

Shakespeare,

HIS TIMES, LIFE AND WORKS.

The writer of these articles does not presume to any high critical quality nor pretend to any new literary light in writing upon England's greatest son, but only seeks to place before the readers of the ANGLO-SAXON some facts and opinions that have reached his attention and commanded his thought in certain leisure moments devoted to "Shakespeare, His Times, Life and Works." By bringing them before others, the writer hopes to refresh the memory and resuscitate the pleasure of those to whom the ground is familiar as well as to create a desire in the hearts and brains of a possible few who do not know their fellow-countryman, to make his further acquaintance.

I.—A FEW WORDS ON THE BACON THEORY.

Three centuries ago William Shakespeare was hard at work with head and hand making the certainty of the morrow's livelihood by the careful labor of the day—fighting like all men in the common battle of life.

This deliberate statement of truth is necessary because for some years past there has been evolving from many disingenuous hearts a deliberate statement of untruth, which if successful in its slander would reduce the household god of English literature to a mere mythical *nom de plume*.

It has given birth to some of the most stupendous and elaborate nonsense that has ever crept into English thinking heads.

It is openly asserted and honestly believed by many—including good scholars as well as captious critics—that the name of William Shakespeare was used, and some insinuate that it was probably paid for, by the greatest prose-writer of that day, Lord Bacon, and that while there was perhaps a common actor of the name of William Shakespeare, he was not the real author of the dramas attributed to him—Ignatius Donnelly tries to show in his cipher-story that Shakespeare was also a low blackguard.

A parallel to the Baconian theory is the celebrated "Historic doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte" of Archbishop Whateley, which by sheer force of misapplied reasoning upsets the facts of history and shows it possible that the great Frenchman may never have existed at all!

Perhaps the chief champions of the craze are Delia Bacon, who first aired her peculiar views in Putnam's Magazine, and subsequently went insane; W. H. Smith, who conveyed his opinions in a letter addressed to Lord Ellesmere in 1856; Leo Vale, who cited Lord Palmerston; Mrs. Henry Pott with her parallel passages; Appleton Morgan, whose "Shakesperian Myth" was amply refuted by George Wilkes in his "Shakespeare from an American point of view;" Nathaniel Holmes, who proclaimed the peculiarly skeptical bent of his mind by the sweeping statement that "we worship in Jesus what belongs to Plato; in Shakespeare what belongs to Bacon;" and lastly, Ignatius Donnelly with "The Great Cryptogram;" Francis Bacon's Cipher in the so-called Shakespeare Plays," which is constructed from the original folio of 1623 and is a mass of false reasoning and confused methods. Professor Masson, of Edinburgh, says "Mr. Donnelly's theory is miserable drivel, and his cryptogram a tissue of arithmetical conundrums, which would be hissed even in Bedlam." Mr. Furness called the Baconian theory "a disease," and it seems to be of the epidemic variety."

In spite of all the ingenious parallels, comparative phraseologies, calculating puzzles and chronological data advanced by these theorists, there is one short passage referring to Shakespeare in the undoubted writing of his friend, Ben Jonson, which far outweighs all their specious arguments and shallow fancies—a passage charged with

personality so powerful as to utterly explode the heartless and senseless attacks made upon the memory of the world's greatest poet.

The words of Ben Johnson are these: "I knew this man and loved him and do honour his memory, on this side of idolatry, as much as any; he was indeed honest and of an open and free nature, had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions."

Besides this direct testimony there are the cotemporary references of many dramatists, poets and critics, both friendly and otherwise; the registrations of his baptism; the evidence of his marriage; the letter of Richard Quincey begging a loan of thirty pounds; the published poems during his life bearing his name; the letters patent of King James I. licensing the theatrical company to which Shakespeare belonged and in which his name occurs; and the famous will of the poet.

Thus here exist facts against which the Baconian theorists can only pit fancies, though Mr. Donnelly pretends to put forth arguments. *Garrit aniles ex re fabellas.*

The entire absence of any personal indication of himself in his works has been used as negative evidence in favor of the claim of Bacon, with as much reason as the absence of Charles Dickens' own name might be urged as a reason that he did not write David Copperfield.

In his last will and testament, Shakespeare bequeathed to John Heminge and Henry Condell, as well as to the great Richard Burbage, "my fellows," as he calls them, "26 shillings and 8 pence a peece to buy them ringes."

Would his brother actors, who knew Shakespeare so intimately and were part proprietors of the same theatres, Heminge and Condell above mentioned, have dedicated their edition of his plays to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery within seven years of his death had they not been sure of his work?

Is it likely that the print of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshont would have been placed opposite the title page, had he not been the real author? or that Jonson, who knew the poet and his works so well, would have penned these lines beneath that portrait:

"To The Reader.

This Figure, that thou here seest put
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With Nature to outdo the life;
O! could he but have drawne his wit
As well in brass, as he hath hit
His face; this Print would then surpasse
All that was ever writ in brass.
But since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke."

Again, would 'rare Ben' have addressed his eulogy "To the Memory of my beloved Master, William Shakespeare," so intensely reverential and genuine in feeling and so particular in its attributes, had not the object of his praise been a near and dear friend, a benefactor and brother artist, such as the real man was and such as Lord Bacon, by his very temperament and position, could never possibly have been—though Jonson knew him and his works also?

References to Shakespeare were made by several cotemporary writers—notably Robert Greene, in his pamphlet, "A Groatsworth of Wit bought with a million of Repentance," published in 1592; Francis Meres, in his "Palladis Tamia," published in 1598; John Weever in his Epigrammes, published in 1599; etc.

Not long after his death he is referred to by I. Mayne, Owen Feltham, Richard West, H. Ramsay, T. Terrent, William Basse, Hugh Holland, L. Digges, Richard Barnefield, Thomas Freeman, Michael Drayton, S. Sheppard, William D'Avenant, and others; nor must it be forgotten that John Milton's verses were prefixed to the folio edition of 1632.