

THE SHAKSPER CONTROVERSY.

BY JOSEPH WARREN KEIFER.

(Reply.)

In Edwin Watts Chubb's attempt to analyze my article, entitled — "Did William Shaksper write Shakespeare," his denunciation of it as "delightfully confused," is greatly relieved of any sting by his own (twice repeated) unbiased, though charmingly frank, confession that he is not only a "*simple minded*" but a "credulous believer in the old-fashioned notion that Shaksper is Shakespeare"; then declaring his belief in "Mr. Keifer's creed." What follows needs no characterization, as it is in consonance with those who are either forced to abandon the field of sound argument based on indubitable facts, or with that other class that assumes to know everything, and without deigning to give up their assumed infinite knowledge, or a part of it, dogmatically assail all who differ with them as incapable of understanding what they are trying to investigate.

My paper was written for a literary club and not for publication; nor did I then, nor do I now, pretend that it was exhaustive or conclusive. Its merit, if it has any, was in arraying some of the salient facts connected with the reputed great author's life, only one of which — and that of no importance on the question of authorship — is assailed by Mr. Chubb. He inquires where I got the information that Shaksper was born on April 23, 1564, adding that "fifty years ago school texts and primers of literature contained the statement," etc. He says "all *we* know is that he was baptized on the 26th." Mr. Chubb expresses the belief that this is an inaccuracy which throws doubts on my familiarity with the subject. I am gratified that he found something — one thing — that he could, with some plausibility, question, though I doubt his having ever even seen "*primers of literature*," fifty years old, confirming the date given by me. Were there ever such *primers*?

The date is unimportant, but Hamilton Wright Mabie in his recent (1901) life of Shakespeare undertakes to give the date of his birth as occurring on April 22d or 23d, 1564, preferring the later date. Mabie's elaborate book was written as though no person had ever questioned the authorship of the Shakespeare plays. The "Annals of the Life of Shakespeare," found in Vol. 12 of the (1901) "Larger Temple Edition of Shakespeare," give April 23d, "the day of St. George, England's patron saint," as Shakespeare's birthday.

These authorities may not, however, be modern enough for the self-styled "accurate modern scholar," Mr. Chubb. I hope I will be pardoned for a reference to only one record older than Mr. Chubb's "*primers of literature*."

In an old house in County Sussex, England, a great chair, black with age, with papers faded with age (no manuscript or writing of Shaksper accompanying), to prove the identity of the chair as the one Shaksper used, is carefully guarded as the most interesting of Shakespearian relics. It is accounted as genuine. On the top rail of this chair is an inscription in old English lettering:

“WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,

“Born 23 April, 1564.

“Died 23 April, 1616.”

But Mr. Chubb's great error (or worse) is the assumption in his article that I tried to show a “Great Unknown” wrote the Shakespeare plays; and he then proceeds with equal unfairness to classify me as a Baconian. On such false assumptions he still makes out a bad case. My article expressly repudiates the claim that Bacon or any other known contemporary of Wm. Shaksper was alone the author.

The following paragraphs from my article are reproduced here:

“Collaboration work, common to literary productions in Shaksper's time, may furnish a fairly satisfactory answer as to the authorship.

“It may be reasonable to suppose that Shaksper, with his acumen for the business of the theaters in London and the travelling companies with which he was connected, may have employed the best educated, but impatient play-writers and poets, said to have been numerous in his day, some of whom had travelled in other countries, unsuccessfully seeking fame and fortune. Many of such are said to have been educated younger sons of wealthy gentlemen, whose fortunes went, by English law, to their eldest sons, leaving their brothers only an education which was often obtained at college or university. That Shaksper ‘kept a poet’ has long been believed by many. Perhaps, too, some of the known play-writers and poets worked in collaboration with these just referred to; and it is not impossible that even the writings of a Bacon and a Raleigh, or others of the then learned of England, may have been drawn on for parts, where special and professionally technical or scientific knowledge was required; and this may account for portions of Bacon's writings, cypher included, appearing in some of the Shakespeare plays and poems. It may be true that some of the great men were employed to revise particular parts for plays, the plans for and skeletons of which had been outlined by another or others. Some of these men were doubtless often needy, and might well have written for money.”

But Mr. Chubb has discovered, and pretends to promulgate on authority, a newly discovered principle, or law, of interpretation, in settling disputed questions.

I quote from his article:

“Gen. Keifer writes that he does not intend to give an opinion as to the authorship of the greatest of literary contributions to the world. Of course he does not. I challenge him to name any man other than William Shakespere of Stratford, England. Every repudiator of Shakespere knows that he is *under the necessity* of naming somebody as the author—a demonstration that another was.”

Here is a new canon for settling a fact in history.

To assert that a named person was the hero of a particular event, the author of a great writing, etc., is, according to this canon, absolutely conclusive that he was the real hero, or author, unless somebody came forward

and demonstrated not only that he was not, but that another named person was; and the latter demonstration must not only be conclusively satisfactory to the general reasoning public, but to those who proclaim this law, and make the unwarranted assertion. It does not suffice with them that the name brought forward was an impossible person, or a person fairly demonstrated to have been incapable of the great thing attributed to him; all this is quite immaterial and the world must still accept him; and those who refuse to do so are only "lawyers, or some one engaged in non-literary work—a troop of less than half-educated people—raw Americans and fanatical women," not entitled to consideration beside the Chubbs, at least not until the latter are satisfied by demonstration satisfactory to their "modern scholarship" and assumed super-human acumen, that some other well-known, named person was the real party.

Here we have a key to the modern wisdom that assails those who doubt that Shaksper was the great author. If Shaksper had ever claimed to have written anything, or called himself other than a playwright, which he was, an issue would be made with him, or if the publishers of the First Folio Edition (1623), including some of the great plays, only seven years after Wm. Shaksper's death (1616), had pretended to have obtained them from him when in life, or his family or legal representatives after his death, instead of from another source (theater archives), there might still be some room for a controversy on which testimony would have to be weighed.

There is so little to be overthrown in the way of evidence tending to show Shaksper was the author of anything that the burden should be on those who are contented to believe, without knowledge, or investigation for knowledge.

That some of the plays were called Shakespeare's in Wm. Shaksper's lifetime, and more when (1623) he was dead (with others shown to belong to then living writers), proved nothing then, and proves nothing now, save, possibly, that they were written and kept in theaters which Wm. Shaksper owned, or partly owned, in London. It is certain that when he retired from London in 1612, and always thereafter, he made no claim to the plays in manuscript or in other form; that his family or executor, never obtained even one manuscript or other writing from him, or left by him. He never himself claimed authorship of anything, and it is certain he, if an author, abandoned, as valueless, all his manuscripts. But what boots all this to Mr. Chubb, or what matters it to him, and others like him, whether Shaksper of Stratford could write a line or not, the world is bound to accept this Shaksper as the sole and only author of the great dramas, because some rational doubter could not clearly demonstrate that another named person, solely, and alone, wrote them.

I made no point out of the varied spelling of the name in records of Shaksper's time. I did suggest that in the five "morning glory" signatures known to be genuine, he should, if the greatest scholar of his, or any age, have been able to spell his name each time the same way, especially on the same day.

I did not, in my article, and will not here, for want of space, give lengthy quotations from Emerson, Dickens, and others, to prove they are classed by Mr. Chubb, and those who believe and reason like him, among "the troop of

half-educated people." My article does give enough, quoted from Emerson and Dickens, and from other English, and "raw Americans," to satisfy most people that "a prominent professor of literature in England or America" *can* be found in the doubter's camp.

How profound is the argument of Mr. Chubb that because Emerson *used*, or quoted, Shakespeare in his writings; that because Charles Dickens was once a member of a London Shakespeare Society and often attended its meetings, and that once he played the part of Justice Shallow in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," proves each a settled believer in the authorship of Shaksper of Stratford? (Others of the present day would excel in performing the character of Justice Shallow.)

So it might be claimed that all the writers, orators, or speakers who quote from the great Shakesperean writings, and all who have been performers of the great plays (according to Mr. Chubb's philosophy of reason), believe Wm. Shaksper was their author.

Because I am not "cocksure" in my belief is another profound reason why my critic should be free from doubt as to his views.

These free-from-doubt believers, as Mr. Chubb shows, are driven to proclaim, to maintain their positiveness, that the Shaksper who wrote the plays, sonnets, etc., was an *ignorant* man; hardly up to the commonest.

Mr. Chubb says:

"Is Shakespere a learned writer? No modern Shakesperean scholar "pretends that Shakespere was a learned man. The plays abound in evidence "to the contrary."

This sweeping statement is attempted to be proved by exceptional or apparent mistakes in allusions to history, the classics, to law forms, etc. In this Mr. Chubb is unfortunately following others whose claims have been overwhelmingly disproved by those who have been willing to take pains to examine each instance. No point is made about bad spelling. This is put forward to appear to have something easy to refute.

Poetic license, quite as great three hundred years ago as now, explains much of what those who claim to be modernly learned critics point out.

It will not be safe to rest Shaksper's authorship on his *ignorance* of the best learning and literature; of the sciences, arts, court customs and practices; of the history of the world, ancient and then modern; of the best court society, of kings and princes, courts and courtiers, of wars and their heroes, and of the habits of birds and animals, and a knowledge of plants, and of all the common and extraordinary affairs of life in the Elizabethan period, and prior thereto, etc., including all countries.

The common sense of the common people, possessed of common knowledge, as well as those highly learned in literature, history and the arts and sciences, know well that the author of the Shakespeare plays was possessed of a universal knowledge and of an erudition in technical scholarship far in advance of his time: that he wrote for all time — for eternity.

What is portrayed in the Shakesperean writings, stands yet, and will ever stand, to educate the highest races of civilized man. Who gainsays this, save those who seek by small technicalities to overthrow substantial realities?

To illustrate, Mr. Chubb says that one Judge Allen "has carefully ex-

amined every legal term used by Shakespeare, and he finds many inaccuracies. He finds that the 'Merchant of Venice' is full of bad law," etc.

How singular? Did anybody ever suppose that the author of this play was engaged in writing a treatise on law? He was writing an overdrawn tale to illustrate character, and to point out how the exacting usurer should be defeated in a remorseless attempt to enforce a hard bargain, etc. The poet-author made the rules of law to suit the purposes of his story.

In Mr. Chubb's quotation from "Julius Cæsar":

"On this side Tiber, he hath left them you,
And to your heirs forever, common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves."

He claims the phrase, "your heirs forever," is misplaced, and "no good lawyer would have thus phrased it." It is fortunate that no merely good lawyer wrote "Julius Cæsar." A poet wrote it, and adapted, in the best possible way, an English common law, legal formula, denoting perpetual inheritance of the great bounty of Cæsar to the Roman people, and this in a poetic funeral oration. He was writing for English readers.

The quoted passage from "Henry IV" as to the Salic (Salique) law, which prohibits a woman from inheriting a crown, is an historical description of the origin of such law, well stated in poetic language, and cannot be regarded as a disquisition on that, or any other, law. The real author, learned as the text shows in Latin and other languages, gives an accurate, though poetic, history of the Salic law, long enforced in France and other monarchical countries. This quoted passage only demonstrates the author of "Henry IV" as a man of superior learning, capable of accurately adapting the best history to a poetic use.

But what of the examination of the author's legal learning by Appleton Morgan, A. M., LL.B., one of the most learned of Shakespearean scholars and law writers (see his *Shakespearean Myth*, etc., etc.). And Mr. Grant White, of equal learning, says:

"Legal phrases flow from his pen as part of his vocabulary and parcel of his thought. . . .

" Shakespeare uses his law just as freely in his early plays, "as in those produced at a later date."

And Lord Campbell, also a great scholar and writer, a chief justice of England, writes:

"While novelists and dramatists are constantly making mistakes as to "the law of marriage, of wills, and of inheritance, to Shakespeare's law, "lavishly as he expounds it, there can neither be demurrer nor bill of exceptions, nor writ of error."

That the author was learned in medical jurisprudence conclusively appears.

Mr. Chubb adopts the expedient of setting up unwarranted and assumed claims against the authorship of Shakspere, and then seeks to overthrow them. This is the resort of those who have no faith in the justness of their cause. He says, "Perhaps if Ben Jonson and Milton, and Goethe, and Coleridge, and Carlyle, and Schlegel, and Furness, and Lowell, and John Fiske," and

others "had only investigated this matter as deeply as Mrs. Gallup and General Keifer, they too could envy those simple-minded who are so credulous and blissful in their harmless illusions." What a stately argument this is, to overthrow the facts of history, even though summarized by "raw Americans and fanatical women."

Mr. Chubb would have his readers imply that Ben Jonson and Milton, and the others, had studied, profoundly, the question of Shaksper's authorship. Ben Jonson lived contemporary to Shaksper of Stratford, and knew him as a player in theaters and, at times, on the roads, when the law was not enforced against such then interdicted people. He knew Shaksper to be, what he called himself—a player. Ben Jonson's dedication of the First Folio Edition to one Wm. Shakespeare we have in our former article, sufficiently spoken of.

Milton, too, lived contemporary to Shaksper, and for years after his death, but he knew him not as the great author. He spoke in *L'Allegro* of his Shakespeare's "native wood-notes wild." Surely he did not refer to the stately plays so full of camps and courts, tragedy and comedy, with so little of woods or forests. If, as in *The Iconoclast*, the blind poet referred to Shaksper of Stratford it was—like Ben Jonson—with contempt. Goethe, and others named, never, so far as we know, essayed to study the question of the authorship of the Shakespeare plays; but some of those named were not so "simple-minded" that they could not be doubters.

Nearly all of these great men died before 1856, when the authorship of the great plays was first seriously investigated. The over thirty learned men named in an opening paragraph of my former paper, and other whose names could be added, who were not "*so credulous*" they could not doubt, are a sufficient guarantee that earnest investigation has imbued great men, and scholars, with such reasonable and honest convictions against the right to call Shaksper of Stratford the great author, as not to be justly classed by Mr. Chubb, and his like, as "the gullible."

But Mr. Chubb, correctly, near the close of his criticism, admits Shaksper's title to authorship rests on "tradition extending in unbroken line back three hundred years." He says the people are asked "to believe that all Shaksper's contemporaries were grossly deceived." What contemporary of Shaksper of Stratford knew and recognized him as an author. Mr. Chubb should have given us a few names.

I quote once more from my former paper, and from Ralph Waldo Emerson who was strong-minded, at least enough to doubt.

"Shaksper lived in a period of eminent men. Raleigh, Sidney, Spencer, "the Bacons (Francis and Thomas), Cecil, Walsingham, Coke, Camden, Hooker, Drake, Hobbes, Herbert, Laud, Pym, Hampden, and others were "his contemporaries; their history and work are not in doubt; there is no "evidence tending to show that he was personally known to one of them, or to "any other of lesser note among statesmen, scholars, or artists. Nor did they "discover him.

"Emerson says, 'not a single fact bearing on his literary character has "come down to us,' though he had examined with care the entire correspondence covering Shaksper's time, in which almost every person of note of "his day is mentioned, and adds:

“Since the constellation of great men who appeared in Greece in the “time of Pericles, there never was any such society, yet their genius failed “them to find out the best head in the universe.”

Again, Mr. Chubb says he is asked to believe, “that the writer of the greatest literary productions . . . could live and grow in power and yet not leave the slightest evidence of his existence, not even a grave.” This begs the question. Did Shaksper of Stratford “live and write and grow in power”? He lived, and died, and then had a grave with a slab over it, on which is an inscription, chiefly relating to his bones—*nothing to authorship*; nor has the slightest proof ever come to light that he ever wrote a letter, or left to his family a line of manuscript, or that he ever claimed to have written anything.

Is it not a greater mystery to know that this Shaksper left no claim, or evidence of authorship, than that the real author (or authors who worked, perhaps, in collaboration around Shaksper’s theaters for pay) should be unknown? Mr. Chubb and his self-styled “simple-minded and credulous” kind, being satisfied that a man called Shaksper had an existence, and left a grave—whether he did, or could, write a play, or anything—are quite satisfied he was the great author. It is enough for Shaksper to have lived, and acquired a grave; all else is unimportant to the controversy.

Nobody claims Shaksper was not an author, alone because the verse on his tomb does not so testify; nor because he poached, in his young manhood, on Mr. Lucy’s deer-warren; nor because Stratford was a filthy town. These are things of straw Mr. Chubb sets up, because he thinks *he* can knock them down. He concludes with a climax of profundity, by again saying that the doubters must agree as to who the “Great Unknown” is, or it conclusively follows that Wm. Shaksper did the writing; this whether he was illiterate or not. But Mr. Chubb says it remains to “persuade us that Ben Jonson was either a ‘knave or a fool.’” Why? He was neither. There is no doubt of *his* learning or authorship. He wrote, as we have shown in our former paper, a poetic dedication, using old forms of expression, and for pay, to promote the sale of the plays published or edited by Heminge and Condell, in 1623, seven years after Shaksper of Stratford was dead, and had bequeathed to said Heminge and Condell 26 shillings, 8 pence “apiece” (no manuscript) “to buy them Ringes”; and to his faithful wife, out of his large estate, only his “*second best bed with the furniture.*”

To whom, as the Shakespearean author, Ben Jonson referred in his poetic dedication to the First Folio (1623) we do not know with absolute certainty. There are those who believe Ben Jonson, in his laudatory poetic dedication, referred to the Stratford Shaksper as the theater owner, rather than the writer, of the plays published in the First Folio Edition and, for the writing of which, he was undoubtedly employed, and paid, the principal object being to advertise the Folio.

The ownership of the manuscripts of the play seems to have attached to the theaters in which Shaksper held ownership, as there is no evidence that Heminge and Condell got them anywhere else—certainly not from Shaksper of Stratford, his family, or executor.

It is fortunate for Ben Jonson’s reputation that he is not generally credited with the “Epistle Dedicatorie,” to the same Folio, as, after three

hundred years, some investigator—not too “simple-minded and credulous”—has discovered that it is a badly botched and poorly disguised piece of plagiarism, the source of the principal parts thereof being the Preface to Pliny’s (the elder) *Natural History*, which is an extravagantly written, laudatory dedication to the great Titus. Did Heminge and Condell, or Ben Jonson scruple at this? They could borrow language eulogizing a great Roman, to characterize another without giving a summary of his life, allowing the apparent facts to take care of themselves. The Folio must sell.

BOOK NOTICES.

The Light of Dharma, published by the Japanese missionaries at San Francisco, contains essays by Albert J. Edmunds on “Buddhist Bibliography,” by Ananda Maitriya on “Animism and Law,” by C. A. F. Rhys-Davids on “The Threshold of Buddhist Ethics.” Further, Dr. Eleanor M. Heistand Moore discusses the problem whether Buddhism existed in prehistoric America, and Aris Garabed explains some points of the origin of the Christian Trinity Idea.