



SHAKESPEARE IDENTIFIED

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PRELIMINARY NOTE

IN discussing the authorship of the Shakespeare plays and poems it is necessary to guard against the ambiguity attaching to the name "Shakespeare."

Following the example of the Baconians and Sir George Greenwood, I have spelt the word with an "e" in the first syllable, and an "a" in the final syllable—"Shakespeare"—when referring to the author, whoever he may have been; and without these two letters—"Shakspeare"—when referring to the person hitherto credited with the authorship. By the addition of the Christian name in the latter case, and in other ways, I have tried to accentuate the distinction.

In immaterial connections the former is usually employed, and in quotations the spelling of the original is generally followed.

INTRODUCTION

As a much graver responsibility attaches to the publication of the following pages than is usual in the case of treatises on literary subjects, it is impossible to deal with the matter as impersonally as one might wish. The transference of the honour of writing the immortal Shakespeare dramas from one man to another, if definitely effected, becomes not merely a national or contemporary event, but a world event of permanent importance, destined to leave a mark as enduring as human literature and the human race itself. No one, therefore, who has a due sense of these things is likely to embark upon an enterprise of this kind in a spirit of levity or adventure; nor will he feel entitled to urge convictions tending to bring about so momentous a change as if he were merely proposing some interesting thesis. However much the writer of a work like the present might wish to keep himself in the background he is bound to implicate himself so deeply as to stake publicly his reputation for sane and sober judgment, and thus to imperil the credit of his opinion on every other subject. It would therefore have been more discreet or diplomatic to have put forward the present argument tentatively at first, as a possible or probable, rather than an actual solution of the Shakespeare problem. The temptation to do this was strong, but the weight of the evidence collected has proved much too great and conclusive to permit of this being done with even a fair measure of justice either to the case or to my own honest convictions. Only one course then was

open to me. The greater responsibility had to be incurred; and therefore some remark upon the circumstances under which the investigations came to be undertaken is not only justifiable but necessary.

For several years in succession I had been called upon to go through repeated courses of reading in one particular play of Shakespeare's, namely "The Merchant of Venice." This long continued familiarity with the contents of one play induced a peculiar sense of intimacy with the mind and disposition of its author and his outlook upon life. The personality which seemed to run through the pages of the drama I felt to be altogether out of relationship with what was taught of the reputed author and the ascertained facts of his career. For example, the Stratford Shakspeare was untravelled, having moved from his native place to London when a young man, and then as a successful middle-aged man of business he had returned to Stratford to attend to his lands and houses. This particular play on the contrary bespoke a writer who knew Italy at first hand and was touched with the life and spirit of the country. Again the play suggested an author with no great respect for money and business methods, but rather one to whom material possessions would be in the nature of an encumbrance to be easily and lightly disposed of: at any rate one who was by no means of an acquisitive disposition. This was hardly the type of man to have risen from poverty to affluence by his own efforts when but little more than thirty years of age, nor was such a man likely to have been responsible for some of the petty money transactions recorded of the Stratford man. Other anomalies had forced themselves upon my attention and had done much to

undermine my faith in the orthodox view. The call of other interests, however, prevented my following up the question with any seriousness.

A recurrence of the old doubts under new circumstances led me at length to look more closely into the problem and to consult writers who had dealt with it. These convinced me that the opponents of the orthodox view had made good their case to this extent, that there was no sufficient evidence that the man William Shakspeare had written the works with which he was credited, whilst there was a very strong *prima facie* presumption that he had not. Everything seemed to point to his being but a mask, behind which some great genius, for inscrutable reasons, had elected to work out his own destiny. I do not maintain that any single objection, to what for convenience sake we must call the Stratfordian view, afforded by itself sufficient grounds for regarding it as untenable; for most of these objections have been stoutly combated severally, by men whose opinions are entitled to respect. It was rather the cumulative effect of the many objections which, it appeared to me, made it impossible to adhere with any confidence to the old view of things, and so gave to the whole situation an appearance of inexplicable mystery.

Here, then, were the greatest literary treasures of England, ranked by universal consent amongst the highest literary achievements of mankind, to all intents and purposes of unknown origin. The immediate effect of such a conviction was the sense of a painful hiatus in the general outlook upon the supreme accomplishments of humanity; a want much more distressing than that which is felt about the authorship of writings like the Homeric poems,

because the matter touches us more directly and intimately. It was impossible, I felt, to leave things thus, if by any means the problem could be solved and the gap filled up. I resolved, therefore, notwithstanding the extreme boldness, or rather presumption, of the undertaking to attempt a solution of the problem.

At the beginning it was mainly the fascination of an interesting enquiry that held me, and the matter was pursued in the spirit of simple research. As the case has developed, however, it has tended increasingly to assume the form of a serious purpose, aiming at a long overdue act of justice and reparation to an unappreciated genius who, we believe, ought now to be put in possession of his rightful honours; and to whose memory should be accorded a gratitude proportionate to the benefits he has conferred upon mankind in general, and the lustre he has shed upon England in particular.

That one who is not a recognized authority or an expert in literature should attempt the solution of a problem which has so far baffled specialists must doubtless appear to many as a glaring act of overboldness; whilst to pretend to have actually solved this most momentous of literary puzzles will seem to some like sheer hallucination. A little reflection ought, however, to convince any one that the problem is not, at bottom, purely literary. That is to say, its solution does not depend wholly upon the extent of the investigator's knowledge of literature nor upon the soundness of his literary judgment. This is probably why the problem has not been solved before now. It has been left mainly in the hands of literary men, whereas its solution required the application

of methods of research which are not, strictly speaking, literary methods. The imperfection of my own literary equipment, of which I was only too conscious, was therefore no reason why I should not attempt the task; and if the evidence collected in support of any proposed solution should of itself prove satisfactory, its validity ought not to be in any way affected by considerations purely personal to the investigator.

I proceeded accordingly to form plans for searching for the real author of Shakespeare's plays. These plans were outlined before taking any step, and will be fully explained in due course. Personally, I have not the slightest doubt as to their having succeeded. Whether I shall be able to so present the case as to establish an equally strong conviction in the minds of others, is, of course, a vastly different matter. The force of a conviction is frequently due as much to the manner in which the evidence presents itself, as to the intrinsic value of the evidence. For example, when a theory, that we have formed from a consideration of certain facts, leads us to suppose that certain other facts will exist, the later discovery that the facts are actually in accordance with our inferences becomes a much stronger confirmation of our theory than if we had known these additional facts at the outset. We state this principle in matters of science when we affirm that the supreme test and evidence of the soundness of a scientific theory is its power of enabling us to foresee some events as a consequence of others. The manner, therefore, in which facts and ideas have been arrived at becomes itself an important element in the evidence; and it is this consideration which has decided for me the method most suitable for presenting the case.

Though it is impossible ever to carry the minds of others through precisely the same processes as those by which one's own settled beliefs have been reached, it has seemed to me that in this instance some attempt of the kind should be made in order that the reader, in seeing how readily newly discovered particulars have arranged themselves in a clear order around an original hypothesis, may come to feel something of the same certainty which these things have produced in my own mind. As a matter of fact, some of the most convincing evidence presented itself after my theory of the authorship had already assumed the form of a settled conviction, and indeed after this work was virtually completed; thus rendering my receding from the theory practically impossible. To others however, who might only see it in the general mass of accumulated evidence, it could not appeal with anything like the same compelling force. These considerations have decided me to present the case as far as possible in the form of a representation of the various stages through which the enquiry was pursued, the manner in which the evidence was collected, and the process by which an accumulating corroboration transformed a theory into an irresistible conviction.

What at first blush may appear a pedantic description of a method ought, therefore, to be viewed as in itself a distinctive form of evidence. I would ask, then, that it be regarded as such, and that what would otherwise be an unseemly obtrusion of personality be excused accordingly.

The reader's indulgence must also be sought on another score. The first steps in an enquiry pursued according to the method I had to adopt were in-

evitably slow, and this may import a measure of tediousness into the introductory stages of an exposition following on the same lines. Yet without a patient attention to the various steps of the enquiry the unity and conclusiveness of the argument as a whole might be missed. Although these pages are addressed to the general reader rather than to literary scholars, I am obliged to assume a serious desire to discover the truth and a willingness to take some trouble to arrive at it. Especially must I ask for that concentrated individual reflection by which alone the various parts of the argument may be seen as a whole: a practice which, we are afraid, is somewhat alien to the purely literary mind.

In one or two instances I have no doubt made use of books that are somewhat rare, the most critical chapter of the work, in fact, depending wholly upon a work, copies of which are not readily accessible to every one: nevertheless it will be found that nothing important in the argument rests upon newly unearthed data. Everything has been accessible for years to any one who might have been on the lookout for the facts, and was prepared to take trouble to ascertain them. Even where personal judgments constitute important elements in the evidence, as is natural in enquiries of this nature, the case has been made to rest at almost every critical stage, not upon my own judgment alone, but upon the statements of writers of recognized standing and authority whose works have for some time been before the public. In most cases it will be found that the authorities quoted are writers of the Stratfordian school. Great as are my obligations specially to Sir George Greenwood's work, I have purposely refrained from

quoting from it when I might often have done so with advantage to my own argument, and preferred resting upon the authority of writers of the opposite school. How completely these writers support my thesis, will I trust be apparent in the sequel. This being so, the question might reasonably be asked: how comes it that the discovery which is claimed has not been made before now? The answer to this question is to be found in the history of almost all the important advances that man has made. The basic facts of his discoveries have usually been well known for some time before. What has been of special consequence has been the perception, sometimes purely accidental, of a relationship amongst these facts hitherto not noticed. Once detected, however, other facts have become grouped and co-ordinated by it, and the resultant discovery, for which mankind had probably waited long, appears at last so natural and obvious, that men wonder that it had not been thought of before. This may be taken as a compendium of human discovery generally.

In almost every such case there has been a preparatory movement towards the discovery; a movement in which many minds have participated; and the one who has been fortunate enough to make the discovery has frequently been, in important respects, inferior to those into whose labours he has entered. Now, I have no doubt that Shakespearean study has of late years been making surely towards the discovery of the real author of the works. I can detect two distinct currents of literary interest, which, it seems to me, were bound ultimately to converge, and in their converging disclose the authorship. The first of these has been the tendency to put aside the

old conception of a writer creating everything by the vigour of his imagination, and to regard the writings as reflecting the personality and experiences of their author. The result has been the gradual rise of a conception of the personality of "Shakespeare," differing very widely from the conventional figure: an outstanding expression of this tendency being Mr. Frank Harris's work on "The Man Shakespeare." The second current, only faintly perceptible as yet, has been slowly forcing from obscurity, into our knowledge of Elizabethan literature and drama, the name and figure of one still quite unknown to the vast mass of his countrymen. These two movements, if continued, had in them the possibility of the discovery; though how long that discovery might have been deferred, no one can say.

What I have to propose, however, is not an accidental discovery, but one resulting from a systematic search. And it is to the nature of the method, combined with a happy inspiration and a fortunate chance, that the results here described were reached.

In presenting a thesis the strength of which must depend largely upon the convergence of several separate lines of argument, a certain amount of repetition of particular facts is unavoidable, and in this matter I have preferred to risk an unnecessary reiteration rather than an incomplete statement of any particular argument. The reason for such repetition it is hoped will not be overlooked. My object being to solve an important problem rather than to swell the supply of literature, all merely literary considerations have been kept subordinate to the central purpose.

One other matter affecting the general presentation

of the argument remains to be mentioned. As originally written the work contained no special examination of Stratfordianism, but merely incidental observations scattered throughout the various chapters. My feeling was that sufficient had already been written by others upon the subject; that short of absolute proof of the negative, the anti-Stratfordians had established their case, and that what was wanted was not more evidence but a serious attention to what had already been written, and above all a reasonable positive hypothesis to put in the place of the old one. From this point of view it seemed possible to begin my argument at the point where others had left off. I was, however, advised by friends, more capable than myself of judging the needs of readers, to make my argument complete in itself, by presenting first of all the case for the negative view, and thus clearing the way for my own special investigations. This change of plan is bound to involve what might appear like wanton and pointless repetition in several instances, and may interfere with the unity of the constructive scheme of exposition. I would, however, urge the reader not to linger unduly over the things that are destined to pass away, but to press on to a consideration of those matters which, if there be truth in my thesis, will endure, at least so long as the English language is understood.

CHAPTER I

THE STRATFORDIAN VIEW

Ex nihilo nihil fit

I.

IN spite of the efforts of orthodox Stratfordians to belittle the investigations that have been made into the question of the authorship of the Shakespeare dramas; perhaps indeed because of the very manner they have chosen to adopt, the number of Britons and Americans, to say nothing of the non-English speaking nationalities, who do not believe that William Shakspeare of Stratford produced the literature with which he is credited is steadily on the increase. Outside the ranks of those who have deeply committed themselves in print it is indeed difficult nowadays to find any one in the enjoyment of a full and assured faith. At the same time the resort of the faithful few to contemptuous expressions in speaking of opponents is clearly indicative of uneasiness even amongst the most orthodox *littérateurs*.

Growing
scepticism

The unfortunate "cryptogram" of Ignatius Donnelly, whilst tending to bring the enquiry into disrepute with minds disposed to serious research, has been unable altogether to nullify the effects of the negative criticism with which his work opens.

CHAPTER II*

I

CHARACTER OF THE PROBLEM

Recognized
mystery.

THE three greatest names in the world's literature are those of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare. The first belongs to the ancient world and the personality behind the name is lost beyond recall in the perished records of a remote antiquity. The two last belong to the modern world. The former of these belongs to Italy; and Italy is quite certain of the personality and cherishes every ascertained detail in the records of her most illustrious son. The last of the three—and who will venture to say it is not the greatest of all?—belongs to England, and although nearer to us than Dante by three hundred years, the personality behind the name is to-day as problematic as that of Homer; his identity being a matter of dispute amongst men whose capacity and calmness of judgment are unquestionable.

The inquiry into the authorship of the Shakespeare plays has therefore long since earned a clear title to be regarded as something more than a crank problem to be classed with such vagaries as the "flat-earth theory" or surmises respecting the "inhabitants of Mars." It is common in serious works on Elizabethan literature to take cognisance of the

* *Note.*—The work as originally written begins here. Only a few slight verbal adjustments to the preceding pages have been possible.

problem, thus making the authorship an open question still awaiting a decisive answer; and every theory advanced in regard to it either implies or affirms the mysteriousness of the whole business. Those who maintain the orthodox view, that the plays and poems were written by the Stratford citizen, William Shakspeare, are obliged to recognize the fact that a writer, the whole of whose circumstances and antecedents rendered the production of such a work as the Shakespeare plays one of the most extraordinary feats recorded in history, and who with the intelligence attributed to him must have seen that this would eventually raise doubts as to the genuineness of his claims, deliberately reduced to a minimum all that kind of evidence which might have placed his title beyond question. For as we have seen, neither that part of his life prior to his appearance in the London theatre, nor that subsequent to his retirement from the stage, nor a single word in his will, shows any mark of those dominating literary interests to which the writings bear witness. In a word, though willing to enjoy the honour, and, maybe, the pecuniary advantages of authorship, he must have actually gone out of his way to remove the normal traces of his literary pursuits; in this way casting about the production of his plays that kind of obscurity which belongs to anonymous rather than to acknowledged authorship.

Probably one of the most significant facts connected with this paucity of personal literary details, upon which we have so much insisted, has been the issue in modern times of literary series without volumes on Shakespeare. The original issue of "English Men of Letters," including Elizabethan writers, like

Spenser and Sidney, appeared without a volume on the greatest of all. The omission continued through later editions, and was only made good at the extreme end of the series with the apparent purpose of removing an anomaly; adding to the series thereby, however, a most valuable work upon the Shakespeare literature, which yet admits frankly the meagreness of the material available for a real literary biography. In addition to this the long list of the "Great Writer" series is still without its volume on England's greatest writer. The explanation of all this seems to lie in the uncertainty of everything connecting the Shakespeare literature with the personality behind it; thus exposing such scholarly works as Sir Sidney Lee's "Life of William Shakespeare" to criticism on the grounds of the supposititious character of much of the biographical details.

Whilst then the view of authorship hitherto current implies its mysteriousness, those who oppose that view postulate thereby an uncertain authorship. All therefore must agree that the whole business is a profound mystery. Only the Shakespeare tyro believes nowadays that William Shakspeare's credentials stand on the same plane with those of Dante and Milton; and only the too old or too young are disposed to represent the sceptics as cranks and fanatics. Our last chapter has but outlined the arguments by which we claim the incredibility of the old belief has been established; other points will arise in the course of our discussion. What we do now is to assume an undecided authorship and attempt to lift the veil from this, the most stupendous mystery in the history of the world's literature.

The objection, though not so frequently raised as

formerly, is still occasionally met with, that the enquiry is unnecessary; that the great dramatic masterpieces stand there, that we cannot be deprived of them, and that such being the case all we need to do is to say that the name "Shakespeare" stands for their writer, whoever he may have been, and that there the matter may be allowed to rest. Such indifference to the personality of the author is usually, however, but the counterpart to an indifference to the writings themselves. Those who appreciate some great good that they have received cannot remain indifferent to the personality of the one to whose labours they owe it. Such an attitude, moreover, would be unjust and ungrateful to the memory of our benefactors. And if it be urged that "Shakespeare" in leaving things as he did, showed that he wished to remain unknown, there is still the possibility that arrangements were made for ultimately disclosing his identity to posterity, and that these arrangements have miscarried. Again, it is one thing for a benefactor of mankind to wish to remain unknown, it is quite another matter for others to acquiesce in this self-effacement. Then there is the possibility that the writer's effort to obliterate the memory of himself may not have succeeded, and that there may be current an incomplete, distorted and unjust conception of him, which can only be rectified by establishing his position as the author of the world's greatest dramas.

The discovery of the author and the establishing of his just claims to honour is therefore a duty which mankind owes to one of the most illustrious of men; a duty from which Englishmen, at any rate, can never be absolved, if by any means the task can be

A solution
required.

accomplished. He is the one Englishman of whom it can be most truly said that he belongs to the world; and in any Pantheon of Humanity that may one day be set up he is *the* one of our countrymen who is already assured of an eternal place. England's negligence to put his identity beyond question would therefore be a grave dereliction of national duty if by any means his identity could be fully established.

Problem
defined.

Accepting the duty thus laid upon us, our first task must be to define precisely the character of the problem that confronts us. Briefly it is this. We have before us a piece of human work of the most exceptional character, and the problem is to find the man who did it. Thus defined, it is not, as we have already remarked, strictly speaking a literary problem. Those who enter upon the search must obtain much of their data from literary men; they must rest a substantial part of their case upon the authority of literary men; and they must, in the long run, submit the result of their labours very largely to the judgment of literary men. But the most expert in literature may be unfitted for prosecuting such an investigation, whilst a mind constituted for this kind of enquiry may have had only an inferior preparation so far as purely literary matters are concerned.

It is the kind of enquiry with which lawyers and juries are faced every day. They are called upon to examine questions involving highly technical matters with which they are not themselves conversant. Their method is naturally to separate what belongs to the specialist from what is matter of common sense and simple judgment; to rely upon the expert in purely technical matters, and to use their own dis-

crimination in the sifting of evidence, at the same time allowing its full weight to any particular knowledge they may chance to possess in those things that pertain specially to the expert's domain. This is the course proper to the investigation before us. The question, for example, of what is, or is not Shakespearean; what are the distinguishing characteristics of Shakespeare's work; what were its relationships to contemporary literature; between what dates the plays appeared; when the various editions were published, are matters which may be left, in a general way, to the experts. As, however, there is a considerable amount of disagreement amongst the specialists (and even a consensus of expert opinion may sometimes be at fault): where it is necessary to differ from the experts—a thing which is more or less inevitable in the breaking of entirely new ground, and especially in presenting a new and potent factor—such differences ought to be clearly indicated and adequately discussed. Nevertheless the cumulative effect of all the evidence gathered together ought to be of such convincing weight as to be in a measure independent of such personal differences, and indeed strong enough to sustain an unavoidable admixture of errors and slips in matters of detail.

Our task being to discover the author of what is acknowledged generally to be Shakespeare's work, the exceptional character of that work ought, under normal conditions, to facilitate the enquiry. The more commonplace a piece of work may be the greater must be the proportion of men capable of doing it, and the greater the difficulty under ordinary circumstances of placing one's hand on the man who did it. The more distinctive the work the more limited

"Shakespeare's"
self-effacement.

becomes the number of men capable of performing it, and the easier ought it, therefore, to be to discover its author. In this case, however, the work is of so unusual a character that every competent judge would say that the man who actually did it was the only man living at the time who was capable of doing it.

Notwithstanding this fact, after three hundred years the authorship seems more uncertain to-day than at any previous time. The natural inference is that special obstacles have intentionally and most carefully been laid in the way of the discovery. There is no mere accident in the obscurity which hangs round the authorship, and the very greatness of the work itself is a testimony to the thoroughness of the steps taken to avoid disclosure. This fact must be borne in mind throughout the enquiry. It is not merely a question of finding out the man who did a piece of work, but of circumventing a scheme of self-concealment devised by one of the most capable of intellects. We must not expect, therefore, to find that such a man, taking such a course, has somewhere or other gone back childishly upon his intentions, and purposely placed in his works some indications of his identity, in the form of a cryptogram or other device. If the concealment were intended to be temporary it would hardly be within the works themselves or in any document published at the same time that the disclosure would be made.

As it is not from intentional self-disclosure that we should expect to discover the author, but from more or less unconscious indications of himself in the writings, it is necessary to guard at the outset against certain theories as to the possibilities of genius

Genius
and the
problem.

which tend to vitiate all reasoning upon the subject. Upon hardly any other literary topic has so much that is misleading been written. There is a frequent assumption that the possession of what we call genius renders its owner capable of doing almost anything. Now William Shakspeare is the one stock illustration of this contention. In all other cases, where the whole of the circumstances are well known, we may connect the achievements of a genius with what may be called the external accidents of his life. Though social environment is not the source of genius, it certainly has always determined the forms in which the faculty has clothed itself, and even the particular direction which its energies have taken: and in no other class of work are the products of genius so moulded by social pressure, and even by class relationships, as in works involving the artistic use of the mother tongue. To what extent the possession of abnormal powers may enable a man to triumph over circumstances no one can say; and if a given mind working under specified conditions is actually proved to have produced something totally unexpected and at variance with the conditions, we can only accept the phenomenon, however inexplicable it may appear. It is not thus, however, that genius usually manifests itself; and, failing conclusive proof, a vast disparity or incompatibility between the man and the work must always justify a measure of doubt as to the genuineness of his pretensions and make us cast about for a more likely agent.

Now no one is likely ever to question the reality or the vastness of "Shakespeare's" genius. If he had enjoyed every advantage of education, travel, leisure, social position and wealth, his plays would

still remain for all time the testimony to his marvellous powers: though naturally not such stupendous powers as would have been required to produce the same results without the advantages. Consequently, if we regard the authorship as an open question we shall be much more disposed to look for the author amongst those who possessed some or all of those advantages than amongst those who possessed none of them. That is to say, we must go about the task of searching for the author in precisely the same way as we should seek for a man who had done some ordinary piece of work, and not complicate the problem by the introduction of such incommensurables as are implied in current theories of genius.

Maturity
and Master-
pieces.

If we find that a man knows a thing we must assume that he had it to learn. If he handles his knowledge readily and appropriately we must assume an intimacy born of an habitual interest, woven into the texture of his mind. If he shows himself skilful in doing something we must assume that he attained his skill by practice. And therefore, if he first comes before the world with a masterpiece in any art, exhibiting an easy familiarity with the technique of the craft and a large fund of precise information in any department, we may conclude that preceding all this there must have lain years of secret preparation, during which he was accumulating knowledge, and by practice in his art, gaining skill and strength for the decisive plunge; storing up, elaborating and perfecting his productions so as to make them in some degree worthy of that ideal which ever haunts the imagination of the supreme artist.

Most of the other poets differ from Shakespeare in that they furnish us with collections of their juvenile

productions in which, though often enough poor stuff, we may trace the promise of their maturer genius. Apart from this value, much of it is hardly entitled to immortality. Amongst the work of Shakespeare the authorities, however, ascribe priority in time to "Love's Labour's Lost;" and what Englishman that knows his Shakespeare would care to part with this work? We could easily mention quite a number of Shakespearean plays of even high rank that would more willingly be parted with than this one. It would, however, be perfectly gratuitous to argue that this work is a masterpiece.

Masterpieces, however, are the fruits of matured powers. Dante was over fifty years of age before he finished his immortal work; Milton about fifty-five when he completed "Paradise Lost." Quite a long list might be made out illustrating this principle in works of even the second order; Cervantes at sixty producing "Don Quixote," Scott at forty-three giving us the first of the Waverley Novels, Defoe at fifty-eight publishing "Robinson Crusoe"; Fielding at forty-two giving "Tom Jones," and Manzoni at forty "I Promessi Sposi." Or, if we turn to Shakespeare's own domain, the drama, we find that Molière, after a lifetime of dramatic enthusiasm and production, gave forth his masterpieces between the ages of forty and fifty, his greatest work "Tartuffe" appearing just at the middle of that period (age forty-five), whilst Goethe's "Faust" was the outcome of a long literary lifetime, its final touches being given only a few months before his death at the age of eighty-two.

Drama, in its supreme manifestation, that is to say as a capable and artistic exposition of our many-sided human nature and not mere "inexplicable

dumb-shows and noise," is an art in which, more than in others, mere precocity of talent will not suffice for the creation of masterpieces. In this case genius must be supplemented by a wide and intense experience of life and much practice in the technical work of staging plays. Poetic geniuses who have not had this experience, and have cast their work in dramatic form, may have produced great literature, but not great dramas. Yet, with such a general experience as these few facts illustrate, we are asked to believe that a young man—William Shakspeare was but twenty-six in the year 1590, which marks roughly the beginning of the Shakespearean period—began his career with the composition of masterpieces without any apparent preparation, and kept pouring out plays spontaneously at a most amazing rate. He appears before us at the age of twenty-nine as the author of a superb poem of no less than twelve hundred lines, and leaves no trace of those slight youthful effusions by means of which a poet learns his art and develops his powers. If, however, we can disabuse our minds of fantastic notions of genius, regard the Shakespearean dramas as anonymous, and look at them with the eyes of common sense, we shall be inclined rather to view the outpouring of dramas from the year 1590 onwards as the work of a more matured man, who had had the requisite intellectual and dramatic preparation, and who was elaborating, finishing off and letting loose a flood of dramas that he had been accumulating and working at during many preceding years.

When in 1855 Walt Whitman gave to the world his "Leaves of Grass," Emerson greeted the work and its writer in these words: "I find it the most extra-

ordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed . . . I greet you at the beginning of a great career, *which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere.*" This concluding surmise was merely common sense, and, as the world now knows, perfectly true. What is wanted is to apply the same principle and the same common sense to work of a higher order, and to recognize that if by the year 1592, by which time we are assured that the stream of Shakespearean drama was in full flood, Shakespeare was manifesting an exceptional facility in the production of works that were at once great literature and great stage plays, there had been "a long foreground somewhere."

The considerations we have been urging in this chapter are necessary for getting the problem into its right perspective and on the same plane of vision as the other problems and interests of life. We must free the problem from illogical entanglements and miraculous assumptions, and look for scientific relationship between cause and effect. This must be the first step towards its solution. It may appear, however, that if it is simply a question of searching for a particular man, according to the same methods which we would employ in any other case, that the man should have been discovered long before now, if the material for his discovery were really available; and that as he has not been discovered after three hundred years the necessary data do not exist, and his identity must remain for ever a mystery. It must not be forgotten, however, that "Shakespeare" had to wait until the Nineteenth Century for his full literary appreciation; and this was essential to the mere raising of the problem. "Not until two

A modern
problem.

centuries had passed after his death," says Emerson, "did any criticism which we think adequate begin to appear." Recognition he had, no doubt, in abundance before that time. But that exact and critical appreciation which made it possible to distinguish the characteristics of his work; and begin to separate true Shakespearean work from spurious; that enabled a Shakespearean authority to condemn "Titus Andronicus" as "repulsive balderdash"; which has enabled us to say of "Timon of Athens" that it contains but "a fragment from the master hand"; that "Pericles" is "mainly from other hands" than Shakespeare's; that "Henry VIII" was completed by Fletcher; all this belongs to the last hundred years, and has only been preparing the way for raising the question of Shakespeare's identity.

Even up to the present day the problem has hardly passed definitely beyond the negative or sceptical stage of doubting what is called the Stratfordian view, the work of Sir George Greenwood being the first milestone in the process of scientific research. The Baconian view, though it has helped to popularize the negative side, and to bring into prominence certain contents of Shakespeare's works, has done little for the positive aspect except to institute a misleading method of enquiry: a kind of pick-and-try process, leading to quite a number of rival candidates for Shakespeare honours, and setting up an inferior form of Shakespearean investigation, the "cryptogram." Amongst all the literature on the subject, we have so far been able to discover no attempt, starting from an assumed anonymity of the plays, to institute a systematic search for the author. Yet surely this is the point towards which the modern movement

of Shakespearean study has been tending; and once instituted it must continue until either the author is discovered or the attempt abandoned as hopeless.

II

METHOD OF SOLUTION

Failing the discovery of some new and sensational documentary evidence, if any headway is to be made towards the solution of the problem it must result very largely from the inauguration of new methods of investigation. Even when these lead to conclusions which have ultimately to be abandoned they give cohesion and definite direction to the efforts that are made, and thus assist in clearing up the situation, suggesting new methods, and preparing the way for more reliable conclusions.

The writings in question not having been produced in some distant country or in a remote age, but here, in England, in an age so near as to have transmitted to us masses of details relating to most unimportant individuals, and yet so little advance having, as yet, been made in the direction of either solving the Shakespeare problem or of pronouncing it insoluble, confirms the impression that, in addition to the mystery purposely thrown over the authorship, the investigation has not yet been prosecuted on right lines. Prepossessions of one kind or another have stood in the way of sounder methods; for people who spend themselves in glorifying every new detail discovered about the Stratford man, or who lose themselves in the labyrinths of Baconian cryptograms, can hardly be expected to assume the impartiality necessary for the invention of new and reliable instruments of

enquiry. The clearing out of all this impedimenta is therefore the first essential condition of any real progress.

Ridding the mind of all such personal prepossessions, we must now make a beginning from some hitherto untried standpoint. The standpoint adopted at the outset of these researches, and already indicated, was to assume the complete anonymity of the writings, and to apply to the search for the author just those ordinary methods which we should have had to apply if it had been some practical question involving important issues of life and conduct.

What then is the usual common-sense method of searching for an unknown man who has performed some particular piece of work? It is simply to examine closely the work itself, to draw from the examination as definite a conception as possible of the man who did it, to form some idea of where he would be likely to be found, and then to go and look for a man who answers to the supposed description. When some such man has been found we next proceed to gather together all the particulars that might in any way connect him with the work in question. We rely, in such cases, very largely upon what is called circumstantial evidence; mistakenly supposed by some to be evidence of an inferior order, but in practice the most reliable form of proof we have. Such evidence may at first be of the most shadowy description; but as we proceed in the work of gathering together facts and reducing them to order, as we hazard our guesses and weigh probabilities, as we subject our theories to all available tests, we find that the case at last either breaks down or becomes confirmed by such an accumulation of support that

doubt is no longer possible. The predominating element in what we call circumstantial evidence is that of coincidences. A few coincidences we may treat as simply interesting; a number of coincidences we regard as remarkable; a vast accumulation of extraordinary coincidences we accept as conclusive proof. And when the case has reached this stage we look upon the matter as finally settled, until, as may happen, something of a most unusual character appears to upset all our reasoning. If nothing of this kind ever appears, whilst every newly discovered fact adds but confirmation to the conclusion, that conclusion is accepted as a permanently established truth.

The above is an epitome of the method of research and the line of argument we have followed. In reviewing the work done the critic may disagree with one or other of the points on which we have insisted; he may regard this or that argument as trifling or insufficient in itself, and it is possible we should agree with many of the several objections he might raise. It may even transpire that, notwithstanding all our efforts to ensure accuracy, we have fallen into serious mistakes not only in minor details but even upon important points: a danger to which the wanderer into unwonted fields is specially liable. It is not, however, upon any point separately, but upon the manner in which all fit in with one another, and form a coherent whole, that the case rests; and it is this that we desire should be kept in mind. We proceed, therefore, to present a short statement of the details of the method of enquiry, outlining its several stages as determined prior to entering on the search.

1. As a first step it would be necessary to examine the works of Shakespeare, almost as though they had appeared for the first time, unassociated with the name or personality of any writer; and from such an examination draw what inferences we could as to his character and circumstances. The various features of these would have to be duly tabulated, the statement so arrived at forming the groundwork of all subsequent investigation.

2. The second step would be to select from amongst the various characteristics some one outstanding feature which might serve best as a guide in proceeding to search for the author, by furnishing some paramount criterion, and at the same time indicating in some measure where the author was to be looked for.

3. With this instrument in our hands the third step would be to proceed to the great task of searching for the man.

4. In the event of discovering any man who should adequately fulfil the prime condition, the fourth step would be to test the selection by reference to the various features in the original characterization; and, in the event of his failing in a marked degree to meet essential conditions, it would be necessary to reject this first selection and resume the search.

5. Supposing the discovery of some man who should in a general way have passed successfully through this crucial test, the next step would be to reverse the whole process. Having worked from Shakespeare's writings to the man, we should then begin with the man; taking new and outstanding facts about his performances and personality, we should have to enquire to what extent these were reflected in Shakespeare's works.

6. Then, in the event of the enquiry yielding satisfactory results up to this point we should next have to accumulate corroborative evidence and apply tests arising out of the course of the investigation.

7. The final step would be to develop as far as possible any traces of a personal connection between the newly accredited and the formerly reputed authors of the works.

This, then, was the method outlined at the start, and, in the main, adhered to throughout the investigations we are about to describe: one which might be justly styled a coldly analytical process, quite at variance with literary traditions and the synthetic soul of poetry but which, it appeared, was the method proper to the case. The danger of the plan was, not that we might have too many claimants for the honour, but that its severity might cause us to pass over the very man for whom we were looking, supposing his name and personality were really accessible to us. At any rate, it avoided the random picking first of one man and then of another in the hope of alighting eventually on the right one: after the manner of certain other investigations.

Supposing, and it is a perfectly reasonable possibility, that every other trace of the writer has been effectually destroyed beyond what we have in Shakespeare's work, then, of course, the enquiry must in the end prove futile; for any false selection would almost certainly break down under the various tests, leaving an altogether negative result for our efforts. In the event of anything like a really good case being made out for any man there seemed a chance that other investigators with more leisure, greater resources, and a readier access to necessary

documents than the present writer possesses, might be led to more important discoveries.

Opinions may differ as to the soundness or appropriateness of the course outlined; but, as it is the result of researches pursued in accordance with it that we are about to describe, it was necessary to lay bare the method at the outset, however crude or commonplace it may appear for so lofty a theme.

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR—SOME GENERAL FEATURES

THE first task—following the course just outlined—must be to form, from a general survey of the position as a whole, and from a review of the contents of the writings, some conception of the outstanding characteristics of the author. This should include some legitimate surmises as to what we might expect to be the conditions of his life, and the relationship of his contemporaries towards him.

Although we are obliged, from the nature of our problem, to assume that his contemporaries generally were not aware of his producing the great works, it is hardly probable that one endowed with so commanding a genius should have been able to conceal the greatness of his powers wholly from those with whom he habitually associated; and therefore we may reasonably expect to find him a man of recognized and recorded genius. At the same time the mysteriousness in which he has chosen to involve the production of his works ought not to have escaped the observation of others. Consequently we may suppose that he would appear to many of the people about him something of the enigma he has proved to posterity. We must not look, however, for an exact representation of actual facts in any recorded impressions of the personality and actions of the man. Between what contemporary records represent him as being, and what he really was, we ought, indeed, to be prepared to find some

Of recognized genius,
and
mysterious.

striking discrepancies: the important thing is that there must be some notable agreement in essentials. Certain discordances may, however, become important evidence in his favour. For example, a man who has produced so large an amount of work of the highest quality, and was not seen doing it, must have passed a considerable part of his life in what would appear to others like doing nothing of any consequence. The record of a wasted genius is, therefore, what we might reasonably look for in any contemporary account of him.

Apparent
eccentricity.

Again, unless some special reasons should appear to account for his self-effacement we are bound to recognize that the whole manner of his anonymity marks the writer as being, in a manner, something of an eccentric: his nature, or his circumstances, or probably both, were not normal. And, when the indications of his intense impressionability are considered, along with his peculiar power of entering into and reflecting vividly the varied moods, fierce passions and subtle movements of man's mind and heart, when the magnitude of his creative efforts is weighed, and account taken of the mental exhaustion which frequently follows from such efforts, we may even suppose that he was not altogether immune from the penalties that have sometimes accompanied such powers and performances. Altogether we may say his poetic temperament and the exuberance of his poetic fancy mark him as a man much more akin mentally to Byron or Shelley than to the placid Shakespeare suggested by the Stratford tradition. Add to this his marvellous insight into human nature, revealing to him, as it must have done, such springs and motives of human actions as would be hidden from his asso-

ciates, and we may naturally expect to find him giving vent to himself in acts and words which must have seemed extraordinary and inexplicable to other men: for the man who sees most deeply into the inner workings of the human mind must often act upon knowledge of which he may not speak. It ought not, therefore, to surprise us if his contemporaries found him, not merely eccentric in his bearing, as they have frequently found the genius whom they could not understand, but even on occasion, guilty of what seemed to them vagaries of a pronounced type.

The possession of abnormal powers, and a highly strung temperament like that of Byron or of Shelley, interposes a barrier between a man and his social environment. The mediocrity, and what seems like the insensibility of the average people about him, place him in an irritating milieu, against which he tends to protect himself by a mannerism, sometimes merely cold and aloof, at times even repellent or defiant. To be a general social favourite a man needs to combine with personal graces a certain average of intellect and sensibility, which assimilates him to the generality of the people about him. The poetic genius has always, therefore, been more or less a man apart, whose very aloofness is provocative of hostility in smaller men. Towards these he tries to assume a mask, often most difficult to penetrate but which, once pierced, may necessitate a complete reversal of former judgments—one of the most difficult things to accomplish once such judgment has passed beyond mere individual opinion, and has taken firm root in the social mind.

A man
apart, and
unconven-
tional.

We venture to say that, whatever course the discussion may take, either now or in a distant future,

Apparent
inferiority.

one of the most serious hindrances to the formation of correct views will be the necessity of reversing judgments that have had a long standing social sanction. We shall first have to dissociate from the writings the conception of such an author as the steady, complacent, business-like man-of-the-world, suggested by the Stratford Shakspeare. Then there will be the more arduous task of raising to a most exalted position the name and personality possibly of some obscure man hitherto regarded as quite unequal to the work with which he is at last to be credited. And this will further compel us to re-read our greatest national classics from a totally new personal standpoint. The work in question being the highest literary product of the age, it cannot be otherwise than that the author, whoever he may have been, when he is discovered must seem in some measure below the requirements of the situation; unequal, that is, to the production of such work. We shall therefore be called upon in his case radically to modify and correct a judgment of three hundred years' standing.

An English-
man of
literary
tastes.

Although apparently unequal to the full measure of Shakespeare's capacity, there is a natural limit to such allowable inferiority in appearance. It might, in a given instance, be so great as to make it absurd to entertain the thought of connecting the man with the work. His writings being masterpieces of English literature, and all the world's literary masterpieces having been produced by men who wrote in their mother-tongue of matters in which they were keenly interested, and to whom writing, or more properly speaking the mental occupation of composing, has been a master passion, we are entitled to require in the person put forward as the author a body of

credentials corresponding to the character of the work. That is to say, we are bound to assume that the writer was an Englishman with dominating literary tastes, to whom the classical literature of the world, the history of England during the period of the Lancastrians and Yorkists, and Italian literature, which form the staple materials of his work, were matters of absorbing interest, furnishing the milieu in which his mind habitually worked. To think of him as one who made an excursion into literature in order to win a competency for himself, and who retired from literary pursuits when that purpose had been served, is to contradict everything that is known of the production of such masterpieces. Other interests he may have had, just as men who were chiefly occupied with social and political affairs, dabbled also in literature, poetry, or the drama; but what to them was a mere hobby or pastime would be to him a central and consuming purpose. Unless, then, we are to recast all our ideas of how the great things of literature have been achieved, we cannot think of him otherwise than as one who had been swept by the irresistible force of his own genius into the strong literary current of his times. The fact that he was himself busy producing such works, he may have hidden from the men of his day, but it is inconceivable that he should have hidden from them where his chief interest lay.

Again, the great mass of the literature he has given to the world being in the form of dramas, we may repeat in relation to this particular class of work what has already been said of literature generally: namely, that an intense, even passionate devotion to the special form of art in which his masterpieces are produced is invariably characteristic of a genius. And although,

Enthusiasm
for drama.

again, this writer's absorption may have been partially concealed, it is hardly possible that it could have been wholly so. We are entitled, therefore, to expect that "Shakespeare" appeared to his contemporaries as a man over whom the theatre and all that pertained to play-acting exercised an irresistible fascination.

Carlyle treats of this matter as though play-writing were but an incidental element in "Shakespeare's" work: almost an accident of circumstances, arising out of the material necessities of life. He "had to write for the Globe Playhouse: his great soul had to crush itself, as it could, into that and no other mould"—the particular mould in which he worked having evidently no necessary connection with his distinctive genius. For what perversions of fundamental truths has not the orthodox view of the authorship been responsible! The world's greatest productions in a given art coming from a man to whom the art and its essential accessories furnished but an uncongenial medium of expression! His special domain chosen for him, not by the force of his peculiar genius, but by the need for money! If this proved true, the plays of Shakespeare would, from that point of view alone, probably remain for all time unique amongst the masterpieces of art. It is much more reasonable, however, to suppose that the dramatist was one who was prepared to give both himself and his substance to the drama, rather than one who was engaged in extorting a subsistence from it.

That he was one over whom the theatre exercised a strong attraction is, moreover, borne out by the contents of the plays themselves. There is no better key to the interests that stir the enthusiasm of poets than, on the one hand the imagery they employ, and

on the other the passages in their works which arrest the attention of their readers and fix themselves in the popular memory. It hardly needs pointing out how frequently in Shakespeare's works, the simile of the "stage" recurs, and how commonly the passages are quoted. We must expect, therefore, to find the author of the writings well known as a literary and dramatic enthusiast.

To represent him as a man who, having made a snug competency for himself, left dramatic pursuits behind him voluntarily whilst still in the full enjoyment of his marvellous powers, abandoning some of his unfinished manuscripts to be finished by strangers and given to the world as his, in order that he might be at liberty to devote himself more exclusively to houses, lands and business generally, is to suggest a miracle of self-stultification in himself and an equal miracle of credulity in us. Yet this is the exact position into which the orthodox view forces so eminent a scholar and literary authority as Sir Sidney Lee. "Shakespeare," he says, "in middle life brought to practical affairs a singularly sane and sober temperament," acting on the following advice, "'when thou feelest thy purse well lined buy thou some piece of lordship in the country, that growing weary of playing, thy money may bring thee to dignity and reputation.' It was this prosaic course that Shakespeare followed. . . . If in 1611 Shakespeare finally abandoned dramatic composition, there seems little doubt that he left with the manager of the company more than one play that others were summoned at a later date to complete." Thus must incongruities be piled increasingly upon one another if we are to make the man who has got himself credited with the authorship

Contrast to
the orthodox
Shakespeare.

adjusted to the rôle that Fate has called upon him to play. Once, however, the old theory is repudiated we are bound to look for an author who believed with his whole soul in the greatness of drama and the high humanizing possibilities of the actor's vocation.

Known as
a lyric
poet.

Whether attention be directed to the contents of the dramas or to his other writings, no one will question his title to a foremost place amongst the lyric poets of his time. It is questionable whether any other dramatist has enriched his plays with an equal quantity—to say nothing of the superior quality—of lyrical verse; whilst his sonnets, "Venus and Adonis," and other lyric poems, place him easily amongst the best of the craftsmen in that art. Now, although his contemporaries may not have known that he was producing masterpieces of drama, it is extremely improbable that his production of lyric verse was as completely concealed. He may have hidden lengthy poems like "Venus and Adonis" or "Lucrece," or brought them out under a nom-de-plume. But that no fugitive pieces of lyric verse should ever have gained currency under his own name is hardly possible. The writer with the facile pen for lyrics is only too prone to throw out his spontaneous products lavishly, sometimes in a cruder form than his better judgment would approve. Whilst, therefore, he may have concealed the actual authorship in the case of works involving prolonged and arduous application, we may be sure that some of those short lyrics, which are the spontaneous expression of passing moods, would be known and appreciated. We may expect, therefore, that he was actually known as a writer of lyric verse.

At the same time it would be unreasonable to look for anything like a large volume of such poems in addition

to the Shakespearean writings. This would have necessitated his living an additional lifetime. A few scattered fragments of lyric verse, under his own name, is all that we should expect to find. Elizabethan poetry is, however, characterized by the mass of its lyric pieces of unknown or doubtful authorship. The mere fact that a person's name or initials are attached to a fragment is never a sufficient guarantee that he actually wrote it. Tradition alone, or the mere fact that it was found among his papers, may be the only ground upon which he is credited with the authorship. Nevertheless, after full allowance has been made for the peculiar conditions under which the writing and issuing of poetry was at that time conducted, it remains highly probable that the writer of Shakespeare's works has left something authentic published under his own name amongst the lyric poetry of the days of Queen Elizabeth.

In no matter has the hitherto accepted view of the authorship of the Shakespearean writings played such sad havoc with common sense as in the matter of the relationship of genius to learning. Place the documents before any mixed jury of educated, semi-educated, and ignorant men, men of practical common sense, and stupid men, and, unless for some prepossession, they would unanimously declare, without hesitation, that the writer was one whose education had been of the very best that the times could offer. And even a moderately educated set of men would assure us that it was not the mere bookish learning of the poor, plodding student who in loneliness had wrested from an adverse fate an education beyond what was enjoyed by his class. There is nothing in Shakespeare suggestive of the close poring over books by which a man of

Classical
education.

scanty educational advantages might have embellished his pages with learned allusions. Everything indicates a man in contact at every point with life itself, and to whom books were but the adjunct to an habitual intercourse with men of intellectual interests similar to his own. His is the learning which belonged to a man who added to the advantages of a first class education at the start, a continued association with the best educated people of his day. No ordinary theory of genius would account for the production of the plays otherwise ; the intervention of some preternatural agency would be required.

In respect of the leading feature of his learning one would judge it to have lain in the direction of classic poetry. There is "law" in his works, but it is open to question whether it is the law of a professional lawyer, or that of an intelligent man who had had a fair amount of important business to transact with lawyers, and was himself interested in the study of law as many laymen have been. It may be claimed that there is "medicine" in his writings, but it is more suggestive of the man accustomed to treat his own common ailments, than that of a medical man accustomed to handle patients. There are indications of the dawning movement of modern science in his works, but they are such as suggest a man alive to the intellectual currents of his time, but no enthusiast for a merely materialistic science. But over all these there presides constantly a dominant interest in classic poetry.

Summing up the general inferences treated in this chapter, supplemented by conclusions drawn from the preceding one, we may say of Shakespeare that he was :—

1. A matured man of recognized genius.

2. Apparently eccentric and mysterious.
3. Of intense sensibility—a man apart.
4. Unconventional.
5. Not adequately appreciated.
6. Of pronounced and known literary tastes.
7. An enthusiast in the world of drama.
8. A lyric poet of recognized talent.
9. Of superior education—classical—the habitual associate of educated people.

CHAPTER IV

THE AUTHOR—SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

OUR object in the last chapter being to form a conception of some of the broader features of the life and character of Shakespeare, our present object must be to view the writings at closer quarters and with greater attention to details so as to deduce, if possible, some of his more distinctive characteristics.

Feudalism.

It is hardly necessary to insist at the present day that Shakespeare has preserved for all time, in living human characters, much of what was best worth remembering and retaining in the social relationship of the Feudal order of the Middle Ages. Whatever conclusion we may have to come to about his religion, it is undeniable that, from the social and political point of view, Shakespeare is essentially a medievalist. The following sentence from Carlyle may be taken as representative of much that might be quoted from several writers bearing in the same direction: "As Dante the Italian man was sent into our world to embody musically the Religion of the Middle Ages, the Religion of our Modern Europe, its Inner Life; so Shakespeare we may say embodies for us the Outer Life of our Europe as developed then, its chivalries, courtesies, humours, ambitions, what practical way of thinking, acting, looking at the world, men then had."

When, therefore, we find that the great Shake-

spearean plays were written at a time when men were revelling in what they considered to be a newly-found liberation from Medievalism, it is evident that Shakespeare was one whose sympathies, and probably his antecedents, linked him on more closely to the old order than to the new: not the kind of man we should expect to rise from the lower middle-class population of the towns. Whether as a lord or a dependent we should expect to find him one who saw life habitually from the standpoint of Feudal relationships in which he had been born and bred: and in view of what has been said of his education it would, of course, be as lord rather than as a dependent that we should expect to meet him.

It might be, however, that he was only linked to Feudalism by cherished family traditions; a surviving representative, maybe, of some decayed family. A close inspection of his work, however, reveals a more intimate personal connection with aristocracy than would be furnished by mere family tradition. Kings and queens, earls and countesses, knights and ladies move on and off his stage "as to the manner born." They are no mere tinselled models representing mechanically the class to which they belong, but living men and women. It is rather his ordinary "citizens" that are the automata walking woodenly on to the stage to speak for their class. His "lower-orders" never display that virile dignity and largeness of character which poets like Burns, who know the class from within, portray in their writings. Even Scott comes much nearer to truth in this matter than does Shakespeare. It is, therefore, not merely his power of representing royalty and the nobility in vital, passionate characters, but his failure to do the same

Shakespeare
an
Aristocrat.

in respect to other classes that marks Shakespeare as a member of the higher aristocracy. The defects of the playwright become in this instance more illuminating and instructive than do his qualities. Genius may undoubtedly enable a man to represent with some fidelity classes to which he does not belong; it will hardly at the same time weaken his power of representing truly his own class. In a great dramatic artist we demand universality of power within his province; but he shows that catholicity, not by representing human society in all its forms and phases, but by depicting our common human nature in the entire range of its multiple and complex forces; and he does this best when he shows us that human nature at work in the classes with which he is most intimate. The suggestion of an aristocratic author for the plays is, therefore, the simple common sense of the situation, and is no more in opposition to modern democratic tendencies, as one writer loosely hints, than the belief that William Shakspeare was indebted to aristocratic patrons and participated in the enclosure of common lands.

An aristocratic outlook upon life marks the plays of other dramatists of the time besides Shakespeare. These were known, however, in most cases to have been university men, with a pronounced contempt for the particular class to which William Shakspeare of Stratford belonged. It is a curious fact, however, that a writer like Creizenach, who seems never to doubt the Stratfordian view, nevertheless recognizes that "Shakespeare" was more purely and truly aristocratic in his outlook than were the others. In a word, the plays which are recognized as having the most distinct marks of aristocracy about them, are

supposed to have been produced by the playwright furthest removed from aristocracy in his origin and antecedents.

We feel entitled, therefore, to claim for Shakespeare high social rank, and even a close proximity to royalty itself.

Assuming him to have been an Englishman of the higher aristocracy, we turn now to these parts of his writings that may be said to deal with his own phase of life, namely, his English historical plays, to seek for distinctive traces of position and personality. Putting aside the greater part of the plays "Henry VI," parts 1 and 2, as not being from Shakespeare's pen, and also the first acts of "Henry VI," part 3, for the same reason, we may say that he deals mainly with the troubled period between the upheaval in the reign of Richard II and the ending of the Wars of the Roses by the downfall of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. The outstanding feature of this work is his pronounced sympathy with the Lancastrian cause. Even the play of "Richard II," which shows a measure of sympathy with the king whom the Lancastrians ousted, is full of Lancastrian partialities. "Shakespeare" had no sympathy with revolutionary movements and the overturning of established governments. Usurpation of sovereignty would, therefore, be repugnant to him, and his aversion is forcibly expressed in the play; but Henry of Lancaster is represented as merely concerned with claiming his rights, desiring to uphold the authority of the crown, but driven by the injustice and perversity of Richard into an antagonism he strove to avoid. Finally, it is the erratic wilfulness of the king, coupled with Henry's belief that the king had voluntarily abdicated, that

Lancastrian
Sympathies.

induces Bolingbroke to accept the throne. In a word, the play of "Richard II" is a kind of dramatic *apologia* for the Lancastrians. Then comes the glorification of Prince Hal, "Shakespeare's" historic hero. Henry VI is the victim of misfortunes and machinations, and is handled with great tenderness and respect. The play of "Richard III" lays bare the internal discord of the Yorkist faction, the downfall and destruction of the Yorkist arch-villain, and the triumph of Henry of Richmond, the representative of the House of Lancaster, who had received the nomination and benediction of Henry VI. We might naturally expect, therefore, to find Shakespeare a member of some family with distinct Lancastrian leanings.

Italian
enthusiasm.

Having turned our attention to the different classes of plays we are again faced with the question of his Italianism. Not only are we impressed by the large number of plays with an Italian setting or derived from Italian sources, but we feel that these plays carry us to Italy in a way that "Hamlet" never succeeds in carrying us to Denmark, nor his French plays in carrying us to France. Even in "Hamlet" he seems almost to go out of his way to drag in a reference to Italy. Those who know Italy and are familiar with the "Merchant of Venice" tell us that there are clear indications that Shakespeare knew Venice and Milan personally. However that may be, it is impossible for those who have had, at any time, an interest in nothing more than the language and literature of Italy, to resist the feeling that there is thrown about these plays an Italian atmosphere suggestive of one who knew and felt attracted towards the country. Everything bespeaks an Italian enthusiast.

Sport.

Going still more closely into detail, it has often been

observed that Shakespeare's interest in animals is seldom that of the naturalist, almost invariably that of the sportsman; and some of the supporters of the Stratfordian tradition have sought to establish a connection between this fact and the poaching of William Shakspeare. When, however, we look closely into the references we are struck with his easy familiarity with all the terms relating to the chase. Take Shakespeare's entire sportsman's vocabulary, find out the precise significance of each unusual term, and the reader will probably get a more distinct vision of the sporting pastimes of the aristocracy of that day than he would get in any other way. Add to this all the varied vocabulary relating to hawks and falconry, observe the insistence with which similes, metaphors and illustrations drawn from the chase and hawking appear throughout his work, and it becomes impossible to resist the belief that he was a man who had at one time found his recreation and delight in these aristocratic pastimes.

His keen susceptibility to the influence of music Music. is another characteristic that frequently meets us; and most people will agree that the whole range of English literature may be searched in vain for passages that more accurately or more fittingly describe the charm and power of music than do certain lines in the pages of Shakespeare. The entire passage on music in the final act of "The Merchant of Venice," beginning "Look how the floor of heaven," right on to the closing words "Let no such man be trusted," is itself music, and is probably as grand a paean in honour of music as can be found in any language.

Nothing could well be clearer in itself, nor more at variance with what is known of the man William Money matters.

Shakspeare than the dramatist's attitude towards money. It is the man who lends money gratis, and so "pulls down the rate of usance" in Venice, that is the hero of the play just mentioned. His friend is the incorrigible spendthrift and borrower Bassanio, who has "disabled his estate by showing a more swelling port than his faint means would grant continuance," and who at last repairs his broken fortunes by marriage. Almost every reference to money and purses is of the loosest description, and, by implication, teach an improvidence that would soon involve any man's financial affairs in complete chaos. It is the arch-villain, Iago, who urges "put money in thy purse," and the contemptible politician, Polonius, who gives the careful advice "neither a borrower nor a lender be"; whilst the money-grubbing Shylock, hoist with his own petard, is the villain whose circumvention seems to fill the writer with an absolute joy.

It ought not to surprise us if the author himself turned out to be one who had felt the grip of the money-lender, rather than a man like the Stratford Shakspeare, who, after he had himself become prosperous, prosecuted others for the recovery of petty sums.

Of the Stratford man, Pope asserts that "Gain not glory winged his roving flight." And Sir Sidney Lee amplifies this by saying that "his literary attainments and successes were chiefly valued as serving the prosaic end of providing permanently for himself and his daughters." Yet in one of his early plays ("Henry IV," part 2) "Shakespeare" expresses himself thus:—

"How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object.
For this the foolish over-careful fathers
Have broke their sleep with thoughts, their brains with care,
Their bones with industry;
For this they have engrossed and piled up
The canker'd heaps of strange achieved gold."

From its setting the passage is evidently the expression of the writer's own thought rather than an element of the dramatization.

Finally we have, again in an early play, his great hero of tragic love, Romeo, exclaiming:—

"There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,
Doing more murders in this loathsome world
Than these poor compounds."

In a word, the Stratfordian view requires us to write our great dramatist down as a hypocrite. The attitude of William Shakspeare to money matters may have had about it all the "sobriety of personal aims and sanity of mental attitude" claimed for it. In which case, the more clearly he had represented his own attitude in his works the greater would have been their fidelity to objective fact. Money is a social institution, created by the genius of the human race to facilitate the conduct of life; and, under normal conditions, it is entitled to proper attention and respect. Under given conditions, however, it may so imperil the highest human interests, as to justify an intense reaction against it, and even to call for repudiation and contempt from those moral guides, amongst whom we include the great poets, who are concerned with the higher creations of man's intellectual and moral nature. Such, we judge, was the dramatist's attitude to money.

The points treated so far have been somewhat on the surface; and most, if not all, might be found adequately supported by other writers. There are, however, two other matters on which it would be well to have Shakespeare's attitude defined, if such were possible, before proceeding to the next stage of the

Woman.

enquiry. These are his mental attitude towards Woman, and his relation to Catholicism.

Ruskin's treatment of the former point in "Sesame and Lilies" is well known, but not altogether convincing. He, and others who adopt the same line of thought, seem not sufficiently to discriminate between what comes as a kind of aura from the medieval chivalries and what is distinctly personal. Moreover, the business of a dramatist being to represent every variety of human character, it must be doubtful whether any characterization represents his views as a whole, or whether, indeed, it may not only represent a kind of utopian idealism. Some deference, too, must be paid by a playwright to the mind and requirements of his contemporary public; and the literature of the days of Queen Elizabeth does certainly attest a respectful treatment of Woman at that period. In quotations from Shakespeare on this theme, however, one is more frequently met with suggestions of Woman's frailty and changeableness. In his greatest play, "Hamlet," there are but two women; one weak in character, the other weak in intellect, and Hamlet trusts neither.

Shakespeare, however, is a writer of other things besides dramas. He has left us a large number of sonnets, and the sonnet, possibly more than any other form of composition, has been the vehicle for the expression of the most intimate thoughts and feelings of poets. Almost infallibly, one might say, do a man's sonnets directly reveal his soul. The sonnets of "Shakespeare," especially, have a ring of reality about them quite inconsistent with the fanciful non-biographical interpretation which Stratfordianism would attach to them. Examining, then, these sonnets we

find that there are, in fact, two sets of them. By far the larger and more important set embracing no less than one hundred and twenty-six out of a total of one hundred and fifty-four, is addressed to a young man, and express a tenderness, which is probably without parallel in the recorded expressions of emotional attachment of one man to another. At the same time there occurs in this very set the following reference to woman:—

"A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false woman's fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling."

Mistrust
and
affection.

The second set of sonnets, comprising only twenty-eight, as against one hundred and twenty-six in the first set, is probably the most painful for Shakespeare admirers to read, of all that "Shakespeare" has written. It is the expression of an intensely passionate love for some woman; but love of a kind which cannot be accurately described otherwise than as morbid emotion; a combination of affection and bitterness; tenderness, without a touch of faith or of true admiration.

"Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which, like two spirits, do suggest me still.
The better angel is a man right fair.
The worser spirit, a woman, coloured ill."

"In loving thee (the woman) thou knowest I am
forsworn,

* * * * *
And all my honest faith in thee is lost."

"I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell and dark as night."

Whether this mistrust was constitutional or the outcome of unfortunate experiences is irrelevant to our present purpose. The fact of its existence is what matters. Whilst, then, we have comparatively so little bearing on the subject, and that little of such a nature, we shall not be guilty of over-statement if we say that though he was capable of great affection, and had a high sense of the ideal in womanhood, his faith in the women with whom he was directly associated was weak, and his relationship towards them far from perfect.

Catholicism. To deduce the dramatist's religious point of view from his plays is perhaps the most difficult task of all. Taking the general religious conditions of his time into consideration there are only two broad currents to be reckoned with. Puritanism had no doubt already assumed appreciable proportions as a further development of the Protestant idea; but, for our present purpose, the broader currents of Catholicism and Protestantism are all that need be considered. In view of the fact that Protestantism was at that time in the ascendant, whilst Catholicism was under a cloud, a writer of plays intended for immediate representation whose leanings were Protestant would be quite at liberty to expose his personal leanings, whilst a pronounced Roman Catholic would need to exercise greater personal restraint. Now it is impossible to detect in "Shakespeare" any Protestant bias or any support of those principles of individualism in which Protestantism has its roots. On the other hand, he seems as catholic as the circumstances of his times and the conditions under which he worked would allow him to be. Macaulay has the following interesting passage on the point:—

"The partiality of Shakespeare for Friars is well known. In 'Hamlet' the ghost complains that he died without extreme unction, and, in defiance of the article which condemns the doctrine of purgatory, declares that he is

"Confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes, done in his days of nature,
Are burnt and purged away."

These lines, we suspect, would have raised a tremendous storm in the theatre at any time during the reign of Charles the Second. They were clearly not written by a zealous Protestant for zealous Protestants."

We may leave his attitude towards Catholicism at that; except to add that, if he was really a Catholic, the higher calls of his religion to devotion and to discipline probably met with only an indifferent response. It is necessary, moreover, to point out that Auguste Comte in his "Positive Polity" refers to "Shakespeare" as a sceptic.

To the nine points enumerated at the end of the last Summary chapter we may therefore add the following:—

1. A man with Feudal connections.
2. A member of the higher aristocracy.
3. Connected with Lancastrian supporters.
4. An enthusiast for Italy.
5. A follower of sport (including falconry).
6. A lover of music.
7. Loose and improvident in money matters.
8. Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to woman.
9. Of probable Catholic leanings, but touched with scepticism.

Such a characterization of Shakespeare as we have here presented was, of course, impossible so long as the Stratford tradition dominated the question; for there is scarcely a single point that is not more or less in contradiction to that tradition. Since, however, people have begun to throw off the dominance of the old theory in respect to the authorship of the plays, the most, if not all of the points we have been urging have been pointed out at one time or other by different writers; as well, no doubt, as other important points of difference which we have overlooked. If, then, it be urged that there is not a single original observation in the whole of these two chapters, then so much the better for the argument; for such a criticism would but add authority to the delineation and we should, moreover, feel that the statement had been kept freer from the influence of subsequent discoveries than we can hope to be the case.

Although these subsequent discoveries have doubtless affected in some degree the manner in which the present statement is made, the several points, along with other minor and more hypothetical matters, were roughly outlined before the search was begun; whilst the statement as here presented was written, substantially as it stands now, in the first days of the investigations: as soon, that is to say, as it seemed that the researches were going to prove fruitful. There are some of the above points which we should now be disposed to modify and others which we should like to develop. The appearance of others of them in the interpolated anti-Stratfordian chapter would under ordinary conditions have required their omission here. As, however, one of our objects is to represent something of the way in which the argument has developed

almost spontaneously—in some respects one of the strongest evidences of its truth—we leave the statement, with what vulnerable points it contains, to remain as it is.

The various points are, indeed, the outcome of the labours and criticisms of many minds spread over a number of years, and it may be that the only thing original about the statement is the gathering together and tabulating of the various old points. So collected, these seem to demand such an aggregate and unusual combination of conditions that it is hardly probable that any man other than the actual author of the plays himself could possibly fulfil them all. When to this we add the further condition that the man answering to the description must also be situated, both in time and external circumstances, as to be consistent with the production of the work, we get the feeling that if such a man can be discovered it must be none other than the author himself.

With this we complete the first stage of our task which was to characterize the author from a consideration of the work.

CHAPTER V

THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY

"Time's glory is to calm contending Kings,
To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light."
(*Lucrece* 135)

At this point I must ask for the reader's indulgence for a change in the method of exposition. What must be now stated is so purely a personal experience, that it will facilitate matters if, even at the risk of apparent egotism, I adopt frankly the First Person Singular. Perhaps, in view of certain admissions it will be necessary to make, it may become evident that there could be little ground for any egotism. At all events, the mode of presentation seems essential to the argument, and that, it appears to me, is all the justification it requires.

Choice of a
guide.

In accordance with the plan upon which the investigation had been instituted, the author had been characterized from an examination of his works. The next step was to proceed to search for him. The method of search was to select from the various features some one which, by furnishing a crucial test and standard of measurement, would afford the surest guidance. Now, if there had been any likelihood of his having left other dramas under his own name, this would certainly have been the best line to follow. A little reflection, however, soon convinced me that not much was to be hoped for in this direction; for already the experts have been able to discriminate to a very

THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY 135

large extent between what is really his and what is not his, in writings that, for centuries, had been regarded as pure Shakespearean work; and this process is going on progressively as the distinctive qualities of his work are being more clearly perceived. Consequently, had whole plays of his existed elsewhere it is natural to suppose that they would have been recognized before now.

The point which promised to be most fruitful in results, supposing he had left other traces of himself, was his lyric poetry. The reasons for this choice have already been indicated in the chapter in which the lyric powers of Shakespeare are discussed. It was, therefore, to the Elizabethan lyric poets that I must go.

This decision marked the second stage in the enquiry; I must now proceed to the third and most important, namely the actual work of searching for the author.

Whether the scantiness of my own knowledge of this department of literature at the time was a hindrance or a help it is impossible now to say positively. Certainly, it was the very imperfection of my knowledge that decided the method of search, and this, along with a fortunate chance, was the immediate cause of whatever success has been achieved. In addition to "Shakespeare's" works, parts of Edmund Spenser's and Philip Sidney's poems were all that I could claim to know of Elizabethan poetry at the time. Beyond this I had only a dim sense of a vast, rich literary region that I had not explored, but in which a number of names were indiscriminately scattered.

Narrowing
the
operations.

To plunge headlong into this unexplored domain in search of a man, who, on poetic grounds alone—for

that I deemed to be essential—might be selected as the possible author of the world's greatest dramas, seemed, at first, a well-nigh hopeless task. The only way was to compensate, if possible, my lack of knowledge by the adoption of some definite system. What was possibly a faulty piece of reasoning served at this point in good stead. I argued that when he entered upon the path of anonymity, wherein he had done his real life's work, he had probably ceased altogether to publish in his own name; and that, dividing his work into two parts, we should find the natural point of contact between the two, the point, therefore, at which discovery was most likely to take place, just where his anonymous work begins. Now the poet himself comes to our aid at this juncture. He calls his "Venus and Adonis," published in 1593, under the name of William Shakespeare, "the first heir of my invention" (see the dedication to the Earl of Southampton). I must, therefore, try to work from this poem, to the work of some lyric writer of the same period.

The point
of contact.

Turning to this "first heir" I read a number of stanzas with a vague idea that the reading might suggest some line of action. As I read, with the thought uppermost in my mind of it being an early work, kept in manuscript for some years and now published for the first time, I soon came to feel that the expression "first heir" was to be interpreted somewhat relatively; being possibly the first work of any considerable size: whereas the writer had as a matter of fact already become a practised hand in the particular form of stanza he employed. Except for the fact that "Shakespeare" has proved too blinding a light for most men's eyes we should long ago have rejected the idea that he actually "led off" on his

literary career with so lengthy and finished a work as "Venus and Adonis." At any rate the facility with which he uses the particular form of stanza employed in this poem pointed to his having probably used it freely in shorter lyrics. I decided, therefore, to work, first of all, on the mere form of the stanza. This may appear a crude and mechanical way of setting about an enquiry of this kind. It was, at any rate, a simple instrument and needed little skill in handling. All that was necessary was to observe the number and length of the lines—six lines, each of ten syllables—and the order of the rhymes: alternate rhymes for the first four lines, the whole finishing with a rhymed couplet.

With this in mind I turned to an anthology of sixteenth-century poetry, and went through it, marking off each piece written in the form of stanza identical with that employed by Shakespeare in his "Venus and Adonis." They turned out to be much fewer than I had anticipated. These I read through several times, familiarizing myself with their style and matter, rejecting first one and then another as being unsuitable, until at last only two remained. One of these was anonymous; consequently I was left ultimately with only one: the following poem on "Women," by Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford—the only poem by this author given in the anthology and also the only poem of his, as I afterwards noticed, that Palgrave gives in his "Golden Treasury."

The actual
quest.

"If women could be fair and yet not fond,
Or that their love were firm not fickle, still,
I would not marvel that they make men bond,
By service long to purchase their good will,
But when I see how frail those creatures are,
I muse that men forget themselves so far.

An impor-
tant poem.

"To mark the choice they make, and how they change,
 How oft from Phœbus do they flee to Pan,
 Unsettled still like haggards wild they range,
 These gentle birds that fly from man to man,
 Who would not scorn and shake them from the fist
 And let them fly, fair fools, which way they list ?

"Yet for disport we fawn and flatter both,
 To pass the time when nothing else can please,
 And train them to our lure with subtle oath,
 Till, weary of their wiles, ourselves we ease ;
 And then we say, when we their fancy try,
 To play with fools, Oh what a fool was I."

I give this poem in full because of its importance to the history of English literature if the chief contention of this treatise can be established. Had I read it singly or with no such special aim as I then had, its distinctive qualities might not have impressed me as they did. But, reading it in conjunction with a large amount of contemporary verse whilst the cadences of the "Venus" stanzas were still running in my mind, its distinctive qualities were, on the one hand, enhanced by the force of contrast with other work of the same period, and on the other hand emphasized by a sense of its harmony with Shakespeare's work. Having, therefore, fixed provisionally on this poem I must first of all follow up the enquiry along the line it indicated until that line should prove untenable.

Although the selection had been in a measure a personal exercise of literary judgment, it was part of the original plan that I should not, at any critical part of the investigation, rest upon my own private judgment where the issue was purely literary ; and as this was a matter for the expert I must first of all seek for some kind of an endorsement of my selection from literary authorities. Meanwhile the choice must be considered tentative. To those who are specialists in the literature of that age it may appear like the

Seeking
expert
support.

confession of colossal ignorance when I say that, far from having prepossessions in favour of Edward de Vere, although I must have come across his name before, it had never arrested my attention ; and, so far as any knowledge of his personality and history is concerned, I had either never possessed it, or had quite forgotten everything I had ever known. Nor was I wishful to know more until the choice had been duly tested on purely poetic grounds. The name De Vere I knew to be that of an ancient house ; the Earls of Oxford I remembered had appeared in English history in certain secondary connections ; and the dates of the poet's birth and death (1550 and 1604), the only piece of information vouchsafed in the anthology, accorded sufficiently well, for the time being, with the general theory I had formed of the production and the issuing of the plays. He would be about forty years of age at the time when the plays began to appear, and, according to the generally accepted dating of them, the most and best of the work would be given to the world before his death. Still these considerations might apply with equal force to others whose poems appeared in the collection, and therefore must not be allowed to exercise undue weight at this stage.

Turning to the literary section of several text books, and standard works of English history with varying amounts of reference to literature, I found all as silent as the grave in reference to the Earl of Oxford. Creighton's "Age of Elizabeth" has a special chapter on Elizabethan literature, but not a single word on this particular poet. Beesly's "Queen Elizabeth" barely mentions his name in a footnote of quite insignificant import that has nothing to do with poetry or literature. Altogether, I got the impression at first

that he was almost an unknown man. So far the result was discouraging and I turned again to the anthology to try some of the other poems. None of them seemed to have the same Shakespearean grip as this one. In addition to the identity in the form of the stanza with that of "Venus and Adonis," there was the same succinctness of expression, the same compactness and cohesion of ideas, the same smoothness of diction, the same idiomatic wording which we associate with "Shakespeare"; there was the characteristic simile of the hawks, and finally that peculiar touch in relation to women that I had noted in the sonnets.

First
indications.

Again I consulted my books. Although Green, in the part of the "Short History" dealing with Elizabethan literature, makes no mention of the poet, I found in another part of his work the following sentence. Speaking of the Jesuit mission to England under Campion and Parsons, he says, "The list of nobles reconciled to the old faith, by these wandering apostles was headed by Lord Oxford, Cecil's own son-in-law and the proudest among English peers." It was impossible to avoid a touch of excitement in reading these words; for the first indications of the man justified the selection on two of the points of my characterization. Still it was not what I was immediately in search of; and until the vital question of his acknowledged lyrical eminence was settled it was important not to be led away by what might turn out to be only a specious coincidence. All the other points were to be so many tests held in reserve as it were, to be applied only when his lyric credentials had been duly presented. For the time being then all available resources had been exhausted. The next step must be to consult such larger works as might be found in a reference library.

On consulting the Dictionary of National Biography and turning to the Veres, or more properly the De Veres, I found myself confronted with quite a formidable number of them. By means of the Christian name and the dates, the one for whom I was seeking was speedily recognized: Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford; the article being contributed by the Editor of the work, Sir Sidney Lee. This is perhaps as fitting a point as any at which to remark that, both by his biography of Edward de Vere in the article from which I am about to quote, as well as by his invaluable work, "A Life of William Shakespeare," Sir Sidney Lee, convinced Stratfordian though he is, has furnished more material in support of my constructive argument than any other single modern writer. Although differing widely from his general conclusions I do not wish therefore in any way to stint my acknowledgment of indebtedness to his researches and opinions upon important questions of Shakespearean literature.

Dictionary
of National
Biography.

Skimming lightly over the article at first, with the attention directed towards the one thing for which I was searching, I nevertheless felt some elation as I ran up against new facts bearing upon other aspects of the enquiry. Then came the following sentences, every word of which, in view of the conception I had formed of "Shakespeare," read like a complete justification of the selection I had made.

"Oxford, despite his violent and perverse temper, his eccentric taste in dress, and his reckless waste of substance, *evinced a genuine taste in music and wrote verses of much lyric beauty.* . . .

Selection
justified

"Puttenham and Meres reckon him *among the best for comedy* in his day; but though he was a patron of players *no specimens of his dramatic productions survive.*

"A sufficient number of his poems is extant to corroborate Webbe's comment, that he was the *best of the courtier poets* of the early days of Queen Elizabeth, and that 'in the rare devices of poetry he may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent amongst the rest.'"

I venture to say that if only such of those terms as are here used to describe the character and quality of his work were submitted without name or leading epithet to people, who only understood them to apply to some Elizabethan poet, it would be assumed immediately that Shakespeare was meant. We have in these words a contemporary opinion that he was the *best* of these poets, and we have a modern authority of no less weight than Sir Sidney Lee corroborating this judgment from a consideration of the poems themselves.

All that I wanted, for the time being, on the first issue, I had found; and so I was at liberty to go over the whole of the article, to see to what extent the Earl of Oxford fulfilled the other conditions belonging, as I had judged, to the authorship of Shakespeare's works. In making the selection the enquiry had passed its third stage. The fourth was the testing of the selection by reference to the characterization outlined in the first stage.

Competing
solutions.

Although, in the course of subsequent enquiries, difficulties have presented themselves, as was inevitable, none of these has ever raised any insurmountable objections to the theory of Edward de Vere being the author of Shakespeare's works; whilst as we shall see, the evidence in favour of the theory has steadily accumulated. Other names, too, have presented themselves or have been suggested by other writers as

possible alternatives, and I have not hesitated to consider such cases most carefully. These, however, have always in my own view broken down readily and completely, and their very failure has only served to add weight to the claims of De Vere. Such cases I do not, as a rule, discuss in full, and thus an important element of negative evidence will be missed so far as the reader is concerned. It is of first importance, however, that he should realize the precise extent of the evidence upon which the choice was made; the great mass of the evidence we shall have presently to submit, coming as it did subsequently to the selection, forms such a sequence and accumulation of coincidences, that if the manner of its discovery is clearly apprehended, only one conclusion seems possible.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONDITIONS FULFILLED

As it will be necessary to discuss the life and character of Edward de Vere from a totally different standpoint from that of Sir Sidney Lee's article in the Dictionary of National Biography, and also to add particulars derived from other sources, we shall, at present, in order to avoid as much unnecessary repetition as possible, merely point out the numerous instances in which the portraiture answers to the description of the man for whom we have been seeking.

Personal
traits.

Although we are not given much information as to what his "eccentricity" consisted in, beyond the squandering of his patrimony, the distinctiveness of his dress, and his preference for his Bohemian literary and play-acting associates, rather than the artificial and hypocritical atmosphere of a court frequented by ambitious self-seekers, it is clear that in those latter circles he had made for himself a reputation as an eccentric, and as a man apart. When, therefore, we are told that his eccentricities grew with his years, we may take it to imply that this preference became accentuated as he grew older, that he became less in touch with social conventionality, more deeply immersed in his special interests and in the companionship of those who were similarly occupied.

His impressionability is testified by his quickness to detect a slight and his readiness to resent it, whilst his evident susceptibility to perfumes and the elegancies

THE CONDITIONS FULFILLED 145

of dress, involving, no doubt, colour sensitiveness, bespeak that keenness of the senses which contributes so largely to extreme general sensibility.

Connected with these traits is his undoubted fondness for, and a superior taste in music. The matter is twice referred to. The first instance is in connection with his education, and from this reference it appears as if music had not formed part of the scheme of education which others had mapped out for him, and that his musical training was therefore the outcome of his own natural bent and choice. The second reference is the passage quoted in the last chapter, from which it appears that his musical taste was of so pronounced a character as to secure special mention in the records of him that have been handed down, notwithstanding their extreme meagreness.

His looseness in money matters, and what appears like a complete indifference to material possessions, is undoubtedly one of the most marked features of his character. So long as he had money to spend or give away, or lands which he could sell to raise money, he seems to have squandered lavishly; much of it, evidently, on literary men and on dramatic enterprises. Consequently, from being one of the foremost and wealthiest of English noblemen he found himself ultimately in straitened circumstances.

His connection with play-actors and the drama was not the superficial and evanescent interest of a wealthy patron. It was a matter in which he was actively engaged for many years. He had his own company, with which he both toured in the provinces, and established himself for some years in London. It was quite understood that his company was performing plays which he was himself producing. It is evident,

Personal
circum-
stances.

too, that he made a name for himself in the production of comedies and that the celebrity he enjoyed in this respect came not merely from the masses, but from the literary men of the time. On the other hand, we are informed in the article that "*no specimens of his dramatic productions survive*"—a most mysterious circumstance in view of the vast mass of drama of all kinds and qualities that the Elizabethan age has bequeathed to us.

Of his family, we learn from the first series of articles on the De Veres, that it traced its descent in a direct line from the Norman Conquest and that for five and a half centuries the direct line of male descent had never once been broken. As a boy, not only had he been a prominent figure about Elizabeth's court, but from the age of twelve he was a royal ward, and may be said to have been actually brought up at court near the person of the Queen herself. The irksomeness to him of court life seems to have manifested itself quite early in manhood and he made several efforts to escape from it.

His education was conducted first of all by private tutors among whom were celebrated classical scholars. He was a resident at Cambridge University and ultimately held degrees in both universities. We may add here, what is not mentioned in the article, that his poems are replete with classical allusions, which come to him as spontaneously as the figure of a field mouse, a daisy, or a haggis, comes to Burns.

So keen was his desire for travel that when permission was refused him he set the authorities at defiance and ran away; only to be intercepted and brought back. When at last he obtained permission to go abroad he speedily made his way to Italy; and

so permanent upon him was the effect of his stay there, that he was lampooned afterwards as an "Italionated Englishman."

The article in the Dictionary of National Biography testifies therefore to the following points :—

Summary
of points
attested.

1. His high standing as a lyric poet.
2. His reputation for eccentricity.
3. His highly strung sensibility.
4. His being out of sympathetic relationship with conventional life.
5. His maturity (1590) and genius.
6. His literary tastes.
7. His practical enthusiasm for drama.
8. His classic education and association with the best educated men of his time.
9. His belonging to the higher aristocracy.
10. His feudal ancestry.
11. His interest in and direct personal knowledge of Italy.
12. His musical tastes.
13. His looseness in money matters.

Four points insufficiently supported in the article are :—

Remaining
points.

1. His interest in sport.
2. His Lancastrian sympathies.
3. His distinctive bearing towards woman.
4. His attitude towards Catholicism.

The eighteenth point—inadequate appreciation—needs no special treatment, being involved in the problem itself and in any proposed solution to it.

Before proceeding to the next step in the investigation we shall finish this section by adducing other evidence and authority for the four points mentioned above.

1. In relation to sport we notice—and this is really

Sport.

the point that matters—that his poems, few as they are, bear decided witness to the same interest. The haggard hawk, the stricken deer, the hare, the greyhound, the mastiff, the fowling nets and bush-beating are all figures that appear in his lyric verses. In addition to this we notice that his father, John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford, who died when Edward was twelve years of age, had quite a reputation as a sportsman, and until his death Edward was, of course, living with him. The article from which we first quoted mentions his interest in learning to shoot and to ride, so that there is abundant evidence of his familiarity with those sporting pastimes which Shakespeare's works so amply illustrate.

Lancastrianism.

2. Though no statement of his actual sympathies with the Lancastrian cause has been found, we are assured by several writers that he was proud of his ancient lineage, which, taken along with the following passage on the relationship of the De Veres to the Lancastrian cause, may be accepted as conclusive on the subject:—

"John the 12th Earl (of Oxford) was attainted and beheaded in 1461, suffering for his loyalty to the Lancastrian line. His son John was restored to the dignity in 1464, but was himself attainted in 1474 in consequence of the active part he had taken on the Lancastrian side during the temporary restoration of Henry VI in 1470. . . . (He) distinguished himself as the last of the supporters of the cause of the red rose, which he maintained in the castle of St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall for many months after the rest of the kingdom had submitted to Edward IV. . . . Having been mainly instrumental in bringing Henry (VII) to the throne he was immediately restored to the

Earldom of Oxford, and also to the office of Lord Chamberlain which he enjoyed until his death in 1513."

("Archaeological Journal," vol. 9, 1852, p. 24.)

3. So far as his attitude towards woman is concerned, the poem already quoted in full is sufficient evidence of that deficiency of faith which we have pointed out as marking the Shakespeare sonnets; the very terms employed being as nearly identical as Shakespeare ever allowed himself in two separate utterances on one topic. Then that capacity for intense affection combined with weakness of faith which is one of the peculiarities of Shakespeare's mind, has not, so far as we are aware, so close a parallel anywhere in literature as in the poems of Edward de Vere. It is not merely in an occasional line, but is the keynote of much of his poetry. Indeed we may say that it probably lies at the root of a great part of the misfortune and mystery in which his life was involved, and may indeed afford an explanation for the very existence of the Shakespeare mystery.

Only when these poems shall have become as accessible as Shakespeare's sonnets will this mental correspondence be fully appreciated. Meanwhile we give a few lines each from a separate poem:—

"For she thou (himself) lovest is sure thy mortal foe."

"O cruel hap and hard estate that forceth me to love my foe."

"The more I sought the less I found
Yet mine she meant to be."

"That I do waste, with others, love
That hath myself in hate."

"Love is worse than hate and eke more harm hath done."

With these lines in mind all that is necessary is to read the last dozen of Shakespeare's sonnets, in order to appreciate the spiritual identity of the author or authors in this particular connection.

Religion.

4. So far as the last point, his attitude to Catholicism, is concerned, the quotation we have already given from Green's "Short History" is all that is really necessary. The fact that his name appears at the head of a list of noblemen who professed to be reconciled to the old faith shows his leanings sufficiently well for us to say of him, as Macaulay says of Shakespeare, that he was not a zealous Protestant writing for zealous Protestants. When, further, we find that his father had professed Catholicism, it is not unlikely that on certain sentimental grounds his leaning was that way. Roman Catholicism would, moreover, be the openly professed religion of his home life during his first eight years. There is also evidence in the State Papers of the time that the English Catholics abroad were at one crisis looking to him and to the Earl of Southampton for support. At the same time it is not improbable that intellectually he was touched with the scepticism which appears to have been current in dramatic circles at that time, for amongst the charges made against him by one adversary was that of irreligion: the name "atheist" being given him by another (State Papers). Classic paganism, medievalism and scepticism, in spite of the contradiction the combination seems to imply, can certainly all be more easily traced in him than can Protestantism; and in this there is a general correspondence between his mind and that of "Shakespeare."

On all the points then which we set before ourselves in entering upon the search, we find that Edward de

Vere fulfils the conditions, and the general feeling with which we finish this stage of our enquiry is this, that if we have not actually discovered the author of Shakespeare's works we have at any rate alighted upon a most exceptional set of resemblances.

We have thus, in a general way, carried the enquiry successfully through four of its stages, and completed the *a posteriori* section of our argument.

Note.

In the contemporary State Papers of Rome there is a list of English nobility, classified as (i) Catholics, (ii) of Catholic leanings, (iii) Protestants. Oxford's name appears in the second group.