

WILLIAM SHAKSPER  
of  
STRATFORD-ON-AVON  
1564-1616



THERE HAS BEEN affirmatively presented in the foregoing chapters positive and irrefutable proof that "William Shakspeare" was the pseudonym of Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford. It seems therefore superfluous to present either arguments or evidence of a negative character to show the possibility of William Shaksper's being the famous dramatist. This volume would be incomplete, however, without a discussion of William Shaksper of Stratford, not only because he has been for so long the accepted author, but because from the part he played in the story Ben Jonson derived the idea of using him for the hoax in the First Folio.

It is necessary to note the distinction, yet similarity, between Lord Oxford's *nom de plume* and the name of the Stratford man. Shakspeare (hyphenated on the title pages between 1598 and 1622 of eighteen quarto editions of plays) was obviously a made name, as the anonymous author of *Willobie his Avisa*, in 1594 readily recognized. It was suggested—among other things—by the cognizance of Edward de Vere, as Lord Bolebec, which was a lion shaking a spear; and by the complimentary address to the young Earl of Oxford at Cambridge University, in 1578, by Gabriel Harvey, who after extolling de Vere's high qualities, his literary achievements and eminence, appealed to him to renounce literature and follow the martial career of his great ancestors, saying "Thine eyes flash fire; thy countenance shakes a spear."

"In Grecian mythology, Pallas Athena was the goddess of wisdom, philosophy, poetry and the fine arts. Her original name was simply Pallas, a word derived from *pallein*, signifying a spear. She was generally represented with a spear. Athens, the home of drama, was

under the protection of the Spear-Shaker. In our age such a signature would be understood at once as a pseudonym."<sup>1</sup>

Pallas Athena, also goddess patron of the Greek theatre, wore a helmet which made her invisible. These facts known to Oxford, a student of Greek, might have influenced his choice of a pen-name. As the victor in jousting tournaments, in which he had few peers, he was known as a "spear-shaker." Oxford's nickname in certain circles was Will. Wylle was an old English word meaning well or spring. Ver meant spring. He put together these words and formed his pseudonym.

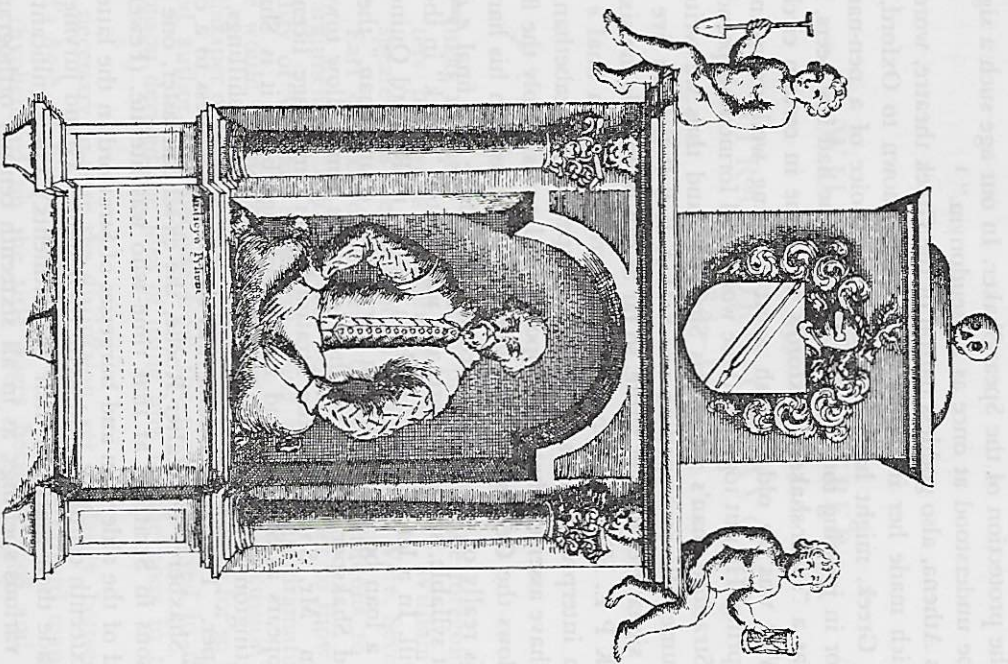
The Stratford man's name was Shaksper, and thus we write it in this volume. His own spelling was S H A K S P E R in five of the only six signatures he ever wrote, so far as can be found; the sixth was S H A K P E. His biographers have generally added a final *e* to the name in interpreting these signatures. Experts in Elizabethan handwriting have asserted that the supposed final *e* was simply the flourish that follows the German or Gothic *r*, the script used in his handwriting. It is really of no consequence whether there is a final *e* or not. The first syllable is always short, and was written "Shack" in the body of his will. In a letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney asking that a loan be obtained from our "yellow countinman," the name is spelled Shaksper, and in another letter the same fellow townsman calls him "Mr. Shak." In the Stratford man's marriage license the name appears as Shaxper and in the marriage bond it is Shagsper. T. Whittington, a creditor of William's wife for forty shillings, writes it "Shaxper." The father's name was signed as a witness to a conveyance as "Shaxbere" by Walter Roche, the ex-schoolmaster, one of the few persons in Stratford at that time who was literate. (Fewer than one-third of the aldermen and burgesses of Stratford in the latter half of the sixteenth century could write their names. Grand juriesmen generally made their marks in their presentments.) The significant thing in these various spellings, as in all sixteenth century orthography, is the pronunciation, the phonetics. In Shaksper and Shakspeare the *a* was invariably short and the accent fell on the first syllable.

Thus throughout this book we call the Stratford man by the name he himself used, Shaksper. When we say Shakespeare we mean the *author*, unless we are quoting or reciting the London entries which may refer to the Stratford man—such, for instance, as the reference to his being a tax-defaulter, etc.

The similarity of names was a pure coincidence, of which, however, advantage was taken by Shaksper to his own financial gain, and after his death by Ben Jonson, Bacon, and Lord Oxford's family, for the insertion in the First Folio of the false clue that later led biographers and others in cumulative numbers to Stratford-on-Avon.

<sup>1</sup> William H. Edwards, in *Shaksper Not Shakespeare*, p. 11, note.





*From the engraving by W. Hollar from a drawing by Sir William Dugdale*  
The only effigy or portrait of William Shaksper of Stratford-on-Avon ever known to have existed.

It should be understood that during Shaksper's lifetime there was no reference which the most diligent research has been able to find, to indicate that he was ever an author of anything, except his will. Most of his entire life was spent in Stratford, first as a butcher's apprentice during his teens, and as a grain dealer from the time he was thirty-three until his death. For several years he lived in London, having a dubious connection with the theatre, finally becoming perhaps a minor actor. That is all we know about him. Every known item is given below. It could all be put on one page.

The recorded facts in the life of William Shaksper begin with an entry in the Stratford Parish Register: C. Gulielmus filius Johannes Shaksper was christened April 26, 1564. The date of his birth is not given. The next record is the issuance of a marriage license eighteen years later on November 27, 1582, in the Bishop of Worcester's Registry in Stratford, authorizing the marriage of William Shaxper to Anne Wharley of Temple Grafton. On the following day a bond was filed in the same registry signed by two bondsmen to guarantee the Bishop against all liability, should a lawful impediment exist to the marriage of Wm. Shagsper to Anne Hathway of Shottery. Just when the marriage to one of these Annes took place is not known; but within six months after these entries in the Bishop's Registry a daughter of Shaksper named Susanna was recorded as christened on May 26, 1583. And on February 2, 1585, was entered in the Registry at Stratford the baptism of twins born to the William Shaksper. From the time of his own christening, April 26, 1564, until the date of the marriage license nothing whatever is *known* of his life. There is no record of his ever having attended school.

There existed in Stratford a Grammar School of sorts provided with few if any textbooks, but with the inevitable "horn book chained to the desk." Shaksper's parents were illiterate; they could not have taught their son reading and writing. William Shaksper seems never to have acquired the art of penmanship, if we are to judge from the three crude signatures to his will in 1616 and the three illegible scrawls he made of his name in 1612—the only times he ever tried to sign his name, so far as diligent research has discovered. When Shaksper was asked to write, he always declined, saying he was "in paine," as Beeston, the actor, declared in later years.

The common people of sixteenth century England were not only illiterate but dismally ignorant; a wide gulf separated them from the nobility. In the provincial cities and towns the people spoke dialects scarcely comprehensible in other counties. This was the case of the soldiers and sailors who came from Stratford and other towns to fight in the war against Spain in 1588. The first English grammar was published only in the seventeenth century. Among the yeomen the art of writing was almost unknown and among tradesmen in the provinces was considered a high accomplishment.

The first biographer of William Shaksper who made an honest effort to find out and record the truth was Halliwell-Phillips. He tells us that in March, 1565, John Shaksper, the father of William, and his colleagues in office could not even write their own names, and that nearly all tradesmen reckoned with counters. As bailiff, John Shaksper made his mark in signing official papers. On March 29, 1577, a writ of habeas corpus showed John Shaksper had been in prison. In 1592



it is recorded that he was one of fifteen persons who "come not to church for fear of process for debt." And he was fined for allowing filth to accumulate in front of his home. In 1575 John Shaksper acquired the house in Henley Street now misrepresented as the "Birth-place," which thousands of gullible tourists pay fees to enter.

After the birth of his twins in 1585 there is no further record in Stratford of William Shaksper (except that his name appears as a party to a court action in 1589) until 1597, when he contracted to purchase "New Place." He was recorded that year as a "householder" in Stratford and listed that year as the owner of "ten quarter of grain." According to tradition, which Halliwell-Phillips accepted, he had been apprenticed to a butcher when he was thirteen. The Clerk of Stratford Parish, the only Stratfordian alive during Shaksper's life ever named in an interview, told one Dowdall that Shaksper left Stratford and became a "servitor" in a London theatre.

Because his biographers have mistakenly identified Shaksper as the actor who was "in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country," they bring Shaksper to London before 1592.

In 1593 occurred an event of pointed and comprehensive significance. This was the publication of the long poem, *Venus and Adonis*, written in polished, sophisticated English, which marked the Earl of Oxford's first public use of his pseudonym (the "first heir of my invention"—the name he had invented). The dedication to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, was signed "William Shakspeare." The publisher, John Harrison, had in 1578 published a volume on military tactics dedicated to the 17th Earl of Oxford. *Venus and Adonis* was printed by Richard Field, a London printer who had come from Stratford-on-Avon, where his father was a tanner, and who in this town of 1600 population was no doubt acquainted with the butcher, John Shaksper. *Venus and Adonis* at once became popular, and several subsequent editions were printed by Richard Field, who in 1594 also printed Oxford's second long poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, with his pseudonym, William Shakespeare, signed to the dedication to the Earl of Southampton.

That the name "William Shakespeare" was recognized in some quarters as a made name is shown by an address prefixed to an anonymous poem, *Willobie his Avisa*, published late in 1594:

Yet Targuynne pluckt his glistering grape  
And Shakespeare paints poor Lucrece rape.

This is the first known allusion to the author "Shakespeare" under his pseudonym.

As subsequent editions of *Venus and Adonis* were published, the mystery of the authorship grew. Persons at court and some of the literati knew that "William Shakspeare" was the anonymous drama-

tist whose plays had long been popular. In 1599 John Weever published a tribute beginning:

Honie-tongued Shakespeare, when I saw thine issue,  
I swore Apollo got them and none other,  
.....  
Rose-checkt Adonis.  
Romea-Richard, more whose names I know not.

Other writers who were aware that the author was the Earl of Oxford were Edmund Spenser, Marston, Greene, Thomas Nashe, and Marlowe. John Lyly and Anthony Munday, Kyd and Dekker, who had been in Oxford's employ as secretaries, knew. So did Gabriel Harvey. Some merely understood that "William Shakespeare" was the pen-name of a nobleman who wrote the perennially popular plays, but were ignorant of his identity.

Oxford's dramas were written at first for the entertainment of the Queen and the personages at court, including many foreign diplomats; he himself aided in producing them, and with other young nobles often acted in them. Then in 1580 he took over Warwick's company of actors who thenceforth performed Oxford's plays at court even after the Queen's own company was established by Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, in 1583. In this year, Lord Oxford leased the Blackfriars for use as a private theatre where his company acted under management of Lyly and Evans. (Oxford's was the only adult company giving plays at court in the season of 1584-5.) His actors played in the provinces as a road company continuously for the first five years of the Eighties, and from time to time until the Nineties. During the Eighties Lord Oxford also had a company made up of choir boys from St. Paul's and of the Chapel Royal, who played at court.

As such plays as *Hamlet*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew* began to be played in public theatres, becoming more and more popular in the late Eighties and early Nineties, printers grew eager to publish them. This they could not do without the risk of being sued; nor could they obtain possession of the manuscripts. Although there was no statutory copyright in England under Elizabeth, there was common law copyright: that is, protection by the common law courts of the property rights of an author to his work. The principle of common law copyright is still recognized by the courts of England and also by the courts of the United States, where there is also statutory copyright. As authority for the doctrine of common law copyright and its application in England as a well-recognized principle of law, there are the cases of *Mil-lar vs. Taylor*, 4 Burrows 2303; and *Jefferys vs. Boosey*, 4 H.C.L. 920. There is also the well-known work, Copinger's treatise on Copyright,



in which (Third Edition, p. 7) the author states: "Every man has the right at common law to the first publication of his own manuscript. He has in fact supreme control over his own production and may either exclude others from their enjoyment or may dispose of them as he pleases." This statement is applied to the common law of the Elizabethan era.

(The Court of Appeals of the State of New York rendered a decision on December 29, 1949, holding that the common law copyright of a literary composition is separate from the ownership of the paper on which it is written and that the copyright belongs to the author until disposed of by him and not to the owner of the author's manuscript. The Court affirmed the judgment, forever enjoining the owner of the manuscript written by Samuel L. Clemens—who likewise wrote under a pseudonym—from publishing it.)

The printers of London were at a loss to know how they could meet the demand for the publication of these plays. Likewise theatrical producers were eager to obtain them for their theatres. Since the author, who was the owner of the copyright, was anonymous, known to comparatively few persons as the Earl of Oxford, and to a few others as a nobleman using the *nom de plume*, William Shakespeare, there was the obvious difficulty not only of obtaining possession of the manuscripts, but also of securing the right to produce or publish them. The demand became so urgent that finally an ingenious, although illegal, method was adopted by printers to meet it. This method is explained and worked out very cleverly by A. S. Cairncross in his valuable study, *The Problem of Hamlet, a Solution* (1936, Macmillan). An actor with a well-trained memory who had played Marcellus in *Hamlet* memorized the parts of the other characters, writing out as much of the entire play as he could recall. The result was a garbled and abbreviated version occasionally embodying lines or words from some other play in which the actor had taken part. And this constituted the "stolen and surreptitious" copy of *Hamlet*. Cairncross proves that this pirated copy existed before 1593, and that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been written certainly by 1588. Cairncross utilized the scientific studies of *Stolen and Surreptitious Copies* by Professor Alfred Hart of Melbourne University, demonstrating that the following plays were memorized, written out and published in garbled versions: the 2nd and 3rd parts of *Henry VI*, printed anonymously under the titles of *The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of Yorke*, respectively; *King Lear*, printed under the title of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*; *Romeo and Juliet*, printed under the title of *An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet*; *Hamlet*, printed under its own title; *The Taming of the*

*Shrew*, printed under the title of *The Taming of a Shrew*. All these pirated plays were performed and printed anonymously until 1598, except that the garbled *Hamlet* was not printed until 1603.

The question naturally arises, How did the printers justify their action in putting out plays without the consent of the owner? To obtain the answer we have to analyze and interpret various references to this practice as found in the writings of Ben Jonson and other contemporary works. It had been rumored for some time that the anonymous playwright was none other than the author of the two long poems published under the *nom de plume* of William Shakespeare. Now enters the young man who had come from Stratford and got a job as a "servitor" in a London theatre, William Shaksper. Struck by the similarity of his name to the name signed to the popular *Venus and Adonis*, he saw the possibilities for taking advantage of that similarity.

It would be less risky (or so they thought) for printers to accept one of the "stolen and surreptitious" copies of the Shakespeare plays from this man who, though no more than an agent of an undisclosed principal, was connected with the London theatre. The gist of the offense of the "Poet-Ape" (Shaksper) was that he passed off plays of other men as his own.

The Stratford man became so "proud by underhand brokery" that he must needs have a coat-of-arms and pass himself off as a "gentleman born."

Shaksper's lowly status around the theatre, "a servitor," a handyman, or a minor actor, would preclude him from making an application for a coat-of-arms. The application could, however, be made by his father. Filed in 1596, the application was interlined with the statement that John Shaksper had married Mary, daughter of Robert Arden of Warwickshire, a yeoman branch of a family that bore arms, and the proposal was therefore submitted that John be allowed to impale the arms of Arden. A draft of a "coat-armour" was drawn up in the College of Arms to John Shaksper (or Shakspere), dated October, 1596. It was not ratified by the College of Heralds, and it did not authorize the arms of Arden to be impaled, as, according to Sidney Lee, the Heralds appear to "betray conscientious scruples," and this claim was abandoned. "Both of Shaksper's parents were descended from obscure peasantry"; so Halliwell-Phillips found.<sup>2</sup> He states that neither the 1596 nor the 1599 grant was ratified by the College of Heralds. In 1597 changes took place in the College of Heralds, and Shaksper now asserted that "certain draft grants prepared by the Heralds in the previous year [1596] had been assigned to John Shak-

<sup>2</sup> J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (1890), 9th ed., vol. 1, p. 178.



spert while he was bailiff, and the Heralds, instead of being asked for a grant of arms, 'were merely invited to give him a recognition or exemplification of it' which was a thing much more easily secured than a grant, for the Heralds might if they chose, tacitly accept without examination the applicant's statement that his family had borne arms long ago, and they thereby regarded themselves as relieved of the obligation of close inquiry into his present status." (Sidney Lee, p. 151.) "There was, however," according to Greenwood, "a limit beyond which these complaisant Heralds refused to go,"<sup>3</sup>—the claim of Mary Shaksper to the Arden arms.

Richard Grant White speaks of the "pretension of gentry set up" when the coat-of-arms was asked for with the actor's money, that coat-of-arms which Shaksper prized because it made him a "gentleman by birth." Elsewhere he remarks, "This more than the squalid appearance of the place [on Henley Street] saddened me."<sup>4</sup>

The first application had been denied by the Garter King-at-Arms with the notation: *Non, Sans Droict*. Sir William Dethick, Garter King-at-Arms in 1599, was charged with having granted coats to persons of base origin not entitled to them, and the case of John Shaksper was one of those complained of.

We have gone into this matter of the coat-of-arms rather fully because Ben Jonson makes much of it in satirizing Shaksper's pretensions in his play, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (produced in 1598 and published 1601).

The year 1597 was a momentous one in our chronicle. It was the year Lord Oxford decided—with how great reluctance who can measure?—permanently to secure his anonymity as playwright, making it doubly sure by publishing his plays under the pseudonym used for his long poems in 1593 and 1594. And 1597 was the year William Shaksper decided to return to Stratford to live—or perhaps this was decided for him. Six of the plays we now call Shakespeare's had been pirated in the manner Cairncross describes and printed in garbled, abbreviated editions. The true author had made no protest, had initiated no legal action to stop these thefts. But obviously this sort of thing could not be allowed to go on. Oxford's decision had meant that he must give up during his life all hope of being publicly acknowledged as the great dramatist. The year 1598 was the first time any of his plays had ever been published under his pseudonym. Three in fact were so published in 1598, *Richard II* and *Richard III* under the name of William Shakespeare, hyphenated, and *Lone's Labour's* *Lost* under the name William Shakspeare.

The next step was to get William Shaksper out of London, or at

least to get him away from the activities Jonson described in *The Poet-Ape*. It is interesting that Nicholas Rowe quotes Sir William Davenant as saying that the Stratford man had received one thousand pounds from the Earl of Southampton for the purchase of property. The first purchase made by Shaksper was of "Newplace" in Stratford, which he contracted to buy in 1597. He completed the purchase in 1601 when he obtained a deed after a delay occasioned by the murder of the seller, William Underhill, by his son. Shaksper was described that year as a "householder" of Stratford. He bought additional real estate there, 107 acres, in 1602; and he purchased the titles from the Towns of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton and Welcombe in 1605 for four hundred and forty pounds. In 1614 Shaksper made another deal in Stratford real estate. Besides engaging in these transactions, William Shaksper and his father—until the latter's death in 1601—were grain-speculators, supplementing the father's business as a wool-dealer. In January, 1598, William is recorded as the third largest hoarder of grain (corn) in Warwickshire. Records show that owing to the drought and to the Spanish wars, there was a shortage of grain in Warwickshire in 1597-8. Jonson makes John Shaksper, in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, "the farmer who [almost] hanged himself on the expectation of plenty." William also was engaged in selling malt. In July, 1604, his legal action against one Philip Rogers was tried in a local Stratford court. The suit was for two shillings loaned to Rogers and for one pound fifteen shillings, the purchase-price of malt sold to Rogers by Shaksper in March, 1604. In February, 1609, William Shaksper obtained judgment for six pounds and one pound five shillings costs in Stratford against another fellow-townsmen, John Addenbroke, and a surety, one Thomas Horneby, against whom according to Sidney Lee, Shaksper "avenged himself." He sent the surety to prison for the unpaid judgment, Addenbroke having left town. In 1612 Shaksper's name was in a bill of complaint affecting the tithes.

In 1614, William Shaksper, W. Combe, and M. Mainwaring sought to enclose for themselves the common pasture-lands near Stratford and thus deprive the poor of their time-honored rights of pasturage. The only recorded conversation of Shaksper's, so far found, is one with his "cosen," Thomas Green, the town clerk who recorded it in his diary, 1614, as he did one or two other items about Shaksper and the enclosure. Shaksper did not discuss the theatre, did not discuss literature or the drama. He is merely reported as having told his "cosen" that they meant to enclose the commons no further than to Gospel Bush. The Town of Stratford successfully opposed this rather high-handed appropriation of the commons.

There is one remaining instance which must be noted to make the

<sup>3</sup> Sir George Greenwood, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> White, *England Without and Within*, p. 526.



Stratford record complete. In the Chamberlain's accounts of Stratford there is an entry to the effect that the Town of Stratford is charged for one quart of claret given to a preacher at William Shaksper's home in 1614. That entry is worth a paragraph. We pass on to the will which Shaksper executed in January 1616.

The most interesting feature of Shaksper's will is his signature, or rather his signatures. Next are the interlineations inserted after the will was drawn, as an afterthought, the bequest of his "second-best bed" to his wife, his sole bequest to her, and the bequests interlined at some later date to "John Heminges, Richarge Burbage and Henry Cundell of xxvj s and viij d a peece to buy them rings," which could be part of the "build-up" of Shaksper undertaken by the perpetrators of the hoax in the First Folio. Another very significant point regarding the will is that there is no mention whatever, no bequest, of a library or of a book or a manuscript. The will itemizes and disposes of various articles of a personal nature: a sword, a bowl, jewels, plate—but no books. Incidentally, no shares in any theatre were mentioned in the will. There was no devise to his wife, no life-interest was given her in the real estate which he left to his daughter; and no bequest was made to Ben Jonson, who said he loved Shakespeare "on this side idolatry."

The only mention of Anne as Shaksper's wife, except the bequest in 1616, is found in the will of Thomas Whittington, who had been a shepherd and who died in 1601. This is the extract from the will, as Halliwell-Phillips gives it: "Unto the poore people of Stratford xli. that is in the hand of Anne Shaxper, and is due debt unto me, beying paid to mine executor by the said Wyllyam Shaxsper or his assignees according to the true meanyng of this my will."

The only letter ever written to William Shaksper, so far as has been discovered, is one from Richard Quiney in 1598 addressed to "Mr. Wm. Shackspere" and requesting a loan of thirty pounds. This letter was found in Stratford where it is now preserved. A letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney in the same year makes the request that "our countiman, Mr. Shaksper," procure a loan for him, thus indicating that Mr. Shaksper might have become a loan-broker. A second letter from Sturley to Quiney making the same request refers to him as "Mr. Shak."

The foregoing is absolutely all that is known of the life of William Shaksper in Stratford-on-Avon. At his death in April, 1616, no one referred to him as an author, or playwright, or actor. In fact there was no public mention of his death at all.

His son-in-law, Dr. Hall, entered one line in his diary: "My father-in-law died on Thursday." That was all. Incidentally Dr. Hall was a

more important man in Stratford than Wm. Shaksper, according to C. Martin Mitchell in his *The Shakespeare Circle*.

William Camden, the antiquarian, in his *Britannia* of 1605, listed the worthies of Stratford, but made no mention of William Shaksper, or Shakespeare. In Camden's *Annals* of the events of 1616 containing seven thousand words there is not one about Shaksper or his death. The same omission is noted in the *Annals* of Stowe, another historian of the period.

The most recent biography of Shaksper with any pretensions to scholarship, *William Shakespeare*, by Sir Edmund K. Chambers, makes this important admission:

After all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the patient balancing of possibilities, the last word for a self-respecting scholarship can only be that of *nescience*.

Canon Gerald Rendall writes, regarding the life of the Stratford man:

Research, exhaustive and indefatigable, has succeeded in gleaning only a small handful of negligible facts about business transactions with acquaintances and neighbours, not of an inspiring kind. . . . The Stratfordian surroundings disclose no trace of literary interest or associations, past or present.

The facts of Shaksper's life in Stratford, meager as they are, suffice to demonstrate the impossibility of his having had any literary interests or of his capacity to write plays or poems. Knowing what we do of his life in Stratford from 1597 until 1614, we are convinced that he could not have been a writer or had literary interests. Had he owned a library, or even a folio or two, his will would surely have made some disposition of it, as it did of his bowl, his sword, and his second-best bed. An actor of that day with any education would have been interested in owning books. Heminge, who died in 1630 at the age of seventy-five, provided in his will that five pounds should be spent for books for the education of a grandchild.

With this mention of Heminge we now turn to the records that have been found in London concerning anyone named William Shaksper or Shakespeare who might be identified as the Stratford man.

There are two records in which William Shaksper is identified as the Stratford man, and only two. Both belong to the year 1612. The first is the testimony taken by deposition of Shaksper in a lawsuit against the plaintiff's father-in-law, one Mountjoy, a wigmaker, alleging that Shaksper was a lodger at the home of Mountjoy in London in 1604 and helped to effect a match between the plaintiff, Belot, and Mountjoy's daughter, having knowledge of the promise by the father of a dowry, which is sued for. The trial gives us an idea of the hum-



ble surroundings in which Shaksper sojourned in London at that time. The length of his stay is not recorded. The decision of the court was that both Mountjoy and his son-in-law were such low characters that the court washed its hands of the matter. The deposition was signed "William Shakspe." (A final *r* might be visible.) This is the first of the supposed signatures of Shaksper that we have.

The Earl of Oxford's death occurred in June 1604. It was the year when Shaksper paid four-hundred-and-forty pounds for the tithes in Stratford. We know that in March, 1604, he was selling malt in Stratford to Philip Rogers, and that in July, 1604, his lawsuit against Rogers was being tried. (It should be mentioned here that on March 15, 1604, cloth was issued to a group of actors for the coronation parade. The list of actors included the name "Shakespeare.")

Shaksper's presence in London in 1612, the year he made the deposition in the Mountjoy case and bought the property near Blackfriars, may not be without significance. It was the year of Lady Oxford's death. Her will makes a number of bequests of personal effects to various legatees—relatives, servants and friends. There is a curious bequest of blank pounds to be paid quarterly by her executors to "my dombe man."

The only other London record involving and identifying William Shaksper of Stratford was the deed and mortgage covering property near Blackfriars' Theatre, purchased by Shaksper and two other persons in 1612. The deed to the property was signed, "Wm. Shakspr" (an *a* seems to have been inserted before the *r*). The signature to the mortgage was "William" and under it "Shaksper," apparently written in a different hand from the deed signature, though both are crude scrawls hardly legible. Thus four years before his death, the Stratford man was known in London as Shaksper, *not* Shakespeare. Again in January, 1616, three months before his death, he signed his name as "Shaksper" in his will. These six signatures are the only ones extant. Much has been written about these signatures—a whole book, in fact, by E. Maunde Thompson. We have read these signatures as Malone read them about 1800. No two signatures are alike. It seems altogether reasonable to believe that someone was holding the testator's hand while he formed the letters. The way these signatures appear to one student, a professor, but not an expert in handwriting, is as follows: "The earliest signature, 1612, on the deposition in Belott vs. Mountjoy, written Willn Sh(blob)p; as one of three grantees in a deed to London property near Blackfriars, written (blob)illiam Shakspe, 1612; on the mortgage given same day covering this property written Wm. Shakspe; on his will, page one, written Wille(blob)m illegible scrawl; will, second page written Willm Shap(scrawl); will, third page,

written Willin (plainly) Shasp (scrawl). On the second page of the will, Willm is written over the last name."<sup>5</sup>

Facsimiles of five of these signatures can be seen in several of the better known biographies of William Shakespeare (i.e., Shaksper). These are famous.

Returning to the London records, we find entries referring to a William Shakespeare as one of the defendants in a warrant to keep the peace in 1596, as a tax-defaulter, as one of three payees of the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors, and, in four instances, as a member of a group of actors. In two of these four instances the name "William Shakespeare" is listed in the cast of two of Ben Jonson's plays in the Folio of his works published in 1616. But nowhere has there ever been found an entry showing *any* part in *any* play at *any* time assigned to him or acted by him. There are innumerable records of the specific parts in given plays taken by the leading actors of the day, Heminge, Condell, Burbage, Tardleton, Alleyn and others—but never Shakespeare. His name does not appear in *any* municipal record of theatrical performances in London or in *any* of the smaller cities or towns of England, although plays were given in about seventy-odd such places during this period and the names of leading actors recorded.

There is certainly enough evidence to show that William Shaksper was connected with the London stage, though not necessarily as an actor. He was first a "servitour," doing menial work. Speaking the Warwickshire dialect, he could not have become an actor without considerable training, although, if the identification by Greene can be accepted, Shaksper had been an interpreter in a puppet show for seven years. Ben Jonson's *Poet-Ape* apparently refers to William Shaksper as an actor (an "ape") and a play-broker, sometimes palming off as his own works which he had pirated, "stroln and surreptitious copies." Chettle's apology for printing Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* and the reference to "Shake-scene" could not possibly include Shaksper as one of the three playwrights whom Greene was addressing. Greene had warned these three friends against a certain actor, not a playwright, who was "in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a countree." Now if "Shake-scene" were William Shaksper, whom his biographers regard as William Shakespeare, one of the three playwrights, Greene would be warning Shaksper against himself! Such a notion is ridiculous. Chettle writes of the two playwrights who were offended by Greene's plea: "With neither of them that takes offence was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I ever be." He then goes on to speak of the "other, whom at that time I did not so

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Louis P. Bonczek, *News-Letter*, Shakespeare Fellowship, Am. branch; Oct. 1913.



much spare as since I wish I had." Yet biographies of Shaksper by Sidney Lee, Churton Collins, Malone, Garnett and Gosse, and others, as well as works by critics, state that it *was* the Stratford man to whom Chettle was apologizing, and Lee puts the name Shakespeare in parentheses, making it appear that Chettle had done so, as one of the three playwrights warned by Greene. As Sir George Greenwood observes, "a more dishonest method of writing biography than this can hardly be imagined."

As for the name "Shakespeare," it was never known to the public as connected with the theatre until 1598, when the plays began to be published under that name, hyphenated.

We shall now give the full details of the few references in London records to a William Shakespeare otherwise than as a writer. The first, if the date be accurate, was in 1594, as one of three payees of the Lord Chamberlain's company; but since this entry was made by Lady Heneage several years after the date given, 1594, we shall defer submitting the full details.

Omitting for the time being this unauthenticated entry as in all probability spurious, we pass next to a petition to keep the peace brought in the autumn of 1596 against "William Shaksper, Francis Langley, Dorothy Soer, wife of John Soer, and Anne Lee, for fear of death, etc." In 1596 the name of William Shakespeare was returned as a tax defaulter in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, for an earlier assessment of which five shillings were unpaid; and the next year the same name was returned at the same address for the unpaid portion of thirteen shillings on another assessment. The next entry is in 1603 when the name of William Shakespeare is included in a list of nine actors licensed to act as the King's Company; there is the record of cloth's being issued to a group of actors, which included the name of William Shakespeare, to enable the actors to take part in a procession on the 15th of March, 1604. (In that month William Shaksper was selling malt in Stratford, as we know from his suit to collect on this malt sold in March, 1604, to Philip Rogers.) In the will of Augustine Phillips, an actor, May, 1605, the testator leaves to William Shakespeare a thirty-shilling piece in gold. This reference, like the others to Shakespeare as an actor, never mentions him as a playwright or poet.

In 1616 was published the Folio of Ben Jonson's works. The name of William Shakespeare appears twice, as we have noted, in the cast of actors—first for the performance of *Every Man Out of His Humour* (in 1598), and again for the performance of *Sejanus* (in 1603), though with no specific part assigned him. This is the first record extant, 1616, naming William Shakespeare in the cast of a play.

The foregoing covers every item of any kind in the records of London containing the name of William Shaksper or William Shake-

speare, except literary references to the author of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* and of the plays, Sonnets and other poems published under the name William Shakespeare (the name hyphenated) or William Shakespeare.

There was reported one other reference (of doubtful accuracy) to a William Shakespeare in the records, though not in London and not in Stratford. An account in the household expenses of Francis, Sixth Earl of Rutland, at Belvoir Castle, states that in March, 1613, the sum of forty-four shillings was paid to "Mr. Shaksper for work about my lord's impresa" and a like sum to Richard Burbage "for paynting and making it." An impresa is a pictorial design suggesting some quality or experience of the person for whom it was drawn.

This is absolutely all in England—whether Stratford, London or elsewhere—which the most diligent search has been able to discover about the life of William Shaksper of Stratford and London.

The reasons for our skepticism about the entry of a payment to three actors, including William Shakespeare of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, in 1594, must be given. Sir Thomas Heneage was Treasurer of the Chamber from 1569 to 1592, and was Vice-Chamberlain from 1588 until his death in 1595. Some time after his death it was found that he had not made a full accounting of the monies he had received for his office of Treasurer. The Queen finally wrote a severe note to Lady Heneage, who succeeded her husband as Treasurer of the Chamber, demanding that the shortage be explained or made good. Soon thereafter an entry was made in the books of the Treasurer of the Chamber to the effect that payment of twenty pounds in two sums was made to Kempe, Shakespeare and Burbage, "servants of the Lord Chamberlain," for comedies played before the Queen on December 26th and 28th, 1594. In the same book, the *Admiral's* company of actors are recorded as having played before the Queen on December 26th, while Henslowe's diary records that the Lord Chamberlain's Company gave *The Siege of London* on December 26th at his theatre. On December 28th the Lord Chamberlain's Company presented *The Comedy of Errors* at Gray's Inn, and not at Court. The payments totalled twenty-four pounds and eighteen shillings, *not twenty pounds*. The payee of the Lord Chamberlain's Company receiving the wages of the actors and distributing them was always one payee, not three. These are circumstances which make it impossible to credit the genuineness of this entry. Lady Heneage had been the Second Countess of Southampton. The Third Earl of Southampton, known as her son, was at this time, according to letters still extant, spending most of his time at the theatre; he was certainly acting parts in plays given at court, as young noblemen occasionally did. There is



evidence brought out in the foregoing chapters that as a youth he sometimes appeared and acted under the name, Will Shakespeare.

It behooves us now, after having cited every item pertaining to Shaksper in the records of the day, to make a few observations about the lacunae in the records.

The Treasurer of the Chamber accounts, which record payments to actors, never list Shakespeare as an actor during the whole time Shakespearean plays were being produced at Court. (In the suspicious Henage entry recited above he is, however, named as one of three payees, "servants of the Lord Chamberlain.") Records in London and in some seventy smaller cities and towns in England, as we have said, give the names of the leading actors of Elizabeth's and also James's reign, and often the parts they played—Tarlton, Kempe, Burbage, Condell, Alleyn and others—but never once, *until after his death*, is the name Shakespeare mentioned as an actor in the cast, when it twice appears in Jonson's Folio of 1616. Mrs. C. C. Stopes in *Burbage and Shakespeare* confesses that the records of all actors appearing at Court from 1597 to 1616 fail to reveal a Shakespeare.

There is no reference of any sort anywhere identifying the dramatist and poet Shakespeare as the man from Stratford during the latter's lifetime. There is no reference during Shaksper's lifetime identifying him or the actor Shakespeare, as the playwright.

No scrap of writing which can be attributed to the Stratford man, William Shaksper, no letters, no memoranda, no diary, no manuscripts, have ever been found. The reason that none has been found is patently that none was written. If we are to judge by his illegible scrawl—and that is all we have to judge by—he did not know how to write. He would say he was "in paine," when asked to write.

Edward Alleyn, the son-in-law and partner of Henslowe, was one of the leading actors of the period during which Shaksper is supposed to have been on the London stage. Alleyn's memoirs and papers, published in 1841 and 1843, "contain the names of all the notable actors and play-poets of Shaksper's time, as well as of every person who helped, directly or indirectly, or who paid out money or who received money in connection with the production of the many plays at the Blackfriars Theatre, the Fortune, and other theatres. His accounts were very minutely stated, and a careful perusal of the two volumes shows that there is not one mention of William Shaksper or Shakespeare in his list of actors, poets, and theatrical comrades." <sup>6</sup>

Henslowe was a theatrical producer in London at the time and, from 1591 until 1609, kept a detailed account-book or journal of the plays he put on, the payments of royalties to dramatists, and pay-

ments to actors. During this period he produced a number of Shakespearean plays. There is no mention from one end of his journal to the other of the name Shaksper or Shakespeare. The reason is obvious: Lord Oxford, as an anonymous dramatist and nobleman, accepted no royalty payments. The names, signatures, handwriting, of all other leading playwrights of the day are to be found in Henslowe's journal; but not Shaksper's. Frequent are the names of Ben Jonson, Dekker, Chettle, Marston, Wilson, Drayton, Munday, Heywood, Middleton, Porter, Webster, Day, Chapman, and others, but never one mention of Shaksper or Shakespeare as an actor playwright. *There is no record anywhere of any royalty payment to Shaksper or Shakespeare.*

Although sixteen of the Shakespearean plays were entered for publication at the Stationers' Register before 1610, none was ever entered in Shaksper's or Shakespeare's name.

There is no evidence whatever, not an iota, that anyone during Shaksper's life ever referred to him as the playwright. It was not until seven years after his death that the basis for the myth was laid in the "red herring" inserted in the First Folio. Had Shaksper been both a playwright and an actor, especially a theatrical manager, as his biographers maintain, he would have seen to it that his plays were retained for the theatre, and not stolen and published.

We have shown that, beginning in 1598, Lord Oxford was impelled to have his plays published under his pseudonym, William Shakespeare. It was while Southampton was in the Tower between early February 1601, and April 1603, that no authorized publications of the plays of Shakespeare occurred; but the pirated copy of *Hamlet*, which had been written out from memory by one of the actors before 1598, was given to the public in a garbled and incorrect printed copy in 1603, so that Oxford in 1604, shortly before his death, arranged for the publication of the Second Quarto, which is a more complete copy than even the one in the First Folio.

Charles Knight says of the Second Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* of 1599: "There can be no doubt whatever that the corrections, augmentations and emendations of the second edition (Second Quarto) of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1599, were those of the author. We know of nothing in literary history more curious or more instructive than the example of minute attention, as well as consummate skill, exhibited by Shakespeare in correcting, augmenting and emending the first copy of the play." <sup>7</sup>

Heminge and Condell, who were used as a "blind" for the sponsorship of the First Folio, are made to say that plays are given as the

<sup>6</sup> Sir George Greenwood, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, p. 967.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by William H. Edwards, *Shaksper Not Shakespeare*, p. 77.



author conceived them, and characterize the "stolen and surreptitious copies" as being put out by impostors.

London records, like those of Stratford, are almost devoid of personal references to William Shaksper by any of his contemporaries. John Manningham, a Barrister-at-law of the Middle Temple, made an entry in his diary, as follows:

13 March 1601 (1602). . . . Upon a time when Burbidge played Rich. 3. there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him, that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Ri: the 3. Shakspeare overhearing their conclusion went before, was intertained, and at his game ere Burbidge came. The message being brought that Rich. the 3.<sup>d</sup> was at the doore, Shakspeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Rich. the 3. Shakspeare's name William.

There is another entry in Manningham's diary dated about six weeks earlier, February 2, of his having been to the play, *Twelfth Night*. The second entry gives no indication that he thought the Shakspeare of the anecdote was the author of *Twelfth Night*. Of his identity, whether actor, playwright, or Stratford man, Manningham says naught. He tells the first name, as if it were not generally known.

Had William Shaksper been a distinguished dramatist in this great era, living among the literati of London, active in the theatre and interested in learning, he would have been the recipient of notice from persons of importance—from someone, in any case, who could have left a memoir of him; he would have received invitations to dinners, letters from his colleagues, surely some mention by one of them; and at his death eulogies would have been published. But there is not a word during his life, not a word at his death. Ben Jonson and Edmund Spenser were eulogized abundantly at the time of their respective deaths, and likewise Philip Sidney.

The contemporary records of London and Stratford are almost a blank, so far as personal references to William Shaksper are concerned. We have given the only ones that can be found. We are not including, of course, the references which were written two or three generations after his death, merely bits of gossip said to have been picked up in Stratford years after his death. In the main, they seem to be fiction—wishful thinking at best; one is inconsistent with another, and they are invalid as evidence. An instance is the item Dr. Furnivall thought fit to relate: "He [Shaksper] was a glover's son. Sir John Mannes saw once his old father in his shop—a merry-checkt old man, that said 'Will was a good honest fellow, but he daren't have crackt a jest with him at any time.' This is the only known notice of the look of Shaksper's father."

Since Sir John Mannes was born March 1, 1599, and Shaksper's

father died in September, 1601, this testimony is hardly to be taken seriously. Greenwood calls the account the "sweetly unsophisticated impression of the innocent little toddler, who at the age of two and one-half travelled with his nurse from Kent to Stratford for the purpose of interviewing Shaksper's father!"

When we say there are no contemporary references to Shaksper, we except references to him in several dramas in which he is represented by fictitious names, as in Ben Jonson's plays and in the anonymous *Parnassus* plays, or simply by the name of William in *As You Like It* or as the Clown in *A Winter's Tale*. These references clearly show that Shaksper was not an author.

When we come to know that the one reference in the First Folio—"thy Stratford monument"—was inserted for the purpose of leading the public down a false trail—the "red herring" of 1623—we realize there is absolutely nothing on which to base any opinion supporting the Stratfordian theory.

It seems a waste of time to quote the casual gossip fished up in Stratford two generations or more after Shaksper's death. When the denizens of the town were told they had had a famous citizen, they rose to the occasion as best they could; but this proves nothing, for their "recollections" are completely unreliable.

John Aubrey completed his *Lives of Eminent Men* in 1680. He inserted a few items about William Shaksper of Stratford to the effect that his father was a butcher, that he followed his father's trade, and that at about eighteen years of age he went to London where he was an actor and "did act exceedingly well." He had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country. But where, Aubrey did not say.

Mr. Halliwell-Phillips says Aubrey was one of those "foolish and detestable gossips who record everything that they hear or misinterpret." Anthony Wood, the biographer of Jonson, said that Aubrey, his own employee, was "a roving, magotty-pated man, [who] thought little, believed much and confused everything."

The Reverend John Ward, Vicar of Stratford, soon after his arrival in the town, in 1662, entered in his memorandum-book finished in April 1663, one or two items about "Mr. Shakspeare": that he had a natural wit, that he spent at the rate of a thousand pounds a year, and that Shakspeare and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, drank too hard, and Shakspeare died. The Reverend Ward quotes no authority for the items he jotted down. He added that Shaksper supplied the stage with two plays a year. This was certainly true for a number of years of the real Shakspeare. It may be also that William Shaksper, while in London from 1595 to 1598, supplied the stage as a play-broker with two old plays a year—the revision of plays which he had bought or plays which he had pirated. The Reverend John



Ward lived in Stratford for eighteen more years but never made another entry about Shaksper.

Thomas Fuller in his *Worthies of Warwickshire* published in 1662 inserted an item about Shaksper of no particular importance except that "his learning was very little" and "nature itself was all the art that was used upon him." Sir William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* of 1656 makes no mention of Shaksper except for the reproduction of Hollar's engraving of the monument, although Dugdale, born in 1603, was educated at Coventry, twenty miles from Stratford. The bust of William Shaksper in the Stratford Church, as shown by the Hollar engraving, made from a drawing by Sir William Dugdale himself, depicts a sad-looking man with a drooping mustache holding a sack in his lap, a proper token for a grain-dealer. In 1747, an actor named Ward, grandfather of Mrs. Siddons, while playing in Stratford gave the proceeds of the performance of *Othello* to pay for a new bust, one which would hold a writing-tablet in his lap instead of a sack, and this later bust is the one that can be seen today. It is totally different from the original.

Why did none of these seekers after information consult Shaksper's daughter Susanna who lived in Stratford until July, 1649, or his daughter Judith who lived in Stratford until 1662, or his granddaughter who lived there until 1670? The only person interviewed whose remarks were reported on the subject of William Shaksper, who was alive during the latter's lifetime, was the parish clerk of Stratford. In 1693, one Dowdall visited Stratford and saw the church, as he said, and the "effigies of our English tragedian, Mr. Shaksper." "The clark that show'd me the church," Dowdall states, "is above eighty years old, he says that this Shaksper was formerly in this towne bound apprentice to a butcher, but that he ran from his master to London, and there was received into the play house as a servitur, and by this meanes had an opportunity to be what he afterwards proved." There is no word of his being an author or a poet. "The clark" was canny.

In 1709 (ninety-three years after Shaksper's death) was published the first "biography" of William Shaksper, only four pages in a pamphlet of thirty-nine pages. This "biography" was written by Nicholas Rowe of London, who states that the information he gives about Shaksper was supplied him by Thomas Betterton, an actor, obtained on a visit to Stratford. Betterton's stepson and fellow-actor, however, said that Betterton had never been to Stratford. (We have this on the authority of E. K. Chambers.) Rowe says that Shaksper was the eldest of ten children and that his father was a wool-dealer and butcher who could give his eldest son no better education than his own employment, and withdrew him from school at an unusually

early age. (We have here one hundred and forty-five years after his birth the first indication that he ever went to school.) Rowe tells the deer-stealing story, remarking that Shaksper was obliged to leave his family in Warwickshire and shelter himself in London. "It was at this time, and upon this accident, that he is said to have made his first acquaintance with the theater. He was received into the Company then in being; at first in a very mean rank." Rowe continues: "Tho I have inquir'd I could never meet with any further account of him in this way, than that the top of his performance was the Ghost in his own Hamlet." Some local wit must here have been "pulling someone's leg" with an apt and facetious pun. Rowe in this 1709 biography of four pages quotes Sir William D'Avenant as saying that the Earl of Southampton gave Shaksper one thousand pounds for the purchase of property. This is no doubt true. The remainder is largely apocryphal: the deductions he makes from the plays, of course, apply only to the actual author. One hundred years went by before another biography of Shaksper was published—this by Edmund Malone.

Gossip grew into tradition, as it has a way of doing, and by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries biographies increased in size with the increasing credulity of the public and, shall we say ingenuity? of the biographers. The volumes became fatter and fatter, expanding the meager facts about William Shaksper by means of conjecture and assumption into a final monstrosity of one thousand pages, accepted as authoritative and definitive, but actually spurious, a distortion of fact, a dishonest fabrication. Collier, Ireland and others perpetrated forgeries which were later exposed.

Some writers have honestly admitted their inability to find any authentic facts beyond the few meager ones which can be put on one page. Mrs. C. C. Stopes confessed that, in writing her biography of the Third Earl of Southampton, she spent eight years of industrious and painstaking research, ransacking the public record-offices, in the hope of finding some connection between Southampton and "Shakspeare" but found absolutely nothing; in consequence she felt that her life had been a failure.

Another honest critic was John Bright who said no one but a fool would believe that the Stratford man was the author of these noble dramas. Walt Whitman wrote that the real Shakespeare was "one of the wolfish Earls," or a "born descendant and knower." Henry James said: "I am haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world."

Mark Twain was another American who could not swallow the fiction of William Shaksper of Stratford and wrote a book to say so. English writers of learning and ability who have written convincingly



against the Stratford theory of authorship are Lord Penzance, and Sir George Greenwood, K.C., M.P., an eminent London barrister.

William H. Edwards, an American, wrote a thoroughly documented book in 1890, proving that Shaksper could not possibly have been the poet and playwright.

Professor George Saintsbury of Merton College, Oxford, and later of the University of Edinburgh, an eminent literary critic, wrote of William Shaksper of Stratford in the Cambridge History of English Literature:

Almost all of the commonly received stuff of his life story is shreds and patches of tradition if not positive dream work. We do not know whether he ever went to school. The early journey to London is first heard of a hundred years after the date. . . . The crystallization of these and other traditions in Rowe's biography (of 4 pages) took place a hundred and forty-six years after the poet's supposed birth.

An immense gulf separates the illiterate youth of Stratford who at thirty-four was a grain-speculator, a dealer in malt and a frequent litigant in the courts of Stratford, from the broadly cultured courtier and nobleman, educated in the classics, in Latin and Greek, in French and Italian, in music and in law, who was the real author. In order to bridge this gulf and bestow upon the Stratford burgher the manifold qualifications of the writer of the Shakespearean plays, his biographers are compelled to rely upon manufactured evidence and conjecture. These biographers seen never to have suspected that the one reference to Stratford in connection with the poet-dramatist—to wit, Leonard Digges's phrase in the First Folio—was inserted deliberately to divert suspicion from the true author to a dummy. "Thy Stratford monument," he wrote. To enhance the plausibility Ben Jonson—who three years before had written a list of the distinguished persons he had known and omitted Shaksper's name, and *Shakspeare's*—now undertook to give Shaksper the status of an actor of the rank of Burbage, Alleyn, Heminge and Condell (to which he was certainly not entitled.) The name of William Shakespeare was listed in the First Folio, taking precedence over the others, as one of the leading actors of London: a flagrant deception.

When Oxford's daughters and their husbands—probably in collaboration with the Eighteenth Earl—decided to publish the twenty Shakespearean plays never before published, Ben Jonson's aid was enlisted for this First Folio, and two leading actors of the day, Heminge and Condell, were made the "front" for the publication. Their names were signed to the dedicatory letter and to the preface addressed to "the Great Variety of Readers." Both compositions were obviously from the hand of Ben Jonson. The dedication is to "the most Noble and Incomparable Paire of Brethren, William, Earle of Pembroke,

etc., Lord Chamberlain to the King's most excellent Majesty, and Philip, Earl of Montgomery" [Oxford's son-in-law], etc., etc. The preface states that the friends of the author, who is dead, have collected his manuscripts and now publish them; "and so to have published them, as where (before) you were abus'd with divers stoln, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors." The Preface further assures the "Great Variety of Readers" that "wee have scarce received from him [the author] a blot in his papers," because "what he thought he uttered with that easiness etc."

Of the thirty-six plays published in the First Folio, twenty had never before been printed, and most of the twenty had never been produced on any stage. Where did Ben Jonson or the publishers obtain the manuscripts of those never before produced or printed? Obviously from the "grand possessors" to whom, as stated in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609 Quarto, these manuscripts belonged. The "grand possessors" could only have been Oxford's family—the author's family. The illiterate Judith, daughter of William Shaksper of Stratford, or Shaksper himself, who was active in business in 1609 in Stratford, could not, by any stretch of courtesy, be called a "grand possessor."

The publishers, as well as Lord Oxford's family, undoubtedly foresaw the future of interest which would be aroused by the appearance of these thirty-six great dramas, a score of them for the first time, in folio. It would be the most spectacular publishing event in English literary history. No expense and no effort were spared to make it a notable one. The cost was too high for the publication to have been an ordinary commercial venture. There is a record of one copy's having been sold just after publication, in 1624, for one pound, which would be ten dollars in today's money. Dr. Samuel Johnson, who was familiar with printing practices, estimated the number of volumes published to have been five hundred. Obviously the venture was subsidized by the two noblemen to whom the Folio was dedicated, the Earl of Pembroke, and his brother, the Earl of Montgomery, Oxford's son-in-law; these men were the sons of Lord Oxford's friend, Lady Mary Pembroke.

There is reason to believe that Ben Jonson may have actually suggested the publication of the First Folio, persuading the reluctant Countesses, Oxford's daughters, that their father's anonymity could be protected by going to the extreme of indicating that William Shakespeare was the name of a real person in Stratford, who had been a minor actor. It is significant that the Lord Chamberlain, who was the brother of Oxford's son-in-law, arranged in 1616 for a pension to Ben Jonson of one hundred marks a year, temporarily increased in



1621 to two hundred pounds, equivalent to \$8,000 in today's money.

Thus was laid the basis for the most amazing literary hoax of all time. Its success has surely gone beyond the most optimistic hopes of those who conceived and executed it. Ben Jonson himself would no doubt be the most astonished of all, could he know that William Shaksper of Stratford, the pretentious and uncouth impostor pictured in Jonson's own plays, as Sogliardo-Shift and the Poetaster, is to this day believed, as a result of his artful ambiguities, to be the author of the great dramas which had so stirred Jonson's envy. He would be also not a little gratified, for thus his own standing is enhanced; and he would always—did always—sacrifice any man, and any truth, for that.

Public curiosity concerning the author of the First Folio was inevitable, and this must be provided for. Essential for a frontispiece would be a likeness of the author, a picture of the mysterious "Shakspeare." An engraving was accordingly made for this purpose by a London artist only twenty years of age. His name was Droeshout. It is not known what model he used for the engraving. Someone took thought also for providing paintings by famous artists of "Mr. Shakspeare." A portrait of Edward de Vere was altered by some capable hand. It was given a bald head; the ruff embroidered with the Tudor rose, which was *de rigueur* in the costume of courtiers, was painted out of the Oxford portrait and there was substituted the plain neck-piece of a commoner such as Shaksper might have worn. The wild-boar crest embellishing the signet-ring Lord Oxford wore on his thumb is partially discernible. The Trenham coat-of-arms in the upper left-hand corner was painted out. (It was customary for a nobleman's portrait to be thus inscribed with his wife's coat-of-arms.) All this and more can be seen in Charles Wisner Barrell's X-ray and infrared photographs—reproduced in *The Scientific American*, January 1940—of the Ashbourne portrait of Shakespeare which hangs in the Folger Library in Washington. This portrait of the Earl of Oxford, which shows him wearing the court dress of an Elizabethan nobleman, was painted by Cornelius Ketel, a well-known Dutch artist.

M. H. Spielmann, the great "orthodox" expert on the portraits of Shakespeare, asserts that of all the portraits only the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford monument (How different in appearance the two are!) display the slightest semblance of authenticity, and all the others are frauds made by unknown artists. The Hampton Court portrait, owned by the King of England, has many indications of being a portrait of Lord Oxford, clumsily painted over, as a Barrell X-ray picture shows.

Thus we see upon what a slim and mythical basis has been constructed, without any evidence worthy of the name, the tradition and belief that William Shaksper of Stratford was in fact the greatest of

English poets and dramatists, William Shakespeare. Biographers have been forced to adopt tortuous devices in an effort to stabilize that theory. They have had to accuse the greatest luminary in the history of English literature of plagiarizing the works of such minor poets and dramatists as Marlowe, Lodge, Greene, and even Kyd, so that they might date the plays to correspond with Shaksper's maturity. They have presented this essential courtier and this magnificent man of the Elizabethan Renaissance as writing pot-boilers for the Jacobean stage!

To explain the author's great learning, his knowledge of the classics, of law, of court procedure, court manners and speech, Shaksper's biographers fall back upon another argument which is fallacious—that he was a genius and *ipso facto* became possessed of vast knowledge. It is true that the dramatist was a genius, the greatest the world has ever known. But a genius must acquire both knowledge and experience. Even a genius could learn Latin, Greek, French, Italian, history, law, only by close study under competent teachers and from textbooks. Such studies, either in a university or at the Inns of Court, were obviously not available to the Stratford youth. Flippancy is certainly no answer to the question, yet defenders of the Stratford man frequently say with a lofty air of finality that "Shakespeare was Shakspeare"; which is no more than to state that George Eliot was George Eliot or that Mark Twain was Mark Twain.

Class distinctions in England in the sixteenth century were marked and inflexible. Shaksper's family belonged to the peasant and yeoman class: Mary Arden's father was a small farmer near Stratford related to a family which had won the right to bear arms. The gulf between the peasant, yeoman, tradesmen class and the old aristocracy, not only in social status but also in education and political importance, was so great as to be almost beyond the realization of persons reared in the United States where there have been practically no class distinctions. Shaksper's parents and daughters were illiterate, and Shaksper—to judge by his crude handwriting—was almost so. Throughout his youth in Stratford the family lived in squalid surroundings. The educational facilities were meager; there was a dearth of text-books. Stratford was once described as "a bookless community." Most provincial towns were such. Books were very expensive, and few were obtainable except by the well-to-do and by the universities.

William Shaksper, coming to London from such an environment, uneducated, speaking a provincial dialect, becoming connected with the public theatre, where the lowest classes gathered, finally acting as a "fence" for stolen plays, and as a play-broker, could in no conceivable manner have had an entrée to the court or to the homes of courtiers;



nor could he have had any opportunity to acquire knowledge of court-life, of court-language, of court-etiquette, which the author of the plays possessed as by second nature. Few of the classics, Greek and Latin, had been translated into English. There were no public libraries, no encyclopaedias or dictionaries, no means of acquiring even a smattering of learning except from the original sources. It was very different from the situation today. There were no travel- or guide-books. Knowledge of other countries had to be acquired by travel or by listening to the discourse of persons who had travelled. Foreign travel was extremely costly: it was only the privileged and well-to-do who travelled abroad.

By no process of reasoning and only by blind faith, which accepts the traditional and adores the myth, could such an uneducated man as Shaksper—a man primarily interested in making money, materialistic, provincial—be today identified as the greatest poet and dramatist in English letters, the writer of the most polished verse and noblest dramas, when there is no evidence at all to support such a claim. One argument made to us was that since he has been regarded as the author for three hundred years, he must *be* the author. For a longer time than three hundred years the world was believed to be flat, and universities continued to teach this as fact even after Magellan's fleet had sailed around the globe.

The *Chicago Tribune*, making an estimate from words in the New English Dictionary never used before they were used by Shakespeare, concluded that he had added five thousand words to the English language—of Greek and Latin derivation, mainly. Theobald wrote that it is much in Shakespeare's manner to use words borrowed from the Latin closer to their original significance than they were commonly used. Charles Knight said that Shakespeare used learned words in strict accordance with their derivation. Macaulay in his essay on Dryden wrote: "Genius will not furnish a poet with a vocabulary; it will not teach what word exactly corresponds to his idea, and will most fully convey it to others. Information and experience are necessary for strengthening the imagination." Thomas Carlyle wrote: "I think the best judgment not of this country only, but of Europe, is slowly pointing to the conclusion that Shakespeare is the chief of all poets hitherto; the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world, has left a record of himself in the way of literature." (The significance of the expression, "a record of himself" is not to be overlooked.)

Dr. Nathan Drake wrote of Shakespeare: "No person can study his writings without perceiving that throughout the vast range of being, whatever is lovely and harmonious, whatever is sweet in expression, or graceful in proportion, was constantly present to his mind." Ed-

wards<sup>8</sup> asks, in effect, Could that poet have been the persecutor of poor debtors and one who brought up his daughter in ignorance?

Could this uneducated provincial from Stratford have written at the very beginning of his career *Love's Labour's Lost*, even assuming, as Stratfordians do, it was written as late as 1589 (which was actually ten years after its production at court) accurately portraying court life, the lives of French kings and princesses, lords and ladies then living?

In his *Microcosmos*, 1603, John Davies of Hereford inserted a tribute beginning, "Players, I love yee." Several lines further down, in the margin, the letters, "W.S.R.B." were written—whether by Davies himself is not known. Another line of the poem reads, "*And though the stage doth stain pure gentle blood.*" This tribute can only be to a man of gentle blood—that is, noble blood—who had acted on the stage, and thus debased his noble status. Lord Oxford alone fits this description, although Southampton and an occasional young nobleman took part in plays at court, or in the home of some wealthy man of title, or at Gray's Inn. The letters "W.S." indicate Oxford, of course. He admits in Sonnet 111 that he has sullied his name by the work he engages in.

*The Scourge of Folly*, by Davies, 1610, contains a stanza headed, "To our English Terence, Mr. Will. Shake[lyphen]speare." Of this the first four lines are often quoted:

Some say (good Will) which I, in sport, do sing,  
Hadst thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport,  
Thou hadst bin a companion for a King;  
And beene a King among the meaner sort.

Davies "sings" of him as *good Will* "in sport"; and thus it was, as Will Shakespeare, that he took kingly parts in his own plays—"in sport," not professionally. Here again he is said to debase himself by his theatrical activities.

The description of Shake[lyphen]speare as "our English Terence" is particularly arresting, since "Terence" was a *nom de plume* also. John Davies goes on to relate an anecdote of this Shakespeare upon the occasion of his playing a part before the Queen. While he was speaking his lines, she dropped her glove; and he, stooping to retrieve it, extemporized, without pausing or breaking the rhythm:

Although engaged on this high embassy,  
Yet stoop we to pick up our cousin's glove.

It is utterly unthinkable that William Shaksper of Stratford, a common player, would ever have addressed Her Majesty as "our cousin." Oxford would have used that very term. In the official grant of one thousand pounds which the Queen made Lord Oxford, in

<sup>8</sup> William H. Edwards, *Shaksper Not Shakespeare*, p. 183.



1586, she spoke of him three times as "our cousin," the first time as "our trusty and well-beloved cousin the Earl of Oxford." No person in rank below an Earl could address his sovereign as "cousin."

In 1635, Cuthbert Burbage, son of James Burbage, on behalf of himself, his brother's wife and William Burbage, his son, sent a petition to the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Pembroke, seeking to enlist his aid in connection with the affairs of the Globe Theatre. The petition recited the activities of James Burbage in connection with the Blackfriars Theatre and stated that his two sons, Cuthbert and Richard, had built the Globe Theatre and "were joined by those deserving men Shakspeare, Hemmings, Condall, Phillips and others." The Earl of Pembroke was Lord Oxford's son-in-law; he and his brother were the "incomparable pair of brethren" to whom the First Folio of 1623 was dedicated. Cuthbert Burbage, seeking in this petition the aid of the Earl of Pembroke, would naturally have reminded him that "Shakspeare" was in fact the great dramatist whose works had been dedicated to the Earl and his brother, had this been the case. That Burbage referred to Shakspeare as a "deserving man" and later in the petition as a "man-player," instead of designating him as the great dramatist, is a pretty clear indication that he and the Earl of Pembroke knew he was not the dramatist.

Finally, the lines on his gravestone are altogether characteristic of William Shaksper of Stratford-on-Avon, but they could never have been an expression of the author of *Hamlet*, the true William Shakespeare.