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THE FLYLEAF

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WILL THE REAL WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

PLEASE STAND UP?

The late Professor Hardin Craig, Shakespeare authority and mentor of generations of students, always wanted people to know Shakespeare as a man of his time as well as a genius for all times. He was distressed when other claimants to the authorship of Shakespeare's plays were put forward, but he never attempted in print to refute far-fetched theories or question hypothetical ciphers. Rather he put his emphasis on the positive, pointing out how much, rather than how little, is known about Shakespeare, and how the facts of his life and the testimony of contemporaries fit together in a perfectly natural way to make Shakespeare the man and the playwright.

The article which follows is actually a letter, recently found among Professors Craig's papers and not hitherto published, on the subject of Shakespearean authorship. The critical article to which he refers is not available, but one can gather the gist of it from what he says. The editor feels that all readers of the FLYFEAF will enjoy the letter.

H. C., Jr.

Miss G _____ P _____
 San Francisco, California

Dear Miss P _____:

It was very nice to hear from you again, and I wish I had time to say a few things in reply to Mr. H _____'s contention, as published in "The Argonaut" of April 21st. As it is, I can only make a few jottings, which are intended for your eye alone. I do not wish to enter into any controversy on the subject of the De Vere theory, mainly because I have found the Oxfordians extremely ill-tempered and unscholarly in their behavior. I do not know that this gentleman is so, but I do not wish to investigate his temper. Please, therefore, regard this as a communication addressed to you alone.

The first things I should like to bring up are the suppositions that underlie the whole case. It is assumed (1) that Shakespeare had no education. We have no right to assume that. We know that there was a standard Elizabethan grammar school maintained

at Stratford during his youth. No records covering that school are known to exist. But Professor Baldwin in his book called William Shakespeare's Small Latin and Lesse Greeke has shown beyond peradventure that Shakespeare's works were written by a man schooled in just such an institution as the Edward VI grammar school at Stratford and nowhere else. (2) It is assumed that a person of ordinary birth can never succeed in literature or achieve eminence, although we have in this country the spectacle of Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain, and many, many others. (3) It is assumed that there is no evidence covering the literary life of William Shakespeare; whereas we have the testimony of Camden, Drayton, Weever, Webster, and about 160 other contemporaries, including the best informed literary man of the day, namely, Ben Jonson. (4) It is assumed that we have little information about Shakespeare; whereas we have

much more about him than we have about any of the Elizabethan dramatists except Jonson and possibly Chapman. We know almost nothing about Dekker, Middleton, Webster, and others who were regarded as important as Shakespeare or were more popular than he. The great fire of London of 1666 cleaned out the ordinary commercial and personal records which exist, for example, for Dryden and Samuel Johnson at a later date. The defect in records applies to a whole group. Jonson, Chapman, and Fletcher lived on into the thirties when the world had grown more conscious of the value of the drama and the interest of literary persons. The day of literary gossip had not dawned. (5) It is assumed, for example, that Oxford, who died in 1604, could have written the plays of the later period. It is known that the style of The Tempest, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale reflects the work of Beaumont and Fletcher, and that style did not make its appearance until

several years after Oxford's death. Besides, the dates of a number of these plays are definitely known. Whatever we may think of J. M. Robertson as a critic, we owe him a great debt for his book, The Baconian Heresy; A Confutation, in which he employed his skill as a man trained in the nature of evidence to scatter to the four winds the claims of the Baconians.

Now, apply this to the article in hand. The author assumes that poets were scorned. This is not true, as anyone can see who knows the lives of Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, Donne, Daniel, and scores of others. The "defences" of poetry were all of Italian origin and were merely claims that the poet is more important than materialistic society was willing to grant then or now. Such defences would be quite as appropriate now and at any time as they were then. They are merely formal. It was in Shakespeare's time no longer considered

"disgraceful" to write plays or to be connected with the theatre. During the earlier years of the Queen's reign there had been statutes against players and playwrights as vagabonds, but in Shakespeare's time the companies had come under the patronage of the leading men of the court. The author assumes that L_____ and W_____ are scholars, a very questionable supposition indeed. They are both advocates certainly, but scholarship is an honest quest for truth, not merely a desire to prove preposterous things. This author assumes that Shakespeare was a villager who could not write. How can he utter such ignorant abuse as is contained in the paragraph below the middle on page 7? See also his ignorance as displayed in the first column on page 8. The King James Bible was not published until 1611. See also his faulty logic lower down in that column. It is quite as likely that the allusion to Oxford's shaking a

spear is a mere casual reference to the fact that a broken spear appeared in his crest (nay, much more likley) than that it is meant to reflect his authorship of anything at all. When it comes to matters of proof, one has no right to seize on one possible interpretation of an allusion and accept it to the exclusion of another possible, and in all reason, more probable interpretation. The author is also wrong in assuming that the Oxford hypothesis is growing in favor. In point of fact, it is not. It has quickly fallen into the position of a pet avocation of a small coterie, for it is seen that it has not one single definite bit of proof in its favor. The stuff will not bear sifting. The Oxfordians go on searching out small coincidental references and use them to bolster up a case based on false suppositions.

Most of the argument for Bacon's or Oxford's or Fulke Greville's or Darby's authorship of Shakespeare's plays rests on allusions. Suppose you

have an allusion which does not support a given thesis, but might be reconciled to that thesis. One such allusion does not prove it, nor will five or ten or a hundred. The reason for this is that the arguers of this kind have constructed a thesis or hypothesis and have gone out and searched for matter which can be reconciled with that hypothesis. Their whole case then is built up within itself. Bacon says that the fact that an hypothesis is consistent with itself is not a proof of the truth of that hypothesis. A true hypothesis is one supported by proof independent of the presuppositions of that hypothesis. These cases lack what are called "controls." The other common resort of the Pseudo-Shakespeareans has been to ciphers. They have been extensively used, but never fairly, never without a mathematical advantage in favor of the user, so that he will find what he is looking for. The most enlightening treatment of the subject I

have encountered is that of my old friend Frederick Erastus Pierce who had in his education the rare combination of higher mathematics and English literature. He shows that in these ciphers the truth has not a fifty-fifty chance to emerge. Given an hypothesis and an ardent observer and a sufficient freedom in the interpretation of symbols, the thing desired as a support for the hypothesis is sure to emerge.

All this is on the negative side. May I ask you to look at the extensive, natural and positive case for Shakespeare's authorship? In my judgment it contains absolutely nothing which is improbable or unnatural or unexpected. I have made extensive studies of Shakespeare's learning. It is perfectly plain that he was trained in an ordinary Elizabethan grammar school. He shows no elementary knowledge (only popular knowledge) of university studies as distinguished from grammar school studies. He is

as he ought to be. His genius will account for all that he did on the basis of just such a life experience as such a man reared and educated in Stratford would have had. I am perfectly honest about it when I say that the case against him is cooked up by fanatics and persons who do not know the nature of ordinary proof. The fallacy which Whateley exposed in his "Historic Doubts concerning Napoleon Buonaparte" is the one that has run rampant and continues to run.

With all kind regards,

Sincerely,

Hardin Craig

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