

THE GREAT PLAYS

Authorship is Questioned Along a New Line.

CAREFUL AND LOGICAL ANALYSES

Considering the Actor and Writer as Boy and Man—His Time and Connections. Argument.

Whether Sir Philip Francis or Mr. Burke wrote the "Letters of Junius," whether Dr. Gauden or Charles I wrote "Elkon Basilike" are questions that will never cease to interest a class, thought it will be only a small class; but as long as the best literature ever yet produced by the human mind shall continue to be read on any part of the globe men will be found willing to hear further, if only rational conjecture, on the question who wrote "Shakespeare." He that expects certainty, or even, after a lapse of 300 years, expects an array of facts and a course of reasoning that will leave the inquisitive mind satisfied, must be disappointed. Only a probable case is now possible, but a probable case will be welcomed by the cultured mind. Years ago Judge Holmes, of St. Louis, a learned and strong writer, published a book on the inquiry. He missed the mark completely. A conclusive reason against Shakespeare's authorship of thirty-six plays, many of them among the best ever penned, is that the task is too great for any one mind. Holmes only increases the difficulty by guessing that the plays came from the pen of Bacon, one of the most fertile prose writers of that age. The world is growing incredulous of miracles as modern and secular facts. Up to fifty years ago it was believed that one mind, Homer, produced the "Iliad," and carried the whole twenty-four books in his memory. Today all scholars agree that "Iliad" is made up of a number of poems, composed by bards who never saw each other, and gathered together and welded into one great whole. In our day there remains one literary miracle, the production of the body of plays called "Shakespeare." But is it in fact a miracle?

William Shakespeare was born in the village of Stratford, in Warwickshire, in 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was in early life rich, but afterward became poor, quite poor. In childhood William went to the free school, where, probably, only primary studies were taught, but seems to have left that school at an early age. As to the father's vocation, there are two traditions, one that he was a wool dealer, another that he was a butcher. Probably both are true. In the middle of the sixteenth century cleared land for meadows was scarce in England, and to gather the clip of wool in the neighborhood of a village, clean it of burrs, wash and card it for the use of farmers' wives, would be no great job. The butchering business for so small a market would be light. A boy of 14 with occasional help could do the whole. William seems to have been a wool dealer. He married when barely turned 17, and appears to have married under compulsion. Nor did he have a nice respect for the property rights of his neighbors. He stole deer, and when about 19 found it prudent to flee from Stratford to London. In his new abode immediate subsistence was a necessity. London was then a small place, and people rode on horseback to the theater, hiring persons to care for their horses during the play. Young Shakespeare took up the business of holding horses at the theater. By his promptness and politeness, perhaps that patronage increased, and he hired other boys, who, when a gentleman rode up, stepped forward with "I'm Shakespeare's boy." Unless we except his tact in getting venison, this is the first piece of enterprise we hear of in Shakespeare. But not the last. Enterprise was his notable merit.

Soon our adventurer got employment inside the playhouse as a callboy, or supernumerary. At that time the word theater was not much used, but in its steady playhouse, and the performers were called, not actors, but players. In the tragedy of Hamlet they are called players: "There be players that I have seen play, etc." The playhouse was a large room in or attached to a tavern, and taking the name of the tavern, at Globe, Blackfriars' Fortune, Red Bull, Boar's Head.

In Shakespeare's day Puritanism was at its height, and it hated and detested playhouses, players and plays. It procured sharp legislation against them. One prohibition reads "that no plays be printed except they be allowed by such as have authority." The Archbishop of Canterbury occasionally ordered a bonfire of books. The religious world regarded players and playing as it did gamblers and gambling, that is, with abomination. "No man of ambition dared to attend a playhouse unless in disguise, or, if a writer, to write for the playhouse unless by stealth. The mercantile man would lose patronage, the incumbent of a scholarly position would lose his place, the courtier his possibility of promotion by any known connection with the drama. Shakespeare prospered. He became an actor, though never rose higher than to play inferior parts, such as the "Ghost" in Hamlet. He also became manager of the Globe. Enterprise led him to form and cultivate the acquaintance of one Lord Southampton, who made him a munificent present, and he became a part owner of the Globe. His connection with the Globe gave further room for enterprise. Plays were abundant, but were chiefly worthless. Here was a further call for enterprise. In those days every playhouse could use only the plays which belonged to it or

which it stole from other playhouses. If the Globe is to yield large gains it must procure new and attractive plays. The time was auspicious. England under Elizabeth, like France under Louis XIV., was prolific of mind. But under the ascetic despotism of Puritanism mind could not afford to identify itself with the odious playhouses. Many a mind was teeming with thoughts which it burned to express, but dared not. What can be done? The man of enterprise is equal to the occasion. He seeks men of genius and says to each of them: "You write me a play. I will do the copying with my own hand; will in the printed copy give myself as the author, and I pledge myself that you shall not be known. The bargain is at once struck, and soon several of the first intellects and a goodly number of second-rate and third-rate intellects are secretly writing plays which are successively published at the Globe playhouse as written by William Shakespeare. One can easily see several motives that Shakespeare had for keeping the secret. First, he was bound by honor; secondly, the supposed authorship brought him high credit, and that, too, among the most gifted minds in England—Milton, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Selden, Carew, Fletcher, Donne and hosts of such; thirdly, to break faith would not only publish his own infamy, but would stop utterly the labor of such as were then engaged in producing plays for him, and would reduce the gains of the playhouse. Acting on this plan, the wily manager could defy Puritanism, and enlisted the best minds in England, best in native vigor and in culture, in producing those odious things—plays. Notice some of the consequences of this drawing talent from every quarter. Shakespeare is called myriad-minded. He is equally great in tragedy and comedy. No one mortal can be named who could produce Macbeth and Midsummer Night's Dream, King Lear and the first part of Henry IV. The qualities of mind that produce Hamlet can not be possibly produce Twelfth Night. Just as the author of Rascals could not have written the Vicar of Wakefield. It is the combination of incompatible qualities that evoked from Macaulay that phrase whose absurdity strikes every mind that reflects: "The supreme and universal excellence of Shakespeare." Excellence at once supreme and universal does not belong to earth. Miracles are still demanded.

Consider the question of learning. If we judge by the plays we may properly call the author myriad-minded and impute to him "supreme and universal excellence." The man Shakespeare did not have universal excellence. The writer of some of the plays was a lawyer. Shakespeare was not. The writer of some was familiar with the French tongue. Shakespeare was not. The writer of some was versed in Italian. Shakespeare was not. The writer of some had more than a layman's knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Shakespeare had no medical learning. Let us inquire into his knowledge of Latin. In the absence of information to the contrary, it is safe to presume that 300 years ago Latin was not taught in his native village, and that, if it was, he was too busy handling wool and the butcher's knife to study it. As player and especially as manager his quick mind rapidly picked up the stock Latin words of the playhouse. Doubtless it was the frequency with which he used them that induced his rival and companion, Ben Jonson, to say that he had "small Latin and less Greek," the less Greek being added partly to apologize for the scant Latin by ascribing a little Greek to each partly to give smartness to the sentence. His knowledge, or, rather, lack of knowledge, of Latin appears from the fact that he tacitly approved such phrases as "excutit" (but "exit omnes"; "Actus (not "tertius," but) "tertia." This shows, not small Latin, but no Latin.

As to general learning, it is not possible that he could have accumulated any. Probably there was not a library in Stratford containing five books. While player and manager of the Globe, his reading must of necessity have been scant and fitful. Yet if the author of the Shakespeare plays, he must have known history, ancient and modern, pretty critically, and that, too, before history had been gathered from its original sources by the diligence of a Grote and Arnold, a Gibbon and Hume. But England had men of learning and genius, each of whom could furnish his special share of all that the Shakespeare plays contain. Only a sailor could have produced the nautical phrases and thoughts of *The Tempest* and Shakespeare never set foot on board a ship. He who wrote *The Tempest* must also have been familiar with the "ancient classics." But Shakespeare was ignorant of the classics. But there was one man in England, chiefly residing in London, a finished scholar, sometimes courting the muses, in intellect second only to Bacon only; if Macaulay's estimate is to be accepted, the most accomplished sailor of that day, and withal a personal acquaintance of Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh. He and he alone of all men then on God's footstool had the learning and genius requisite to the production of that gorgeous drama, *The Tempest*.

King Lear is one of the greatest of dramas. Near its close the steward attempts to slay Gloucester and Edgar, the latter being dressed as a peasant. Finding it necessary to disguise his speech, Edgar adopts a peasant's dialect and selects, not the dialect of Warwickshire, the only one Shakespeare knew, but the peasant dialect to which Sir Walter Raleigh had been bred. The fact is significant. Few other men ever lived who had the genius to produce that masterpiece. If the view I am taking, that the Shakespeare plays, like the component poems of the *Iliad*, were produced by a number of minds, there is reason for conjecture that Macbeth is from the pen of a Scotchman, connected, perhaps, with the court of James I. Reasons, but not conclusive ones, could be given for imputing Scotch paternity to that great play.

A reason wellnigh conclusive against the hypothesis that the plays were written by Shakespeare is found in their horribly mutilated condition. It would be insufferably tedious to set

forth many illustrations of the shameful deprivation of the text of the plays. I will give only one. In Macbeth these lines occur:

that we but teach
Bloody instructions which, being
taught, return
To plague the inventor. This even-
handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our pois-
oned chalice
To our own lips.

In 1632 a reprint of Macbeth was being made. The typesetter had finished the words "To plague the," when he was called away. On his return, glancing at his type, he saw that his last word was "the," and, pursuing the sentence, as he supposed, but in fact, beginning after the next "the," he made such stuff as this:

Which, being taught, return
To plague the ingredients of our pois-
oned chalice
To our own lips.

Luckily the original copy remained to furnish the true reading, but no sagacity could guess it from this botched reading. But there were other sources of error in the text quite as fruitful as typographical errors. The errors were so great and so numerous that in spite of the diligence of the critics for the last 150 years there remain abundance of passages of which the meaning can not be conjectured. Well, as Shakespeare himself, armed with authority as manager, was on the ground six days in the week, and these multitudinous and horrible blunders were being made daily under his very nose, is it not absurd to say that he would quietly allow the children of his brain to be gashed and mutilated and destroyed? Shakespeare knew himself to be a money-making stage manager, but not a dramatic poet. The plays were mangled because there was no author to read proof.

The only evidence that I know of that any given play was written by Shakespeare is that when it was first printed for stage use its title page contained the words, "Written by William Shakespeare." There were seven other plays marked in the same way. Why are they not published with the thirty-six that we have? Seven years after Shakespeare's death two of his old colleagues published the thirty-six, but found that they dropped them out. Thus we have forty-three plays purporting to be written by an uneducated man, and written while he was performing double duty as player and as manager.

Presumably in 1608 Shakespeare, grown rich, quit the playhouse, returned to Stratford, bought himself a fine property and planted the mulberry tree. He was yet in middle life, in robust health, without employment, and without care. He must have known the corrupted condition of his plays. Naturally he would find it a delight to devote two or three hours a day for a month or so to an elimination of the errors. Not a line did he write. He seem to have lived seven years longer, and in good health, but he wrote not a line. The imputed children of his brain he utterly neglected in their mangled, misshapen condition.

ISAAC BICKERSTAFF, JR.

A WARNING NOTE.

(From Sydney Morning Herald.)

A note of warning.
At first the faintest echo,
It strikes the back.
A peculiar warning not heard but felt.

It increases day by day.
The back cries out—rebels.
The aches, pains, and lameness
Make life a misery—become un-
bearable.

Do you understand the warning?
Do you realize 'tis kidney talk?
The kidneys are on a strike.
They have been overworked.
Nature intends you to know this.
And has only one way to warn you.
The kidneys are located near the
small of the back.

They are composed of delicate fil-
ters that filter the blood.
Stooping positions, a strain or cold
often clogs the filters.

This is serious when you don't
know what to do.
Backache is the beginning, lame
and weak back follows.

The filters fail to do their work.
Kidney disease develops.
The urine is too frequent.
The calls of nature wake you up
at night.

A brick-colored deposit shows the
trace of failing kidneys.
The urine acid if going the wrong
way.

It is passing through the blood.
Poisoning the whole system.
Rheumatic pains and many aches
appear.

All this from a small beginning.
So easy to cure, too, when you
know how.

Get at the cause.
Break up the kidney blockade.
Doan's Backache Kidney Pills do
this.

That's their specialty—for the kid-
neys only.
One thing at a time is why they
succeed.

Doan's Backache Kidney Pills are
not a cure-all, but a kidney cure.
Here is some testimony right here
in Sydney as to what these pills will
do and are doing every day.

Mrs. M. Mullins, of No. 49 Hunter
street, this city, says:—"For about
three years I suffered from kidney de-
rangement. The worst symptom was
a constant backache, which became
more painful when I had to stoop down.
I tried many remedies for this com-
plaint, but the effect was anything but
beneficial. Doan's Backache Kidney
Pills have given me great relief, and I
believe I am permanently cured. I will
always recommend these pills to suf-
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Doan's Backache Kidney Pills are
for sale by all dealers, for 50c per box,
or six boxes for \$2.50, or will be mailed
on receipt of price by the Hollister
Drug Co., Ltd., Honolulu, agents for
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