WHO WROTE SHAKESPEARE?

A Contribution to an Interesting Discussion.

Was Bacon the Author of Shakespeare's Plays?—Mr. Donnelly's Theory Discussed—Shakespeare's Poetry and Bacon's Philosophy.

Did Francis Bacon write the plays ascribed to William Shakespeare? Mr. Ignatius Donnelly says yes. Criticism and comment say no. Swinburne likens Shakespeare to an unsounded sea; and for two centuries minds of every phase and caliber have been endeavoring to explore this sea. No other single source has given impetus to such a literary flood as that which comes from the Shakespearean dramas. They have been studied and admired by the ablest men that have lived since their publication. Coleridge, for instance, who I believe to have been quite as competent as General Butler is; and Schlegel, whose critical judgment will compare not disadvantageously with that of Appleton Morgan; and Goethe, too, who will possibly stand shoulder to shoulder with Ignatius Donnelly.

"To know a man well were to know himself." Many of the mosteminent critics of the Shakespearean drama were no less poets and philosophers than critics. Indeed Goethe is scarcely less than Shakespeare, and Coleridge scarcely less than Goethe. They knew, in the general sense that we know anything, the human soul. They knew themselves; by the affinity of genius they knew their equals, and certainly none so competent to, they to know whomsoever the Infinite Father created above them. Their acquirements embraced the learning of their time. They knew Shakespeare; they knew Bacon. And they also knew that the mighty mind which mapped out the Instauratio Magna did not evolve Othello and Macbeth.

In addition to these observations on criticism we may consider that Sainte-Beuve—the king of critics, who "sounded all the shoals and depths" of learning, and whose knowledge of character was not a whit less than that of Shakespeare—saw nothing to indicate that Francis Bacon was the author the Shakespearean drama.

As believers in the Baconian authorship I have seen no name mentioned deserving special consideration except that of Henry Temple; and even his opinion, every one will admit, was only pre-eminent in matters of state. Entering upon a political career at the age of twenty-three as Lord of the Admiralty, passing on from that to Secretary of War, and from that to Prime Minister, serving in this capacity longer than any other man, except Liverpool, and almost continuously in some office of government from the time of his political advent until his death, his estimate of the plays that bear Shakespeare's name, and the question as to whether Shakspeare or Bacon wrote them, is hardly worthy to be placed beside that of some others who favor the authorship of Shakespeare, much less to counteract it.

Mr. Donnelly says he has discovered the cipher of Bacon in Henry IV. and the Merry Wives and upon this bases the theory that Bacon wrote the Shakespearean plays. This is a bold assertion, and to substantiate it it is necessary to present a premiss fully as bold. Mr. Donnelly, however, is equal to the occasion he has created. He declares that Bacon is a universal genius. This is absurd—altogether unworthy a critic who assumes to reveal the secrets of the great. Furthermore, the detection of universal genius is beyond the ken of those who thus far, at least, have claimed to discover it in Bacon.

The best argument in favor of Shakespeare is that of nature, and yet, strange as it doth appear, this is brought forward in favor of Bacon; not in its simplicity, in which alone are its beauty and force and truth, but in a way which shows that nothing but vast intellect, strengthened and enriched by laborious study, could have produced the Shakespearean plays—and that Bacon was the only man of his age who possessed this requisite great intellect and universal knowledge. Let circumstances do what they will they can not completely obliterate the divine mark, and the appreciative soul, though the winds of adversity pile the clouds into a mount as deep as Pelion, will see it and rejoice.

Shakespeare, it is said, was the son of a wool dealer (Mr. Donnelly prefers butcher) who at one time had been in good circumstances, having occupied in his native town the office of High Bailiff and Chief Municipal Dignitary, but gradually sunk into great distress and ultimately was a recipient of charity. "Genius," says Irving, "delights to nestle its offspring in strange places." What of Shakespeare's childhood? Nothing historical, and yet the general conclusion can not be far from accurate. We know that his father was poor, and that his intellectual diet was not at all like the curiculum of Cambridge. His name in childhood is not resplendent with the halo of the school angel as in manhood with that of the world's first genius. He was not the infant Bossuet, nor the infant Bacon, nor possibly the infant Balzac. Whether precocious or dull we know not. It is evident that his mind was not hampered by the early and ignorant discipline of the schoolmaster. He was free of the customary environments of education, and fortunate that he was free; for all his productions in after life are the fullblown fruit that grows unhindered from an abundant soil and falls in its season. Though the plays may have been well revised, they do not bear the marks of strain or drudgery in composition, which must have been the case had Bacon written them when he was young and obscure, or even after he began his judicial and political career, and before he reached the position of Chancellor. It is manifest that Shakespeare was a student in youth. His work abundantly shows it. But of what was he a student? Of nature and human nature—the sum and substance of his poetry. Above all Shakespeare knew man; and had the gentleman Bacon known him one-tenth as well as the plebeian Shakespeare he might have achieved glory as a statesman instead of shame. It is a shallow and pedantic trick to sneer at the base born genius and kneel to the learned aristocrat. The paltry spirit in which the ridiculous claim for Bacon is made is obvious—not to determine the authorship of the plays, nor to enhance the fame of Bacon, but rather that those making it may be reputed erudite. If discipline is so highly advantageous—quite indispensable—would it be amiss to establish schools specially equipped for the training of poets? I know the voice of a persecuted world will say no, but if we can develop Shakespeares let the work begin.

Francis Bacon was not a poet by nature, yet behold the poetic marvels of his linguistic, historical and metaphysical studies! A marvel verily—a more astounding one than if these plays which Shakespeare bought of Bacon had been written by himself. After all it may be philosophical to conclude that there is glory enough in Shakespeare's plays for a dozen men, and now that the poet of Stratford has had his share there is enough left surely for a contemporaneous Lord Chanceller. If the judgment is irrevocable that Shakespeare has had his day, why, then, let Bacon succeed him.

In one respect Francis Bacon was like all other men of pronounced originality—he was himself. If the task given a young and vigorous mind is congenial it soon ceases to be a task; but if otherwise it is most irksome, and the mind will refuse it and take another course. In this it follows instinct, fleeing as it does to a refuge, and shows its natural bent. You don't find Bacon in a paridisal nook poetically entranced, but in a corner studying Aristotle. Bacon never did anything in maturity more clearly indicative of his great intellectual gifts than was his early mastery of Aristotle; and had the desire for knowledge then consumed him, as it did the Stagyrite, the Instauratio Magna would now be a perfect edifice instead of the domeless temple that it is. Nature reveals this, and Mr. Donnelly will hardly dispute it, Baconian enthusiast that he is; for to do so would be to shatter his idol and deprive Sir Francis of the title of "universal genius," though it still left him supreme in poetry.

At thirteen Bacon entered Cambridge and at eighteen wrote a most sagacious essay on "The State of Europe." Of this work and its young author Shaw says: "The political knowledge exhibited in this little treatise, and the profound wisdom and acuteness displayed in it, would astonish us as the work of one hardly entered upon the period of adolescence, if any manifestation of intellect could surprise us on the part of this astonishing person. It is obvious that he had already felt the mysterious vocation of genius—that secret oracle which points out to the highest order of minds the true path which Providence intended them to pursue, a path from which they never deviate with impunity. Bacon so strongly felt that the true bent of his character would lead him to consecrate his future life to sublime and solitary meditation, and was so proudly and justly confident in the yet unexercised strength of his intellect, that he entreated Burleigh to procure him from the State some provision which would enable him to prosecute his studies in uninterrupted leisure." If philosophy then was the first and last love of Bacon—and all the world knows it was—and he permitted the allurements of statecraft to obscure his sublime visions, and the voice of the siren to stifle that of the angel, he probably created such people as Lear and Hamlet when at leisure—when there was nothing serious to engage his attention. After he entered politics, tugged at and tormented, as he certainly was, by the conscience, so to speak, of his philosophical genius, he had little time for poetry. No sooner had he struck the current of popular prosperity than his eye became single, his ambition absorbing.

Mr. Donnelly says, "Yes, but you should remember that Bacon, though always a gentleman, was once young, poor and obscure," and though he does not positively say so, he implies that Bacon wrote the Shakesperean dramas when he was "young, poor and obscure." If this is Mr. Donnelly's meaning his position is ridiculous. Every astute student of Shakspeare sees distinctly the poet's different stages of growth, and assigns to each its production. Bacon write the Shakesperean plays before he was appointed Queen's Counsel? It could not have been.

Now what is claimed for Bacon, pure and simple, is this: that in youth he was the sublimest poet, in maturity the most comprehensive statesman, and in after life the greatest practical philosopher—a "universal genius." Here are three extraordinary lives in one, and that life cut short. A striking peculiarity of it is that the middle part is the lowest and the two ends the loftiest. It is sadly out of shape—so extremely swayback that the ends nearly meet. Are the achievements of youth superior to those of maturity? If Bacon wrote the plays when young, he never did anything else so well, and would therefore be the solitary exception. But genius, though peculiar, does not drive cart foremost. It is strange, as Joseph says, that so great a statesman should have been so sublime a poet; and stranger that this rare poetic light should have been dimmed so suddenly; and stranger still that when Bacon realized his occupation was gone he should have applied himself to philosophy rather than to poetry.

Grant that Bacon wrote some of the plays after Robert Cecil became conspicuous, is it probable that he thought to humiliate Cecil by producing Richard III? It is not apparent that Richard was seriously affected with humility—less so, perhaps, than any other character except one in the whole round. A deformed idiot might have hit the mark, but a deformed king—never. Richard's ambition was a kingdom, and he secured it. His bold and subtle mind was ever equal to the demands of the most exacting occasions. He walked in blood, to be sure, and maintained himself by blood, and though his leg was drawn and his body dwarfed by a crooked back, his mind was the loftiest in his realm. If Cecil could have seen himself in Richard he might have felt complimented. If Bacon detested him he would not have devised this means to debase him. Such pretentions do not magnify the opinion of Bacon; and though Mr. Donnelly can not convince us that he was a poet, he should have more respect for the memory of the great philosopher than to depreciate his merit. And as to the date of Richard, it is considered one of Shakespeare's early productions.

Mr Donnelly claims that Bacon's cipher runs through the Shakespearean plays. He has detected it in "Henry IV." and the "Merry Wives of Windsor," and says that "Hamlet" is one fifth larger than when first written. He says further, that whoever wrote the cipher wrote the plays. But this is not evident. It does not necessarily follow that the author of the one is the author of the other. Mr. Donnelly virtually admits this when he declares that the cipher was written separately and subsequently, and then inserted. Even if he has found Bacon's cipher in the plays of Shakespeare, he does not hold in his hand, as he proudly asserts, the lives of Shakespeare, Bacon and Raleigh.

Young Bacon, like young Spinoza, knew himself to be a philosopher; but, unlike Spinoza, he could not toil in poverty and obscurity, gaining a livelihood by some humble means, that he might write philosophy. Bacon was too great for either the law or the State, but unfortunately was cursed with a passion for splendor and magnificence. After he entered the service of his sovereign he was never at his best, his abilities being constrained to an unnatural course, and when he reached the end of it, humiliated and broken hearted, he saw there was nothing in it to recommend him to posterity. The question is, which is greater in its sphere, Shakespeare's poetry or Bacon's philosophy? We scarcely know how vast the complete system of philosophy might have been, but the poetry, we know, is unapproached. Now, if as a poet, he could stand absolutely ahead, and as a philosopher only abreast—for we do not think him greater than Aristotle—why did he not, in retirement, attempt to rest his fame on poetry rather than philosophy? and why was it not his solace in distress? But we find him true to his nature, notwitstanding Mr. Donnelly's distasteful effort to make him an intellectual and psycological hermaphrodite, feeling in the dark for the lost thread of his genius, and when he finds it he knows it and straitway pursues it until he dies, carried away by the impulse of his one great power. Remember it was in youth Bacon sketched the Instauratio, intending, at a future time, to complete it. It is not likely, then, assuming at an early age judicial and political duties, imbued from the first with a paramount idea and evolving it as far as he was able at the first opportunity, that he wrote the plays of Shakespeare.

Mr. Donnelly truly says Bacon wanted to be known to future ages as one of the world's great men. He was undoubtedly one of them, and his ambition in this regard was eminently just. His history as lawyer and statesman, we believe, he would have gladly disowned, conscious that his fame as such would pale when compared to that of others; and knowing his God given strength, his career up to the age of fifty-nine must have been dissatisfying. His life was now far spent, and if he had written the Shakespearean plays, he might have added to them an aggregation of characters greater than either Prospero or Macbeth, for he was at the age to mingle the ripest sentiments of poetry with the ripest speculations of philosophy—and this is what he would have done had he been the poet of the plays. But the Instauratio was planned, and by its consummation he hoped when young to win a name that the glory of the Stagyrite would not dim. He could not now hope to completely unfold his design, so vast was it. Here too he saw that he was baffled; that he must be known to posterity as a corrupt politician and the author of an incomplete system of philosophy. That was inevitable. But the world is more generous than to measure Bacon simply by what he did. It sees in the skeleton of his system a genius for philosophy unsurpassed.

Bacon understood that Shakespeare's poetry was and ever would be incomparable. This reflection, in the light of the remarkable discovery made by Mr Donnelly, begets another that we would fain reject. We can not believe that Bacon wrote the Shakespearean plays, and therefore regret to learn that his cipher has been found in them. Of course, says Mr. Donnelly, the world does not care whether it apotheosizes Shakespeare or Bacon—it would simply crown the poet. We admit that. But does Mr. Donnelly realize that the evidence of the cipher does not place the Shakespearean chaplet on the Baconian brow? Does he see in the cipher a stigma?

Would he who did not blush at self-contradiction to please Elizabeth; who raised the hand of an ingrate against Burleigh, his friend and protector, for the advancement of Essex, and then turned and throttled Essex when urged too hard by Burleigh; who, as Lord High Chancellor, sold his honor to Villiers for favor, retired in disgrace and begged the Lords that they "press not too hard upon a broken reed"—would such a character invent a cipher and insert it in another's work? Would Lord Bacon do it? We prefer to think he would not, and can't thank Mr. Donnelly for intimating that he would. For, say what we will, Bacon was a great soul.

EUGENE ROHAN.

Indianapolis, May 22.

WASHINGTON.

Letter From the National Capital.

Chiefs of Statistics—Pictures of Professor Dodge, James Nimmo and Carrol D. Wright.

WASHINGTON, May 22.—The statisticians of Washington are occupying a pretty large share of public attention just now. Professor Nimmo, the head of the Bureau of Statistics of the Treasury Department, is packing his gripsack preparatory to leaving the place which he has held for the past seven or eight years. Mr. Carroll D. Whight is hard at work getting his twenty special agents into the field, and Professor Dodge, the Statistician of the Horticultural Department, has just launched upon an unsuspected public a calculation of facts and figures which will only be appreciated by the few who have time to give them a careful study. Editor Switzler, of Missouri, who has been named to succeed Mr. Nimmo, is here preparing to take the position on the first of the coming month. Mr. Wright, although appointed by President Arthur, expects to retain his place, and Professor Dodge, who has been at his present post about twenty years, feels that he is in no immediate danger. The figure which the study of statistics cuts in the administration of a great and intelligent government such as this is greater than many would suppose. An able statistician is a person of great value to the Government or a department.

"It is wonderful," said a gentleman connected for many years with the statistical work of the Government here, "to see the growth of this work in the past few years, and the incressed interest that is being taken in it. You would be surprised to see the interest that people take in the class of matter that a few years ago failed entirely to interest them. Indeed we find the interest growing in much greater proportion than our force or our ability to supply the increased demand upon us for the same."

"You get a good many calls for information, then?"

"A good many! Well I should say so. Thousands of them."

"From what class of people do they come?"

"All classes. Of course when Congress is in session we get a great many demands from members who want the information for use in debates. But you would be surprised

PROF. J. R. DODGE.

to see the interest people generally take in this matter. We get inquiries from all classes of people—members of State Legislatures, merchants, teachers, students, preachers, lecturers, manufacturers and farmers. This is especially the case when the tariff or some question of that sort is being discussed in Congress and in the newspapers."

"You consider this a healthy sign, do you not?"

"Very. When you see the people beginning to take an interest in statistical information, you may be sure they are thinking on matters of importance. Yes, the development in this regard in the past few years has been very great."

"You get more calls for information in this line than you did a few years ago?"

"A great many more—yes, ten times as we did ten years ago; and the work of gathering the statistics is looked upon much more favorably now than it was a few years ago. Then it was looked upon with aversion; there was a sort of feeling that it was an interference with private business, and that the facts and figures so gathered would not be of any material value. There was a demand with a certain class for statistics, but they were few in number."

"What is the scope of the work undertaken by the Treasury Bureau of Statistics?"

"Imports and exports, and internal commerce. We give with exactness the amounts of the imports and exports, and a pretty good estimate of internal commerce. Of course it would be impossible to cover everything in internal commerce, for that would include every business transaction down to the sale of a pound of coffee, but we get the great movements in a gratifying way."

"It must take a large force of employes to accomplish this work?"

"Yes. We have thirty five men here now, and all the collectors of ports and their forces of men are required by law to assist us, furnishing us the quantities and value of the various articles imported and exported. By this means we are able to state the precise quantity and value of over 1,000 different articles and classes of articles that are imported."

"How does your system compare with that of other countries?"

"Very favorably. We get the statistical reports of other Governments, and find by comparison that ours is more satisfactory than theirs. Then this is by no means the only statistical bureau of the Government. Each department has its statistician who deals especially in the class of information suited to his department, so the amount of information gathered by the Government in this way is something wonderful."

Mr. Nimmo, who has been so long connected with this service, goes to California as soon as his term of service expires, at the end of the present month, but will return here and continue to make Washington his home. He has been in Government work for twenty years, having been selected in 1865 to formulate and put in practice a system of admeasurement of ocean vessels, and being soon thereafter made Chief of the Tonnage Division, going on from this position to the present one through a grade of positions of trust. His work has been largely of a literary character, also, and his productions rank high with those who make a study of this class of work.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, under Mr. Carroll D. Wright, of Massachusetts, is gradually getting itself into working order. There are to be four or five agents sent to Europe to gather facts bearing on labor depressions, and the remainder of the lot of twenty or twenty five will operate in this country. Mr Wright, who is very familiar with this work, will himself take charge of the working force, especially in New England where he has thoroughly plowed the

JAMES NIMMO, JR.

field. There is a good deal of interest felt in the work of this bureau. Statisticians here speak in very high terms of Mr. Wright and very hopefully of his proposed work. The business of this season will be the investigation of labor depressions and on effort to ascertain their cause. The attention of Mr. Wright and his force of assistants will be especially devoted to this subject, in all parts of this country and in Europe as well.

Another statistician who covers the entire country even more thoroughly than any of those named is Professor Dodge, the Statistician of the Department of Agriculture. His division has a Section of Correspondence and Investigation, a Section of Crop Returns and Records and a Section of Railway and Steamship Transportation Rates. The crop reporting system includes a corps of about 8,000 correspondents, reporting from more than 2,000 producing counties. A parallel and supplementary work is carried on through statistical agents representing each State and Territory. These agents are executive officers of State official systems of crop reporting in the States where such work is organized, thus combining State and National organizations and unifying and perfecting the work. The inauguration of crop reporting in Europe for the information of American farmers who depend more or less upon the European demand for their cereal and meat products has been attended with a good degree of success. Professor Dodge, through these correspondents, is able to give each month a very accurate statement of the condition of the crops of the country. He furnishes to the press on the afternoon of the 10th of the month the condition of the crops the country on the 1st of the month, following with the details a few days later. His

CARROLL D. WRIGHT.

work is very closely watched, especially by those interested in the price of grain, and constant but unsuccessful efforts are made to get "advance information" through which parties might make fortunes in grain speculations. Professor Dodge has found in his twenty years in this position a steadily growing interest in statistics, especially in the past five years, since the result of the last census is beginning to make itself apparent in its effect on the public mind. "There are evidences," he said to your correspondent, "of a higher popular appreciation of the uses and utilities of statistics, and assurances of a farther reach and superior accuracy in the work. In the past the greatest bar to efficiency in census work was found in the ignorance, the indifference, or the actual opposition of individuals from whom primary data must be obtained. Man, in the individuality or selfishness of his wild or savage state, has not learned to yield gracefully something of his natural rights to the general welfare of the community. He is suspicious and fears a tax levy if the inquirer is a government official, and some economic advantage if he is a fellow craftsman. It is wonderful to observe the lingering of some such prejudice in the minds of multitudes of no little intelligence and a degree of culture. It is gratifying to see this prejudice disappearing in the practical culture of the present day. The spirit of statistical inquiry is everywhere felt. Statesmen are imbued with it, newspapers have caught the inspiration, and pleasant sermons find illustration through its influences."

A Missouri farmer refused to look at a sample sewing-machine recently, as he always "sowed wheat by hand." He is related to the man who did not want a threshing-machine on his farm. "For," said he "give me a harness-tug or a barrel-stave, and I can make my family toe the mark according to law and Scripter."