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Charlotte Carmichael Stopes

Excerpt

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THE
BACON - SHAKSPERE QUESTION

ANSWERED.



INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

THE Bacon-Shakspere theory in one way benefits literary students. The opportunity of studying, on parallel lines of date and action, the lives of the two greatest writers of the greatest period of English literature is too good to be lost. The Baconian theory acts as a *filum labyrinthi* in the mass of materials of the period, and much matter that might otherwise be passed as unimportant is carefully sifted in reviewing what has come down to us from a Past that was once a Present.

The proceedings of the Bacon Society tell us, "The contention of the Baconians is that William Shakspere had no hand whatever in the production of either the plays or the poems—that he was an uneducated man, who could just manage to write his own name; that there is not a particle of evidence that he ever wrote, or could write, anything else." They also accuse him of every sin and crime, short of murder, to take away his character, and thus argue from his want of character an incapacity to have produced his poems. It is reasoning in a circle with a vengeance, when the *argumentum ad hominem* is thus made to contradict the *argumentum ad rem*. The personal animus shown in the way their proofs are presented, discounts from the

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validity of their conclusions. The Baconians are unwise, they try to prove too much. They say Shakspere was utterly illiterate and unable to write any of his works. If I can only prove he wrote "some," or even that he was *capable* of writing "any," I can prove their universal assertion *false* by a particular.

I cannot imagine any literary student asserting Bacon's claim. I cannot imagine a psychologic student believing in its possibility. As Dr. Furnivall said, "Some men are born colour-blind, and cannot distinguish tints; those must be born character-blind that cannot distinguish Bacon from Shakspere."

I may divide my answers into four groups.

1st. The probabilities from known character and education of the writer of the plays.

2nd. Internal evidence, gained by comparing Shakspere's plays and the works of Bacon, and referring each to the character of the ascribed author and supposed author.

3rd. The external evidence of most of the poems and plays being at some time claimed by Shakspere, and *never* by Bacon.

4th. The external evidence of the writings of contemporaries, some of whom personally knew both these great men.

The question is too large to be discussed fully in these pages, yet I must briefly consider each of these four divisions, introducing specially as a novel illustration the differing views of the two writers regarding stimulants. Afterwards I shall notice briefly the history of the heresy, and one or two particular contradictions.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROBABILITIES FROM KNOWN CHARACTER AND EDUCATION OF THE WRITER OF THE PLAYS.

THE probabilities from character and education are those that the Baconians specially present to us in favour of their theory ; so it is well to consider this point first.

The psychologic aspect is of prime importance in such a discussion, but the historical is a part of the psychological. All minds live and learn through environments ; all are, to a certain extent, moulded by circumstances.

The first question naturally to be considered is the birth-place of an individual. William Shakespeare was not born in London, it is true, but probably he was born in a more favourable nursery for poets than York House, Strand.

Warwickshire belonged to the province Flavia Cæsariensis. It is a central county ; the great Roman roads from Dover to Chester and from Totnes to Lincoln met there, so that much traffic and interchange of ideas must have sharpened the natives, from the times of the Romans on into the sixteenth century. In Saxon times it was the district of Mercia, whither King Alfred sent for scholars, and which gave the literary language to later England. This pre-eminence it had not lost. Bacon, in his *Jewel of Joy*, dedicated in 1549 to the Princess Elizabeth, speaks of it as the most intellectual of the English counties.¹

¹ See Appendix, Note 1.

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Drayton speaks of it as "warlike Warwickshire." It was the border-land between the Celtic and Teutonic races. Shakspere is the type Englishman who has, as Green says, "combined the mobility and fancy of the Celt with the depth and energy of the Teuton," and the place of his birth must not be ignored. By the River Avon it was divided into "Arden," a part of the primeval forest in the north-west, and Felldon in the south-east, where hills, dales, clearings, woods, and fields alternated. The whole neighbourhood was haunted by suggestions; subjects for romance floated in the very atmosphere.¹

Guy of Warwick² and Heraud of Arden formerly roamed there. Evesham and Bosworth were fought on the borders of the shire. Layamon and Piers Ploughman and Wycliffe were writers of the district. Henry VII. had slept in Coventry, where the old "Mysteries" lingered until Shakspere's youth, and the pageants of Kenilworth (1575) were among the most magnificent in Elizabeth's royal progresses.

The address presented to Elizabeth on coming to Warwick in 1572 gives the history of the shire under the Britons and Saxons. The Black Book of Warwick contains an account of the celebration of the Order of St. Michael (1571) by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at St. Mary's Church in Warwick; and an account of the magnificent funeral of the Earl of Northampton in 1571 at Warwick. Though the young Shakspere may not have seen these pageants, he must have heard of them.

¹ John Rous, our earliest antiquary, in the reign of Edward IV. writes the *Antiquities of Warwick*, of which Dugdale makes much use in his *Warwickshire*, 1644.

² In the *Gesta Romanorum* is the story of Guy of Warwick returning from Palestine to a hermit's cell near Warwick, and receiving alms for three days from his lady without her recognising him.

"Guy of Warwick, I understand,
Slew a dragon in Northumberland."

He also fought Collbrun, the Danish giant.—*Legend of Guy of Warwick*.

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Jean Paul Richter said that every poet ought to choose to have himself born in a small town, so as to grow up having the advantages of town and country life. This happened in Shakespeare's case, and every other condition known of his life is essentially congruous with the idea of a poet's development. Stratford was no inconsiderable town. It was of old foundation, having a history that led back to Roman times. In Shakespeare's early life it was prospering, in common with the rest of the kingdom, under Elizabeth. Camden calls it "emporium non inegans." In Speede's county map of England, 1610,¹ we find it marked as of the same size and importance as Warwick, and second only to Coventry in the county. It possessed the first highway bridge over the Avon below Warwick, and much traffic must therefore have passed through it. It had a handsome church; liberal feast-days; an annual fair; frequent visits from the Earl of Leicester's and other companies of players; a good grammar-school, and a town-council intelligent enough to know the value of written records, and to preserve them.

The scenery was sweet rather than majestic, yet varied sufficiently, within the stretches of a young man's ride, for all the inland suggestions of the scenery of the plays; for the foliage, the flowers, the heaths. For the town lay just by the fair Forest of Arden,² placed on the sweet Avon, whose banks, with their "hoar willows," their "footpath way," their stiles, their merry knaves, are often suggested in his plays.

¹ See Appendix, Note 2.

² "Where nightingales in Arden sit and sing
 Amongst the dainty dew-empared flowers."—DRAYTON.
 "Muse, first of Arden tell, whose footsteps yet are found
 In her rough woodlands more than any other ground,
 That mighty Arden held, even in her height of pride,
 Her one hand touching Trent, the other Severn's side."
 — DRAYTON'S *Polyolbion*.

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Shakespeare was born of one of the best families within that town.¹ His father had passed through the various grades of municipal dignity, having been successively Ale-taster, one of the four Constables, one of the four Afferors, then High Alderman or Bailiff of Stratford, and that more than once, until 1586; and a sense of importance and general interest must have risen in his house. He was evidently much respected; even the old records give witness of that; and he must have met the best society to be had.² His wife, an heiress of the neighbouring old family of Arden, of good connections, was a great "gift from God" to him. Well-endowed and capable; probably handsome,³ and certainly affectionate; she gave her husband a chance in life such as few of his townfolk had. No doubt she cherished the memories of her old family, that went back into warlike Saxon times; even though her branch of it had ended among seven distaffs.⁴

On many winter nights she would doubtless pour into the youthful ears of her children the family and local legends (for tradition in those days took the place of much of our modern education), and would connect the present with the past. A sense of the romance of war and a dream of the pomp of courts would thus arise in young Shakespeare's heart. We can see how he would appreciate the martial suggestion in his patronymic, so much made of by his contemporaries.⁵

¹ See Appendix, Note 3.

² See Appendix, Note 4.

³ Oldys says Mary Arden was beautiful.

⁴ There is an old superstition about the seventh child of the same sex having a "seer's eye." Mayhap, Mary had just enough of it to transfer it to her heir.

⁵ A record of the name appears in Kent in 1279: "Some are named from that they carried, as Palmer, . . . Long-sword, Broad-spear, and, in some respect, Shakespeare."—*Camden's Remaines*, ed. 1605.

"Breakspear, Shakspear, and the like, have bin surnames imposed

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Though his father seems to have had at least little skill with the pen, William would certainly get the best opportunities of education the place could afford. Nine years before his birth, King Edward VI. specially interested himself in the re-establishment by royal charter of the Free Grammar-School of Stratford, which had been suppressed at the dissolution of the religious houses in his father's reign. The head-master had £20 a year at the time the master of Eton had but £10 a year. It may be supposed that he was at least rather above the average, and that his school was relatively a good one. Mr. Baynes¹ gives a list of the books used there. But I imagine that to this list should be added Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, which was dedicated in 1557 to the Earl of Warwick, to whom Stratford belonged, and would very naturally be introduced here. Not only does he explain how "three things are required of an orator, to teache, to delight, and to persuade;" but the foundation of Iago's speech, which the Baconians insist is from untranslated Berni, is found therein. Herein also is an epistle devised by Erasmus in behalf of his friend, to persuade a young gentleman to marry, that suggests passages in the Sonnets. William must have learned something at school. No doubt he often was dreaming and indolent, he had so many interests. He might remember himself when he wrote of the "school-boy creeping unwillingly to school," or playing truant, from facts to weave his fancies, "of imagination all compact." The old chap-books and romances must have floated many a time between the pages of his Latin Grammar and his eyes. The river, the stile-paths, the woods, the wild

upon the first bearers of them for valour and feates of armes."—*Versteegen's Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, ed. 1605.

In Polydoron (undated): "Names were first questionlesse given for distinction, facultie, consanguinity, desert, quality, . . . as Armstrong. Shakespeare of high quality."

¹ Appendix, Note 2.

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flowers, the clouds, and the birds must have been an early attraction to the natural poet-soul.

Doubtless the temptations of beautiful Mother Nature were often too much for him, and he would rush off from the chattering town to the sweet solemn silences of the Forest of Arden, thinking, "I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows;" and perhaps he would dream there till he saw the Fairy Queen as evening fell, and was sworn into her service like Thomas of Ercildoune.

It was all so natural, further, for one like him to have merry times with young fellows as he grew older, and to play big schoolboy pranks on Sir Thomas Lucy and his keepers. We cannot but think there must have been some foundation for the legend of deer-stealing. It was a part of the romance of youth to re-enact the legends of the past. The old literature of the time shows that "to have a buck" was to win a feather in one's cap. The law of the time¹ proves that no dreadful consequences would have ensued on such a deed, even if Lucy had wished to enforce them, which would not have been likely had the culprit been a child of his old neighbour, Mary Arden, and of his old fellow Justice of the Peace, John Shakspeare. Besides, a conclusive evidence of its haziness lies in the fact that Lucy was preparing to be member of Parliament for the county of Warwick, for which he was returned in 1584.

I do not think that Shakspeare meant all the satire in Justice Shallow for Lucy. There must have been many another "Justice of the Peace" familiar to him, whose peculiarities would be more original than those of a culti-

¹ The "penalties" were only attached to poaching on the royal parks. For taking a deer from an "enclosed park," a man was liable to pay three times its price, or, in default, to remain in prison for three months. But the park from which Shakspeare was said to have taken the deer, Fulbrooke, was not enclosed. It was sequestered, and lay next to that of Sir Thomas Lucy, whose park also had not been "licensed" at the date necessary to make penalties legal.

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vated man like Sir Thomas.¹ But a little irritation is displayed. My own opinion is that Lucy had withdrawn from intimacy with the family at the time of its waning fortunes, and roused a bitter feeling thus in the eldest son's heart, which afterwards expressed itself in *Timon*. But it was not Sir Thomas Lucy that drove Shakespeare from Stratford.

His over-early and impetuous love, suddenly sobered by a hasty marriage, suggests many a poetic thought in his love scenes. But it was his too rapid awakening to the responsibilities of paternity that changed the current of his life. His father had a large family to support upon the lands, and the trade slipping from him; and more than enough domestic help to perform the various employments that farmers combined in those days before the division-of-labour system had arisen. Times or people had changed, and the fortunes of the family had grown darkest just before a new dawn.² Its eldest-born son rose to the emergency. His mother's inheritance, that should have been his own, had gone at great disadvantage in times of sore pressure. The Henley Street house was retained, but anxious thoughts must have often darkened it, how to keep the wolf from the door. There is no doubt that the money difficulties of that period acted as a peculiar, and perhaps necessary, training for the free poet-soul, and were the real cause of his after industry and worldly success. When, in the midst of his father's money anxieties (that he evidently sympathised in), he compli-

¹ Mr. Halliwell has unearthed the strange fact that Sir Thomas Lucy himself, supposed to be so Puritanic, was a patron of players, as he found in a record of the Chamberlain's accounts in Coventry, 1584: "To Sir Thomas Lucy's plaiers, x. s." If so different in one respect from his received character, he may also be in another.

² There is a complaint that "for want of such trade as heretofore they had by clothing and making of yarn," the town had become less prosperous than formerly at this time.

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cated matters by marrying Anne Hathaway before he could support her, he had met the crisis of his life.

“Love is too young to know what conscience is :
Yet who knows not conscience is born of love.”

After that he certainly felt that he must *give up* his future life to duty. That he had power to combine two dissimilar aims, and succeed in both, showed no common mind. In choosing a career, he allowed his inclinations some play; buckled on his knapsack, and, like many another man, went to seek his fortune in London, and found it. He went not unknown. His mother had good friends, his father many acquaintances; there were many Stratford men in London; I find about a dozen in the Stationers' records; but it is more than likely he went straight to his old school-fellow Field, who was a printer in Blackfriars. In Blackfriars also were the players that had been often down in Stratford, Warwickshire men also, Burbage among them. To them would he go, possibly with the rough scroll of *Venus and Adonis*, the “first heir of his invention,” in his pocket. If he went to London in 1586, as some think, it may only have been as a visit, for he must have returned to Stratford in 1587, as he then concurred with his parents in giving up his right to inheritance in Asbies, that they might mortgage it further to Lambert, for an additional sum of £20.¹

Several companies of players were in Stratford in 1587, and it is more than likely he went to London along with them, and engaged to them. His father had always been fond of spectacle, had been kind to the players in the day of his power, and they, more than likely, had a kindly feeling towards the young Benedict of their own neighbourhood, on whom the cares of domestic life were now pressing so heavily. For there is no doubt his parents and younger

¹ See Appendix, Note 5.