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BEATRICE. "Kill Claudio."

"MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING," *Act IV., Scene I.*

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THE COMEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. A. ABBEY, AND COMMENTS BY ANDREW LANG.

V.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

"LET but Beatrice
And Benedicke be seen, loe, in a trice,
The cock-pit, galleries, boxes all are full,"

says Mr. Leonard Digges. The verses of Mr. Digges, an Oxford scholar, were prefixed to "*Poems*, written by Will. Shakespeare, gent.," published at London in 1640. The lines are supposed to have been originally intended to appear in the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. However that may be, they prove the popularity of *Much Ado about Nothing* in years not so long after Shakespeare's death. Digges has been remarking that Ben Jonson's pieces have only a *succès d'estime*, and

"Acted, have scarce defraied the sea-cole fire,"

while the dramas of "Will. Shakespeare, gent.," are

"Like the coyned gold, whose lines in every page
Shall pass true current to succeeding age."

Mr. Digges may not have been a very great poet, but he is a *vates* in the other sense: succeeding ages find his prophecy come true; and pit, boxes, and galleries yet welcome Benedick and Beatrice, Dogberry and Verges. We all have our favorites among the comedies. There be some who reckon *Much Ado about Nothing* in the rank of Shakespeare's best six pieces. Probably it is really in that proud place, as an acting play. "In the closet," as they say, it is hardly so preeminent, and is not among the plays most rich in poetry and most magical in style. The stage has its conventions, accepts impossible plots, admits astoundingly sudden changes of character, in all of which elements *Much Ado about Nothing* is more than necessarily rich. If it were a new piece, the critics of the first night's performance would have a good deal to say against the plot. The fable in which a lover is made to believe he sees the proof of his lady's falseness, when he sees only her maid dressed up in her garments, is probably of great antiquity. "The substituted bride"—really a deceitful maid of the bride's—is a common figure, not only in German and Scotch and Norse, but even in Zulu nursery tales. To limit the extent of the handmaid's deceit is an easy modification of the world-wide legend. Shakespeare must have known it through Spenser's "Faerie Queene" (Book ii., Canto iv.).

"This gracelesse man, for furtherance of his guile,
Did court the handmayd of my lady deare,"

with all that follows. Spenser, again, probably adapted the incident from Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso." In Ariosto the traitor is moved by jealousy: the lady has rejected his suit. In Spenser, his motive is not clearly stated:

"He either envying my toward good,
Or of himselfe to treason ill disposd."

In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Don John, being a bastard, is one of those characters with a natural malignity, and love of mischief for its own sake, though he is also jealous of Claudio's triumphant youth. But Shakespeare keeps much closer to the form which Bandello gives the legend in one of his novels, where the scene is laid, as by Shakespeare, at Messina, and wherein the accused heroine is feigned to die (as in

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DON JOHN. "Only to despite them, I will endeavor anything."
Act II., Scene II.

the play), and is brought forward like the statue in the *Winter's Tale*, disguised, not as a statue, but as her own cousin. This plot, with the hasty and disloyal readiness of the lover to believe evil, and with the sudden death of the lady, not vouched for by "crowner's law," may pass, of course, on the stage. But the levity of Claudio after he has disgraced his bride, his arrogant cynicism when confronted by her father and uncle, his ready repentance, and the still more ready repentance of his tool, Borachio, are all certainly most displeasing, and if true to nature, not true to the nature of the *jeune premier* in a drama.

The fact is that, as in *Measure for Measure*, and in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare was determined to make the play "end well" at any price. If the plot required moral impossibilities from the characters, so much the worse for these characters—for Angelo, Claudio, and the elder brother of Orlando. He had not interested himself much in them, or not so much as to prevent his treating them like marionettes. Nor does Shakespeare care much how he disposes of his "second lady." Hero, Mariana, Celia, are all not happily wedded, or happily wedded only within the conventional requirements of the pit and galleries. There has been some recent discussion about sudden changes of character on the stage, *à propos* of a play named *Beau Austin*. Its authors might certainly quote Shakespearian parallels for the Beau's repentance (if he did repent), and for giving the unlucky heroine to that elderly man of fashion. Critics may thus arraign the plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*, but to condemn it is really to make nothing the matter of much ado. The characters have to be "got off" in a manner which will please the groundlings. In a modern tale or play we would not have Hero forgive Claudio. "Kill Claudio," we say, like Beatrice. We would not let Borachio off so easily. We would

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(if we were "Realists") dispute the coincidence by which the watch hear Conrade and Borachio conspiring. It is improbable. Away with it! It is one of the tales which have been told a hundred times. But all this has little to do with the merit of the piece as an acting play, though one can imagine that a foreign critic who sees it for the first time, like M. Jules Lemaître, may condemn *Much Ado about Nothing* as indifferently *charpenté!* The English-speaking world has made up its mind not to mind these trifles. Yet, to confess the truth, I cannot, when reading the play in cold blood, easily accept Claudio. He may have been a very fair representative of the Elizabethan gilded youth; and yet we do not like to believe that Sidney or Raleigh would have conducted himself with his heartless levity, and would have been so promptly forgiven. The plot, then, does not hold water as far as its graver interest is concerned. It is otherwise with the real protagonists of the play, who, of course, are not Hero and Claudio, but Beatrice and Benedick. Shakespeare did not take *them*, nor Dogberry, from Spenser or Bandello. He drew them from nature, with absolute knowledge and consistency. Thomas Campbell, the author of "Ye Mariners of England," thought Beatrice "an odious woman." He had known a pair like Beatrice and Benedick, he says, and they had lived together unhappily, and parted at last. To this we can say

BENEDICK. "What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?"
Act I., Scene 1.

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only that Mr. Campbell's acquaintances must have had but a superficial resemblance to Beatrice and Benedick. It may be a heresy, but, for one, I am convinced that those two had loved each other before Benedick went to the wars, though their love-making had been all fencing and sparring. Many a time, no doubt, Lady Disdain carried an anxious heart when "Signior Montanto" was in the tented field. Observe that she asks for him the moment that she hears of the expedition's return.

"I pray you, is Signior Montanto returned from the wars, or no?"

There is a good deal of relief in her instant outbreak of badinage about the gentleman of Padua. There has always been "a kind of merry war between Signior Benedick and her"—an Elizabethan flirtation, what the Scotch call "daffing." Beatrice's wit, let it be frankly avowed, is uncommonly Elizabethan. It would have been called "chaff" if our rude forefathers had known the word in that sense. She utters "large jests," ponderable *persiflage*. If she did not steal it from the *Hundred Merry Tales*, as was said, she had been a scholar in that school of coquettes. We cannot be angry with the French for failing to see the point or edge of this lady's wit. It has occasionally no more point or edge than a bludgeon. For example:

Benedick. God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

Beatrice. Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours.

This kind of merry combat would be thought blunt by a groom and a scullion. There is no possibility of avoiding this distressing truth. Beatrice, while she has not yet acknowledged her love to herself, nor been stirred by the wrong done to Hero, is not a mistress of polished and glittering repartee; but it were absurd, indeed idiotic, to call her "odious." Other times, other manners. Wit is a very volatile affair. Look, for example, at Mr. Paley's collection of rudenesses and ineptitudes called *The Wit of the Greeks*. It is *humor* that lives—the humor of Falstaff, of Benedick when he is not engaged in a wit combat. The humors of Dogberry can never grow flat and stale; but the "wit" of Beatrice is neither better nor worse than that of her waiting gentlewoman, Margaret. Yet Benedick, though he is shrewdly touched by some of her sallies, has clearly from the first a liking for Beatrice, as Beatrice has for him. Of Hero he says, "There's her cousin, an she were not possessed of a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May does the last of December." And "when Liking marries Pity," as the late Lord Lytton might have said, "their offspring is Love." Beatrice's friends and Benedick's have only to devise the charming scenes of the overheard conversations when Pity weds Liking, and Love is "the consekens of that manœuvre." From that moment Benedick and Beatrice have the courage to be their real selves, and become two of the most gallant, amiable, and loyal hearts whom we meet even in the plays of Shakespeare.

The skill in the development of the plot is almost as excellent as the plot itself is feeble—if we are to deal strictly with such mere canvases. Scene succeeds brilliant scene, and character is rapidly unfolded in dialogue and action. Claudio is as prompt to fall in love at first sight as to be sullenly and stupidly jealous of the Prince at the masked ball. This gay spectacle is charming on the stage; and here Beatrice hits Benedick more shrewdly than usual: "He'll but break a comparison or two on me, which, peradventure, not marked, or not laughed at, strikes him into melancholy; and then there's a partridge' wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night." An admirable satire on the jester, who, like Mr. Wagg in *Pendennis*, is "impudent and easily abashed." Then Claudio, in blank verse, discovers his jealous folly, "Farewell, Hero," and prepares us for his readiness to believe in her disloyalty. Then Benedick, hurt at being styled "the Prince's fool," actually speaks about "the base, though bitter, disposition of Beatrice," which, on the theory that he was in love with her from the first, only shows how extremely thin-skinned wits are—a fact of every-day experience. Review a reviewer, or make a pun on a punster's name, and "how the rogue roars!"

As to Benedick, a minute critic may easily observe that there have been passages between him and Beatrice.

Don Pedro. Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

Beatrice. Indeed, my lord, he lent it me a while; and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one: marry, once before, he won it of me

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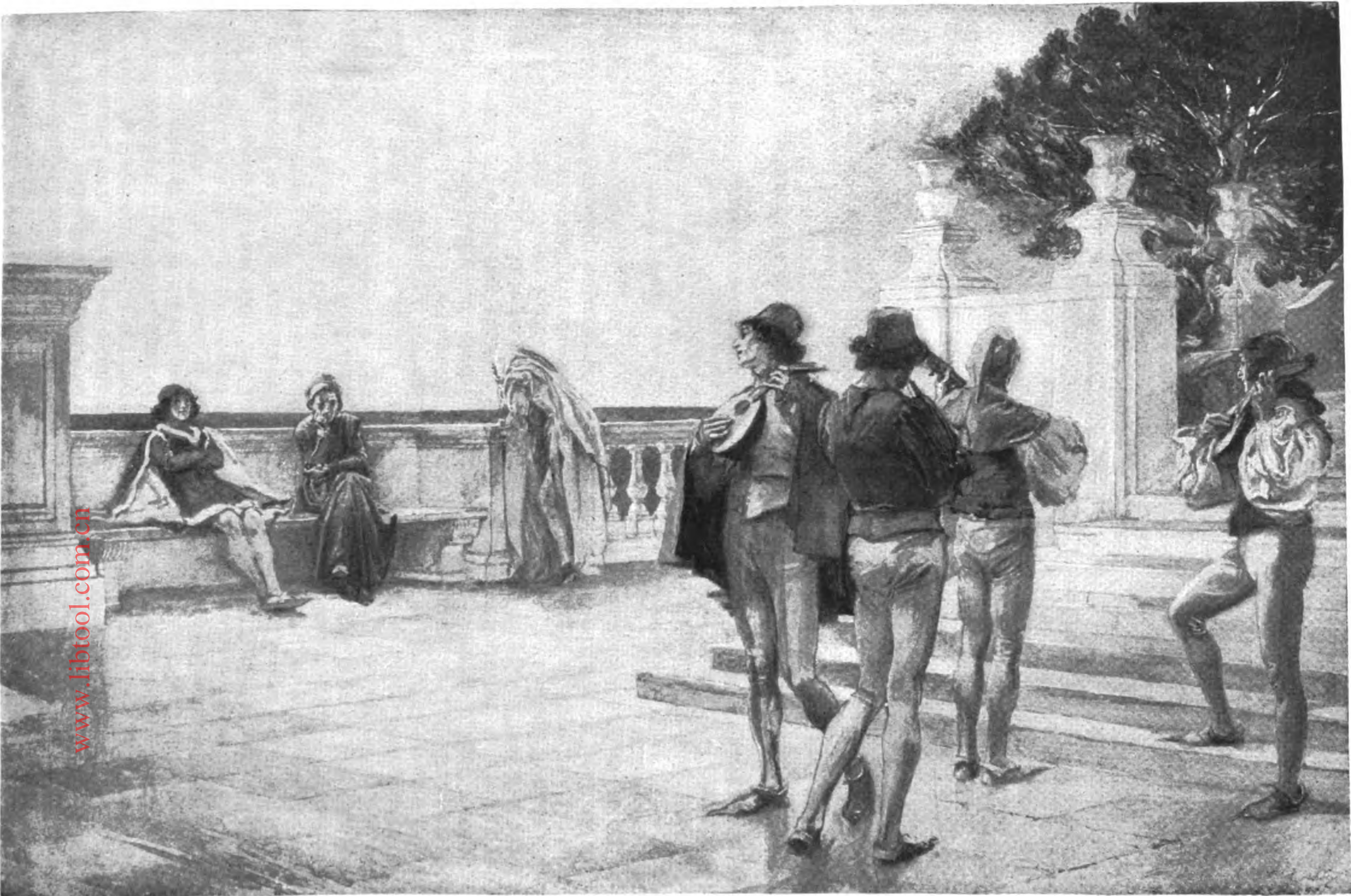

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Balthazar sings: "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more; Men were deceivers ever."

Act II., Scene III.

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with false dice, therefore your grace may well say, I have lost it.

We must take Beatrice at her own estimate: "There was a star danced, and under that was I born," or at the estimate of her friends, "By my troth! a pleasant-spirited lady," and regret that most of her wit in the early scenes is no longer very witty. On the same evidence, that of Don Pedro, it is still easier to accept "the sensible Benedick" for what he later proves himself to be, "of a noble strain, of approved valor, and confirmed honesty." These opinions of the people who know the lively pair best, lead them to lay the charming plots for their happiness, at the very moment almost when Don John's tool, Borachio, is persuading Margaret to show herself in the dress of Hero. As Borachio afterward gives Margaret a good character (not that we like Borachio's security), it is to be supposed that Shakespeare follows Spenser here: the waiting gentlewoman does not understand that her disguise is to be used against her mistress.

"Ne should faire Claribell with all her art,
Though she thy lady be, approach thee neare:
For proofe thereof, this evening, as thou art,
Aray thyselfe in her most gorgeous geare,
That I may more delight in thy embracement deare."

Margaret is persuaded that she and Borachio are only amusing each other by playing at being Hero and Claudio. But why Margaret is to call Borachio Claudio within Claudio's own hearing—"they will hear Margaret term me Claudio"—it is impossible to explain, except on the hypothesis that Shakespeare sometimes nods.

In accordance with the theory that Benedick is already in love with Beatrice, he now tries, in a soliloquy, to argue himself out of love, and at the amorous Claudio. "May I be so converted, and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not: I will not be sworn, but love may transform me to an oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool." Benedick "doth protest too much," and in the midst of his high argument he slips into the arbor, and Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato lay their trap for him. It is an old trap, and if married people ever made their confessions, many of them would admit that they have fallen into it. There is always a sister, or a cousin, or an aunt, or a friend, to persuade two young people that each is devoted to the other. The daughters of Eve have played this game since summer first was leafy.

It is "most wonderful that she should so dote on the Signior Benedick."

"Is't possible? Sits the wind in that corner!" whispers the sensible Benedick.

The savage bull is in the toils. Benedick would not think it "a gull" even if the white-haired fellow did not speak it. "Love me!" says Benedick, with a lover's usual logic; "why, it must be requited!" Had Benedick not been as many fathoms deep in love already as ever Rosalind was, his celebrated sensible character would have made him fly to the port of Messina, and go away by the first boat "to fight the foreign loons in their ain countrie," a resource always open to the gentlemen of the period. His tickled vanity —"I must not seem proud"—makes him "spy some marks of love" in Beatrice. No doubt the marks were there, though, in the technical language of young ladies, she certainly does not "give him any encouragement." The sister plot, between Ursula and Hero, on Beatrice's affections, is charmingly discriminated from the other by the delicate poetry of Hero:

"For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing, runs
Close by the ground, to hear our conference."

And again:

"No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful:
I know her spirits are as coy and wild
As haggards of the rock."

And again:

"Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes."

A lovely picture in a line. Even blank verse is not stately and happy enough for Beatrice's confession to herself after this joyful hearing. She talks in rhyming numbers.

"And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee;
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand;
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band:
For others say, thou dost deserve; and I
Believe it better than reportingly."

Cupid's crafty arrow does not wound only by hearsay: she has felt its point already. "The two bears will not bite one another when they meet."

The chief plot, the bait of Don John's

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DON PEDRO. "Will you have *me*, lady?"
Act II., Scene 1.

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malignity which Claudio is so eager to swallow, has this main advantage, this unborrowed merit, that it introduces Dogberry and Verges. Shakespeare is always quite indifferent to "local color." Having his constables in his eye, he forgets all about Messina, about Sicily, and foreign manners, and makes his watchmen as thoroughly English as they are immortally diverting. Mr. Halliwell has printed part of a letter from Lord Burghley to Mr. Francis Walsingham, written in 1586, and describing the English Dogberrys of the day.

"As I came from London homeward in my coach, I saw at every town's end the number of ten or twelve standing with long staves." And these worthies he took for mere idlers, but he found them to be watchmen, lying in wait for three malefactors who "were wanted." About those persons the watch knew only that one of them had a hooked nose. "Surely," Lord Burghley goes on, "these watchmen stand so openly in plumps as no suspected person will go near them; and if they be no better instructed but to find three persons by one of them having a hooked nose, they may miss thereof," and so thank Heaven that they are rid of three knaves. Dogberry may have been studied from one of these intelligent members of the old English police. He is the eternal type of the conceited official, absolutely absorbed in his own importance, and among all Shakespeare's many Malaprops, Dogberry is perhaps the most consistently entertaining. Almost every speech he makes contains a jewel. Pearls of absurdity drop from his lips like real pearls from those of the girl in the fairy tale. All his phrases have become bywords, as: "To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature." "For your reading and writing, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity."

But it is absurd to quote passages which every one knows by heart, and which no one can read or remember without being moved to Lord Chesterfield's vulgar infirmity of laughter. Pope and Swift are said never to have been heard to laugh. Lord Chesterfield hoped that his son never would laugh. Could any of those persons of quality ever have read the address of Dogberry to his watch, or his reiterated complaints about being written down an ass? The delicious expedient by which the watch sits on the church bench till two, with the proclaimed intention of then going all to bed, brings about the fortunate coincidence by which Borachio and Conrade are overheard conspiring. The watch "recovers the most dangerous piece of lechery that was ever known in the commonwealth"; and if Dogberry had not been so delightfully Dogberry, Don John's plot would never have come to the ripening, and there would have been no play. The scoundrels would have been denounced before old Leonato in the morning, before Claudio had the chance of displaying his odious character in church, but, alas, Dogberry, when he does come to Leonato with his story, bestows all his tediousness on him. "Yea, an 'twere a thousand times more than it is." There is a daring and humorous originality here, which only Shakespeare would have ventured. If there is a parallel to such momentous news being so absurdly delayed, it is in the *Agamemnon*, where the chorus of dotards dodders, drivels and plays the Dogberry while the fatal net is woven, the fatal stroke at the King of Men is being dealt within the palace. But the Æschylean chorus only makes us angry, like British statesmen quibbling and dividing and perorating while the days went by and Khartoom was left unrelieved. Dogberry, in spite of our impatience, compels our mirth even in the crisis of Hero's fate.

Impatience, of course, turns to impotent anger when Claudio jauntily denounces Hero at the altar—Hero as pure

"as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown."

"Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?" Leonato calls. The marvel is that no man's dagger has a point for Claudio. Benedick is "so attired in wonder, he knows not what to say." But Beatrice knows what to say, as, naturally, she inevitably knows what to think, and "disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes" with excellent reason at last. Benedick is wise enough to know that John the bastard is the maker of the plot. The Friar has the device of a feigned death for Hero, which seems to have been familiar to Shakespearian ecclesiastics, and old Leonato speaks proudly and like a man. But we do not breathe again, as it were, after Claudio's outrage on the sweetest and gentlest of women, till Beatrice speaks:

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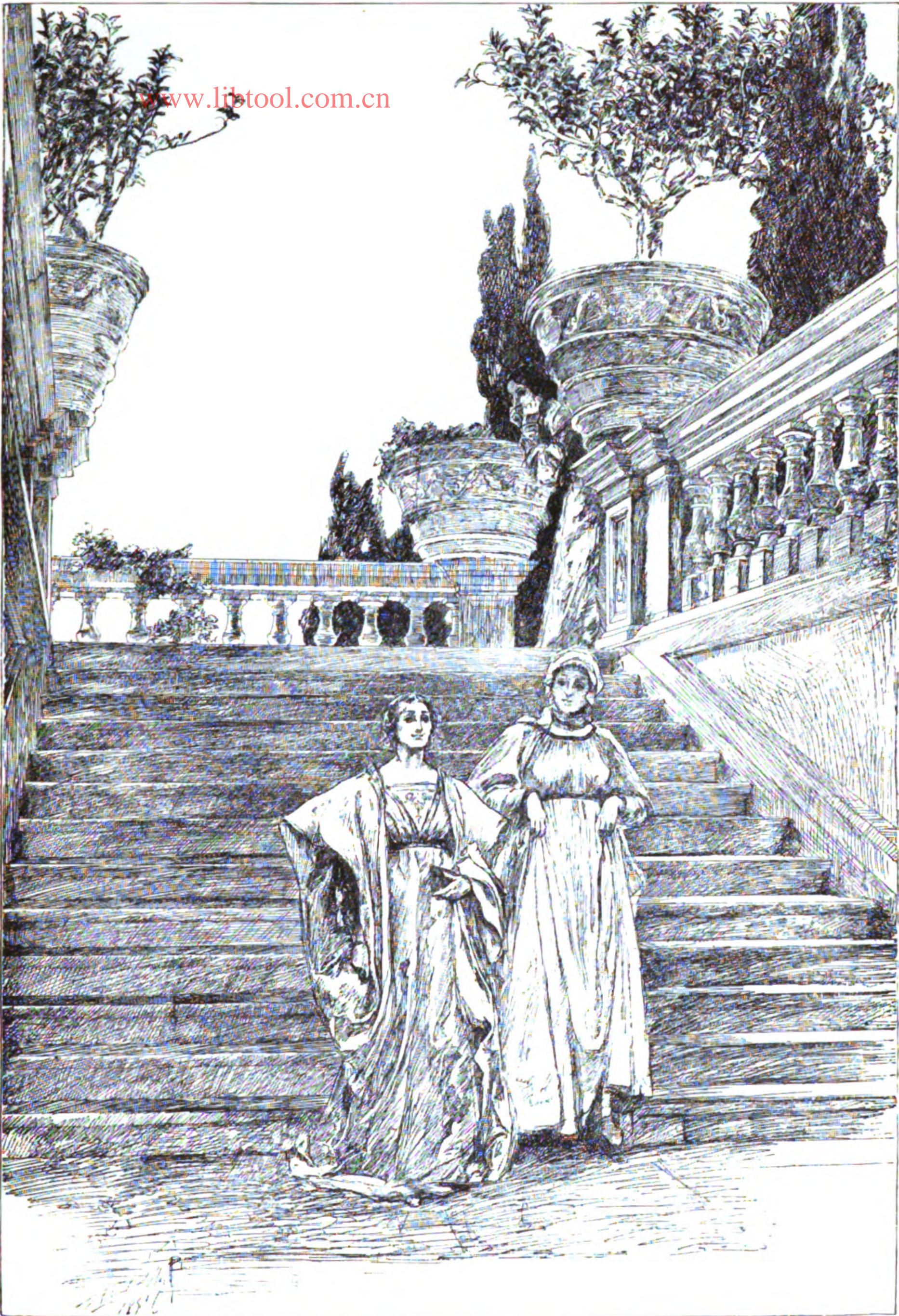

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URSULA. "She's lim'd, I warrant you; we have caught her, madam."
HERO. "If it prove so, then loving goes by haps:
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps."

Act III., Scene I.

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BEATRICE. "Against my will, I am sent to bid you come in to dinner."
Act II., Scene III.

"*Kill Claudio!*....
"O, that I were a man!—What! bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor,—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place."

Though Hero forgave Claudio, we may be happily certain that Beatrice never did. Our friends' wrongs are infinitely more difficult to pardon than our own, and Beatrice was not a lady of general and feeble good-nature. It is difficult not to regret that Benedick let Claudio off so easily, with contempt and a challenge, but so the fortune of the play must needs determine it. Angelo even is a person whom it is comparatively easy to pardon. Claudio throughout behaves like the most hateful young cub. He is, perhaps, more absolutely intolerable when he fleers and jests at the anger of Leonato than even when he denounces Hero, making her a sacrifice to the vanity of his jealousy. It is his self-love, not his love, that suffers from the alleged conduct of Hero, and he carries his grudge so far as to flout Leonato when he "speaks not like a dotard or a fool," and "challenges him to trial of a man." He has infinitely more dignity than his brother Antonio, who, with an old man's contempt for the new school of swordsmanship, cries, "Sir boy, I'll whip you from your foining fence."

Shakespeare lived just when the new method of the *passado* and the *punto reverso* came in, when men were only beginning to kill by the book of arithmetic, with their one, two, and the third in your bosom. It is likely that old Antonio would have been pinked at the first disengagement. It is again a happiness to the reader or spectator when Benedick comes in, and, in a very sober and gentleman-like manner abates the insolence of Claudio:

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"Wilt thou use thy wit?"
"It is in my scabbard; shall I draw it?. . . .
"You are a villain;—I jest not;—I will make it good how you dare, with what you dare, and when you dare."

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Duelling is an illogical, and in English-speaking lands an obsolete and discredited custom. This is very well; the balance of advantage is on the side of our manners, very likely. But how it clears the air, in a case like Claudio's, when a gentleman tells him that he is a villain, and is ready to make his words good. We can do nothing now to men like Claudio. They may break their word, and ladies' hearts, with perfect and graceful impunity. It is entirely safe, rather diverting, in fact, than otherwise, a feather in the cap of the male jilt. When such things are done, even a peaceful man sees the meritorious side of the older arrangement, the ancient way of punishing villanies that

DOGBERRY. "Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? —O that he were here to write me down an ass!"
Act IV., Scene II.

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now go unavenged. But we try to arrange life on a system of compromise; otherwise, one presumes, there would be very frequent by-elections in an English Parliament. Apparently the Elizabethan code of manners permitted the idiotic pleasantries which Claudio, to disguise the meaning of Benedick's whispered challenge, tries to break on him. Our indignation with Claudio is interrupted by the delightful Dogberry, with "the plaintiff's" not forgetting "to specify, when time and place shall serve, that I am an ass."

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In Dogberry's part Shakespeare simply revels in humor. When Dogberry and Verges and the Sexton get their gowns on, when Dogberry is on the seat of British Themis (for Sicilian Messina has nothing to do with the matter), he excels himself, and far outdoes mere modern waggeries.

"Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves; and it will go near to be thought so shortly." What an admirable *résumé* of the relations between speculative demonstration and mature public opinion! The Sexton is like Mr. Nupkins's clerk at the trial of Mr. Pickwick in Ipswich. Humble as he is, compared with the great Dogberry, he knows that Dogberry does not go "the right way to examine." But Dogberry is not to be snubbed. "Marry, that's the eftest way," he cries, and soars to the famous exclamation, "Flat burglary as ever was committed!" "O that he were here to write me down—an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down" (the pathos is almost lyrical), "yet forget not that I am an ass." O thou pretty piece of flesh as any in Messina! we shall forget the fat knight as soon as thee; thou unapproached, unparalleled father of all them that sit in vestries, and discharge municipal functions!

The last of the various stratagems in *Much Ado about Nothing*, that by which a feigned cousin of Hero, really Hero herself, is offered to "poor Claudio," does not reconcile the spectator to that worthless young man.

"Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me," he says, and perhaps charity will regard his readiness to marry a new bride, "were she an Ethiope," as only a token of repentance. "Charity believeth all things;" malice or stupidity believes anything, like Claudio. He has procured a rhyming epitaph, and this he "reads from a scroll" which he never wrote, over the supposed grave of Hero. When the true Hero unmasks and stands before Claudio, the moment should be one of a happiness which cannot be expressed, as mortal language has no words for such a joy, when

> "To-day the dead are living,
> The lost is found to-day."

This is the utmost of bliss which the fancy can feign for spirits in Elysium, and this reward, in the play, falls to Claudio. So infinitely is he impressed by it that in the course of three minutes he is teasing Benedick about

> "A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,
> Fashion'd to Beatrice,"

while Hero is equally humorous over a similar effusion of Beatrice's. That pleasant pair confess that they take each other "for pity," "and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

All this is perfectly true to their gay characters; but if there be any such thing as passion, who can say that the behavior of Claudio and Hero is anything but a rapid, reckless way of drawing to a happy conclusion, and "Strike up, pipers"? A comedy is a comedy, the pipers must strike up, and we "leave the board of fancy," as Mr. Swinburne says of *As You Like It*, "with a palatable morsel of sweet sugar on the tongue." The Comic Muse imperiously commands the author to this conclusion. This is the unavoidable weak point of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Perhaps nobody will carry heresy so far as to say that this piece is better to read than to see on the stage; on the other hand, it lives for the stage, and on the stage. It is a master-work for the theatre, glittering with points and changes, merry or hushed with laughter and surprises. It is said that Benedick was Garrick's favorite Shakespearian part; it requires such humor, dignity, and gallantry as will try the greatest actor's powers to the highest. A Benedick who makes faces and "clowns" the part, for example, where he listens to the whispered discourse on Beatrice's love, leaves a distinct and horrible stain on the memory. And she who acts Beatrice, again, like her who acts Rosalind, must above all things be a lady, and act like a lady. Mrs. Jamieson

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CLAUDIO (*reads from a scroll*). "Done to death by slanderous tongues Was the Hero that here lies."
Act V., Scene III.

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has called Beatrice "a fine lady," and Mr. Marshall in his preface to the play demurs—"surely nothing could be so unlike a fine lady as Beatrice." Mr. Marshall has a very poor opinion of fine ladies, but Mrs. Jamieson means a *grande dame de par le monde;* not a fribble of fashion, but a woman of high breeding, high passion, and high courage. It is a mere dispute about the meaning of words. I cannot agree with Mr. Marshall that Beatrice's wit combats with Benedick are "like an exhibition of the most brilliant fencing"; some of them are more like clumsy cudgel-play. We must be frank, and here I am rather on the side of that Accuser of the Brethren M. Jules Lemaître. The wit combats must be judged historically. The two-handed sword of Signior Montanto was just going out in the duel; the delicate sword was just coming in. Even court wit was clumsy in Shakespeare's time, and trammelled by euphuistic flourishes, as fencing was encumbered by a ponderous weapon, and perplexing secret *bottes*, and needless laborious manœuvres. The wit of Beatrice is of her own time; her gallant and loyal nature is of all times. The drama in which she lives is "a mellow glory of the British stage," rather than, like the *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*, the poetic charm for solitary hours in the life contemplative. Played first, probably, in 1599 or 1600, the comedy is of Shakespeare's happiest age and kindliest humor. Nobody is melancholy here; not one of the poet's favorite melancholies holds the stage; for we cannot number the morose and envious Don John with Jaques or with Hamlet. He is not a deeply studied character, like Iago, and is a villain only because a villain is needed by the play. In fact, Claudio is the real villain as well as the *jeune premier* of the piece. It is pretty plain that Shakespeare loved not the gay rufflers of his age, though, after all, in opposition to the sullen and suspicious vanity, the heartless raillery, of Claudio, he has given us the immortal Mercutio as a representative of the gallants of his time.

THE NEW YORK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

BY RICHARD WHEATLEY.

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR CADWALLADER COLDEN.
From "The Colonial Records."

THE history of the New York Chamber of Commerce is the key to the history of the United States. It represents the ideas, principles, aspirations, and methods which gave birth to American nationality, and which have shaped its polity for more than a hundred years. The rooms in which the Chamber of Commerce meets are over the site of the old Middle Dutch church, afterward the United States Post-office, and are adorned with portraits and busts of merchants, statesmen, and warriors, more or less intimately associated with the historyof the body.

As a society the Chamber of Commerce consists of 1000 regular members. Ten gentlemen—John Bigelow (ex-Minister to France), ex-President Grover Cleveland, United States Senator William M. Evarts, Judge Enoch L. Fancher, Cyrus W. Field, Thomas A. Edison, Hamilton Fish, John Sherman, George William Curtis, and Carl Schurz—enjoy the distinction of honorary membership, and bring to its aid the experience of statesmanship and the resources of trained diplomacy, while deriving from it the advantages of personal "touch" with the sensorium of modern trade. All departments of commerce and manufacture, and of the learned professions and useful vocations related thereto, are repre-

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Bookman
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were so vigorous and insistent in their plaudits that Mr. Clarke had to pause many times in his reading. At last he said with a pleased smile:

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"If the play goes like this when it is presented I'm afraid the police will interfere."

Myra Kelley has rested her wings in this village and so have many other well-known writers. But to the dramatists belong the honours of long residence, for Charles Klein has worked there for ten summers and J. I. C. Clarke, William De Mille and others have been labouring and loitering there for years. Truly, so far as the writing of plays is concerned, it has been a place of large performance, and if in contemplating such a Helicon one may be permitted to stoop to sordid considerations, it may be mentioned that much wealth has come to the Merriwold dramatists, Mr. Klein alone being reputed to have pocketed, or perhaps it were more fitly proportionate to say sacked, over half a milion dollars. So that Merriwold inspiration has meant money, and I would advise those playwrights who have found managers cold and actors chary to go to Merriwold, sit on a log and let the woodland fays bring big ideas and noble plots to them out of the forest. This sitting in dull urban dens and looking down upon brick perspectives is stale, flat and unprofitable. For while men, for inscrutable reasons of their own, love the city, the Muse loves it not. You dramatist of many pigeon holed plays, rouse yourself, pawn your watch if need be and buy a ticket to Merriwold.

Bailey Millard.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

"The folk who lived in Shakespeare's day
And saw that gentle figure pass
By London Bridge, his frequent way—
They little knew what man he was."

IT was as long ago as 1848 that a United States consul at Santa Cruz suggested a doubt as to Shakespeare's authorship of the plays which bear his name. But the notion that Lord Bacon wrote them came originally from Miss Delia Bacon eight years later; and although one William Henry Smith is sometimes credited with this doubtful honour, the lady, by reason both of her name and of the mental condition revealed by her insanity and death in 1859, may wear it the more appropriately. No profundity of learning is required to confute this crazy hypothesis; yet it is revived afresh at frequent intervals and much futile breath is wasted upon it. Judge Holmes, Mr. Edwin Reed and Mrs. Henry Pott have all been busily engaged in digging up evidence in its behalf—evidence which often seems impressive to those unskilled in the principles of literary criticism. More convincing still to such are the cryptogramic labours of Mr. Ignatius Donnelly. This is a process to which the Bible has often been subjected with marvellous results. Now comes Mr. William Stone Booth, fortunately described as "of Cambridge but not of Harvard," who has produced for our delectation a collection of "signatures" in the form of acrostics* which the amiably credulous will doubtless receive as proof absolute that William Shakespeare was none other than Francis Bacon. It was by the same kind of reasoning that the Scarlet Woman was identified with the Church of Rome by pious Protestants.

If Shakespeare is really to be deprived of his laurels it must be by a different way than this. Such a way is indicated by Mr. Greenwood, a member of Parliament and a London barrister of repute,

*Some Acrostic Signatures of Francis Bacon Baron Verulam of Verulam, Viscount St. Albans. Together with Some Others. By William Stone Booth. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

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who argues, without accepting the Baconian hypothesis, that William Shakespeare the player and William Shakespeare the poet were two different men altogether.* To this Canon Beeching has replied with equal brevity and force,† compelling Mr. Greenwood in turn to defend his position.‡ Then comes Mr. Clemens, in a strange digression from his usual paths, insisting that Mr. Greenwood is right and with a ferocity quite out of keeping with his genial reputation berating the scholars who deny the sufficiency of Mr. Greenwood's evidence. They are "Stratfordolaters, Shakesperoids, bangalores, thugs, troglodytes, herumfrodites, blatherskites, buccaneers, bandoleers"—a nice derangement of epitaphs! Must the subject be discussed in the spirit of John Dennis? It would be easy to retort in kind and to ridicule the qualifications of "Mark Twain" for participating in the discussion.§ And he is not even funny when he loses his temper. Yet what an occasion for humour the whole foolish, futile controversy offers! Consider how many sweeping assumptions the theory that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare involves. Even the *advocatus diaboli* has been constrained to admit that such a tremendous literary hoax could not have been perpetrated without confederates. The fact that the great man who had been Solicitor General, Attorney General and Lord Chancellor, who had held a conspicuous place at Court, who had written the *Advancement of Learning* and the *Novum Organum*, was also the author of the most successful plays of his time could not have been so thoroughly concealed that no one suspected the truth until more than two centuries after his death. Furthermore, the contemporary allusions to Shakespeare as the author are abundant and convincing. Actors and managers, critics like Meres, dramatists like Jonson and poets like Barnfield, all must have joined in keeping the great secret. And the chief conspirator of them all was Jonson.

Less audacious frauds than this have been disclosed by some revelation, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the plotters. If, then, Bacon or any one but Shakespeare was the author of the plays that go by Shakespeare's name, those who conspired to deceive the world must have left some loophole through which the truth may be discerned. There have been many attempts at literary anonymity in our own time. In some cases no one has been particularly concerned to penetrate the disguise. *The Letters of Junius* is perhaps the most conspicuous case in English literature in which any doubt as to the authorship exists, and here the doubt is hardly to be considered reasonable. Certainly it is inconceivable that a man of Bacon's eminence could have covered his tracks so completely. The evidence that he wrote the plays may be external, or internal, or both. The external evidence may be both pro and con. The internal evidence must be conclusive. In other words, unless the external evidence contradicts it beyond the shadow of a doubt, the internal evidence is sufficient. A writer may change his kind of work, his method, even his style, to a certain point; but there still remains some flavour of his personality; his speech bewrayeth him. If we are to say, from the internal evidence, that the author of the *Essays* wrote *Hamlet* we may say with equal credibility that Newman wrote *The History of England* attributed to Macaulay, or that Mr. Andrew Lang wrote the novels ascribed to Robert Louis Stevenson. Indeed, a very good case might be made out for the latter hypothesis; Mr. Lang's versatility is so remarkable that it has already been argued that his name stands for a syndicate. There is nothing in the character of Bacon or in his admitted writings to show that he was the creator of Juliet and Viola, Othello and Macbeth; on the contrary, there is everything in both to show the contrary. That is one reason why no competent student of literature—no "bangalore" or "troglodyte," in Mark

*The Shakespeare Problem Restated. By Granville G. Greenwood, M.P. New York: John Lane Company.

†William Shakespeare: Player, Playmaker and Poet. By H. C. Beeching, Litt.D. New York: John Lane Company.

‡*In re* Shakespeare: Beeching *versus* Greenwood. By C. C. Greenwood, M.P. New York: John Lane Company.

§Is Shakespeare Dead? From My Autobiography. By Mark Twain. New York: Harper and Brothers.

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Twain's choice language—has ever taken seriously the Baconian theory. But to those Peter Bells to whom a book is a book and nothing more, who do not understand what style is, the internal evidence is meaningless.

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If, however, we disregard this internal evidence, conclusive though it be, and turn to the external evidence in the case, we are confronted by a vast superstructure of assumption based upon a very insecure foundation of doubt. So much of it as may be derived from the labours of Mr. Booth needs no analysis. One is reminded of the familiar retort of Sydney Smith to the stranger who rushed up to him saying, "Mr. Robinson, I believe?" "Sir," replied Smith, "if you believe that you will believe anything." If one believes that Bacon, after concealing so carefully from all the world the fact that he wrote the noblest plays in the language, by a conspiracy of silence without a parallel in literature, deliberately revealed his authorship in a series of acrostics one will believe anything. Nor is this all. Jonson's lines *To the Reader* in the First Folio are cited as equally containing Bacon's name; and, of course, he wrote his longer tribute to his dead friend with his tongue in his cheek. Now one trouble with this kind of evidence is that it proves too much. A former reader of riddles of the sort has succeeded in showing that Bacon also wrote the plays of Marlowe. Using Mr. Booth's scheme of counting, you may easily broaden still further the scope of his activities; it has already been pointed out that by this token he wrote the poems of Dryden. In fact, almost any literary masquerade may be detected by these too simple means. I think that I could show, for example, that the same hand wrote *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *The Broken Heart*. And surely, if the Baconian claims are pressed much further it will be necessary to show who wrote the works that go by Bacon's name. Or may we not borrow the scepticism of Mrs. Betsey Prig? and say, "I don't believe there's no sich a person!" Let us not forget how conclusively Whately proved that Napoleon was a myth.

That there might have been two William Shakespeares, one a player and one a poet, as Mr. Greenwood contends, is at least a proposition which may be argued with a straight face. Yet it, too, rests upon too slender a basis to be considered with any great seriousness. Much stress is laid upon the gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare, as if this were a surprising or suspicious circumstance. Mark Twain modestly observes that Shakespeare was not as well known as he is. As a matter of fact the actual sum of undoubted information concerning Shakespeare—excluding all inference or assumption—is greater than in the case of almost any other man of letters of his time. Ben Jonson is an exception; but there are special reasons for this. Marlowe, Massinger, Webster, Ford, Chapman, Fletcher, Dekker—all are wellnigh shadows in comparison with the figure of the owner of New Place and substantial citizen of Stratford-on-Avon. But it is even sought to turn this argument against him. How could one who had sounded all the depths and shoals of passion, who was of imagination all compact, whose spirit had been finely touched to fine issues—how could such an one play the part of the successful manager, the prudent business man, the country landholder? The contradiction is more imaginary than real. It exists mainly in the minds of those who fancy that a man of genius must be incapable of ordinary common sense or self-control—that he must be a spendthrift or a dreamer, or perhaps drink himself to death. But in the very lucidity and luminousness of what Shakespeare wrote, in the very order and restraint which differentiate his plays from those of so many of his contemporaries, there is testimony to the balanced sanity of the man himself.

To deal with this subject point by point would be to write another life of Shakespeare. The facts are amply and convincingly narrated in such a volume as Mr. Sidney Lee's, which has just appeared in a revised edition.* Mr. Lee has found five new contemporary references to Shakespeare since the first edition was published, and these he sets forth in a new preface. The most inter-

*A Life of William Shakespeare. By Sidney Lee. New and Revised Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company.

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esting of them is that which shows him as having joined with Burbage in designing an "impresa" or semi-heraldic pictorial badge, with motto attached, for the sixth Earl of Rutland. Another reveals fresh facts concerning his residence in London. None of them is of the first importance. Yet every link in a chain of evidence which it is sought to break is to be welcomed. It is not without significance that each new discovery tells against those who attack Shakespeare's name and fame. Of such testimony as his contemporaries offer one can only dispose by applying to them a short and ugly word. They, too, entered deliberately into a deception for which there was neither reason nor excuse. "I loved the man and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any." Jonson's familiar tribute was a rare piece of hypocrisy; this is the only conclusion the theory that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare permits us to draw.

Nor is it worth while to enter into such questions as the knowledge of law displayed in the Shakespearian dramas. This point has been dwelt upon as a strong argument for the Baconian hypothesis. As a matter of fact there are errors in the use of legal terms such as a layman might easily make, but not a lawyer. Besides, were there no errors it would prove nothing. Anthony Trollope might be regarded as a barrister or Mr. Kipling as an engineer with equal provocation. It is no unusual thing for an author to turn to good use a mere smattering of a subject. Other errors in the plays are such as Bacon, of all men, would never have made. They are, however, precisely the kind of errors which an eager, inquiring intelligence, a man of quick observation and considerable reading, but without an extended or systematic education, might be expected to make. Furthermore, whoever wrote the plays was a master of stagecraft, acquired by a varied practical experience. This is so conclusive an argument against the Baconians that they are driven to the assumption that some actor "worked them over" after Bacon had written them. If this were so, who would the actor be but William Shakespeare, under whose name they were acted and published? The best we can do for the Lord Chancellor, therefore, is a Beaumont and Fletcher arrangement; and this is about as likely as the collaboration of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Pinero. Mr. Greenwood's notion that Shakespeare the actor and Shakespeare the dramatist were different men is made equally futile by the same considerations. We must not let the changes in methods of stage presentation blind us to the extraordinary technical skill which the writer of these plays everywhere shows. If he was not William Shakespeare, who was he? No one has yet furnished an answer to that inquiry which will endure investigation. It may well be dismissed now as a case of much ado about nothing.

Three of Mr. Swinburne's introductions to Shakespeare's plays have been published in the rather ambitiously named Library of Living Thought.* The poet's vice as a critic is, of course, his intemperate exaggeration and his superabundant use of the superlative. Yet there is a sound and noble enthusiasm in his appreciation of the great Elizabethans; and these essays will help the reader weary of controversy to forget all but the supreme genius of the greatest of them. And to the student the little *Pocket Lexicon*† which has been added to The Temple Shakespeare will be worth more than whole libraries of anagrams and acrostics.

Edward Fuller.

*Three Plays of Shakespeare. By Algernon Charles Swinburne. New York: Harper and Brothers.

†A Pocket Lexicon and Concordance to the Temple Shakespeare. New York: The Macmillan Company.

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