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THE ETHICS OF CRITICISM

Illustrated by

Mr. CHURTON COLLINS

By
ROBERT M. THEOBALD, M.A.

“ Wenn dich die Lästertunge sticht,
So lass dir dieses Troste sagen :
Die schlechtesten Früchte sind es nicht,
Woran de Wespen nagen.”

WATTS & CO.,
17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

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PREFACE

A PAMPHLET of self-defence may itself require to be defended. My chief aim in publishing the facts given in the following pages is not self-vindication, much less self-assertion. It is to put on record a piece of unimpeachable evidence that the Baconian controversy, in the hands of the most distinguished advocates of the Shakespearean side, is not fairly conducted; and that their unspeakable licence of misrepresentation and detraction gives strong presumptive evidence that they are themselves conscious that their case is a bad one.

R. M. THEOBALD.

49, Micheldene Road, Lee, S.E.

June, 1904.

THE ETHICS OF CRITICISM

J'ACCUSE

My chief difficulty in bringing before the public the narrative contained in the following pages is that the story I have to tell is almost incredible. For I have to show that a gentleman of very high reputation in literary circles, a distinguished scholar, a well-known reviewer and teacher, has spoken of three books and three authors in a quite unjustifiable way; that literally not a word of truth exists in his very confident statements; that the absolute falsity of this attack on two of the three authors, and of his approval and personal endorsement of the third, has been demonstrated to him by documentary evidence beyond the possibility of doubt—that nevertheless he adheres to this unverity and refuses to alter or modify one word of his injurious imputations. This would be incredible if affirmed by or of anyone; but when the indictment is drawn up by a Baconian and the illustrious person accused is a Shakespearean, the difficulty of obtaining even a fair hearing for such a strange, unheard-of charge becomes immensely augmented. For the accuser comes before the public—or certainly before the Shakespearean section of the public—with a damaged reputation; and the accused enjoys almost unlimited credit. The accusation is made by one who is already branded with the imputation of mania; he is a crazy crank; he is incapable of weighing evidence; he does not know what he is talking about when he presumes to pronounce an opinion on matters relating to Elizabethan literature; men of his class have been examined by experts

in lunacy, and in every case a diagnosis of monomania has been arrived at.¹ How can the assertion of such a person obtain the least credit when levelled at a literary pundit of high repute?

Nevertheless, I do venture to launch my *J'accuse*—a formula of indictment which seems reserved for use when the accused is a person of eminence. I accuse Mr. J. Churton Collins of stating as fact against Dr. Webb and myself, and in favour of Judge Willis as one of our opponents, that which the most superficial examination would have shown to be entirely untrue; I accuse him of making statements which he makes no attempt to verify, and I accuse him of refusing to alter or qualify his charges after their falsity has been so conclusively shown that no fair critic would hesitate in withdrawing them. For the matters in dispute are perfectly simple, capable of almost immediate verification, not requiring long or elaborate research in order to reach a safe conclusion. It is a plain case. If Mr. Churton Collins is correct, he can prove it at once by a simple reference to the page and the words where the facts on which his assertion rests are found. When his accuracy is challenged, he need not spend five minutes in testing it. The attack which Mr. Churton Collins makes on Dr. Webb and myself is a very definite one, but before making it he was bound to examine the condemned writings very carefully, and to be ready with chapter and verse if his accuracy is disputed. I have proved that the charge he makes is so absolutely destitute of foundation that it cannot possibly rest on anything quotable in the two books. In that case no other origin can be found for it except his own imagination; his charge is entirely, completely, absolutely baseless; there is not an atom of fact to sustain it. Now, the difficulty one finds in

¹ To Mr. Sidney Lee must be given the credit of this most interesting piece of information. He writes: "When any of the genuinely deluded victims have been narrowly examined, they have invariably exhibited a tendency to monomania." If this is to be taken seriously, it implies that some examinations of this kind have been made by those capable of making the diagnosis.

making such a charge as this is to express it with permissible moderation. The ceremonial of modern criticism does not permit the use of violent or extreme language, except for privileged persons. Pascal would not be allowed now to say to his disputant *mentiris impudentissime*, and the "measureless" invective of Coriolanus would be visited with wholesome and deserved rebuke. Nor am I myself inclined to give to my accusation these extreme forms. But, if any other explanation is to be found, it must be psychologic in its nature. The case is one of violent prejudice, extreme "distaste and revulsion" from a hated topic, leading to distorted judgment, perverted mental conceptions, delusions, and hallucinations. So, then, it seems that the "Baconian mania"—to use Mr. C. Collins's own tender phrase—does not stand alone; there is a "Shakespearean mania" not less virulent, not less disastrous in its results, and of this disorder Mr. Churton Collins is an unhappy victim. Either this or undiluted judgment in the style of Pascal and Coriolanus. I prefer the gentler and more charitable verdict.

For one portion of Mr. Churton Collins's inaccuracies some slight extenuation may be admitted. He submitted himself too obsequiously to the guidance of Judge Willis in a matter on which he ought to have had independent convictions of his own. Judge Willis attributes to me most amazing absurdities—and these Mr. Collins incautiously endorses—the nature of which will appear in the following pages. Surely Mr. Churton Collins ought to have been on his guard against the Shakespearean competency of a critic who was quite sure that the dramatist never "turned nouns into verbs." He was, I presume, not so "cabined, cribbed, and confined" as to indulge in any such "linguistic experiments." And he might have suspected the partiality of a controversialist who thinks it necessary to inform me that the Latin word *contriverunt* was not invented by Bacon, but is to be found in classic writers of a much earlier date. With these indications of ignorance and incivility, Mr. Churton Collins might be expected to

look narrowly into such extraordinary imputations of imbecility as Judge Willis seeks to fasten upon me. Evidently his reliance on one of the most vehement and impetuous advocates who ever thundered at the bar, and compelled witnesses to deny what they wished to affirm and to affirm what they wished to deny, must be explained by the psychologic aberrations to which I have already referred.

Now, from Mr. Churton Collins and Judge Willis I appeal to the public, and from this larger tribunal I claim a fair and unprejudiced hearing. And this not merely on personal grounds. I think it high time that the base coins used against us should be nailed to the counter, and their worthlessness exhibited in a conspicuous and typical instance. Too long has it been the fashion to treat the Baconian controversy by empty contradictions, baseless assertions, unmitigated scorn, unmeasured invective, and acrimonious denunciation. These weapons are getting rusty; let them be hung up on the walls of the lowest basement story of the Castle of Dogmatism.

And with this preliminary demand for an unbiassed judgment I proceed to the statement of my case.

THE ATTACK

MR. JOHN CHURTON COLLINS, in his *Studies in Shakespeare* (pp. 342-4), makes the following statements:—

“The work to which Dr. Webb owes most is not, so far as we can discover, mentioned by him. This is *Shakespeare Studies in Baconian Light*, by Robert M. Theobald. The substance of Mr. Theobald’s work appeared, we believe, in a series of articles contributed some years ago to a leading London newspaper, under the modest title of ‘Dethroning Shakespeare.’ Mr. Theobald marshals, with laudable industry, the arguments *à priori* and otherwise, as well as

the evidence accumulated by his predecessors; and adds much new matter of his own. His most remarkable contribution to the subject is a chapter entitled 'The Classic Diction of Shakespeare,' in which he cites some 230 words for the purpose of showing that the author of the Shakespearean dramas was familiar with Latin; that, as a Latin scholar, he was constantly 'making linguistic experiments,' and endeavouring to enrich his native language by coining new words or employing naturalised words in their strictly classical sense; that most of these words are to be found in Bacon; and that, as Bacon was a classical scholar, and Shakespeare, as it is assumed, was not, the presumption is that Bacon *coined the words*; and that, as he coined the words, and so formulated the diction of the dramas, he must have been the author of those dramas. But, unfortunately, Mr. Theobald's learning is not equal to his industry. His ignorance of the English language anterior to and contemporary with Shakespeare, and the recklessness with which he displays that ignorance, are almost incredible. In nearly every case the words which Bacon is *assumed to have coined*, or to have employed in a classical sense, are to be found, and are often of frequent occurrence, in the English of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Indeed, the whole chapter is an excellent illustration of that pseudo-erudition and specious parade of apparently conclusive testimony in which the Baconians are such adepts, and which enables them to impose so easily on credulous ignorance. Whoever would see how their myths fare when submitted to the scrutiny of real learning and sobriety would do well to turn to Mr. Willis's recently-published refutation of Mr. Theobald's fiction, entitled *The Baconian Mint: Its Claims Examined*. Well may Mr. Willis say: 'Mr. Theobald ought, in my opinion, to cancel the fourteenth chapter of his work entitled "The Classic Diction of Shakespeare."' For, at Mr. Willis's touch, the whole thing has collapsed like a house of cards. All that is of any importance in Mr. Theobald's contribution to the subject Dr. Webb assimilates, and, indeed, summarises.

To Dr. Webb's learning Mr. Theobald makes no pretension, and the consequence is that, while he anticipates almost all his disciple's absurdities, he does not give himself away by committing his disciple's blunders. But, although Dr. Webb's obligations to Mr. Theobald are so considerable, it is due to Dr. Webb to say that this does not detract from the importance of his work."

On reading this extraordinary account of the three books referred to—Dr. Webb's, Judge Willis's, and my own—I wrote to Mr. Churton Collins as follows :—

THE CORRESPONDENCE.

32, Lee Terrace, Blackheath, S.E.,
February 26th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

At pages 342-4 of your *Studies in Shakespeare* you say, "All that is of any importance in Mr. Theobald's contribution to the subject Dr. Webb assimilates, and, indeed, summarises." And you say that Dr. Webb's obligations to Mr. Theobald are "considerable."

Will you do me the favour to point out the "summary" referred to in Judge Webb's book, and some specimen or specimens of the "obligations" which you say Judge Webb is under to Mr. Theobald's book? I almost think you are mistaken.

Yours very truly,

ROBERT M. THEOBALD.

To this letter Mr. Collins replied :—

51, Norfolk Square, Hyde Park, W.,
February 28th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

In reply to your letter, I can only say that, if I have made any misstatement with respect to Dr. Webb's indebtedness to your work, it has not been deliberately, but it is right and just that I should be called to account for it. I read your work and his when I was writing on the subject, and the impression made

on me was the impression I recorded. I am so overwhelmed with urgent work that I really have not time again to procure and go over the two works and reckon up the indebtedness in detail. I shall be very surprised if I turn out to be in error with regard to an impression so very definitely formed.

I am, yours very truly,

J. C. COLLINS.

Mr. Churton Collins tells me that the impression which the two books compared made on his mind was "very definite"; he wrote "deliberately," not suspecting any misstatements. And he admits my right to call into question his accuracy.

In order to bring the subject more clearly before his mind, I continued the correspondence as follows:—

32, Lee Terrace, Blackheath, S.E.,

February 29th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

The gentlemanly and courteous tone of your letter emboldens me to speak more freely about my contribution to the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy than I should otherwise venture to do.

As to Judge Webb's indebtedness to me, you say that you asserted this "deliberately." And yet there is not a single chapter or even page in his book that can be brought into comparison with any chapter or page in mine. Our points of view are entirely different. His argument is historical and personal. I have completely and advisedly neglected this side; that is not my department. I go as a plain, unlearned man to the two sets of works, making no profession of deep scholarship, but, on the contrary, expressly disavowing it (page 294). Still, I am not entirely destitute of classic knowledge, and know more of Elizabethan literature than I have used in my book. Here is my standpoint—a lawful one, I contend. I need no larger research than that supplied by a fairly complete and entirely unbiassed and honest study of the texts of Bacon and Shakespeare. I "display no ignorance" as you accuse me, for I make no ventures outside the range of my own knowledge. The standpoint of

Judge Webb is different. He also speaks of what he is capable of judging and knowing, but his topic is one of historic evidence. If he makes any comparison between the writings of Bacon and those of Shakespeare, he selects matters which I have not touched, nothing which he can possibly have derived from me, so that even here, where a debt might be incurred, he is not within visible distance of one. Even of this kind nothing is common to him and me. Consequently, whether "deliberate" or not, your assertion is entirely untrue, and I am quite sure you can never justify it. But I do not stop here. I know as a fact that Judge Webb had never seen my book when he wrote his own. I sent him a copy after reading his book, which he acknowledges in these terms, dated June 22nd, 1902:—"Dear Sir,—Your welcome present has safely arrived at Dublin; but for the last three weeks I have been absent from home, and have been so engrossed by the discharge of my official duties that I fear I have incurred the charge of insensibility to your kindness by not writing before. *I have not yet had the opportunity of reading the work of which you have kindly made me a present, and I fear that when I read it I shall find that you have anticipated me in much of my argument.*" And on July 16th he writes: "I have read your book, and am at once astonished and delighted by it. What pleases me more than anything else—if I am to make distinctions—is the masterly way in which you have obviated the objections of Tennyson and Sir Theodore Martin [and he might now add Mr. Churton Collins, who repeats the same at pages 364–5] against the Baconian theory, based on Bacon's treatment of love and marriage.....Your treatment of the classic evidence leaves nothing to be desired." (He could scarcely have anticipated what a notable addition to it you would make.)

These quotations, I presume, settle the question. You are mistaken, and I contend that your mistake is one that you ought not to have made. There is *absolutely nothing* to sustain it. Your amazing assertion—"All that is of any importance in Mr. Theobald's contribution to the subject Dr. Webb assimilates, and, indeed, summarises"—is textually contradicted by Dr. Webb's own words.

Not less inexcusable is your reference to Judge Willis's *Baconian Mint*. If you had read it with the same critical discernment that you have used in your study of Shakespeare's classical learning, you would at once have detected numerous

errors, plentiful *non-sequiturs*, and a total misapprehension of the matter under discussion. His book is a mare's-nest. He attributes to me notions and beliefs which I have never entertained, and certainly never even remotely expressed, and, having set up this imaginary Aunt Sally, proceeds to fling missiles at it, and, of course, can easily make it "collapse like a house of cards." It is really a blunder from beginning to end, and a stupid, foolish, unnecessary one. I need not now prove this, but enclose a copy of the Preface which I have written for a cheaper issue of my book, and that will show you what a ridiculous piece of Quixotic tilting at windmills you have "deliberately" endorsed. If this is your notion of deliberation, I wonder where you will find recklessness. No, my dear sir; your *animus* has led you astray, and placed you in a false and absurd position. When you are discussing the problem of Shakespeare's learning, your caution and thoroughness are admirable. In my view, you have proved Shakespeare to have been as learned in Greek as in Latin, but you will not pronounce positively on this point; with a hesitation and reserve which is entirely commendable, you refuse to advance a step beyond that which is warranted by the evidence. This, I say, is infinitely creditable. But when you come to deal with the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, all admission of doubt or difficulty or perplexity is abandoned. You are not only confident yourself, but you treat all difference of opinion with scorn and contempt.

Now, I am a far-advanced septuagenarian, and entitled to speak plainly in a matter of ethics and behaviour; and I put it to you whether a little of the judicial calmness and reserve which you show in discussing Shakespeare's scholarship might not be employed in debating the previous questions which our controversy raises. So many of your own conclusions—when applied to the Actor-manager—rest on mere conjecture, for which not a scintilla of evidence seems to me to exist, that some toleration and courtesy might surely be shown for those who cannot accept the evidence which appears to satisfy you.

Are you content to endorse all Willis's absurdities, and to wear the cap that fits him? You commit yourself to his assertion that I am such a fool as to believe that Bacon invented—(*coined* is your word, borrowed from Willis)—such words as Act, Admiration, Advertising, Aggravate, Artificial, Capricious, Cast, Casual, Circumscribe, Contain, Content, Continent, Contraction,

Contrive, Convenience, Conversation, Convicted—I need not go on; all these are taken from the first fifty words of my fourteenth chapter, and the same sort of list might continue for the whole two hundred and thirty. Now, I ask: Do you attribute to me the belief that Bacon coined these words?—for this is what you really imply. Are you quite happy in endorsing this monstrous absurdity?

Perhaps you did it inadvertently; but you know that “an offence may be inadvertent where inadvertency is sin” (*Studies in Shakespeare*, p. 162).

The fact is that my argument is not in the least touched by Willis’s foolish and blundering criticisms, which you heedlessly endorse. Indeed, my argument is a small buttress, which might be added to the support of your larger and more stately structure, and you ought to welcome it as in perfect harmony with your own. It is absolutely untrue to say that I use this collection of “coined” words to prove Bacon’s authorship. What I do prove is that the writer, whoever he was, breathes a classic atmosphere; in less than a quarter of the cases do I connect them with Bacon at all, and nothing depends upon it. So that your very contemptuous description of my argument on page 343 is as purely fictitious as the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Now, I am quite sure that you are honest, and wish to say only what is true—or what you believe to be true. But I must also tell you that this method of dealing with opponents—and accepting ridiculous calumnies without verification—is very dangerous for one who abhors falsehood and “sinful inadvertency.” You are not alone. Mr. Sidney Lee—taking, as I am perfectly justified in doing, the interlinear import of the words which I quote in my Preface¹—has the audacity to tell the public that a select number of Baconians have been medically examined by experts in lunacy, and that in all these cases a diagnosis of monomania has been pronounced. Will you hunt in couples with Mr. Sidney Lee? For I tell you plainly that the interlinear significance of some of your statements is almost as bad. The language used on the top of page 368 is such as no gentle critic ought to employ. It is vulgar and nauseous.

Now, I am claiming decency of debate—a genuine effort to realise the standpoint of those whom you consider mistaken or even

¹ See also p. 6 (footnote).

deluded; a fair balancing of evidence; generous toleration of differences; confutation expressed in measured and non-irritating language; candid recognition of facts which point to conclusions different from your own—and I do not think this claim is unreasonable. Professor Dowden admits that my book has taught him something—has interested and instructed him. We have many men of great culture and level-headed judgment among us. The fact that the strength of our case is admitted by such eminent and capable men as Lord Penzance, Oliver W. Holmes, Chief Baron Palles, Archbishop Walsh, Judge Webb, Rev. Walter Begley, etc., etc., might prompt a little modesty (in the vernacular and classical sense) in any controversy where the reasoned persuasions of these gentlemen are concerned.

I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

ROBERT M. THEOBALD.

It appeared to me that by my simple statement of indisputable facts I had cleared the way for a speedy conclusion, and that, however busy with other pursuits, Mr. Churton Collins would be able very speedily to ascertain that he had been entirely mistaken in the whole of what he had written concerning the mutual relations of Dr. Webb, Judge Willis, and myself. I could not, however, complain if the case did not at once present itself so clearly to his mind as it appeared to me; and I was not entirely unprepared for Mr. Collins' reply to my letter of February 29th:—

51, Norfolk Square, Hyde Park, W.

March 1st, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

I am obliged to you for your letter, which I have read with the care and attention which it deserves. I desire in everything truth, but you must forgive me for saying that we are probably both of us under the dominion—to some extent, at least—of prejudice, and therefore I cannot accept your conclusion and contentions without carefully going over the ground for myself, and, as I have already explained to you, the burden of my daily work is at present too urgent to admit of my doing so now. One thing, however, I have no difficulty in conceding after what you

tell me—namely, that Dr. Webb did not consciously avail himself of your work; and, if my book should go into a second edition, I will retract that statement and refer, with your permission, to your letter. What you say about Judge Willis shall be carefully considered also.

You are quite justified in rebuking me for the very acrimonious and contemptuous tone of my essay, but I am a man who feels very strongly on this particular subject, and therefore I have expressed myself strongly—too strongly, perhaps.....

I have the honour to be, dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

J. C. COLLINS.

I was not inclined to wait indefinitely—perhaps till the appearance of a second edition of Mr. Churton Collins's *Studies*—before receiving some kind of satisfaction for what I considered to be an entirely baseless and unjustifiable attack. In order to stimulate my assailant to an answer without needless delay, I wrote as follows:—

32, Lee Terrace, Blackheath, S.E.,

March 3rd, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

I am obliged by your letter of March 1st, with the promise at some future (indeterminate) time to (1) retract those statements about Judge Webb's book which are proved to be false by his own words (here, of course, you have no alternative); and (2) reconsider Willis's criticisms.

I do not know how far the value of this admission respecting Judge Webb is to be qualified by your speculation that his indebtedness to me may be still real, although "unconscious"; I presume you mean that there may be such an accidental coincidence between us as shall account for and excuse your mistake. If you can substantiate this, you are welcome to do so. But, having again read a good deal of Judge Webb's book, and carefully examined the whole, I am convinced that you will find in it nothing of the kind—nothing that might have been taken from my book if it had been under his eye. I do not see how

you can possibly qualify the entire withdrawal of your account of the relations between the Judge and myself. You must admit that he was in no sense a "disciple" of mine; that the summary which you affirmed does not exist at all; and that you cannot point out definitely one single case of apparent "obligation." You must admit that every word of this very emphatic allegation is untrue.

You promise also to consider Willis's *Mint*, and the imputation of coinage which he makes and which you adopt. This also is to be tested. But as this is *all* that Willis alleges—one small and yet large fact—where is the need for postponement? You have only to glance over the 230 words given in my fourteenth chapter, and put to your own common sense the question, "Does Mr. Theobald really believe what I have attributed to him, that all these 230 words were coined by Bacon, and are not to be found in any books 'anterior to or contemporary with Shakespeare'?" This is the whole case in a nutshell. If you do not believe this, if you can find nothing in my book that implies this or anything approaching to it, then I claim that you should withdraw the whole description of me and my work which is given on pages 342-3. That the issues involved are of this simple quality you can at once see merely by reading these two or three pages in your own book. So far as Willis is concerned, you can settle the case in five minutes; and even as to the possible coincidences between my "disciple" and me I am sure you can certainly soon find them if they exist. They are of the nature of parallels, and you know how valueless and deceptive all parallels are when used by us. I presume you will not treat your own parallels more tenderly.

Now, I protest against the postponement which you claim on account of the urgent and engrossing nature of your present occupations. Nothing, I conceive, can be more urgent than the immediate reparation of the injustice you have done, and the injurious account of me and my book to which you have given your unquestionably great authority. For while you are waiting for your opportunity the mischief is going on; my credit for sanity and as an expositor of our case suffers damage, and the circulation of my book is checked. You certainly have access to some literary journal which would gladly admit anything you wish to say on the entire question, and if you desire to make any personal statement the readiness to hear you would be augmented.

I do not think a single day ought to lapse before this act of justice is done.

As to other matters of justification which you give, I may be allowed to speak briefly. I heartily commend your frank admission that the tone of your essay is "very acrimonious and contemptuous," and that you have spoken *perhaps* too strongly. That confession will, I trust, be included in the *amende* which I anticipate. You tell me in extenuation of this fault that you "feel very strongly." Even so, I do not object; only, if your feelings and beliefs are held *fortiter*, you can still express them *suaviter*, and are bound to do so. There is a temptation for anyone who feels strongly to act unwisely or intemperately, and to judge hastily and unfairly. The *Times* critic, while not entirely averse to your "hanging a Baconian," seems to point to this as a sort of constitutional infirmity under which you suffer, since it manifests itself in other cases than the Baconian. He finds indications of "a certain captiousness in dealing with theories or investigations which conflict with your own." He says you are "impatient," etc. I presume you will scarcely be disposed to question this psychologic diagnosis? Now let me put it to you that it is not a little dangerous for anyone with this temperament to attribute "mania" or "craziness" to his opponents. Indeed, the vehemence and unreasonableness of some Shakespearean apologists does appear to some of us to pass outside the boundaries not only of courtesy but of sanity. I could easily find illustrations of this in your book—but enough!

I have delivered my mind of its burden, and I can only conclude by assuring you that, apart from your anti-Baconian attitude, which seems to me to occupy a detached niche in the otherwise well and fairly furnished chambers of your mind, I have the greatest admiration and respect for you. And I believe you are capable of casting off your unworthy prejudices, and of learning the art of treating your literary opponents in a reasonable and conciliatory way.

Yours very truly,

ROBERT M. THEOBALD.

In order to facilitate Mr. Churton Collins's promised investigations, I wrote briefly offering him a presentation copy of my book, only presuming that he would abstain

from discourtesy in his further discussion. To this Mr. Collins sent the following reply:—

51, Norfolk Square, Hyde Park, W.,

March 6th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

I am very sensible of your kindness in offering to send me a copy of your work, but will you allow me frankly to say—and, indeed, there is no discourtesy intended by what I do say—that this whole subject is so distasteful and repulsive to me that it would not be a kindness to send me the work?

I am, dear Sir, yours very faithfully,

J. C. COLLINS.

After waiting nearly a week I sent the following:—

32, Lee Terrace, Blackheath, S.E.,

March 14th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

I have been waiting for your response to my letter of 3rd inst. You must yourself recognise the necessity of sending a response sooner or later, for you have made a violent and injurious attack upon me, every word of which I have proved to be untrue. Excuse my pointing out that even in the comparatively unimportant detail of your reference to *Dethroning Shakespeare*, the fatality of inaccuracy seems to pursue you. This "modest title," as you term it (of course, for my benefit), was not invented by me; it was given by the *Daily Telegraph* to a correspondence which appeared in its columns, precluded by two leading editorial articles, in 1887-8,—a selection from which, with comments by myself, was subsequently published in a volume bearing the same title. This, however, did not contain the substance of my subsequent volume, *Shakespeare Studies in Baconian Light*, as you incorrectly affirm, so that Dr. Webb could not have derived his "obligations" even unconsciously from this source, and I scarcely think the imported absurdities to which you refer could originate thus.

My vindication rests primarily with you. Is it to be immediate, generous, full, and courteous? I hope so. Surely there should be no Fabian policy, no dilatory shuffling, in so plain a matter. Neither should my vindication be extracted from you

grudgingly. I hope you will see this, and make the *amende honorable* accordingly.

Yours very truly,

ROBERT M. THEOBALD.

Mr. C. Collins seems to have been stimulated by these letters to make the investigation which he promised in his letter of March 1st. On March 19th the following letter was sent, giving me the result :—

51, Norfolk Square, Hyde Park, W.,

March 19th, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

In accordance with my promise, I have compared your work again with Dr. Webb's and Judge Willis's, and I see no reason to alter or modify one word which I have written. You prove to me by a quotation from a private letter that Dr. Webb—though he practically incorporated what is of any importance in your work (presumably from other sources)—had not, as a matter of fact, seen it, and that statement, should my work pass into a second edition, I will cite on your authority; and that is the sole concession which I feel I am justified in making.

I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

J. C. COLLINS.

I confess I was hardly prepared for such a determined adhesion to that which I had proved beyond the possibility of doubt, for any reasonable mind, to be absolutely untrue. At first I was inclined to accept the ultimatum without further protest. But in order that Mr. Churton Collins might be fully informed of the kind of exposition of his methods of criticism that might be expected, also in order to guard against the possible danger of publishing his letters without his express permission, I wrote as follows :—

32, Lee Terrace, Blackheath, S.E.,

March 22nd, 1904.

DEAR SIR,

Your letter of the 19th inst. only makes matters worse, because it leaves the impression that what I charitably took for the involuntary inaccuracy of an honest critic is really the reck-

less calumny of an unscrupulous one. I do not like to think thus of you, and beg pardon if in doing so I am unjust, and I will just make one more attempt to persuade you to be as just to your own character as to me. For I cannot let the matter rest in its present state. Unless you publicly admit the inaccuracy of *all* you have said about Dr. Webb, Judge Willis, and myself on pages 342-4 of your book, I reserve to myself the right to publish the whole correspondence, with such additional explanations as the case requires. I shall assume your consent to the publication of your letters unless you expressly forbid my doing so. If you refuse permission to let the public see your replies, I shall let them know that fact as well. You will probably prefer that your own share should be given in your own words rather than epitomised and perhaps misinterpreted in mine. But I wish once more to make the attempt to convince you how unjust and inaccurate you are.

As to Dr. Webb's book, you admit that he had not seen mine when he wrote, but you presume that he derived his "summary" of the book, his "considerable obligations to it," his "assimilation of all that is of any importance in it," from other sources. Without insisting on the absolute absurdity of assuming such enormous accidental correspondence between any two books, I must inform you first of all that there does not exist any book or books or publication of any kind from which this summary, these obligations, this assimilation, could have been derived. Second, that the substance or summary of my book is *not* present in Dr. Webb's. No summary or incorporation could possibly omit some reference to the elaborate comparisons between Bacon's philosophy and Shakespeare's poetry, which are the main features of my book. Any such reproduction would have something to say about Bacon's Philosophy of Comfort by companionship, of his Philosophy of Hope, of Wonder, of Love and Business, of Behaviour, some paragraphs derived from the thirteen sections dealing with Bacon's philosophical maxims, not to mention the incriminated chapter on the classic diction of Shakespeare. Excepting one or two slight specimens, not the same as mine, of classic diction, *not one word* on all these topics is to be found in Dr. Webb's book. In fact, the absence of resemblance between two books treating of the same topic is to me one of the most striking features in the comparison between them. In the third place, on going through Dr. Webb's book I find just eight

paragraphs referring to matters which are also noticed by me ; and six of these might have been taken from Donnelly or the Bacon journals. In one of the other two remaining cases the parallel between Bacon and Shakespeare is shown in an entirely different form from that which I employ. So that the alleged "obligations," the entire assimilation, the summary, is reduced to *one case*. And yet you say that Dr. Webb uses in his own way "*all*" that my book contains "of any importance."

As to *Dethroning Shakespeare*, I have transferred a few parallels from this earlier publication ; but what I have now defined as the substance of my later book does not exist in any form whatever, however remote and allusive, in the previous volume.

You say, adopting Judge Willis's language as your own, "Mr. Theobald ought to cancel the fourteenth chapter of his book"—and that for the reason that I offer in that chapter 230 specimens of words coined by Bacon—for this is Willis's contention. You know quite well that this is not only untrue, but that it is a flagrant and ridiculous absurdity. Consequently, the whole of your attack on me on pages 342-3 is based on a nonsensical fiction, which you ought to have at once detected, and would have detected if you had examined the books, I will not say carefully and minutely, but *sufficiently* for the purposes of honest reviewing.

Now, if after waiting three or four days you still persist in endorsing, "without any alteration or modification, every word" you have written about Dr. Webb and Judge Willis and myself (except the absolutely unavoidable concession extorted from you by Dr. Webb's own words), I shall feel myself absolved from all obligations of silence, and shall expound for the benefit of the public this remarkable specimen of Shakespearean polemics.

Meanwhile, as one very small test of your accuracy, I ask you to refer me to the page in Dr. Webb's book which contains his summary of mine.

I am, dear Sir, Yours quite faithfully,

ROBERT M. THEOBALD.

Mr. Churton Collins, still impenitent, closes the correspondence thus, (dated March 23rd):—

In reply to your letter, you are quite at liberty to make any use you please of what I have written to you.

I am, &c.

MR. CHURTON COLLINS'S OPINIONS

As to Mr. Churton Collins's general criticism of what he is pleased to call the "Baconian mania," I have no intention of discussing it in detail; I am chiefly concerned with that part in which the three works of Dr. Webb, Judge Willis, and myself are alluded to. I may, however, comment upon some representations which he has given of the entire controversy in the following passages:—

"But among these and similar paradoxes one stands alone. It is not so much by its absurdity as by the absence of everything which could give any colour to that absurdity, that the Bacon-Shakespeare myth holds a unique place among literary follies. Its supporters have no pretensions to be considered even as sophists. Their systematic substitutions of inferences for facts and of hypotheses for proofs; their perverted analogies; their blunders and their misrepresentations; their impudent fictions; and their prodigious ignorance of the very rudiments of the literature with which they are concerned, could not, for one moment, impose on anyone who, with competent knowledge and a candid and open mind, had taken the trouble to investigate the subject. Their contentions and arguments, indeed, so far from misleading any sane scholar, produce the same impression on the mind as Mrs. Gamp's curls—those 'bald old curls that could scarcely be called false, they were so very innocent of anything approaching to deception,'—produced on the eyes of their beholders." (Pp. 333-4.)

"In all seriousness, this Baconian craze is a subject in which the student of morbid psychology is far more intimately concerned than the literary critic. Ignorance and vanity can account for much; the Idols of the Cave and of the Market-place for more; but none of these, singly or collectedly, can account for all. Some appear to be fascinated by its sheer audacity of absurdity. Others, with little judgment to start with, lose what they have in the bewildering mazes of false facts, false inferences, and

myriad irrelevancies of its apologists, and in mere weariness and perplexity acquiesce. Some, again—and this no doubt accounts for its popularity among lawyers—are constitutionally insensible of what relates to the æsthetic, to the incredible—nay, ineffable—absurdity of supposing that the author of the poems of Bacon (and he has left us ample means of judging of his powers as a poet) could have been the author of the poems attributed to Shakespeare..... And so this ridiculous epidemic spreads, till it has now assumed the proportions, and many of the characteristics, of the dancing mania of the Middle Ages.” (P. 368.)

COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is sufficiently obvious, after the disclosures of the preceding correspondence, how completely the tables may be turned on Mr. Churton Collins in respect of his fierce attack on his opponents. If we are the victims of monomania, surely the “strong feeling” which he admits as an explanation of, and a partial excuse for, his “acrimonious and contemptuous” tone—the “distaste and repulsion” which he also acknowledges—give a very colourable suspicion of monomania to his own case. “Strong feeling” and “repulsion” may be the starting-points, the very prodromata, of an acute attack; and the “distaste” which he admits may have made the examination of that which he professes to review very perfunctory and insufficient. If we are to look for “blunders and misrepresentations,” for “impudent fictions,” for “prodigious ignorance of the very rudiments of the literature” which the censor presumes to judge, surely we may find most characteristic specimens of these choice attributes in the writings of Mr. Churton Collins and Judge Willis. To affirm the “absence of all colour” for our argument might be called an “impudent fiction” were we to condescend to borrow our epithets from our opponents, which we do not. We may safely call it a

proof that the writer wilfully shuts his eyes to facts. Chief Baron Palles has allowed the publication of his opinion on this point, and that is that he would hang a man on evidence as clear as that which is produced *contra* Shakespeare and *pro* Bacon. Evidence which satisfies keen lawyers like Baron Palles, Judge Holmes, Judge Webb, Lord Penzance, Mr. Appleton Morgan, and Mr. Castle; which convinces such capable judges of literary excellence and individuality as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mr. Furness, Count Vitzthum, Walt Whitman, Rev. H. R. Haweis, Rev. Walter Begley, Louis de Reynall, Professor Cantor, Rev. W. A. Sutton; which compelled assent from such sensible men of the world as Lord Palmerston and John Bright; which seriously disturbed the Shakespeare faith of Hepworth Dixon, Charles Dickens, Professor F. W. Newman, and Mr. Gladstone—may be insufficient for absolute demonstration, may even leave much excuse for incredulity; but to say that it is “colourless,” non-existing, an outcome of mania and ignorance, is simple nonsense.

In fact, the strange obliquity of judgment shown by these Shakespearean apologists passes the bounds of permissible comment. The writer who calls our controversy a “ridiculous epidemic, which has now assumed the proportions and many of the characteristics of the dancing mania of the Middle Ages,” puts himself by such an outrageous utterance outside the pale of decent controversy; answer to such nonsense is impossible for those who desire to observe the salutary ceremonial which limits the range of reply for literary controversy.

It may be reasonably suggested that Judge Willis and Mr. Churton Collins could not both have formed the impression that the 230 words given in my fourteenth chapter are supposed by me to have been coined by Bacon—or at the very least to have been first used by him in an unusual classic sense—without some plausible reason. I do not think any sympathetic or unbiassed reader, estimating the whole scope of my argument, could make such a mistake. But it is difficult to say how much

misleading is possible for a hostile critic who is eagerly hunting for points of attack, and is very unwilling to be diverted in his quest. Let me, then, frankly present what I suppose to be the entire ground on which this conclusion rests.

The exposition of the purpose and contents of the fourteenth chapter is given most distinctly in the previous chapter, in which four possible lines of discussion regarding Shakespeare's scholarship are pointed out. These are:— (1) The classical allusions in the plays, pointing to particular passages in classic writers. (2) The general evidence derived from the classical plays; which may include *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with the addition of *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Timon of Athens*. The *Comedy of Errors* and *Lucrece* may come either under this group or the previous one. (3) Classic construction of sentences, in which the grammar is more conformed to Latin usage than to English. And (4) The classic diction—the subject of the fourteenth chapter. And here I will give the exact terms in which the plan of this chapter is announced:—

“This kind of evidence [*i.e.*, that of the third class] is still further heightened by the frequent use of Latin words, or words which, although English (*perhaps very familiar in vernacular usage*), are yet derived from the Latin, and are so used as to show that the writer is not limited by their imported significance, can follow them into the widely and more varied range of meaning, or else into the different and more restricted meanings, which they possess in their original forms. This, also, is evidence that cannot be disposed of by any appeal to translations. It shows that the writer could use the Latin language as a mother, or perhaps a step-mother, tongue; could probably read, write, and think in it, and had been accustomed to employ it in all these ways.” (P. 293.)

This is the *only* passage in which the design of this chapter is expressly stated. And it will be noticed that, so far from any intention to attribute to Bacon either the

origin or the exclusive use of these words, they are stated to be in many cases vernacular. And there is no claim made, nor was any claim intended, that Bacon was the first or only writer to use these words in a classical sense. It seems to me that if Judge Willis and Mr. Churton Collins had accepted this, the one authentic statement of the plan of the fourteenth chapter, they could not have made the mistakes against which I protest.

Probably these two writers forgot this passage, and only noticed the less formal and guarded statements of the introductory paragraphs of the fourteenth chapter itself. This is given in the following words :—

“ The object [of this chapter] is to show that Shakespeare’s vocabulary was in the highest degree classic ; that Latin was a language which he could use as a vehicle of his own thoughts ; that his English contains very large augmentations from the Latin. It shows him constantly making linguistic experiments, endeavouring to enrich his native language by coining new words from the Latin, and that *even ordinary English words* often became plastic and elastic in his speech, carrying a larger import than their vernacular employment can account for. As this kind of evidence has not hitherto been very completely shown, and only incidentally noticed, I will give as full a collection as I can of words used in a classic sense by Shakespeare, either non-naturalised Latin words, or else English words of Latin derivation, which, *although they have a fixed English import*, yet in ordinary use do not bear all the meaning which in the poet’s hand they are made to bear, and which is derived from their classic roots.” (Pp. 318–9.)

Now, I will admit that this statement, taken by itself, does not fully protect me from the false construction which prejudice and bias may fasten upon me, although judicial fairness and candour could not go astray. I trusted too much to the more guarded definitions of the previous chapter, and did not sufficiently take into consideration the opportunities supplied to hostile critics, bent on mischief and ready to distort evidence in support of the faults which

they are seeking to find, and certainly will find unless extreme precautions are taken against their perverse ingenuity. And yet even this passage, standing alone, ought not, I think, to have conducted any critic, however hostile, to the monstrous conclusions of Willis's *Baconian Mint* and Mr. Churton Collins's endorsement of the same. In fact, the most plausible objection that might have been raised is that there is nothing in the subsequent pages to fulfil the announcement of "coining new words" made in this introductory paragraph. Nearly all the words given are obviously *not* newly-coined words, *not* invented by Bacon. So that this part of the programme is tacitly ignored. For, indeed, there is absolutely no claim of coinage for any particular set of words; the only claim is that Bacon's habit of coining words finds some illustration in this chapter, and may be operative even when he is using common words. And I do not think this can be well disputed. I believe that some of these words were coined by Bacon; but I am not inclined to pick them out—that is too risky even for my impetuosity. And when the actual imputation is made, these critics, both of them, begin to say what is not true. I will confine myself to the imitator and leave the original. Mr. Churton Collins says (for me) that "most of these words are to be found in Bacon." But, as a matter of fact, out of 230 words I only refer to Bacon in fifty-seven cases—*i.e.*, in less than a quarter of the list—a clear indication of the reckless exaggeration with which the charges are made. Then Mr. Churton Collins assumes, without the least ground, that I display "ignorance of the English language anterior to and contemporary with Shakespeare," because I am supposed to say that Bacon either coined those words or first used them in a classic sense. The fact is that on this matter I pronounce no opinion whatever—Mr. Collin's assumption is purely gratuitous. Not only so; I myself refer to other writers as using the same words in the classic sense. I refer to Hooker, Ben Jonson, Raleigh, Spenser, Sir Thomas Browne, Sir Thomas More, Marlowe, and the English

Prayer Book, and to some of these more than once. But, apart from all this, the intention of the chapter is quite clear. Coinage is *not* the theme; but classic colouring classic usage. Even if the same colour and use are found in other writers, that makes no difference. Any fair-minded critic would recognise this, and never dream of the false imputations which these two false witnesses make. A simple inspection of the list ought to be quite sufficient to prevent this mistake. I have given, in my letter of February 29th, a selection of words, obviously vernacular, taken from the first fifty, and I may be allowed to add another list taken from the second fifty. They are Convince, Crisp, Defused, Degenerate, Delated, Demerits, Depend, Deprave, Derogate, Determine, Delated, Discoloured, Dissemble, Distract, Document, Double, Eminent, Err, Exempt, Exhaust, Exhibition, Expedient, Expedition, Fact, Factious, Fine, Fortitude, Fraction, Frustrate. Now, I confidently assert that no fair-minded critic could ever speak of coinage, even as a half-abandoned alternative, in respect to such words as these. Only stupidity, or reckless resolution to detract, or downright dishonesty, could construct such a charge out of these materials. Let Judge Willis and Mr. Churton Collins select for themselves the explanation that fits and pleases them best. Mr. Churton Collins shows how determined he is to misrepresent the real purpose of this chapter by his echo of Judge Willis's blundering conclusion: "Well may Mr. Willis say 'Mr. Theobald ought, in my opinion, to cancel the fourteenth chapter of his work entitled 'The Classic Diction of Shakespeare,'" for at Mr. Willis's touch the whole thing has collapsed like a house of cards." Now, as Mr. Willis's judgment is based entirely on the foolish assumption of coinage, Mr. Churton Collins in these words adopts the same absurd notion, and proves that he has not taken the least trouble to ascertain what my true meaning is. Anything more scandalous in literary criticism than the bad blunder of these two critics I do not remember to have ever seen.

It should be noticed that many other "linguistic experi-

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