David. They were written about two years before his death, and must therefore be taken as showing whatever mastery he had attained by previous practice over our language for poetical purposes. Admit the postulate of Miss Bacon and her followers, that he wrote all for which an ignorant world has given Shakespeare credit, and then judge if such a verse as the following was likely to have flowed from the pen of the author of the "Venus and Adonis," of the best of the Sonnets, or of "Cymbeline" or "Hamlet":—

“ Who sows in tears shall reap in joy,
The Lord doth so ordain ;
So that his seed be pure and good,
His harvest shall he gain.”

—Psalm cxxvi. 5.

Or this as the rendering from the 90th Psalm of the words, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee : our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance"—

"Thou buriest not within Oblivion's tomb
Our trespasses, but enterest them aright ;
Even those that are conceived in darkness' womb
To Thee appear as done at broad daylight."

Now see how the dominant thought in each of these stanzas has been treated by Shakespeare,—the first in "Richard III.," iv. 4, and the second in "Hamlet," iii. 3 :—

"The liquid drops of tears that you have shed
Shall come again, transformed to orient pearls,
Advantaging their loan with interest,
Oftentimes double gain of happiness."

"'Tis not so above :
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature : and we ourselves compelled,
Even in the teeth and forehead of your faith,
To give in evidence."¹

Could the same man have written these passages and the hidebound stanzas of Bacon's "Psalms"? Here and there a good line occurs in some of these translations, just as Hobbes in his version of the 'Iliad' now and then struck out a line of genuine poetry. But they are such as no man

¹ The contrast between Bacon and Shakespeare in these two passages was first pointed out in the first of two admirable lectures on the "Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy," by Charles H. Higgins, M.D., published in Liverpool in 1886.

would have written who possessed a genuine poetical gift, or the command of poetical and musical language, which the practice of rhythmical composition must have produced. They will be found in Mr Spedding's edition of Bacon's works, vol. vii. pp. 273-286.

To Bacon has been attributed, on no sufficient evidence, the following poem, which it is said he wrote for Lord Burleigh :—

THE RETIRED COURTIER.

His golden locks hath Time to silver turned ;
 O Time too swift ! O swiftness never ceasing !
 His youth 'gainst Time and Age hath ever spurned,
 But spurned in vain : youth waneth by increasing ;
 Beauty, strength, youth, are flowers but fading seeme ;
 Duty, faith, love, are roots and ever greene.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
 And lover's sonnets turn to holy psalmes ;
 A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
 And feed on praiera which are Age's Almes ;
 But though from Court to College he depart,
 His saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest sits in homely cell,
 He'll teach his swaines this carol for a song :
 Blest be the hearts that wish my sovereign well !
 Curst be the soul that thinks her any wrong !
 Goddess, allow this aged man his right
 To be your headsman now, that was your knight.

This poem, which appeared without the author's name in Dowland's 'First Book of Songs,' published in 1600, will not go far to establish a reputation as a poet for whoever wrote it. It is more likely to be held in memory from being quoted by Thackeray and applied to Colonel Newcome in one of the last chapters of 'The Newcomes,' than from any intrinsic merit.

Mr Donnelly and others claim the following poem for Bacon. Mr Spedding admits that it may possibly be his. It is a laboured expansion rather than a paraphrase of a Greek epigram, variously attributed to Poseidippus, to Plato the comic poet, and to Crates the Cynic. It matters little to whom the original Greek is due. Most certainly no one will claim it for Shakespeare, false as it is in philosophy, false in sentiment,—the protest of a sour and commonplace mind against the Creator's dealings with His creatures. It may be called

LIFE A CURSE.

The world's a bubble, and the life of man
 Less than a span ;
 In his conception wretched, from the womb
 So to the tomb ;
 Cursed from his cradle and brought up to years
 With cares and fears :
 Who, then, to frail mortality shall trust
 But limns the water, or but writes in dust.

Yet, whilst with sorrow here we live opprest,
 What life is best ?
Courts are but only superficial schools,
 To dandle fools ;
The rural parts are turned into a den
 Of savage men ;
And where's the city from foul vice so free,
But may be termed the worst of all the three ?

Domestic cares afflict the husband's bed,
 Or pains his head.
Those that live single take it for a curse,
 Or do things worse.
Some would have children : those that have them moan,
 Or wish them gone.
What is it, then, to have or have no wife,
But single thralldom or a double strife ?

Our own affections still at home to please
 Is a disease :
To cross the seas to any foreign soil,
 Perils and toil.
Wars with their noise affright us ; when they cease,
 We're worse in peace.
What then remains, but that we still should cry,
Not to be born, or, being born, to die ?

NOTE TO p. 37.

BEN JONSON'S SCURRILOUS SONNET ON
SHAKESPEARE.

ON POET APE.

Poor poet Ape, that would be thought our chief,
Whose works are e'en the frippery of wit,
From brokage has become so bold a thief,
That we, the robbed, have rage and pity it.
At first he made low shifts, would pick and glean,
Buy the reversion of old plays ; now grown
To a little wealth and credit in the scene,
He takes up all—makes each man's wit his own,
And told of this he slights it.—Tut ! Such crimes
The sluggish gaping auditor devours ;
He marks not whose 'twas first, and after-times
May judge it to be his as well as ours.
Fool ! As if half eyes will not know a fleece
From locks of wool, or shreds from the whole piece !

This is quite in the vein of Richard Greene's attack on Shakespeare. But it has an incidental value as showing that Jonson, when he wrote it, shared the universal belief of Shakespeare's intimates and acquaintances, that he, and nobody else, dressed up and put new life into old and faulty plays, and made them popular in their altered form.

NOTE TO p. 53.

A BACONIAN ON SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN.

The Baconians obviously feel the pinch of the line of argument in the text, for they are driven to meet it by alleging that Shakespeare's plays show that the writer of them had as low an estimate of women as Bacon. Thus Mrs Potts, in a note (p. 479) to her edition of Bacon's "Promus" (London, 1883), says:—

"From the entries which refer to women we see that Bacon formed very unfavourable views regarding them,—views which unhappy passages in his own life probably tended to confirm. *The Shakespeare plays seem to exhibit the same unfavourable sentiments of their author.* There are 130 female personages in the plays, and the characters of these seem to be easily divisible into six classes:—

"1. Furies or viragos, such as Tamora, Queen Margaret, Goneril, Regan, and even Lady Macbeth in the dark side of her character.

"2. Shrews and sharp-tongued women, as Katharine, Constance, and many others, when they are represented as angry.

"3. Gossiping and untrustworthy women, as most of the maids, hostesses, &c., and as Percy insinuates that he considers his wife to be.

"4. Fickle, faithless, and artful—a disposition which seems assumed throughout the plays to be the normal condition of womanhood (!).

“ 5. Thoroughly immoral, as Cleopatra, Phrynia, Timandra, Bianca.

“ 6. Gentle, simple, and colourless, as Hero, Olivia, Ophelia, Cordelia, &c.

“ Noteworthy exceptions, which exhibit more exalted and finer pictures of good and noble women, are the characters of Isabella, Volumnia, and of Katharine of Aragon; but these are not sufficient to do away with the impression that, *on the whole, the author of the plays had but a poor opinion of women; that love he regarded as youthful passion, marriage as a doubtful happiness.*”

Every man or woman who has made a study of Shakespeare can estimate for him or herself what weight is to be attached to the judgment which could arrive at such conclusions.

THE END.

