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Did Shaxpur or Francis Bacon Write Shakespeare?

Preliminary Sketches — The Wonderful Scholar Bacon—The Illiterate Stratford Family—How Did Sh—sp—r— Spell His Name?—His Daughters—Learning of the Plays—Law of the Plays—Course of the Discussion—How Ignatius Donnelly Exhausts the Subject.

In the latter part of the sixteenth century two great lights suddenly blazed out in the galaxy of British intellects. So far did they surpass all who went before, that each is taken as the founder of a new system, both as the beginners of a new era. So great have they seemed to all who have come after that comparison is considered high praise. So far did they outshine all contemporaries in their several lines, that those are for the most part only quoted as witnesses to these two; and while the time abounded in heroes, statesmen, scientists and explorers, these two gave it that distinctive glory which still attaches to the Elizabethan age. These men were a certain dramatist, whose name is in dispute, but usually printed "Shakespeare," and Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam and Viscount of St. Albans. Comes now the Hon. Ignatius Donnelly and offers to prove that these two were one, that "Shakespeare" is a nom de plume, adopted in mild burlesque of a certain witty actor and stage manager; that the authorship of the plays was concealed for political reasons, and thus the ignorant actor has been credited with the philosopher's work. It is as if we should place Pike's Peak upon Popocatapetl, or add the strength of Samson to the muscles and stature of Goliah. If we must add the greatest philosopher down to that time to the greatest dramatist of all time, the colossal intellect thus evoked overpowers the common mind, and we can only remit the explanation to the philosophy of miracles.

Let us, therefore, examine Mr. Donnelly's argument carefully, and add to it what others have discovered, for the theory is no new thing For nearly half a century it has been gaining adherents; at least 250 books and pamphlets thereon have been issued, and literary men are already ranged in two hostile camps—the Baconians and Shakespearians. This article is merely an attempt to present the evidence in compact form, and point out the strongest and weakest counts in Mr. Donnelly's plea, just issued.

THE CONTRASTED TWO.

No two men could differ more widely than the known philosopher and the supposed dramatist. Lord Bacon was nobly born, rich (except during one period of his life) and learned beyond all men of his time, a refined courtier, a profound lawyer and an able judge, an aristocrat in politics and a life long companion of noblemen and the adherents of royalty Of the supposed dramatist the exact reverse was true in every respect until the middle or latter part of his life, when he had gained fame and fortune. The contrasted evidence is amazing and startlingly suggestive. Of Lord Bacon we know as much as of any man in English history. He was born at York house, in the Strand, London, Jan. 22, 1561, and died at Highgate, April 9, 1626. His father was a baronet, Sir Nicholas Bacon, his mother of noble blood and extraordinary talents. The few specimens extant of her letters are perfect models of graceful and classical English. The style is noticeably "Shakespearian." She adopted Puritan views, and her letter warning her sons, Francis and Anthony, against the theatre, bears a striking similarity to passages in the great dramas. Francis was precocious and his health was delicate. At 8 years of age he read the books usually perused by his parents; at 11 he produced an essay on the laws of the imagination; at 12 he entered Trinity college, Cambridge, whence he graduated with high honors, and at the age of 16 he issued a protest against the philosophy of Aristotle, then preferred at the college, and against the general system of teaching. "They learn nothing," he said, "except to believe. They are like a becalmed ship, they move but by the wind of other men's breath and have no oars of their own to steer withal." From childhood he was polite and witty.

"How old are you, my pretty boy?" asked Queen Elizabeth when his mother brought him to court.

"Two years younger than your majesty's happy reign," replied the witty little courtier.

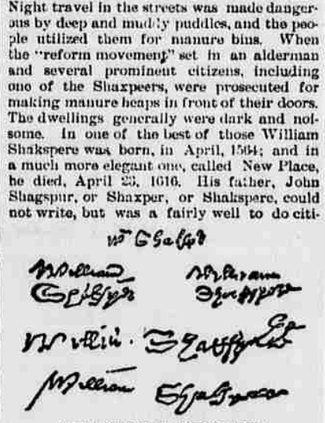
He read all the Greek and Latin authors critically, spoke French and Italian, and had some knowledge of Danish and German. He traveled on the continent of Europe, studied in Paris, read law two years, and was admitted to the bar at the age of 21. At 28 he was made counsel extraordinary to the queen; at 32 he was chosen member of parliament for Middlesex, and devoted himself to a reform of the laws. Subsequently he was special counsel to King James I; then solicitor general, attorney general, and finally lord high chancellor. In 1618 he was created Baron Verulam, and in 1621 Viscount of St. Albans.

We turn now to the alleged dramatist, and are at once almost lost in obscurity. At first view he would seem no more a real historical person than Romulus or Agamemnon. We know that there is a name, "Shakespeare," attached to immortal works, from which we form exalted conceptions of the author, and a portrait accompanying the works, which is admitted to be an "improvement" or flattering imitation of a very different picture. We also know that there was an individual whose name bore a very slight similarity to the other in sound, and a closer resemblance in spelling that he came at an early age from Stratford-on-Avon, lived thirty years in London, grew very rich as manager of a theatre, returned to his native place, and spent his few remaining years in easy living, diversified by some rather discreditable actions. But that individual's real name we cannot know, since the few of his relatives who could write spelled it in at least fifty-five different ways, from Jacquespeer, Shackspeer and Jaxpyr, though the slow evolution of Shaxpeer, Shackspyr, Shackspeer and Shaxper, down to Shakspeer and finally Shakspere, at which it rested during the later years of William Shakspere, after he had tried thirteen different ways of spelling it, only to make its final change some time after his death into "Shakespeare," when his heirs claimed the honor of the dramatic authorship and it was asserted that the family had been founded by a noted warrior who was knighted for his bravery with the spear. And, finally, there is some evidence that the original was the Norman nick name, for a peasant, Jacques-Pierre, which was pronounced Zhackspeair and meant "Jack Peter."

For information of this William Shaxper or Shakspere we turn first to the public and official annals of the time and find not a line. We turn next to the letters and other productions of eminent men of the time, and it was indeed an age of greatness. There were Robert Earl of Essex, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, Cecil Lord Burleigh, Nicholas, Anthony and Francis Bacon, Sir Robert Cecil, Sir Henry Wotton and Sir Philip Sidney, with Walsingham, Coke, Camden, Hooker, Drake, Inigo Jones and all that brilliant galaxy of warriors, scholars and navigators, who only began their career in the reign of Elizabeth and became noted in that of James, and therefore must have been for a short time contemporary with William Shakspere. The literature still extant as made by these men is voluminous; yet in all of it there is no reference to the man, and very little indeed to the plays. Let us pass this omission as due to their preoccupation in other affairs and turn to the poets and other writers of the time. Here we find a few, very few, references to William Shakspere as a genial fellow, a boon companion at a supper and abounding in wit and humor. But one of all those, however, the noted Ben Jonson, left any testimony implying that William Shakspere was a man of great talents. To sum up: All we really know of the man was gathered after his death by visitors to Stratford-on-Avon. Seven years after the death of Shakspere appeared the first complete edition of "Shakespeare," called the edition of 1623; then the reporters of the day went to Stratford and hunted up the particulars, and what they reported, and their successors have discovered, sums up substantially as follows:

THE SH-K-SP-R-S OF STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

Stratford-on-Avon was one of the dirtiest towns in England at a period when the filthiness of common life was indescribable. Night travel in the streets was made dangerous by deep and muddy puddles, and the people utilized them for manure bins. When the "reform movement" set in an alderman and several prominent citizens, including one of the Shaxpeers, were prosecuted for making manure heaps in front of their doors. The dwellings generally were dark and noisome. In one of the best of those William Shakspere was born, in April, 1564; and in a much more elegant one, called New Place, he died, April 23, 1616. His father, John Shagspur, or Shaxper, or Shakspere, could not write, but was a fairly well to do citi-



SHAKSPEREIAN AUTOGRAPHS.

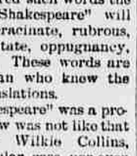
zen; his mother was equally uneducated, most of his relatives the same, and his own daughter Judith, at the age of 27, could not sign her name. When William was but 15 years old his father became a bankrupt. William worked successfully as butcher and wool stapler till the age of 18, when he was compelled to marry Anne Hathaway, 8 years older than himself. Their first child was born a few weeks after, and their twins, Hamnet and Judith, some two years after. The young husband and father became rather dissolute; was prosecuted and whipped for stealing deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, and took revenge by circulating a coarse piece of poetry ridiculing the magistrate, for which he was so threatened that at the age of 21 he fled to London. There he lived a short time by the humblest occupations, then became an actor, and very soon after appeared the first, and perhaps the finest, of the Shakespearian plays.

And here we are face to face with the first great mystery.

If Shakspere wrote "Shakespeare," then we must believe that the illiterate village boy advanced in two or three years to the capacity of producing dramas which sweep the whole gamut of human feeling, rise to the heights of learning and go down to the depths of mental and moral philosophy, display a knowledge of courtly life and gentle manners equal to that of Raleigh and an insight into the principles of law almost rivaling Coke, at the same time that they show a command of Latin derivatives never in any other case gained except by a severe classical training, a smoothness of versification no other poet has attained without years of application and an insight into the workings of the human heart never granted to any other writer. It almost surpasses the power of human credulity. It is perhaps possible to accept it as a fact without invoking miracle as the explanation; but we need not wonder that many thousand thoughtful men disbelieve it.

This is the first and greatest mystery, and the second is like unto it, namely—Why did William Shakspere, if the great dramatist, suddenly cease to write at the very time Lord Bacon was promoted to high office, retire to Stratford and never mention his immortal works? As we have seen, the first plays appeared almost as soon as the youth became an actor, though there is evidence that plays very similar in character and title had been shown in London before Shakspere arrived there. Before 1593 appeared seven plays and two poems, all these before William Shakspere was 30 years old! Between the latter date and 1600 appeared thirteen more plays, and thus they continued to appear till Bacon was promoted—then Shakspere went to Stratford. As manager of the theatre in London he had acquired a great fortune; we should presume, therefore, that he would thereafter lead the life of a retired scholar, and his mansion be the resort of learned men. Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he engaged in the brewing business, loaned small sums on ironclad mortgages, pursued debtors with merciless severity, in one instance suing a man for two shillings, indulged various vices, contracted according to one of his cotemporaries a loathsome disease, and finally died in a fever produced by a long debauch and the accompanying exposure. In all England the utmost research has failed to produce a scrap of his writing except five signatures; none of these had any connection with literature, nor is there any proved copy of anything he wrote in which he referred to "Shakespeare's" dramas. He made a will in which he mentions all his petty household stuff, his bowls, his breeches and his second best bed; but in it there is no word referring to his books, no mention of his plays or any claim to copyright, not one allusion to his possible fame. Did ever great scholar or writer make a will without such reference? Well might Ralph Waldo Emerson say, "I cannot marry the facts to his verse."

The continued history of his family greatly adds to the mystery. His daughter Judith, at the age of 27, had her "mark" certified to because she could not write. His parents' graves were unmarked by any stone and unknown to his children. His daughter Susanna married Dr. Hall in haste, and without publication of banns, for which they were cited to appear before the ecclesiastical court, and were able to prove that the haste was at least advisable. A little later the doctor sued two neighbors for libel, in that they had reported bad conduct in his wife; and as there is no record of a verdict, lawyers have thought that the case was compromised. Dr. Hall was a busy and careful man. He kept a voluminous diary of his patients, his life and his many interests, which is still extant, and has been greedily searched by scholars; but it contains nothing to prove claims to any rights in "Shakespeare." In the next generation the family became extinct, the grandchildren dying childless; the property, the little that was left, went to collateral heirs, and the family dropped into its original obscurity. That out of such a family should suddenly have risen the greatest genius of earth, descended from a long line of peasants and boors; that he should have lived such a life, died such a death, left daughters uneducated and taken no thought for his fame, is of course possible, but it is against all experience.



JUDITH SHAKSPERE'S MARK.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES.

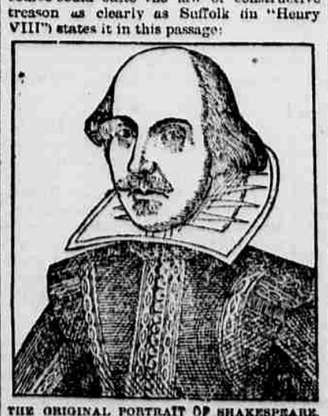
1. The plots of many of the plays are from Latin, Greek and Italian authors, and whole lines and paragraphs are almost literal translations from the obscure classics. The ready explanation was that the unlearned Shakspere obtained his knowledge from translations, but recent research has a conclusive negative in this; many of these works had not then been translated into English, and at least one of them is not translated yet. More convincing still, in those cases where an English translation was then extant the author of "Shakespeare" has rejected the style and words of the translation, and reproduced in his drama a literal rendering of the original, thus proving that he had not only read it, but had it inwrought into the very texture of his mind. Even the so called mistakes of "Shakespeare" often prove to be classical. Thus, in "Antony and Cleopatra" Charmian proposes a game of billiards. In the ordinary reader this excites a smile. But the encyclopedic brain that produced "Shakespeare" knew the curious fact—not one man in a million knows it now—that the game of billiards antedates Cleopatra. In another place is a reference to "Adonis' Gardens," of which the learned Richard Grant White says: "No mention of any such gardens in the classic writings is known to scholars." But James D. Butler has found the passage in the "Phædrus of Plato," used exactly as in Shakespeare.

2. The author makes a word wherever he needs it, makes it generally from a Latin root and invariably follows the best rules of derivation, and gives the word its radical meaning. Of many hundred such words the reader familiar with "Shakespeare" will readily recall these: Deracinate, rubrous, cautelous, armipotent, evitate, oppugnancy, legerity and propinquity. These words are not the coinage of a man who knew the Latin authors only in translations.

3. The author of "Shakespeare" was a profound lawyer. And his law was not like that of Charles Reade or Wilkie Collins, "crammed" for the particular case, nor even like that of Samuel Warren, whose "Ten Thousand a Year" is evidently written by a lawyer and yet contains some very bad law: on the contrary, it is the condensed excellency of the common law of England as it stood at the accession of James I, and so thoroughly absorbed into the writer's mind that even in sportive love scenes or keen ridicule he makes no mistake. This point was lately submitted to a few able lawyers in England, and their decision was that in all the court scenes and law phrases of "Shakespeare" there was but one departure from the actual law, that in the "Merchant of Venice." We can readily see how the necessities of the dramatic situation compelled the author to depart from the correct rule in that case, for it would have been a very flat contradiction if Antony had asked relief in equity from his bond. Authors who dip into law run into danger: unless well read in the science they are certain to blunder. But even in the most careless allusions, or love scenes, the great dramatist employs the techuical terms of law in their strict meaning and preserves the delicate distinctions between purchase and descent, heirs of the blood and collaterals, indictment and presentation, burgage tenure, fees and gavelkind, reversion and recovery. Observe the legal terms, as we have capitalized them, in this love scene:

A Contract of Eternal Bond of love,
Confirmed by Mutual Joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthened by Interchangement of your rings,
And all the ceremony of this Compact
Sealed in my function by my Testimony
—Twelfth Night, v, 1.

How many students of Blackstone, Coke or Mansfield, at the end of a two years' course could state the law of constructive treason as clearly as Suffolk in "Henry VIII") states it in this passage:



THE ORIGINAL PORTRAIT OF SHAKESPEARE.

Lord Cardinal, the king's further pleasure is,
Because all those things you have done of late
By your power legatine within this kingdom
Fall into the compass of a præmunire,
That therefore such a writ be sued against you:
To forfeit all your goods, lands, tenements,
Chattels and whatsoever, and to be
Out of the king's protection. This is my charge.

Stranger still, when a case is disputed in any of the plays, the dramatist lays down the law as it was in the last preceding reports of the higher courts, even when that had changed the previous law or the popular conception of it. Thus the grave digger in "Hamlet," though discoursing clumsily that Ophelia might be buried in consecrated ground, lays down the law as it had been laid down in "Plowden's Reports" in the case of Sir James Hales, who committed suicide. If the Shakespeare preconception were not so strong, the modern lawyer would say that this passage was written by a man in practice and "keeping up with the decisions."

4. The author of "Shakespeare" was fairly well informed in botany, zoology and such science as then existed.

MINOR INTERNAL EVIDENCES.

The foregoing are only the most salient proofs; but many more are cited. Thus the dramatist never refers to Stratford-on-Avon, the home of the Shaxper or Shakspere family; but there are twenty-three references to St. Albans, the home of Bacon. Warwickshire is nowhere praised; but Kent and other districts in the south are. The fauna and flora of the plays are not those of Warwickshire; neither is the geography, the nobility or the dialect. When "Shakspeare's" clowns talk dialect, the only Warwickshire words are those common to that county and the south of England. Neither the politics, nor the religion, nor the social life of the plays are those of Stratford-on-Avon. By all reasonable supposition the Shaxperes were democrats, the dramatist is an aristocrat who only mentions the common people to ridicule them. The dramatist lived through the life and death struggle of Catholicism and Protestantism in England; yet it is impossible to decide which party he favored, and both have claimed him. He plainly ridiculed the pope's claim to sovereignty in England; but he ridiculed the other party's extreme view just as keenly, and as soon as Queen Elizabeth was dead he put forth a play in which her mother, Anne Boleyn, is mercilessly dissected and held up to our contempt.

We have presented but a tithe of the Baconians' evidences, the Shakespearians meet them with weighty facts. First and probably strongest on their side is what logicians call the universal testimony. All the world believed from the start that William Shakspere was the author; and how could all the world be deceived? They add to this the written testimony of three contemporary writers. The Baconians easily dispose of two, one of whom attacks Shakspere as a pretender and the other only refers to him as a witty, easy writer; but the testimony of Ben Jonson is too direct and explicit to be thus got over. He was very intimate with Shakspere and for a time acted as secretary to Bacon; he outlived them both and received a pension from Charles I; he survived to a time when the political divisions of Elizabeth's and James' courts were obsolete, and as far as can now be seen, he was perfectly free to tell what he knew. He knew the universal attribution of the plays to Shakspere and never contradicted it. If he knew that Bacon was their author why was he silent? If it was a fact and he did not know it, how could he be deceived? Mr. Donnelly's answer is ingenious, and to many will be conclusive; but in our limited space we cannot set it forth.

Mr. Donnelly's cipher we do not as yet attempt to master. At first view it appears to us very complicated; but of the few who have worked out sections of it, some insist that it is conclusive. For explanation we need in this place only use a familiar form. Suppose that in some current writing we find that the tenth word is "our," the twentieth "father," the thirtieth "who," the fortieth "art," and thus on through the Lord's prayer—we are compelled to conclude that it is the result of design. Mr. Donnelly's cipher, however, proceeds on a far more complicated plan. It is as if one should take the fifth word, the tenth, the fiftieth, the hundredth, the hundred and fiftieth, and thus on to 1,500, then return through a totally different series of figures, arrived at by dividing, to the place of beginning, and then proceed on a new series of which the separate increments were obtained by a fixed system of division between the previously obtained increments. Of course, this is not Mr. Donnelly's system, but it gives some idea of it, and those who maintain that it is the true solution admit that many days' labor, of tedious counting, are necessary to evolve even one paragraph of the concealed story. But when evolved, they insist, it gives the inside history of Queen Elizabeth's reign and shows why the authorship had to be concealed.

With this caution to the reader we present a few of the paragraphs formed by the words thus numerically selected from "Henry IV," the play in which Mr. Donnelly discovered the cipher. We give the names as formed by the cipher of common words and the real names in parentheses. The Marlowe mentioned was a contemporary and rival of William Shakspere.

SIR ROBERT CECIL.

Queen Elizabeth is represented as talking with Cecil, cousin of Bacon but his enemy. Cecil says: "These plays are put abroad at first upon the stage in the name of more-low (Marlowe), a woebegone, sullen fellow He had engaged in a quarrel with one Arch or (Archer) a servant, about a wanton, ending in a bloody hand to hand fight, in which he was slain. The point of his own sword struck against his head and eye, making fearful wounds." Speaking of Marlowe's blasphemy, he proceeds: "My father would, in his wrath, have burned the borson, rascally knave alive in the fire of Smithfield for the sin he hath committed against Heaven and the state." Speaking of the treasonable purposes of the plays, he says that, having heard that the Essex party were representing the deposition and murder of King Richard II on the stage and cheering uproariously at every hit, he sent a friend to ascertain the facts, who returned with the statement that the reports were true. The following sentence is descriptive of the scene in the theatre on the death of King Richard II: "But when poor King Richard fell a corpse at Pomfret under uncounted blows, they made the most fearful noise. Again and again it broke forth. It seemed as if they would never stop. * * * The play shows the victory of rebels over an anointed tyrant, and by this pipe he hath blown the flame of rebellion almost into open war. These well known plays have even made the most holy matters of religion, which all good men hold in sincere respect, subjects for laughter, their aim being, it is supposed, to thus poison the mind of the discordant, wavering multitude. They mean in this covert way to make a rising and flood this fair land with blood." In another part of the cipher story it reads thus: "Sens-ill (Cecil) said that More-low (Marlowe) or Shak'st-spurre (Shakspere) never writ a word of them. * * * It is plain he is stuffing our ears with false reports and lies this many a year. He is a poor, ill-spirited, greedy creature and but a veil for some one else. I have a suspicion that my kinsman's servant, young Harry Percy, was the man to whom he gave every night the half of what he took through the day at the gate. Many rumors are on the tongues of men that my cousin hath prepared us only the 'Contention Between York and Lancaster,' and 'King John' and this play (Rich. II), but other plays which are put forth, at first under the name of More-low (Marlowe) and now go abroad as prepared by Shak'st-spurre (Shakspere)." Still another represents a conversation between Cecil and the Bishop of Worcester, and the bishop

CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.