

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

PLAYER, PLAYMAKER, AND POET

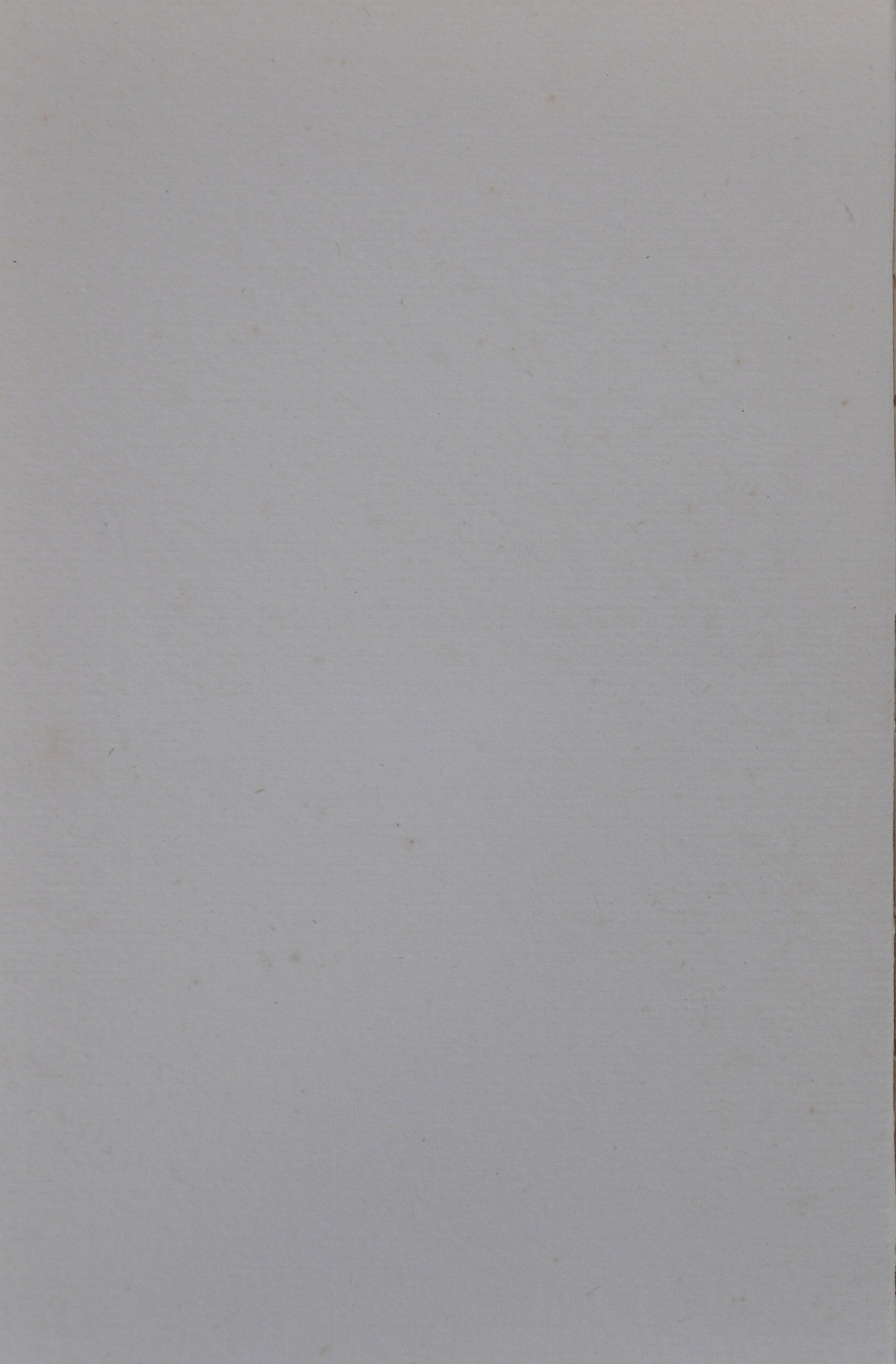
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A REPLY TO MR. GEORGE GREENWOOD, M.P.

BY

H. C. BEECHING, D.LITT.

CANON OF WESTMINSTER

PREACHER TO THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN

*WITH FACSIMILES OF THE FIVE AUTHENTIC
SIGNATURES OF THE POET*

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To
CECIL HENRY RUSSELL, ESQUIRE,

Treasurer of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn.

MY DEAR TREASURER,—One reason for asking your patronage of this little book is that I may have the pleasure of recording my thanks for many acts of kindness, both from yourself and from other members of your worshipful bench, since I was admitted to serve the Society in the first month of the new century; not the least of them being my recent election for a second term of office as Preacher. But a further reason more closely concerns the pamphlet itself; which is an attempt to meet the latest statement by a lawyer, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., of the Middle Temple, of a curious paradox which seems to have a special fascination for legal minds; I mean, the opinion originated by a Miss Delia Bacon in America, and since imported into this country, that "Shakespeare's" works were written by the great Lord Chancellor, her namesake.

When, as Chaplain of the Inn, I was honoured with a seat at the barristers' mess, this topic came up frequently for discussion ; and I should admit that as a recreation at dinner, and as a trial of wits, the theme was excellent, for it is always a good exercise to discover and test the grounds of a traditional belief. But the heresy, if I may call it so, which at the outset numbered but a few fanatical adherents, has of late made many converts among members of your profession ; and one or two distinguished Judges, both in England and America, have written books upon it. To their surprise and chagrin, as I am told, very little notice was taken of them ; the reason, of course, being that most persons who have enough capacity to discuss the question at all, judge it as a question, not of evidence, but of the literary palate. If anyone can believe that the same vineyard produced "King Lear" and "The Advancement of Learning," he must believe it ; there is nothing more to be said. But the latest defender of the paradox has restricted himself to a denial of the Shakespearian authorship, without asserting the Baconian—that is to say, he has changed the *venue* of the matter from the court of literature to that of history. In five hundred large octavo pages he has set out "some of the evidence and the arguments" which in his judgment "make in favour of the negative proposition."

Now while the negative proposition seems to me, on the merits, an equally impossible contention with the other, it is nevertheless an arguable one ; and as

I found that certain opinions of mine were quoted by Mr. Greenwood with a measure of approval, I determined to argue it ; not, I confess, in the expectation of converting Mr. Greenwood, for he safeguards himself by saying that the "evidence and arguments" for his case "might be extended almost *ad infinitum*"—and indeed the Baconian faith peeps out in not a few places from under his cloak of agnosticism—but for the sake of those members of the Bar who have an interest in the question without being committed to an answer, and who can see when evidence is not to the point, and when an argument has been fairly met. Having, therefore, an invitation to give a lecture before the Royal Society of Literature, I devoted it to an examination of Mr. Greenwood's case, so far as it is contained in his book, with what result will appear in the following pages. But in order to show more clearly what positive evidence there is for the traditional view, I have revised and reprinted two lectures given at the Royal Institution, which endeavour to set out the facts of the Player's life as simply as possible, and to show the congruity of what is recorded of his character with the impression made upon our minds by the dramas themselves.

I remember that Ben Jonson dedicated one of his plays to the Inns of Court as being the noblest nurseries of "humanity" in the Kingdom, and the best judge of humane studies. They are not less so to-day, and therefore it is that I take the liberty of

true

appealing to them, through you, for a judgment on this issue.

I have the honour to be, my dear Treasurer, your most obliged and humble servant,

H. C. BEECHING.

LINCOLN'S INN : *November* 1908.

Note.

In the first lecture, for the sake of brevity, I have had to put the section headings, which express Mr. Greenwood's contentions, into my own words. They can be verified from the remarkably full index to his volume. I am indebted to my friend Mr. Sidney Lee for permission to use the facsimiles of signatures made for his *Life of Shakespeare*.

LIST OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES

SHAKESPEARE'S AUTOGRAPH SIGNATURE APPENDED TO
THE PURCHASE-DEED OF A HOUSE IN BLACK-
FRIARS ON MARCH 10, 1613 *facing p.* 20

*Reproduced from the original document now
preserved in the Guildhall Library, London.*

SHAKESPEARE'S AUTOGRAPH SIGNATURE APPENDED
TO A DEED MORTGAGING HIS HOUSE IN BLACK-
FRIARS ON MARCH 11, 1613 ,, 20

*Reproduced from the original document now
preserved in the British Museum.*

THREE AUTOGRAPH SIGNATURES SEVERALLY WRITTEN
BY SHAKESPEARE ON THE THREE SHEETS OF HIS
WILL ON MARCH 25, 1616 ,, 75

*Reproduced from the original document now at
Somerset House London.*

I

MR. GREENWOOD'S CASE EXAMINED

I HAVE met so many people, especially members of the Bar, who have told me that Mr. Greenwood's re-statement of what he calls "the Shakespeare problem" deserves and awaits an answer, that, having the opportunity of addressing this Society on a literary question, I thought it might be profitable to see what exactly the problem is of which Mr. Greenwood speaks, and whether it is to be solved as Mr. Greenwood solves it. The problem is, in Mr. Greenwood's words, this: "Was Shakspere the player identical with Shakespeare the poet?" (p. xxii). Mr. Greenwood is careful to guard himself against being supposed to ask whether Francis Bacon wrote the Shakespearian plays and poems, for that is a literary question on which men of letters would be entitled to the last word. If, for example, a claim were made that Bacon was the writer of the prose passages in the plays of Shakespeare, it would be no difficult task to examine the development of the prose style in the one case and in the other, and see whether they corresponded, for I do not think it could be argued that the same writer could develop

two distinct prose styles in two different ways. But Mr. Greenwood, as I said, leaving aside literary considerations, confines himself to the question upon which he ought to be as competent to form an opinion as any man, and more competent than many, because of his legal training—the question whether there is evidence that the player of Stratford and the poet of Parnassus were the same person. I must admit that Mr. Greenwood employs in his task some professional talents which are more appropriate to the advocate than the judge. Indeed, his book appears to be addressed to those twelve men in the box, the Palladium of our liberties, whose conspicuous merit it is that they bring to the decision of the questions of fact submitted to them a completely open mind; for we have, in these five hundred pages, finished examples of most of the arts, from browbeating to persiflage, from innuendo to declamation, which make up much of the equipment of the successful practitioner at the Old Bailey. Anyone who has heard the cross-examination of medical experts in a murder case will have an exact analogue of the way in which Mr. Greenwood handles, for example, Mr. Sidney Lee or the late Professor Churton Collins. By any and every means they must be made to seem ridiculous. If they agree, it is a conspiracy of fools; if they differ upon any point, however unimportant to the question at issue;—“You see for yourselves, gentlemen of the jury, the value of expert evidence”! I propose to leave on one side this very large portion

of Mr. Greenwood's book which, he would admit, cannot be called evidence; and to devote this paper to disengaging, so far as I can, and answering, as briefly as possible, the actual arguments which he puts forward.

There are, however, two forensic artifices, as I must call them, of which particular notice must be taken, because they are likely to mislead. The first is the suggestion of hidden meanings in quite simple expressions and commonplace uses; an effective practice, of which the classical instances are the "chops and tomata sauce" and "warming-pan" of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. I will give an example of considerable importance for the Baconian case, if not for Mr. Greenwood's.

Ben Jonson was present at the celebration of Bacon's sixtieth birthday, and wrote an Ode, which opens thus:—

"Hail, happy genius of this ancient pile!
 How comes it all things so about thee smile,
 The fire, the wine, the men; and in the midst
 Thou standst as though some mystery thou didst?"

Mystery, says Mr. Greenwood! "What was the mystery which was being performed? The Baconians assert that here is an allusion to the secret Shakespearian authorship—a secret known to Jonson, and which he hoped might soon be published to the world. The Stratfordians, of course, reject this interpretation with scorn, but they are unable to give any plausible explanation of Jonson's meaning, and

the mystery remains a mystery still" (page 490). Well, why should "Stratfordians" invent explanations for what Jonson himself explains in the next line?

"Pardon, *I read it in thy face*, the day
For whose returns, and many, all these pray:
And so do I. This is the sixtieth year," &c.

note (Jonson is addressing not Bacon but the Genius of the house, whom he sees celebrating the "mystery" of Bacon's sixtieth birthday; and to the happy rite he joins his own prayers. That is all. As a classical scholar, Mr. Greenwood is not ignorant that "to do a mystery" (*mysteria facere*) means only to perform religious rites, and conveys no hint of any "mystery" in the vulgar sense of the word.

The other artifice which Mr. Greenwood himself allows me to call forensic (p. 1) is "bluff"; and it is curious to discover that the very keystone of Mr. Greenwood's elaborate piece of architecture is nothing better—I mean his assumption that the difference between two spellings of Shakespeare's name is significant. Throughout his book he distinguishes "Shakspere" the player from "Shake-speare" the poet; as though this assignment of the two spellings were not, as it is, a mere fancy of his own, but clear on the face of the documents, and indisputable. There is, in fact, not a tittle of evidence to support it. To begin with, the presumption is wholly against it, because the spelling of surnames in the seventeenth century was even more inconsistent than that of ordinary words. Sir Walter

Raleigh, for example, is known to have spelt his signature in five different ways—Rauley, Rawleyghe, Rauleigh, Raleghe, Raleigh.¹ And the actual evidence that in Shakespeare's case the variation in spelling is equally meaningless can be given very shortly, and is conclusive. It falls into two parts—evidence of the inconsistent use of both spellings, and evidence of the use of the spelling *Shakespeare* in reference to the Stratford player.

1. *The inconsistency.* There are two drafts of the grant of coat-armour (1596, 1599); the spelling in the former is *Shakespeare*, in the latter *Shakespere*. In the proceedings of the Stratford Courts of Record the spelling is interchangeably *Shackspeare* and *Shackspere*, and in the litigation about the Asbies estate, *Shackespere* and *Shakespeare*. Of printed books bearing the author's name, while the first two publications—the poems (1593-4)—use the form *Shakespeare*, the third, a quarto of "Love's Labour's Lost" (1598), uses *Shakespere*; and two reprinted quartos of the same year the form *Shake-speare*.

2. *The use of the form "Shakespeare" in reference to the Stratford player.* This spelling is found in the list of actors attached to Ben Jonson's "Every Man in his Humour" in the folio of 1616 [in "Sejanus" it is *Shake-speare*]; and also in that prefixed to Shakespeare's own Folio. The same spelling is used in the reference to the player in the accounts of the Treasurer of the chamber in 1594 (see page 59).

¹ Stebbing's *Life*, p. 31.

It is used in the documents connected with the purchase both of the Blackfriars estate, and New Place.¹

3. Mr. Greenwood lays great stress on the hyphen which appears occasionally between the two syllables of the name *Shake-speare* as strong corroborative evidence that that form of the spelling was appropriated by some poet unknown as a "*nom de plume*." I have pointed out above that the full spelling, with the hyphen, is used of the actor in "Sejanus." But that no importance can be attached to the hyphen is decisively shown by a comparison between the title-pages of the two quartos of "Hamlet." The hyphen is found on the title-page of the pirated "Hamlet" of 1603, and disappears from the title-page of the authentic quarto of the year following. Moreover, it is used in one of the commendatory poems prefixed to the First Folio, but not by Ben Jonson, who (on Mr. Greenwood's hypothesis) would have understood its significance.

The evidence, therefore, of any definite intention behind the inconsistent spellings of the name *Shakspere* or *Shakespeare*, or *Shake-speare*, is altogether absent; and the elaborate pains that Mr. Greenwood takes all through his book to distinguish "Shakspere"

¹ A word may be added as to the player's own use. In the extant signatures he does not use an *e* in the first syllable; in the two of 1613 the last syllable is contracted by the exigencies of space; but on the will the final signature is unmistakably "speare," and I have Dr. E. J. L. Scott's authority for saying that the second also has the *a*; the first is too much faded for certainty. See facsimiles, pp. 20, 75.

the player from "Shakespeare" the poet, is, to use his own term, nothing but "a form of bluff." I have dwelt on this point at length because, as will be seen, Mr. Greenwood calls this suggestion of a pseudonym to his aid as a *deus ex machina* when sober reasoning fails.

To come now to the arguments employed to show that the Stratford player could not have written the Shakespearian plays and poems. I will take them one by one, and treat them as briefly as possible.

1. *The town of Stratford was insanitary.* It is difficult to believe that this objection is meant to be taken seriously. "We are accustomed," says Mr. Greenwood, "to think of Stratford as a delightful haunt of rural peace, 'meet nurse for a poetic child'; and fancy pictures have been drawn of a dreamy romantic boy wandering by the pellucid stream of the Avon, and communing with nature in a populous solitude of bees and birds. Far different was the real historical Stratford. A dirty squalid place," &c. (p. 4). It would be a fair reply to this, that if there were no drains in Stratford, the Avon was the more likely to be "pellucid"; and as Stratford was a small town, and William Shakespeare had legs, he may have been able occasionally to escape from the smell of muck-heaps, supposing them to be prejudicial to the development of literary power. But Mr. Greenwood assumes that point: and until he proves it, no more need be said about Stratford.

2. *William Shakespeare's father could not write his name.* Here there is a conflict of evidence. Mr. Lee prints in the illustrated edition of his "Life" a facsimile of John Shakespeare's autograph. But, assuming Mr. Greenwood to be right, I would point out that there is no evidence that Marlowe's father could write his name; and yet Mr. Greenwood does not follow Mrs. Gallup in disputing the authenticity of his plays. No argument can run from John Shakespeare's illiteracy to his son's. He was a self-made man, who served in turn every office in his municipality; and no men are so conscious of their defects in education, or so anxious to secure for their children the advantages they have not themselves enjoyed.

3. *There is no evidence that William Shakespeare ever went to the Stratford Grammar School.* True, there is no recorded list of scholars. But as the school was free to all burgesses, why of all the boys in the town should the eldest son of the chief alderman have been withheld from the privilege of attending it? It must be accepted that he went to school, unless a presumption can be shown against it. There is such a presumption, replies Mr. Greenwood. "He never in all his (supposed) writings makes mention of the Stratford school or of its master" (p. 47).¹ I remember no reference to their schools

¹ I have looked in vain for any reference of the sort in Mr. Greenwood's pages. To defend my own identity, may I say how much I owe of my love of Shakespeare to Dr. Abbott's lessons at the City of London School.

or schoolmasters in the works of any contemporary dramatists except Jonson and Drayton. Of Drayton I shall have a word to say presently. Jonson wrote an ode to Camden, his master at Westminster; and the sufficient explanation of such an unusual celebration is that he was Camden. Spenser, Kyd, and Lodge were at Merchant Taylors' School, but they are silent, even about Mulcaster. Even Herrick, who with his innumerable odes to everybody might have been expected to remember his pedagogue, has not done so, with the result that all the ancient schools in London can claim him as a pupil. It cannot be allowed, then, that there is any such presumption against Shakespeare's schooling as Mr. Greenwood contends for.

4. *Supposing Shakespeare went to the Stratford school, why should we assume that the school taught the ordinary grammar-school curriculum?* The answer is, that it must be presumed unless evidence can be shown against it. And all the evidence is in its favour. We know that Latin was taught in the school a few years before, from letters preserved from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney, both Stratford burgesses. In these letters, says Malone, "are intermixed long Latin paragraphs": and he prints one wholly in Latin, besides another, also in Latin, to Quiney from his son while in the school.¹ Latin therefore was taught at Stratford. That being so, the Latin books read could hardly have been other than

¹ Malone, ii. 105-6.

the usual text books, of which the Shakespearian plays give evidence (p. 42). We find a list of them in a description of his education given by another Warwickshire "butcher's son" (as Aubrey calls him) who became a poet, Michael Drayton. In a delightful passage of Drayton's letter "to my most dearly-loved friend Henry Reynolds, esquire," he writes as follows:—

"For from my cradle you must know that I
 Was still inclined to noble poesy ;
 And when that once *Pueriles* I had read,
 And newly had my *Cato* construed,
 In my small self I greatly wondered then,
 Amongst all other, what strange kind of men
 These poets were, and pleased with the name
 To my mild Tutor merrily I came,
 (For I was then a proper goodly page
 Much like a pigmy, scarce ten years of age)
 Claspings my slender arms about his thigh,—
 'O my dear master, cannot you,' quoth I,
 'Make me a poet? Do it, if you can,
 And you shall see, I'll quickly be a man.'
 Who me thus answer'd smiling: 'Nay,' quoth he,
 'If you'll not play the wag, but I may see
 You ply your learning, I will shortly read
 Some poets to you.' Phœbus be my speed,
 To 't hard went I; when shortly he began,
 And first read to me honest *Mantuan*
 Then *Virgil's Eglogues*. Being entered thus
 Methought I straight had mounted Pegasus,
 And in his full career could make him stop,
 And bound upon Parnassus' bi-clift top."

If Drayton worked hard at his Latin poetry, and his unknown master encouraged and helped him, why is it straining probability to suppose that it was so with Shakespeare?

5. *But Shakespeare did not stay long enough at school to acquire as much Latin as the writer of the plays shows evidence of possessing.* It is Rowe, in his "Life," who preserves the tradition, which came through Betterton from Stratford, that "the narrowness of his father's circumstances, and the want of his assistance at home, forced him to withdraw his son from school." The father's fortunes had begun to fail when William was thirteen; but as there were no school fees to pay, we need not assume that he was withdrawn as early as this. Still, even if he were, a clever boy—as tradition affirms that Shakespeare was,¹ who had spent four years in learning Latin, and nothing but Latin, and who had been taken through the poets usually read in grammar schools, Mantuanus, Ovid, Plautus, and parts of Virgil—would have acquired a good stock of Latin reading, which, if he had inclination, he could afterwards improve. And tradition, coming through Aubrey from

¹ Mr. Greenwood is very sarcastic with the "Stratfordians," as he calls the greater part of the civilised world, for accepting or rejecting the traditions about Shakespeare "at their own sweet fancy." I suppose everybody weighs each tradition separately according to its source, if this is known; if not, according to its congruity with ascertained facts. In regard to the traditions recorded by Aubrey, for example, peculiar importance attaches to those which would have come to him from Beeston the actor. There is one of Aubrey's traditions (which I do not remember to have seen quoted in Mr. Greenwood's pages) to the effect that William Shakespeare was a remarkably clever boy. "There was at that time another butcher's son in this town, that was held *not at all inferior to him for a natural wit*, his acquaintance and coetanean, but died young." The traditions are best studied in Halliwell-Phillipps's *Life of Shakespeare*, ii. 69-76, where they are collected.

Beeston the actor, says of Shakespeare, that "though, as Ben Jonson says of him, he had but 'small Latin and less Greek,'¹ he understood Latin pretty well."

What, then, is the knowledge of Latin required by the Shakespearian plays and poems? Ovid's "Fasti" was used for the "Rape of Lucrece"; Plautus's "Menæchmi" and "Amphitruo" for "The Comedy of Errors"; and Ovid's "Metamorphoses," along with Golding's translation, for "The Tempest." (In the case of Plautus there was a translation available in manuscript and probably an old play to work upon. *Lee*, p. 54.) Besides these general debts there are one or two other passages, such as Portia's speech on Mercy, which come immediately, or through some other author, from the classics. Professor Churton Collins, I know, went further than this, and endeavoured to show that Shakespeare had read the "Ajax" of Sophocles and other Greek plays and poems. But Mr. Collins was a man of vast memory, and parallel passages were his foible. At the same time, he pointed out that there was no Greek classic, of which he seemed to trace a recollection in Shake-

¹ In weighing Jonson's *dictum*, we must remember Jonson's standard of scholarship. In illustration of this, I may quote a passage from Selden's *Titles of Honour*: "I went for this purpose [to consult the scholiasts on Euripides' *Orestes*] to see it in the well-furnished library of my beloved friend, that singular poet Master Ben Jonson, whose special worth in literature, accurate judgment and performance, known only to that few which are truly able to know him, hath had from me, ever since I began to learn, an increasing admiration." (*Symonds' Life of Jonson*, p. 164.)

speare's writings, which was not accessible in a Latin version : so that if some of the parallels he adduced should be considered too close for coincidence, there is no reason to regard them as beyond the scope of William Shakespeare of Stratford, educated as we know him to have been educated.

6. *But, allowing that an industrious boy could get a knowledge of Latin at Stratford, he would learn nothing else.* "All unprejudiced men," says Mr. Greenwood, "must recognise that the idea of Shakspeare coming a raw provincial from Stratford to London, adopting the player's profession after many shifts and vicissitudes, and thereupon writing such a drama as 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and such a poem as 'Venus and Adonis,' is, to say the least of it, wildly improbable" (p. 109). When speaking of "Love's Labour's Lost" we must not forget that we have not before us the first draft of that play. Shakespeare came to London, probably, in 1585, "Venus and Adonis" was published in 1593, and the quarto of "Love's Labour's Lost," *corrected and augmented*, appeared in 1598. We have, by a happy accident, a good measure of the extent of these "corrections," for the first draft of the final speech of Rosalind to Biron, in v. 2, 851, has by the printer's carelessness been left in the play earlier in the scene (lines 827-832); and a comparison between the two versions enables us to guess how very much of what we think the peculiar beauty of the play was due to its revision.

This is the earlier version :—

Biron. And what to me, my love? and what to me?

Ros. You must be purged too, your sins are rack'd,
You are attaint with faults and perjury :
Therefore if you my favour mean to get,
A twelvemonth shall you spend, and never rest,
But seek the weary beds of people sick.

“ Corrected and augmented ” this becomes :—

Biron. Studies my lady? Mistress, look on me ;
Behold the window of mine heart, mine eye,
What humble suit attends thy answer there :
Impose some service on me for thy love.

Ros. Oft have I heard of you, my lord Biron,
Before I saw you ; and the world's large tongue
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,
Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,
Which you on all estates will execute
That lie within the mercy of your wit.
To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain
And therewithal to win me, if you please,
Without the which I am not to be won,
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick and still converse
With groaning wretches ; and your task shall be
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

More interesting still is it to observe that the best part of Biron's speech in iv. 3, 290 is an insertion, lines 302-5 occurring again fifty lines lower down.

Let us, then, state the problem, in regard to these earlier plays, a little less rhetorically than Mr. Greenwood does, and with a closer eye to dates. Shakespeare is last heard of at Stratford in 1585, and reappears in company with Burbage and Kemp, nine years later, as playing before the Queen. Actors

tradition, coming through Beeston from Augustine Phillips, who was in Shakespeare's own company, tells us that Shakespeare acted "exceedingly well." Now it is the distinguishing character of a good actor that he has a keen eye for manners. Nothing of this sort, that he sees, escapes him; and what he sees he can imitate. If Shakespeare, then, had this actor's quality, is it "wildly improbable, to say the least of it," that in six or seven years he had improved what chances he had of observing manners in London so as to be able to represent them on the stage? I submit, then, that the urbanity of Shakespeare's first comedies does not need a miracle to account for it. For the wit I cannot suppose we are asked to account. That is native, and, I suggest, is not so urbane as if Shakespeare had been "a gentleman born."

To pass, then, to "Venus and Adonis," that other "miracle," as Mr. Greenwood would have us regard it. "What are the probabilities," asks Mr. Greenwood, "of a butcher's or draper's assistant at Stratford-on-Avon at the present time, born in illiterate surroundings, and brought up as Shakespeare was brought up, writing (say), at the age of twenty-one, a polished, cultured, elaborate, and scholarly poem, such as 'Venus and Adonis,' and of the same high degree of excellence? Should we not look upon it as an almost miraculous performance? In Shakespeare's time, and for a youth of Shakespeare's environment, it would have been a miracle of ten-fold marvel"

(p. 64). Ah, no; there speaks the clever advocate addressing the common sense of the gentlemen in the box. The miracle is to be explained mainly by the fact that it was not in the twentieth, but at the end of the sixteenth century, when the Spirit of Literature was abroad in England, and when the education of the grammar schools was still in the Latin classics. Would Bottom and his troupe to-day play "Pyramus and Thisbe"? And there are two other things to be borne in mind. First, the poet had a model; the "Venus and Adonis" is closely modelled upon Lodge's "Glaucus and Scilla." Secondly, the poet was no longer in his first youth. He was twenty-nine when he printed his poem (1593), and twenty-six when Lodge's poem appeared. By 1593 he had already been eight years in London, in touch for the last part of the time with such culture, at any rate, as was possessed by the young courtiers and lawyers who haunted the public stage; and it is noticeable that the men of his early plays are much better drawn than his great ladies. To conclude this question of Shakespeare's learning, is it not significant that it struck no *contemporary* writer as "miraculous" that his poems and plays should be the work of a Stratford player?

7. *There is no contemporary evidence identifying the player with the author of the plays and poems.* Let me test this negative in a few particular instances:

(1) *Richard Field, who published the "Venus and Adonis," was a native of Stratford.* Mr. Greenwood

prints
with wings.

acknowledges this, and yet he says "there is absolutely nothing to show that Field had any acquaintance with, or any knowledge of, Shakspere" (of Stratford). Now Richard Field, who was of Shakespeare's own age, did not leave Stratford till he was fifteen; and their fathers were acquainted, for John Shakespeare, when Henry Field died, attested the inventory of his goods and chattels. To most people this will be strong corroborative evidence that the poet of "Venus and Adonis" and the Stratford youth were the same person.

(2) *The poet, player, and playmaker are identified in the "Return from Parnassus."* In this play, acted at Cambridge in 1601, one of the *dramatis personæ*, Ingenioso, gives a catalogue of poets to his friend Judicio, amongst them William Shakespeare and Benjamin Johnson. Judicio characterises them one by one; on William Shakespeare he says: "Who loves not Adon's love or Lucrece rape" (i. 2). Later in the play the actors Burbage and Kemp are introduced discussing the difference between the University playwrights and those attached to the playing companies; and Kemp says, "Few of the university pen plays well; they smell too much of that writer Ovid and that writer Metamorphosis, and talk too much of Proserpina and Jupiter. Why, here's *our fellow* Shakespeare puts them all down, ay, and Ben Jonson too" (iv. 3). I ask, then, if an author in the same play speaks of a poet and a player-playwright both as Shakespeare, and (which Mr. Greenwood thinks

important) spells the name the same way in each case, is this not evidence that they were the same person? If not, Mr. Greenwood must say that the poet "Benjamin Johnson," who is mentioned along with the poet "William Shakespeare" in the first act, is a different person from the playwright "Ben Jonson" who is mentioned along with the player and play-writer "Shakespeare" in the fifth act. And, indeed, he ought to say so, for the names are differently spelt! But what, as matter of fact, does Mr. Greenwood say to the evidence of the "Return from Parnassus"? He has nothing to say, and so he introduces his *deus ex machina*. These are his words: it has "little or no evidentiary value as regards the question at issue," for it is "quite consistent with the theory that Shake-speare was in reality a pseudonym" (p. 330). But we have already seen that the only evidence offered in support of that extraordinary "theory" breaks down as soon as it is examined.

(3) *The player and playwright are identified in an epigram of John Davies of Hereford.* Mr. Greenwood goes through the contemporary allusions to Shakespeare, like Diogenes with his lantern, looking for an honest identification of the player with the poet and playwright; and he comes upon an epigram,¹ inscribed "To our English Terence Mr. Will. Shake-speare." The hyphen looks attractive, and Terence was certainly a play-maker, not an actor, so Mr. Greenwood proceeds to read the epigram; but he

¹ For another epigram by the same writer see p. 76.

finds that it speaks of Shake-speare as "playing kingly parts." Here, then, is the identification of playwright with player of which he was in search. No ; a philosopher is not so easily satisfied. I transcribe Mr. Greenwood's words, adding a few italics for emphasis : "John Davies seems to have the player in his mind rather than the poet. *Did he perchance mentally separate the two?*" As philosophy this is excellent, for we cannot identify what we do not "mentally separate," but I should like to have the opinion of Mr. Greenwood's benchers upon its merit as an appreciation of evidence in regard to the point in question.

(4) *The Earl of Southampton.* Mr. Greenwood denies that there is a "scrap of evidence" that the Stratford player was patronised by the Earl of Southampton to whom the poet of the same name dedicated his verses. One could not be surprised if Mr. Greenwood were right, for the only evidence in the case of the poet is the dedicatory letter prefixed to his verses, and an actor cannot dedicate his gestures. However, there is a tradition recorded by Rowe that "my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to." Now this tradition came to Rowe on the authority of Sir William Davenant, who was the godson of the Stratford player, so that it is "a scrap of evidence" as to the relation of the player with Southampton. Both Halliwell-Phillipps and Mr. Lee

think the tradition probable, even if the sum be exaggerated. The story has no parallel that I know of, and is not a likely one to have been invented.

8. "*It is hardly possible to conceive that the poems and plays were written in William Shakespeare's illegible illiterate scrawl*" (p. 14). The answer is that all we have, so far as we know,¹ of Shakespeare's handwriting consists of five signatures, three of them written on his will a month before his death. These are beyond criticism by any humane person. In regard to the other two, I join issue with Mr. Greenwood and deny that they are either illegible or illiterate. The appeal can only be to the eyesight and judgment of persons accustomed to read our older hands. But it is possible to call attention to certain details which may escape the casual observer. (1) The two signatures are in two different scripts; no illiterate person would write two hands, but playwrights did so habitually to distinguish the text from the stage directions—a fact that anyone may verify who will consult the manuscript plays in the British Museum. (2) The signatures are those of a man accustomed to much writing, for they avoid the least superfluity in the formation and connection of letters. Perhaps Mr. Greenwood was misled into calling the signatures "illiterate" by the fact that

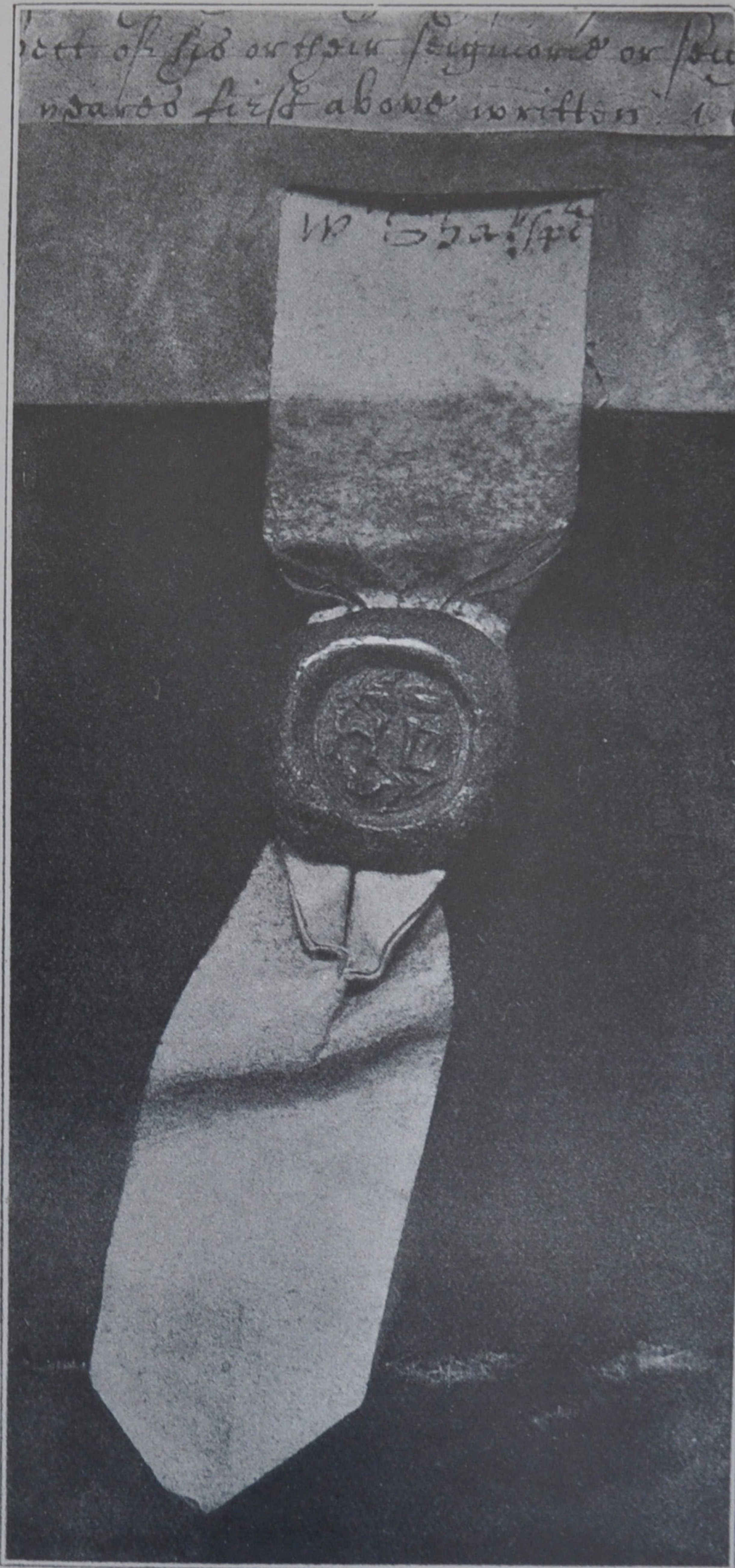
¹ I say "so far as we know," because unless an autograph signed manuscript turns up, we have not a large enough specimen of Shakespeare's handwriting to judge by. Some have thought that the abstract of Holinshed (Sloane 1090) may be Shakespeare's.

Curious



SHAKESPEARE'S AUTOGRAPH SIGNATURE APPENDED TO THE PURCHASE-DEED OF A HOUSE IN BLACKFRIARS ON MARCH 10, 1613.

Reproduced from the original document now preserved in the Guildhall Library, London.



SHAKESPEARE'S AUTOGRAPH SIGNATURE APPENDED TO A DEED MORTGAGING HIS HOUSE IN BLACKFRIARS ON MARCH 11, 1613.

Reproduced from the original document now preserved in the British Museum.

they are written in the Old English hand, about which he is contemptuous, for he goes on to contrast them with "Ben Jonson's clear and excellent *Italian* handwriting." Jonson's writing is certainly "clear and excellent," being modelled on his master Camden's; but the only manuscript we possess of a play of his—"The Masque of Queens"—is written not in the Italian, but in the Old English hand, the Italian being used only for purposes of emphasis and distinction. Our one play of Massinger's is written and distinguished in the same manner.

9. "*There is not a letter, not a note, not a scrap of writing from the pen of Shakspeare which has come down to us except five signatures*" (p. 17). Where are the manuscripts of Shakespeare's plays? They have gone to the same place as the manuscripts of Marlowe, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Greene and Peele, and Dekker and Drayton, and Chapman and Ford. There survives, I believe, of all that treasure, which in our autograph-hunting age would be worth a king's ransom, one masque of Jonson, one play of Massinger, one of Heywood. But where are Shakespeare's letters among his private friends? When Mr. Greenwood has collected a dozen letters other than begging letters among all Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists it will be time enough to make a mystery of the absence of a Shakespearian correspondence. Still undoubtedly there may have been something complexional in Shakespeare's silence. Every man has his humour, and all men are not

given to letter-writing. An evidence of this idiosyncrasy may be found in the absence of the commendatory lines on other poets of which the Elizabethan age had its share, though the fashion set in later. Mr. Greenwood thinks this silence of the dramatist very suspicious. But he overdoes his case when he treats Ben Jonson as the standard in this matter.

10. *Jonson wrote hundreds of occasional poems, lines to friends and patrons, elegies, epitaphs, epithalamiums. Where are Shakespeare's similar effusions?* "Why should William Shakspeare of Stratford have played the part of William the Silent?" (p. 200). It is difficult to take this sort of criticism seriously. Where are the hundreds of epigrams of Lyly and Marlowe, of Ford and Webster? Where are the epithalamiums of Kyd? the elegies of Marston? And Echo, as Mr. Greenwood is fond of saying, "answers Where?" But how thoughtless is this constant comparison of Shakespeare with Jonson! Jonson was a strenuous and not very popular playwright, but he was a master of occasional verse. He was "the Horace" of the times, as Sir Edward Herbert called him; and, indeed, he called himself so in the "Poetaster." Shakespeare was the most successful playwright of his generation, with a lyrical gift quite un-Horatian. Why then should he be expected to write odes and epodes, simply because Jonson did? Mr. Greenwood does not seem to have grasped the elementary fact about Jonson, that in most things he did, he was exceptional in his age. Alone of all the

Elizabethan dramatists he collected his plays ; alone of them all a man of learning, he consorted with men of learning ; poet-laureate and popular with the king, he became popular with the courtiers. Now the epithet Jonson applies to Shakespeare is "gentle," which must imply a temperament in marked contrast with the self-assertive temperament of Jonson himself. Probably Shakespeare was shy—a malady that even to-day afflicts an occasional man of letters. In every literary age there have been men who, without being parasites, have been content to form a part of the furniture of great houses ; and there have been others who, like Shakespeare and Cowley, have preferred their own fireside. But Mr. Greenwood carries on his invidious comparison to the very grave.

II. *Jonson's death "was greeted with a chorus of elegiac and panegyric verses, poured forth by the best poets of the moment. How different was the case of Shakespeare !"* (p. 201). Yes and how different was the case of Beaumont in the same year ; though, being a Beaumont, he found a grave along with his brother in Westminster Abbey. It was not Jonson the dramatist who was applauded, but Jonson the dictator of letters in London ; the wits who contributed their elegies to *Jononus Virbius* were technically "his sons" ; men of the younger generation, like Falkland and Waller and Jasper Mayne. Jonson had set the fashion of the new age, and he was its most venerated tradition ; just as his great

namesake, Samuel Johnson, had become at his death the embodiment of the literary tradition of the mid-eighteenth century. When Shakespeare died in 1616, his star was already paling before the new light of Fletcher; and the silence of the poets round the grave of the Stratford player is not so conspicuous, considering the fashion of the day, as their silence at the publication of the great Folio of the London dramatist.¹

12. *Ben Jonson's mysterious relations with the Folio of Shakespeare's plays.* On this point Mr. Greenwood is far from lucid. He spends much time in defending Malone's opinion that Jonson wrote or revised the preface "to the great variety of readers" signed by the players Hemminge and Condell, in which I should agree with him (though I should not agree that he wrote the Dedication); and I would add that one of the strongest arguments for Jonson's authorship is the passage he puts into the players' mouth: "What he thought he uttered with that easiness, that we

¹ On this point Mr. Lee's investigation into the history of the preliminary leaves of the Folio is illuminating. After showing from the signatures the probable intention of the printers, he continues: "Subsequently Shakespeare's friend Ben Jonson forwarded not merely the fine poem 'To the memory of my beloved, the Author,' which was set up on both sides of the unallotted blank leaf, but the lines on the portrait, which were allotted to an inserted fly-leaf, appropriately facing the title. Hugh Holland, a friend of Jonson's, fired by his example, afterwards sent a commendatory sonnet, which was set up on one side of a second interpolated leaf; and on a later day Leonard Digges and James Mabbe, two admirers of Shakespeare, who were in personal relations with the publisher Blount, paid Blount and Shakespeare jointly the compliment of sending two further sets of commendatory verse, which were brought together on the front side of yet a third detached leaf." (Introduction to Oxford Facsimile.)

have scarce received from him a blot in his papers"; for he tells us in his "Discoveries" that he had *often* had from the players this testimony to their fellow's facility. But when from this simple premiss Mr. Greenwood goes on to hint that, as Jonson was in this year (1623) working for Bacon, his connexion with the Folio may bring with it that of his patron, the answer is complete and can be given out of Mr. Greenwood's own mouth. He points out, as any critic must, that the Folio text of "Richard II." and "Midsummer Night's Dream" is inferior in some respects to that already before the public in certain Quartos; and also that "Titus Andronicus," which the Folio includes, was probably not by Shakespeare at all. The irresistible conclusion is that the author of the plays was either dead, or uninterested in their publication. If he were dead, he could not have been Bacon; and if he were uninterested, why did he publish? ¹

13. *Jonson's commendatory poem.* In dealing with this Mr. Greenwood gives us one of the finest exhibitions of what he calls "bluff" that I have ever witnessed. "We must remember," he says "that Jonson's verses are of the highest importance to the Stratfordians. Had it not been for the poem prefixed to the Folio of 1623, . . . I verily believe that the Stratfordian

¹ Incidentally Mr. Greenwood makes the suggestion that as the Folio text of *Richard III.* preserves the misprints of the Quarto of 1622, and yet contains additional matter, it must have been retouched after the actor's death (1616); but a sufficient and more plausible explanation is that the editors of the Folio took a 1622 text as the basis of their "copy" for press.

hypothesis would long ago have been given up as an exploded myth, or, rather, would never have obtained foothold at all" (p. 106). However this may be, the poem is there, and signed by Ben Jonson. What has Mr. Greenwood to say about it? Does not Jonson in this introductory poem call the author of the plays "sweet swan of Avon," thereby implying his connexion with Stratford? "To all outward appearance he does," assents Mr. Greenwood, and there leaves it. But if that is his case, must he not at this point bring evidence that Jonson was a notorious liar? In regard to the whole poem, he says that it is "a riddle," and that "by the Stratfordians it has to be ingeniously, if not ingenuously, explained away." This is pretty good, from the author of the comment on the "Swan of Avon." What Mr. Greenwood has in mind is the discrepancy between what Jonson said about his friend's "art" in his formal eulogy, and what he said in a private conversation as reported by Drummond of Hawthornden. In the poem he had said:—

"Nature herself was proud of his designs
 And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines !

 Yet must I not give Nature all : thy Art,
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
 For though the poets' 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 ; turn the same
 (And himself with it) that he thinks to frame

Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn,
For a good poet's made as well as born ;
And such wert thou."

Of his conversation with Drummond, that poet notes :—

"His censure of the English poets was this. . . . That Shakspeer wanted art. Shakspeer in a play brought in a number of men saying they had suffered ship-wrack in Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some 100 miles."¹

Well, at the risk of seeming more ingenious than ingenuous, I must confess that what discrepancy there is between these judgments seems to me very human and natural: and I for one love the rugged old man all the better for it. It must be remembered that Jonson had failed as a playwright where Shakespeare had succeeded, and this in spite of the fact, as he believed, that he was the better artist of the two. In private talk the soreness came out; but on an occasion which called for public eulogy he suppressed it. Still, if we look closely at the lines about Art, we cannot fail to observe that they are built on the model of the precept *laudando precipere*. This part of the poem is rather an address to would-be poets than a eulogy of Shakespeare.

¹ Would it be unkind to ask Mr. Greenwood why, if Jonson was in touch with the author of *The Winter's Tale*, as it was going through the press, he did not get him to correct the blunder? And if the blunder struck Jonson as so silly that he could not help talking about it, was Mr. Greenwood's imaginary poet—the man of learning and culture—likely to be less well-informed about the continent of Europe, so as to be at the mercy of Greene's novel, on which the play is based, where the mistake is first made?

Shakespeare's lines were "living," therefore he must have had "art" as well as genius. And, of course, when Jonson said to Drummond that "Shakespeare wanted art," he meant that he took too little pains about his work, not that he took none; as the example he gave shows. That this is the true interpretation of the not very difficult "riddle" is shown by the fuller discussion of the topic which Jonson included in his "Discoveries":—

"De Shakespeare nostrat[i].—Augustus in Hat[erium]. I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted out a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour: *for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry as much as any.* He was, indeed, honest and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: 'Sufflammandus erat,' as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power, would the rule of it had been so too. 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 replied, 'Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause,' and such like; which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. *There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned."*

I have quoted this passage from the "Discoveries"

at full length, not only for the sake of showing that its judgment of Shakespeare is perfectly reconcilable with that of the great encomium prefixed to the Folio, making allowance for the difference between prose and verse, but also because, taken by itself, if Jonson be a witness of credit, it serves as a refutation of Mr. Greenwood's theory of the two Shakespeares. Indeed, it makes Mr. Greenwood very unhappy, for he sees that the players' brag at the beginning implies that Shakespeare belonged to them; that he was player as well as playwright; and his solution of the difficulty seems to be only tentative. If I understand him—and I am not sure that I do, for the argument of Chapter XV. is not easy to disentangle—it would run as follows: This passage in the "Discoveries" must be understood as referring only to the player; the reference to Haterius confirms this, for we must translate *sufflaminandus erat* "he had to be shut up"; evidently he used to "gag"; and as we know that the text of the First Folio, for which the players make the same boast of receiving unblotted papers, was not set up from author's manuscripts at all, the players were liars, and cannot be credited here.

But to this attack, which is not wanting in boldness, the following considerations are fatal:—

(1) The reference to Haterius cannot refer to actor's gag. The heading "Augustus in Hat" governs the whole paragraph, and the sense of the paragraph is fixed by the first clause, which refers not to speech but to writing. Thus Jonson himself comes in as

a witness to the identity of the two Shakespeares, not the players only.

(2) But, in respect to the credibility of the players. They do not say in the preface to the Folio that they had received the author's "copy" without blot. They say, or Jonson says for them, as a general praise of their author's merit: "Who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received *from him* a blot in his papers. But it is not our province, who only gather his works, to praise him." The best explanation of this passage is that it is an advertisement of the inspiration of the plays, not of the state of the text; for the players could scarcely mean that they had procured copy for press from an author who had been dead seven years.

ex. (3) Accepting, therefore, the *prima facie* interpretation of this passage as the only possible one—namely, that Jonson does here identify, as Mr Greenwood says, "player Shakspere" with "author Shakespeare" (p. 479)—we are precluded from supposing that he was writing "with his tongue in his cheek," by the fact that he is writing, as he says, for "posterity." If anyone can bring himself to think that Jonson, knowing that his friend Shakespeare, the player, was not the author of the plays that went by his name, and hoping (as Mr. Greenwood tells us he was hoping) that the secret of the true authorship would soon come out, nevertheless wrote

down this serious judgment for "posterity," which, when posterity came to know the truth, would prove him either a fool or a liar—all I can say is he must keep his opinion, which I cannot share.

One word more about Jonson's "Discoveries." They contain a character of Bacon as well as of Shakespeare, a significant fact to anyone who believes in Jonson's honesty. But it has often been remarked that in speaking of Bacon's learning and eloquence Jonson uses an expression, "insolent Greece and haughty Rome," which he uses also when speaking of Shakespeare's dramas in the folio poem. Repetition of a good phrase is a weakness which most authors yield to; but such repetition is less remarkable when the phrase is not original. In writing his description of Bacon's oratory, Jonson had before him Seneca's praise of Cicero, whose eloquence he celebrated above that of "insolent Greece." In transferring this praise to Bacon, Jonson added "haughty Rome." It looks, from the passage itself, as if Bacon were still living when it was penned; and if so, its date may well be contemporary with the eulogy of Shakespeare. However, what strikes one most in the two characters is that while Shakespeare is blamed for his careless facility, which needed the clog, Bacon is praised for his terseness of speech, which made it impossible to miss a word without loss to the sense.

14. *The silence of Philip Henslowe.* The argument indicated by this heading takes Mr. Greenwood twenty-five pages to develop. It can be stated and

A.B.

note

answered in very few lines. Henslowe was owner of the Rose Theatre on the Bankside, and his Diary, which is preserved at Dulwich, contains elaborate accounts of all sorts; amongst them his share in the takings at the Rose Theatre, and his dealings with playwrights in connexion with the Lord Admiral's company, of which he was manager. Now, Shakespeare's company—Lord Strange's, and on his death the Lord Chamberlain's—acted at the Rose Theatre only between the following dates: February 19 to June 27, 1592; December 29, 1592, to February 1, 1593; June 3 to 15, 1594; and with their internal affairs Henslowe had no concern at all. Hence the only references to Shakespeare that we could expect must come in the few months that his company was acting at the Rose in 1592-3 or the few days in 1594. And, as a fact, we have a reference to takings at sixteen performances of "harey the VI."—*i.e.* "1 Henry VI."¹—between March 3, 1592, and January 31, 1593, though no author's name is mentioned to that or any other play in the account. Where, then, is the problem in Henslowe's silence? To show that I am not doing Mr. Greenwood an injustice, I must give an extract from his argument:—

"Now here is another most remarkable phenomenon. Here is a manuscript book, dating from 1591 to 1609, which embraces the period of Shakespeare's greatest activity; and in it we find mention of practically all the dramatic writers of that day with any claims to distinction—men whom Henslowe

¹ See p. 62.

had employed to write plays for his theatre; yet nowhere is the name of Shakespeare to be found among them, or, indeed, at all. Yet if Shakespeare the player had been a dramatist, surely Henslowe would have employed him also, like the others, for reward in that behalf! It is strange indeed, on the hypothesis of his being a successful playwright, as well as an actor, that the old manager should not so much as mention his name in all this large manuscript volume!" (p. 353). The argument here is, because the playwright of the Chamberlain's company was a man of genius, it is "strange indeed" that he should not be mentioned among the writers for the Admiral's company, who were so much inferior. One might as well argue that if a poet who lives in Berkshire is really a successful poet, it is "strange" that his name should not once appear in all the hundreds of pages of the London Directory.

There are one or two other points raised by Mr. Greenwood which I ought to examine, but this paper is already too long. I have said nothing about that slough of the Poetomachia in which Baconians love to wallow, because Shakespeare cannot be shown to have taken any part in it. When in the interpretation of the "Poetaster," for example, one side proposes to identify Shakespeare with "Virgil" and the other side with "Crispinus,"¹ that play is best left

¹ Mr. Greenwood's attempt at a parallel between Shakespeare's coat-of-arms and that of Crispinus is not very happy. "A bloody toe between three thorns pungent" is nearer to Marston's "a fesse

out of the controversy. The only serious omission of which I am conscious is the doubt raised by Shakespeare's use of law terms; and that would require a treatise by itself, for it must involve a consideration of the way in which law terms are used in all contemporary literature, and also an investigation into how much of Shakespeare's legal phraseology can be traced to the innumerable law papers belonging to the family suits. Perhaps Mr. Lee will give us the former by and by; Mrs. Stopes is, I believe, already engaged upon the latter. Meanwhile it is satisfactory to observe that if distinguished lawyers of our own generation can be quoted for the opinion that Shakespeare's knowledge of law implies a professional training, other lawyers, no less distinguished, can be quoted on the other side. The most cogent fact, to my own mind, that has so far been elicited in the discussion is this — that the Elizabethan dramatist who makes least use of law for metaphor and illustration is the only one who practised as a barrister, John Ford, of the Middle Temple.¹

dancetté ermine between three fleurs-de-lis argent" than to Shakespeare's "Or, on a bend sable, a spear of the first." "A bloody toe," as Mr. Fleay says, is Jonson's joke on Marston's name, *quasi* Mars' toen. The only likeness is in the mottoes, "not without mustard" and "non sans droit"; but "not without—" was the commonest form of motto. Moreover, if Jonson made jokes about Crispinas (in reference to the "thorns") it is idle to say that what he meant was Crisp-inas (in reference to *Shake* speare) (pp. 37, 461). The "Poet-ape" of Jonson's epigram is probably also Marston. In *Poetaster* (v. 1) Crispinus is called "poetaster and plagiary."

¹ "Webster and the Law: a parallel by L. J. Sturge," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 1906.

II

THE STORY OF THE LIFE

“Others abide our question : thou art free.
We ask and ask.”

—ARNOLD.

IT is strange to remember, in these days of multiplied biographies, most of them stretching to two volumes, how little curious our ancestors were about the private lives of the men whom they delighted to honour. Shakespeare died in 1616. His first biography was given to the world nearly a century later (1709), by Nicholas Rowe, and of the ten facts which it contains, eight, according to Edmund Malone, who wrote just a century later still, are incorrect. Malone, who was the most learned, and also the sanest, of Shakespearian commentators, was also the first person to take the scientific view of a biography. He begins his account by drawing up a list of all the people in the seventeenth century who might have written Shakespeare's life and failed to take advantage of their opportunity, persons like Dugdale and Fuller, who were content with

a perfunctory half-dozen lines, when all the time Shakespeare's own daughter Judith was alive and waiting to be questioned. She survived until 1662. Then he gives a list of all the persons whom Rowe might have consulted and failed to consult, persons in the second line of tradition, but still trustworthy evidence. And then he passes to what he himself had been able to gather, no longer, alas, from the living voice, but by researches among official papers in Warwickshire and Worcester, the Public Record Office, and other places. I am proposing on this occasion to review what facts of any importance have been thus gleaned from the rubbish-heap of time, whether by Malone himself or his indefatigable successor, Halliwell-Phillipps, or more recently by Mr. Sidney Lee, partly for their own interest, as showing what were the outward conditions under which so rare a genius was bred and flourished, but still more for any light they may throw upon the character of the great poet himself.

Let me begin by a word upon his name. It has parallels in Shakelaunce, and Shakeshaft, and one or two more; and we may learn that to *shake* a spear meant simply to "wield" it, from such a passage as this in Spenser's "Faerie Queene" (ii. 8, 14):

"Gold all is not that doth golden seem,
Ne all good knights that shake well spear and shield."

We may take it, then, that Shakespeare's remote ancestor was a warrior, though not of course a knight; for in the thirteenth century, when such surnames first came into use, and for some centuries after, the name of Shakespeare was exceedingly common, so common, indeed, that an Oxford student who had inherited the name before it became famous, changed it to Saunders, *quod vile reputatum*.

The ancestors of William Shakespeare are believed to have been substantial yeomen for some generations, but they come but dimly into the light of records till the poet's father migrated to Stratford from the neighbouring village of Snitterfield, where his father Richard had land, and then at once we learn something about him. He is summoned on April 29, 1552, with two other residents in Henley Street, Adrian Quiney and Humphry Reynolds, "for making a heap of refuse in the street, against the order of the court," and is fined 12*d.* Four years later he has gained enough substance to buy two houses (one, the present Museum in Henley Street), and then he marries a local heiress, and at once becomes a person of importance in the commonwealth; passing through all the grades of civic office, burgess, constable, affeeror, chamberlain, alderman, at this point becoming *Master* Shakespeare, till, in 1568, he attains the supreme honours of the borough by being elected high-

bailiff. The lady he had married was the daughter of a wealthy farmer of Wilmcote, who was the owner of his father's farm at Snitterfield; she bore the pleasant name of Mary Arden, and was (or was said to be) of some kin with those great Warwickshire people—Roman Catholics and Recusants—the Ardens of Park Hall, and she brought her husband, besides ready money, a house and sixty acres of land called Asbies,¹ and same other property at Snitterfield.

After losing two children, John and Mary Shakespeare had a boy born to them at the end of April 1564, whom they christened William, and he, having escaped the plague that year, which carried off a sixth of the population of Stratford, *non sine dis animosus infans*, would have been four years old when his father was chief magistrate, and so grew into boyhood as the son of one of the most considerable men in the borough. The question has been much canvassed as to his father's business; and as the discussion about it is characteristic of the process by which the facts of Shakespeare's life have

¹ We hear a good deal, by and by, about this estate of Asbies. John Shakespeare mortgaged it in 1578 to his brother-in-law, Edmund Lambert, and ten years later, when he parted with the Snitterfield property to raise money for its recovery, he was told he must not only repay the loan but clear all other debts; and this he was not able to do. Nine years later, when William Shakespeare had become prosperous, a suit was instituted for its recovery; but there is no record of any decree, and the property did not come back to the Shakespeares.

been ascertained, I may be allowed to illustrate that process by this one instance.

Aubrey, the gossiping antiquary, writing in 1680, had mentioned the tradition that Shakespeare's father was a butcher, and that the son, as a boy, exercised his father's trade; adding that "when he killed a calf he would do it in a high style and make a speech." Rowe in his "Life," which was based on the traditions gleaned by Betterton, states that John Shakespeare was "a considerable dealer in wool," and all sensitive people in the eighteenth century were immensely relieved at finding that Shakespeare's father, and presumably Shakespeare himself, had dealt with the outside rather than the inside of the sheep's carcass. Then Malone set out on his researches and discovered from the Stratford records that John Shakespeare is referred to as a glover, and he pointed a polite finger both at Aubrey and at Rowe. Finally Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps comes along, and produces from a Stratford manuscript particulars of two glovers *who used other trades*; one of them, a certain George Perry, who, "besides his glover's trade, useth buying and selling of wool." So we have the woolman and the glover reconciled; and very reasonably, for the gloves most in use at Stratford would have been thick sheepskin gloves. But no instance has been discovered of the same man being both glover and butcher: and as glovers were frequently tanners, and tanners by statute

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were prohibited from being butchers, it is almost certain that the tradition that Shakespeare's father was a butcher must be discredited, especially as he is officially described as a glover on two occasions thirty years apart. He is sometimes described simply as a yeoman, and we know from the Stratford records that he trafficked in the produce of his farms, selling at one time timber, at another corn, at another wool.

But whatever may have been John Shakespeare's business or businesses, the important fact for us is that, whereas for twenty years and more he succeeded, by and by he failed. The late Professor Baynes, who wrote the Life of Shakespeare in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," discovered in him the sign of "a sanguine unheedful temper" in his neglect to remove that heap of refuse in Henley Street. But such unheedfulness was the rule in Stratford. Six years later John Shakespeare is fined for "not keeping his gutter clean," along with four other residents, one of them Master Bailiff himself; and there is good evidence that it was William Shakespeare's indifference in such matters to which he owed the fever from which he died. Mr. Baynes is, perhaps, more plausible in his conjecture that John Shakespeare was of a social and pleasure-loving nature (and so inclined to be lavish of his means), from the fact that it was during his year as bailiff, and presumably by his invitation, that for the

first time Stratford was visited by companies of players. I mention these details about the father because it is important for us to realise in what sort of social surroundings the son grew to manhood. To call Shakespeare, as is sometimes done, "the son of a Warwickshire peasant," gives no idea of the true facts about his breeding. To begin with, he would never have known, as too many peasants at all times have known, the demoralising pinch of hunger; at his worst straits for money his father was never driven to sell his house property in Stratford; he would never have known either the still more demoralising cringing before his so-called betters, which is so often in the blood of the peasant class, the heirs of the old serfs: for traders, in the provinces as much as in London, were accustomed to hold their heads high, because they managed their own affairs. Then again, although it is probable that neither of Shakespeare's parents could write, it does not follow that they could not read; at any rate they would see the best society there was in the little market-town. And, if we remember that the poet's mother prided herself on being a gentlewoman by family, although brought up as a yeoman's daughter (and no persons are so careful of gentle traditions as those who are a little better born than those among whom their lot is cast), we may guess that Shakespeare's home was not an ill nursery for one who was presently to stand

before kings, and—what is of more consequence—was to hold up to the English people the highest ideal of womanhood ever presented to them by any of their great writers.

At seven years old¹ or thereabout William would have been sent to the Grammar School of Stratford, where the curriculum was probably that of the other schools of the period: Lily's Latin Grammar and a book of Latin dialogues to start with; then the Distichs of Dionysius Cato, and Æsop's Fables; then in the fourth year some easy passages of Cicero, and parts of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," and, not least, the very popular eclogues of a Renaissance scholar, John Baptist Mantuanus. If he remained longer at school he would proceed to Virgil, Horace, Terence, or Plautus.

It is evident from Shakespeare's plays that their writer had gone through a Grammar School course. "The Merry Wives of Windsor" shews us the first-form boy being catechised in his Accidence; and for an example of the colloquial Latin which the Grammar School taught, it is enough to refer to the conversation of Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel in "Love's Labour's Lost," where the schoolmaster interlards his remarks with scrappy sentences out of the phrase book, like *Satis quod sufficit; Novi hominem tanquam te:* while the parson not being in such good

¹ Cf. I *Parnassus* v. 663, "interpreting *pueriles confabulationes* to a company of seven-year-old apes."

practice, and endeavouring to emulate him, trips and falls. Holofernes also quotes the first line from Mantuanus's eclogues: "Fauste, precor gelida quando pecus omne sub umbra Ruminat," and exclaims: "Ah, good old Mantuan, I may speak of thee as the traveller doth of Venice: Old Mantuan, Old Mantuan! who understandeth thee not, loves thee not."

I need not stay to point out the many references in Shakespeare's plays to the writings of Ovid—but when persons wish to reduce the "small Latin" that Ben Jonson allowed his friend Shakespeare to nothing at all, it is worth while to remember that the motto from Ovid which Shakespeare prefixed to the "Venus and Adonis" was from a poem—the *Amores*—of which at the time there was no published translation in English. It is interesting also to remember that one of the few books which contain what may be a genuine autograph of Shakespeare is an Aldine copy of Ovid's "Metamorphoses." It is in the Bodleian Library, and passed the eye of Mr. Coxe, who was perhaps the most acute detector of forgeries who ever presided over a library. On the other hand (and in view of recent controversies this may be the more important consideration), that Shakespeare's classical knowledge was not that of a first-rate scholar like Ben Jonson or Francis Bacon, any one may see for himself who will take up the Roman plays; the

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marvellous success of those plays in reproducing the ancient Roman spirit is due entirely to the vigour of the poet's imagination, working upon the material supplied in Plutarch's Lives, which he read in Sir Thomas North's translation. But where North blunders, Shakespeare blunders; he made no attempt to go behind his crib, and he blunders where North does not blunder, through ignorance of Roman constitutional history, confusing the functions of tribune and prætor.¹ If any one is tempted to think that it is classical knowledge, and not imagination, that is responsible for the success of Shakespeare's Roman plays, let him turn to Ben Jonson's "Sejanus" and "Catiline," every line, almost, of which is supported by references to authorities, and then consult the verdict of the playgoers of the period; here is one by an Oxford scholar, Leonard Digges:

Note

"So have I seene when Cæsar would appeare—
 And on the stage at half-sword 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 brooke a line
 Of tedious (though well labour'd) Catiline ;
 Sejanus too was irksome."

¹ Plutarch says that a Roman general standing for the consulship used to appear in the Forum with his toga only, without the tunic beneath it, so as to display his scars more readily. Amyot used the phrase "une robe simple." North, who translated from Amyot, mistook the sense of "simple," and rendered the phrase by "a poor gown." Shakespeare paraphrased this into the "napless vesture of humility."

Of Shakespeare's education outside the walls of the Stratford Grammar School, every one's imagination will furnish him with a better account than I can pretend to give. But we must not forget that on his holidays the boy would have opportunities of making acquaintance (from the outside) with what (from the inside) he was to come to know as his own profession. Every Corpus Christi at Coventry (only thirteen miles from Stratford) there was performed a cycle of miracle plays; and when Hamlet speaks of "outdoing Termagant," and "out-Heroding Herod," and when Bottom speaks of acting in a "Cain-coloured" beard, and Celia calls Orlando's hair "something browner than Judas's," we know that the playwright is reminding the audience of what he and they remembered in their young days of the actors in such pageants. But the year 1569, when Shakespeare was only five years old, saw the introduction into Stratford of actors of another type, a professional company, the Queen's own players from London, who had come by leave of Mr. Bailiff Shakespeare, and opened their visit by a free performance before the council.

What, one wonders, were the plays which on this first occasion they brought with them? We know that in this very year a small boy at Gloucester, named Willis, of the same age as Shakespeare, had witnessed, as he stood between his father's knees, a morality called the "Cradle

of Security," which he describes;¹ did the five-year-old Shakespeare in the same way peep through his father's knees at the players; and, if so, what was the play? Was it a morality of the same old-fashioned type—or was it, perhaps, the fire-new drama written by the Master of Trinity Hall, Thomas Preston, then being acted in town, "The Lamentable Tragedy, mixed full of pleasant mirth, conteyning the Life of Cambises, King of Persia"? Falstaff, at any rate, knew what it meant to "speak in passion, in King Cambyses' vein"; or was it again "The Tragical Comedy of Apius and Virginia," written by one R. B., parts of which seem to have suggested "that tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe—very tragical mirth," which Peter Quince and his fellows presented before the Duke of Athens. Was this the sort of thing young Shakespeare heard?—

" (*Enter* JUDGE APIUS.)

"The Furies fell of Limbo lake
 My princely days do short;
 All drowned in deadly ways I live,
 That once did joy in sport.
 O Gods above that rule the skies,
 Ye babes that brag in bliss,
 Ye goddesses, ye graces, you,
 What burning brunt is this?
 Bend down your ire, destroy me quick,
 Or else to grant me grace,
 No more but that my burning breast
 Virginia may embrace."

¹ Halliwell-Phillipps, *Life of Shakespeare*, i. 41.

We can imagine the learned Judge continuing in the very words of Pyramus :—

“ But stay ;—O spite !
 But mark ;—Poor knight,
 What dreadful dole is here ?
 Eyes, do you see ?
 How can it be ?
 O dainty duck ! O dear !

“ Thy mantle good,
 What, stain'd with blood ?
 Approach, ye furies fell !
 O fates ! come, come ;
 Cut thread and thrum ;
 Quail, crush, conclude, and quell ! ”

Shakespeare in after days could afford to laugh good-naturedly at Cambyses and Judge Apius, no less than at Termagant and Herod ; but we cannot exaggerate the probable influence on his imagination of his first introduction to the Renaissance drama, whether it came then or a few years later. Here was a new world of thought and passion, brought vividly before his eyes by these players ; one had but to sit still, and the whole cycle of the world's inner history, its joys and sorrows, wrongs and revenges, could pass before his eyes, as in Friar Bacon's magic glass. If youth can still be stage-struck, when the stage is a commonplace of our civilisation, we need not doubt that the visits of these first travelling companies, when acting was a new art, brought to the imaginative soul of the youthful Shakespeare

dreams and hopes that by and by moulded his life.

Just one thing more about this topic of Shakespeare's education. What did he read at home? One of those wiseacres who think that Shakespeare's plays were written by James I.'s philosophical Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon, has pointed out to us that Shakespeare in his will says nothing about his library—a remark that, it may be useful to remember, applies no less to the "judicious Hooker," who probably possessed some books all the same.¹ Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps takes a gloomy view of the amount of literature to be found within the houses at Stratford. "Exclusive of Bibles, Church Services, Psalters and Education manuals," he writes, "there were certainly not more than two or three dozen books, if so many, in the whole town." Even so one may hazard a guess that what books there were found their way to Henley Street. We may be sure that Tottell's "Book of Songs and Sonnets," first published in 1557, of which eight editions were issued in thirty years, was known in the district; for did not Master Slender of Gloucestershire possess a copy? And why should not new books have come down occasionally from London? When Shakespeare was fifteen, his school friend Richard Field,

¹ There is no mention of books in the will of Richard Barnefield, or of John Marston, or of Samuel Daniel. Too few contemporary poets had any occasion to make a will.

who by and by published the "Venus and Adonis," left Stratford and his father's tanyard, to be bound apprentice to a London printer, and Field's brother and two other Stratford boys were apprenticed to London printers a few years later or earlier,¹ which of itself proves that the art of printing was recognised in the little community of Stratford; and I for one choose to believe that young Richard Field would have sent down to his friend at Stratford any books he could get hold of, and certainly a book which at the end of that same year made a great stir—the "Shepherd's Calendar," by Edmund Spenser.

We learn from Rowe, who had the information from Betterton the actor, who is supposed to have gone to Stratford in 1708 to collect intelligence, that "the narrowness of his father's circumstances, and the want of his assistance at home, forced him to withdraw his son from school." He does not say when; and he adds that "upon his leaving school he seems to have given entirely into that way of living which his father proposed to him," which is what might be expected in a good son, but does not help us to determine his calling. Aubrey tells us that he exercised his father's trade, which may have been so, especially as his marriage at eighteen would seem to prove that he was not apprenticed to a very strict master; for apprentices

¹ See introduction to *Venus and Adonis* fac-simile by Sidney Lee, p. 39.