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LORD BACON:

DID HE WRITE

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

A REPLY TO

JUDGE HOLMES, MISS D. BACON, & MR. W. H. SMITH,

BY

CHARLES C. CATTELL,

EDITOR OF "DAWSON'S SPEECHES ON SHAKESPEARE."

'Know the grounds and authors of it.'—*Twelfth Night, Act V Sc. 1*

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DID LORD BACON WRITE SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

BY

CHARLES C. CATTELL.

TO some this is an old question, but it is not so old as some other questions by many thousands of years. Many who possess the volume entitled "Shakespeare's Works" are altogether indifferent as to when or by whom the plays and poems were written. Then there are the idolators who regard the utterance of a doubt, as to Shakespeare being the author, as gross infidelity, a species of blasphemy against "the divine William." But a wise scepticism is a healthy sign in this age of reason, this age of intellectual activity—such as was never before seen in the history of mankind. Old and wise heads have settled this and many other questions to their own satisfaction; but a new generation seeks solutions of its own, and desires to discuss and settle questions, unawed by all authority but the evidence, by which alone a thoughtful man is guided. This humble contribution to the discussion is intended to serve those whose time or opportunity does not permit them to consult more expensive and voluminous books on the subject.

Some persons are angry with the heretics; but it may be fairly taken as a very high compliment to the genius of Shakespeare, that his plays and poems are considered worthy of the pen of so profound a philosopher, scholar, and master mind as Lord Bacon.

Those who think this is a fight with phantoms, a firing into the air at nothing in particular, should be informed that in 1875 a new edition of Judge Holmes's work was published, containing 696 pages, setting forth the claims of Lord Bacon. Besides this, there is a work by Miss Delia Bacon of 582 pages, and one by W. H. Smith of 162 pages, and others.

The position taken by the heretics is that Shakespeare was only a poor strolling, vagabond player—who not only could not be the writer of the plays or of anything else, except his own name, and that so badly that it is still an open question whether he knew how to spell it. On the other hand, Lord Bacon could write, was a scholar, and lived at the same time, in the same country, as Shakespeare, and therefore he *might* have written the plays and poems. Dr. Watts laid down as a sort of logical canon that what *might* be might *not* be. One argument against Lord Bacon is that several literary men of eminence, who lived at the time, in the same country, do not say he wrote the plays, but give the credit of authorship to William Shakespeare.

The words these men wrote, about Shakespeare being the author, were published at the time, form part of our national literature, and remained undisputed for more than 250 years. Besides Ben Jonson, Francis Meres, and others, Earl Southampton calls Shakespeare his "especial friend" and describes him as the "writer of some of our best English plays"

John Milton, in 1632, only a few years after the death of Shakespeare, which occurred in 1616, sings to his memory a hymn of praise. Heminge and Condell, who played with him, were on friendly terms with Earl Pembroke, and had, so far as we know, thirty years good character, published the plays

and poems in 1623, as we now have them, under the name of William Shakespeare; and at the same time under their own signature claimed him as their friend and the author of the books they edited.

In order to sustain the claims set up for Lord Bacon we are compelled to take refuge in the assumption—that men of learning, scholars, pure and noble characters—entered into a conspiracy to deceive mankind to all eternity, or, otherwise, that they were the most weak, deluded, drivelling, soft-headed fools that ever were permitted to breathe the air of Great Britain. Either they lied or were imposed upon, and neither one nor the other is laid to their charge—or, instead of being quoted as ornaments to their age, they would be described as impostors or idiots.

The so-called arguments of the heretics are made up of “if’s,” “but’s,” and “might be’s.” Those who put forth no arguments on their side are the most difficult writers to answer or refute: but the reasoning of the heretics admits of illustration, if not of refutation.

The following will illustrate their method, supposing they described it as I should:—

There was a plague in London; Charles II. was King, and John Milton was a poet. Now John Milton was poor, and old, and blind—and had no power over the elements, the army or the government—but the king had control over the government and its administration, and therefore he “*might*” have had something to do with the plague. Although we have held the opinion for more than twenty years that the King caused the plague, we never hoped or expected to be able to prove any such thing! One conclusive proof against Milton is he left no manuscript giving instructions about the plague;

neither did the King, but no doubt he wrote them. Having sent a copy of our work, showing that the King caused the plague, to a gentleman who has devoted many years to writing a life of the King, and he having thanked us for it, and also given us his opinion—that our theory and statements are totally unsupported by facts, and are incredible and absurd beyond all question; we think it necessary to bring out a new edition of our valuable work, which we find is supported by other independent writers, who have proved nothing at all, and of whose existence we were entirely ignorant at the time we wrote our own views on the same subject.

Judge Holmes makes a point of the fact that no manuscript has been found of Shakespeare's own writing: but if that proves anything against him it is equally fatal in the case of Bacon who has also omitted to leave us manuscript of his Tragedies and Sonnets. Dr. Ingleby suggests that Shakespeare's manuscripts may have been taken to London by his friend Ben Jonson, and that they may have been burnt at the fire which took place at Jonson's house. Heminge and Con-dell say they had Shakespeare's manuscripts of his plays and poems to print from, but I am not aware of any one having said that much of Lord Bacon's. Bacon's works were not published till after twelve of the plays, so that plagiarism would be extremely difficult, especially as *his works contained no plays or sonnets*.

Here we have Lord Bacon busy writing his great works, and having them carefully done into Latin; and we are asked to believe that at the same time he wrote the same sentiments (for their evidence consists of parallel passages only) in sublime tragedies, known and played before, and placed to the credit of a writer whose name was not Bacon. Moreover

these Dramas which have won the praise and admiration of all nations were in his eyes such inferior rubbish, that he allowed them to remain in English instead of having them done into Latin to be preserved for posterity. Any one who knows Bacon's character knows that that is just what he would not have done.

The assumption necessary for the heretics' case is that Bacon not only wrote the sentiments in majestic prose, about which there is no dispute; but that he also made the same sentiments do duty twice—in the second instance they appear in the form of sublime dramatic poetry—the writing of which he confessed himself incompetent, and the heretics produce no evidence that he either could or did.

Holmes says it is 'historically known' that Bacon wrote plays and poems; but does not say to whom this history was known, or who wrote it. Ellis gives a list of fifty persons who wrote in the reigns of Elizabeth and James, but Bacon is not one. Bacon wrote in fulsome adulation of his friend James, but did not produce a sonnet on his accession to the throne, but he did produce some wretched prose, altogether unworthy of his pen. It certainly is recorded by himself that he 'prepared a sonnet' as 'a toy,' in 1599, to please the queen, and in the same document he says he did not profess to be 'a poet.'

It is also 'historically known' that he 'assisted' in preparing a masque, and the part he did was 'the dumb shows,' and the rest was done by others. Another proof that Bacon wrote Shakespeare is that he wrote a metrical version of the Psalms of David. I can only make out that he paraphrased VII of them, and if any body else had produced such—I hesitate to say what language critics would have used about the VII. To produce any force, the parallel passages, to prove identity of

authorship, should have been taken from Bacon's tragedies and sonnets, about which no dispute has taken place because even their existence has not yet been established. Bacon's biographer says—if he did not write the plays of Shakespeare, of which we have no proof, there is no evidence that Bacon could write Dramatic Poetry. True enough, say the heretics, but *if* he did, which he *might*, that is evidence that he could. Verily there is "much virtue in *if*."

Any one reading the plays would infer that the writer had some knowledge of the stage, and was not unacquainted with Warwickshire, and even Stratford-on-Avon:—and '*if*' Bacon did not write them, some other person '*might*' who had some knowledge of both. The author '*might*' have been a player, '*if*' he had once lived on the banks of the Avon. Of course Bacon lived at a time when his parents '*might*' have resided in Warwickshire, and he '*might*' have obtained some knowledge of the stage, '*if*' he was a player, although it is not "historically known" these *mights* are in any sense rights.

It is urged that all the difficulty is occasioned by Bacon's concealment of his name as a Dramatist; because that character was unpopular in his time. A more conclusive reason, to my mind, is the fact that he was unknown to be able to sustain the character—and that the reason why his name was concealed, as the writer of Shakespeare's plays, was because he did not write them—and that purely through his lack of ability to do anything of the sort, as he himself confessed in writing.

Let any one compare Bacon's version of the Psalms with any Tragedy or Drama, attributed to Shakespeare, and see what sort of an idea can be obtained of a parallel. There is as much difference between the writings of Bacon and the Plays as

there is difference in the characters of the philosopher and the poet. Shakespeare has been described as honest, open, gentle, free, honourable and amiable; while Bacon has been described as ambitious, covetous, base, selfish, unamiable and unscrupulous. Now, taking these two descriptions as a fair index of their souls—which is the more likely to have portrayed the women of Shakespeare's plays?

The reasons given for concealment lose all their force when we remember that Bacon's complete works were not published till 1635, one year before he died. He lived long enough to see the end of his plays 'if' he wrote them; so that the excuse which he 'might' have had, when a young rising ambitious man, could not do duty at the age of sixty. Besides, his friend and servant Ben Jonson had placed the plays and poems, many a long year before, high up above all the productions of the genius of the human race. To suppose a man like Bacon dying and leaving such works unowned—leaving them to be fathered by a poor despised player, who could but just sign his name for cash received from the Queen and King for acting before them—is—what? To assert that such is within the limits of probability is unmitigated twaddle.

It is a known fact that Bacon was very anxious about how he should appear to posterity—and yet we are asked to believe that he allowed his plays, 'if' he wrote them, which he *might not*, to come down to us, published under his very eyes, with 20,000 errors.

Then there is the important point that Shakespeare had little or no education—very irregular—short in duration—and the absence of proof that he ever went to school at all—and if he did go—he must have begun to write before he was qualified either by college or university.

At the very starting point in this investigation the presumption is that the boy Shakespeare was totally unprepared for the office of poet at the time when he was busy at it. Now, 'if' he did go to school, his father being a yeoman and having served as chief magistrate, he 'might' have had an education like his friend Lord Southampton. Ben Jonson says Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek," so that it seems quite possible that he obtained these at some school—and is it too much to assume that his friend Ben, who was a scholar, could, and would, and did assist him?

Many of the books he 'might' have read in English, 'if' that be added to his Latin and Greek, which is not impossible, as he lived at a time when English was spoken and written. Surely Ben Jonson would help his 'beloved author' to Ovid and Virgil, about the only two he would want besides translations. It should be remembered that much of Shakespeare is the work of genius observing nature and man, and that he does not write alone as books enable and as colleges teach. He may also have in some measure resembled Pope, Goldsmith, and Burns, whose education was not of a very high order; but they, as also Dryden, Milton, Coleridge, and others began to write before they were twenty, Milton being a fair classical scholar at 17. Shakespeare having, according to Emerson, "the best head in the universe," and some knowledge of Latin and Greek, and some mysterious mental power surpassing that of the wisest of the ancients, he might have been able to produce some of the great works which make his name immortal, without being Lord Bacon in disguise, or the mere puppet of the great philosopher, who had as much to do with the plays as the writer of this.

Holmes cites a number of passages from Bacon containing the same words and illustrations as are found in Shakespeare's plays, and asks "can all this be accidental?" Yes: but if not, things that are equal to the same thing are equal to one another: so that if parallels prove identity of authorship, the inference that Shakespeare wrote Bacon is as logical as the inference that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. The evidence consists solely of similarity of expressions, as the following will illustrate.

Bacon writes that he remembers in a chamber at Cambridge there was "a pillar of iron erected for a prop," in another place he speaks of "Ancient pillars."

Shakespeare also speaks of "a prop to lean upon," "props of virtue," "pillars that stand to us," and "deserving pillars of the law." To me this only proves that both used the words pillar and prop. Bacon speaks of "the finger of God." Shakespeare speaks of "the fingers of the powers above." Bacon speaks of "the soul having shaken off her flesh." Shakespeare speaks of "when we have shuffled off this mortal coil." Bacon speaks of "the mole that diveth into the darkness of the earth." Shakespeare says—"old mole! canst work i' th' ground so fast?" Bacon writes—

"As a tale told, which sometimes men attend,
And sometimes not, our life steals to an end."

Shakespeare writes:—

"Life is as tedious as a twice told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man."

Bacon:—

"The great navies look like walking woods."

Shakespeare:—

"Anon, me thought,
The woods began to move."

It should be noted that the last two quotations from Bacon are

translations from the Psalms, so that, if they prove anything, they prove that Shakespeare was written by King David.

Holmes discovers that the plays were written between 1582 and 1613; Bacon at the same time living thirty-one years, from 21 to 52, "corresponding exactly to that portion of Bacon's life in which *we may most easily suppose they could have been written by him.*" Shakespeare also lived thirty-one years during the same period, corresponding exactly to that portion of Shakespeare's life from 18 to 49, in which *we may easily suppose he wrote some of the plays.* This would be very easy indeed if we took Holmes as a guide. For instance, in speaking of the style of Heminge and Condell's affectionate dedication, he says, "it is much more nearly that of Bacon; but it may very well have been Jonson." Again, Holmes says, there are traditions that Jonson severely criticised Shakespeare's productions, and was envious of his fame—"and from these it should be inferred that Jonson could not really have believed that Shakespeare was the actual author of the works."

While reading this sentence it will be well to bear in mind that Jonson paid the highest compliment to Shakespeare's genius, and that Holmes himself contends that the works so "severely criticised" were written by no less a person than Lord Bacon. If we believe in Holmes and his logic, Jonson was a fool in criticism and a liar in eulogy.

Holmes quotes a postscript from a letter by Tobie Matthew to Lord Bacon, in which allusion is made to a "most prodigious wit"—"of your Lordship's name, though he be known by another." Who else could this refer to but Shakespeare? He calls this a "very remarkable piece of evidence." To me the sentence is by no means clear—as to whom it refers—is a kind of literary conundrum—the true answer to which,

Judge Holmes himself has not, in my opinion, yet discovered. The sentence to me is remarkable as evidence of an obscure style of letter writing, and of interest, or even intelligible, only to the initiated correspondent.

Miss Delia Bacon, whose sincerity is indisputable, since she sacrificed her reason and her life in pursuing this subject, states that she will not place any value on Ben Jonson's evidence in favour of Shakespeare's authorship until he has explained why he did not mention to the author of the "Advancement of Learning" the name of the author of "Hamlet" as, she says, two such remarkable persons "*might* like to meet each other." She offers no evidence that Jonson did not do this, or that they did not meet. The imputation upon the honour of Jonson is therefore unsupported, except by the great argument which the heretics fall back upon on all occasions, which is founded on the fact that all the historians and biographers are entirely silent on the subject. This comes with great force because historians and biographers so seldom agree, but on this point they are unanimous, in saying nothing!

She may be excused for her enthusiasm since she believed she had discovered "hidden treasure" under the surface of Shakespeare's plays, although for years she had been a student of the bard, and, like all the rest of the world, found only beautiful ideas clothed in the most majestic words of one of the greatest living languages. But she, with keener eye than ordinary mortals, saw, "under the surface of Shakespeare's plays," the philosophy of Sir Walter Raleigh, and the imperishable thoughts of Lord Bacon, the father of the inductive method. Strange as this may appear to some—it is marvellous what hidden things may be discovered in any great book, if you go to it with a theory preconceived, and with a

settled purpose of finding in it some support to your theory. A remarkable illustration of this is found in the case of the English Bible. A thousand discordant sects fly to the book of books in search of illustrations and facts and sanctions to enforce their views, and they come back loaded with texts innumerable with which they pelt each other for hundreds of years. Moreover they not only thus fight each other but they combine to pelt all who differ from the whole of them with a vigour that can only be appreciated by those who have been engaged in what Coleridge's coachman called "something in the opposition line."

My contention is, that if you did not first catch your hare you could not cook it, that if you did not get your theory first you would not find it in the book nor the facts in support of it.

I read Bacon's essays before Shakespeare's plays and the thought that one man wrote both was not suggested, and such a thought would not be suggested by the reading only—not to one man in a million—and still it might be so—it might still be true that one man was the author of both. The multitude do not make discoveries. The discoverers of truth, the proclaimers of truth, and the defenders of truth, have in all ages been the few—the minority of the human race.

These facts should be constantly borne in mind, so that personal abuse, persecution in any form, should not be possible among the students, or even among the admirers, of literature, art, and science. In the words of Shakespeare, let it become a common truism, and not the insulting concession called toleration, that "Thought is free."

Mr. W. H. Smith contends that in Bacon alone are to be found the vast variety of talents possessed by the writer of Shakespeare's plays.

The best answer I can give is that the talent required, above all others, is the ability to write such dramatic poetry as the book contains, and which cannot be traced to Lord Bacon.

Mr. Smith considers similarity of ideas or coincidence of expressions unreasonable, and not to be expected, yet here we find them in the following pointed instances.

Bacon speaking of reputation uses these words "because of the peremptory tides and currents it hath" and Shakespeare says "There is a tide in the affairs of men."

Bacon relates an anecdote about a man named Hog, who claimed kindred on account of his name. Sir N. Bacon replied "Ay, but you and I cannot be kindred except you be hanged; for Hog is not Bacon until it is well hanged." Shakespeare has also used the words hang, hog, and bacon.

Evans—"Hung, Hang, Hog."

Dame Quickly—"Hang, Hog is the Latin for Bacon."

Mr. Smith points out that the word 'Essay' was new in Bacon's time, and yet Shakespeare uses it once, Bacon uses it as a title.

If the use of the same word by two authors who lived at the same time proves that one wrote the works of the other, there would be no difficulty in proving that Judge Holmes wrote the book of W. H. Smith, or vice versa.

As a matter of fact he has been charged with copying Miss Delia Bacon. In his defence he says that if it were necessary he could show that for twenty years he had held the opinion that Bacon was the author of the works of Shakespeare. Such a declaration would lead any reader to expect something very conclusive,—yet at the end of his volume he says "we shall be told that the sum of the whole does not prove that Bacon wrote the plays. We have never said or insinuated that we hoped or expected to prove any such thing."

The value of an opinion, although like this of Mr. Smith's, may be twenty years of age, depends on the facts which support it. Any opinion of which there is no hope or expectation is hardly likely to obtain converts, and may be very justly left to expire with the name of W. H. Smith.

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