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The Earliest Official Record of Shakespeare's Name.

By

Charlotte Carmichael Stopes.

In the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber (Pipe Office 542), we find the earliest official record of the name of our great dramatist. There are earlier personal notices of William Shakespeare the Stratfordian's baptism, marriage, and paternity; of his association in his parents' case to recover his mother's lost inheritance of Asbies. But this is the first notice of William Shakespeare the Actor:

To William Kempe, William Shakespeare, and Richard Burbage, servants to the Lord Chamberleyn upon the Councelles warrant dated at Whitehall xv. die Marcij 1594, for twoe severall comedies or enterludes, shewed by them before her Majestie in Christmas tyme laste paste, viz. upon St Stephens daye, and Imocentes day XIII^{li} VI^s VIII^d, and by way of her Majesties rewarde VI^{li} XIII^s IV^d, in all XX^{li}.

Elizabeth spent that Christmas at Greenwich, as may be seen from the entries in the same bill, of the expenses of preparing the Palace for the Queen's reception of that date.

Collier, when writing the History of the Drama was not aware of this entry. In noticing the petition of the inhabitants of the Blackfriars district against the allowance of the theatre there in 1596, he says that he found a paper pinned to this, containing a counter petition of the Players, in which Shakespeare's name appears fifth in order, and he says that "this entry is anterior by seven years to any official notice of Shakespeare's name". This paper of Collier's

has not generally been accepted as genuine; but his words concerning it show that he had not seen this earlier and incontestably genuine record.

Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps notices it, but even he does not see its full bearing. There is something to be gleaned from the name of the Treasurer of the Chamber; and something to be suggested in regard to the title of at least one of the Christmas Plays of 1594. The study of the Treasurer's Books teaches us a good many things; but they require to be read in the light of other facts. They show that there was a fashion in players as well as in plays, and that the same players frequently appeared in connection with different companies. It may be worth noting that the payments to "the Lord Chamberlain's players" had ceased from 1588, and that "The Queen's Players" had taken their place. These appear to have received payments "on a warrant, dated 31st Jan. 1593/4, for a play performed on Twelfth Day at night laste paste at Hampton Courte . . . in all Xⁱⁱ." The person who rendered the Bills from 29th September 1592, till 16th December 1595, was Mary, Countess of Southampton. She did this as widow and executrix of Sir Thomas Heneage, Vice-Chamberlain of the Royal Household, and Treasurer of the Chamber. But on reference to other sources of history, I find these dates are impossible. It took a long time to unravel the puzzle. But it appears certain that either through ill-health, pressure of business, or indolence, Sir Thomas Heneage had allowed his accounts to fall in arrears, and that his widow as executrix had to work them up to the date of her resignation. It is worth noting some of the events that had occurred before this period. Mary, the daughter of Anthony Browne, Viscount Montague, was the widow of the Earl of Southampton, who had died on 4th Oct. 1581, and the mother of the young Henry, Earl of Southampton, who was born on 6th Oct. 1573. In a curious book, called "Honour in his Perfection", 1624, the author, G. M. (Gervase, or George) Markham, gives the character of the Earl of Southampton with high praise: "He spent his younger times in the study of good letters . . . and often combined that study with travel and foreign observation". He had matriculated at Cambridge Dec. 11th 1585. Had taken his degree there on June 6. 1589, and was afterwards incorporated at Oxford, August 19th 1592. He was admitted to Gray's Inn, Feb. 29th 1587/8 by William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, By June 4th 1589 "the Earl of Southampton's armour was to be scoured and dressed up by his Executors" (see State Papers, Domestic Series, of

that date). On March 2nd 1590/1, though still in the Wardship of Lord Burleigh, he writes to Earl Essex from Dieppe, professing his will to serve him, though he has nothing to give but himself (see Cecil Papers). In the same year Lord Burleigh thought of marrying him to his grand-daughter (see Sir Thomas Stanhope's letter to Lord Burghley about the arrangement, July 15th 1590). But apparently the young Earl did not agree to his guardian's proposals. On his return to London, he carried on his studies at Gray's Inn. In the Plague year, on April 18th 1593, *Venus and Adonis* had been registered as his copy in the Stationers Books, by Richard Field, Vautrollier's Stratford apprentice, son-in-law and successor. It was dedicated, with timid respect, by William Shakespeare to the young Earl of Southampton, then only in his 20th year, a suitable soul, thought the author, to appreciate the poetry that was in him. And so it proved. Kindly offices warmed his grateful heart to admiring friendship. In November 1593, Sir Thomas Heneage, a disconsolate widower, writes to Lord Burghley, deploring the death of his wife, from "his woful house at Cophall in Essex". Six months later he had consoled himself, by marrying Mary, Countess of Southampton, in that very same month of May 1594 in which Shakespeare fulfilled the promise made to his young patron by writing (or at least completing), by dedicating in a new and loving style, and by publishing the fruit of his "graver labours", in *Lucrece*. This marriage materially increased Southampton's power to help his friend the poet. His polished and courtly stepfather was trusted by Elizabeth, and all-powerful in the court. *Lucrece* made Shakespeare famous at once. It gave the key to his first poem in a way that disarmed future criticism. It was noticed by contemporary poets even in the same year. By the 3rd of September, 1594, was entered at Stationers Hall, "Henry Willobie his *Avisa*" in which Shakespeare largely figures, and in which his new book is named:

Yet Tarquyne plucked his glistening grape,
And Shakespeare paints poor *Lucrece* rape.

Sir William Herbert, in the *Epicidium* of Lady Helen Branch, 1594, says,

You that have writ of chaste *Lucretia*,
Whose death was witness of her spotless life.

And Drayton also, in his "*Matilda*", which appeared in 1594, adds,

Lucrece, of whom proud Rome hath boasted long,
Lately revived to live another age.

The following year, Clark in his "Polixanteia", Thomas Edwardes in his "Cephalus and Procris", and Edmund Spenser, in his "Colin Clout's come home again", refer to Shakespeare, and George Markham, in his tragedy of Sir Richard Grenville, addresses Southampton thus,

Thou, the laurel of the Muses hill,
Whose eye doth crown the most victorious pen.

But we must not forestall our dates. We may well imagine Southampton's mother showing greater approval of Shakespeare now, and Southampton's expressing even warmer sympathy. The youth came of age on Oct. 6th 1594.

Seven months after the registration of Lucrece by the Stationers company, the author was summoned to play before the Queen at Greenwich twice, on St Stephen's Day, 26th December, and on Innocents day, 28th December, 1594. And in this year, once more payments are recorded to "the Lord Chamberlain's Servants", but not indiscriminately, not generally. For the first and last time, it is noted that "William Shakespeare" was among the players, and among those that received the payments. It might have happened before and afterwards, but it was not thought important enough to notice, save by Mary, Countess of Southampton, the mother of Shakespeare's friend, in the "Lucrece" year. And I am glad she spelt his name correctly, in the form it appeared in his dedications, the natural way according to the Court spelling of the period — *Shakespeare*. Poor lady! she was to lose her affectionate husband on 17th October 1595; to have sad worries over his accounts, receiving an unpleasant letter even from the Queen herself¹⁾ about the deficit; just when her hopeful son had plunged over head and ears in love with the fair Elizabeth Vernon, the Queen's maid of honour, a love that roused the wrath of Burghley and the Queen, and resulted in a marriage that thwarted his fair prospects and finally landed him in prison. His power to help Shakespeare was materially decreased, after that year.

¹⁾ „At the decease of your late husband, Sir Thomas Heneage, he had £ 1, 314. 15. 4 in hand as Treasurer of the Chamber You, as Executrix have paid up £ 401. 6. 10. and £ 394. 9. 11. to the guard and others We require immediate payment of the balance £ 528. 18. 7. to the Treasury of the Chamber, on which you shall receive acquittance for the whole sum" (A draft, damaged; see State Papers, Domestic Series, Elizabeth). Sir William Killigrew steps into the post, and she renders her last bill for "1 year and 62 daies from 15th Sept. 36 to 16th Dec. 38 Eliz." His first account is rendered from 16th Dec. 1595, till the 3rd July 1596.

Having shown thus to whom we owe this first record of Shakespeare's name, I would like to consider the probable title of one of these new Christmas plays of 1594. Greene's "Groatsworth of Wit" 1592, and Chettle's apology in "Kind Heart's Dream" in the same year, suggest Shakespeare's earlier relations to the Drama. In 1593 a letter written to Lord de Clifford styles Shakespeare "our English tragedian". Through the winter of 1593/4 *Titus Andronicus* was being acted, and by Feb. 6th 1594 was registered in the Stationers books to John Danter: "A Noble Roman History of Titus Andronicus". But this could not have been one of these two plays, whose light character is shown by their being named "Comedies or Interludes". "The Revel's Book" fails us during Shakespeare's most critical years. The accounts of the Chamber chiefly concern themselves with the moneys spent, and ignore the literary hunger of posterity. There is no mention of these plays, and no clue to a title for either of them save through a strange scene where William Shakespeare was in a peculiar manner associated with Francis Bacon, and men had, for the first time, to decide upon their rival merits.

At Gray's Inn, 1594, there were to be extraordinary Christmas festivities, to make up for the dulness during the time of the Plague. The Students were to represent a King, a Court, a State, with all the gorgeous ceremonies connected therewith: a good training for young ambitious lawstudents. The Prince of Purpoole and his selected officers chose all the revels of that Christmas week. They had selected Innocents night, Dec. 28th, as the date of their first special play, and a great stage had been erected in their Hall. But the goodly company of real Lords and Ladies they had invited, were not amenable to the mock Prince's discipline. They all seem to have aspired to the seats of honour on the stage, and the throng was so great, that after much uproar and disorder, in default of "the very good inventions and conceptions" which had been intended for the delectation of the guests, they had

to content themselves with ordinary dancing and revelling, and when that was over, with a Comedy of Errors like to Plautus his *Menæchmus*, which was playd by the players.

This performance seems to have been considered the crowning disgrace of the evening.

Next day a "conjurer" was arraigned on the charges of having caused the confusion by magic;

and of having foisted a company of base and common fellows to make up our disorders with a play of Errors and Confusions.

Justice prevailed in this trial, however, and the officers of the Christmas Court were sent to the Christmas Tower for neglect of their duty. The members held a consultation "how to recover their lost honour with some graver conceipt". Spedding feels certain that Bacon aided them, for in the rival show that was brought forward on the 3rd January ("Divers Plots and Devices"), the "speeches carry his signature in every line". The Councillors treat of the laws of chivalry and the enrolment of knights; of the glory of war, the study of philosophy; of virtue and good government; of procuring "eternizement and fame by buildings and foundations". The Sixth Councillor was the first to suggest

sports and pastimes, feasting, music, dancing, triumphs, comedies, love, and ladies. Whom the Prince of Purpoole answered and set his company to dancing.

The performance of which night's work, being very carefully and orderly handled, did so delight and please the nobles and the other auditory, that thereby Gray's Inn did not only recover their lost credit, quite take away all the disgrace that the former night of errors had incurred, but got instead thereof so great honour and applause as either the good reports of our honourable friends that were present could yield, or we ourselves desire". "The reconciliation between "Gray's Inn", and "The Temple", whose friendliness had been disturbed by the "night of Errors", was complete: see *Gesta Grayorum, or the History of the high and mighty Prince of Purpoole, who reigned and died 1594*, W. Canning; and Nichol's Royal Progresses, Fol. III. It is generally allowed that this "Comedy of Errors" was Shakespeare's play of that name, and that the company who played it were his, as no other would have a right to do so. I made a point of this in my "Bacon-Shakespeare Question answered", but I did not then know of this entry in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber. It was the same date as the play before the Queen at Greenwich!

But here we see the importance of noting trivial details. Generally the plays are said to have been shown on "New year's day at night", or "on Innocents day at night last past"; this particular entry was for "Innocents day". There was quite time for the players to return after a day performance from Greenwich to London, there was time for them to take some rest and food together, but there was not time for them to have separated and gone to their own homes, bag and baggage; before they must

have been summoned by one who knew where they were to be found. "The Comedy of Errors", was necessarily a new play at that date; but it may be held as certain that the first performance of a new play would not have taken place on an unexpected opportunity such as this. My own opinion is that the new play was written specially to be produced that Christmas before the Queen, who loved not to be put off with "printed plays"; and that, when the call came, the Chamberlain's Servants were ready with their speeches, and their clothes, ready to seize the opportunity, made by fate for their advantage. It is more than likely that the Earl of Southampton escorted the party returning (on horseback doubtless) from Greenwich to London, that he supped with them, either at an inn, or at his own house, that he left them carousing, and went on to the Gray's Inn Revels. What more likely than that he saw the opportunity of quieting the confusion, and of advancing his own special Poet, at the same time? It is more than probable that he summoned them personally on this occasion. No one would have been allowed to reach that stage without the guidance of one familiar to the place. Was it not Christmas-tide? I like to picture Shakespeare and his fellows taking possession of that stage, bravely acting through the confusion, until interest arose, and the audience listened in silence to the well-rehearsed play they had shown that day before the Queen. Southampton, no doubt an unwearied and appreciative listener, shared his friend's triumph in the situation, and likely presented a suitable "reward" to the company for their special services. Because among the various indignant questions asked at the "Enquiry" next day, there was none heard, "Who paid the Players?" Southampton doubtless thought they richly deserved a reward. They would go home happy. Bacon, with many others, went home, perplexed and mortified, brooding anxiously how to retrieve the lost honour of Gray's Inn, where "base fellows" had usurped the very stage they had destined for themselves.

I emphasize this proof that Bacon could not at least have written "The Comedy of Errors", because it is one of the plays most triumphantly claimed for him on account of its source. It is one of the hackneyed *cruces* that Baconian claimants propose to good Shakespeareans — "How could this man be scholar enough to find the plot of the Comedy of Errors, in the untranslated play of the *Menæchmi* of Plautus?" Though I believe Shakespeare's Latin was sufficient to allow him to find a plot where he pleased, our opponents do not generally know that a translation of this special play was registered in the Stationers

books on June 16th 1594, by Thomas Creede. It is easy to suppose that the Earl of Southampton had an early copy, might even have seen the translation in manuscript, and might have suggested the plot as suitable for the Royal Play: "A Booke entitled Menæchmi, being a pleasant and fine conceited Comedy, taken out of the most wittie poet Plautus, chosen purposely from out the rest as being the least harmful and most delightful". And Shakespeare, as usual, improved on his authorities. How busy he must have been, in that memorable year, to have had the play in acting readiness six months after the translation.

Exactly eleven years later, "on Innocents day at night 1605", the King's Company, played "The Comedy of Errors by Shakespeare", before a new Sovereign and a new Court. Bacon and Southampton likely saw it together again then. Did they remember "the night of Errors", in old Gray's Inn, when Shakespeare heroically filled the gap in the Prince of Purpoole's festivities? Or the following 3rd of January, when Bacon was for the first time pitted against Shakspeare? A careful study of "Divers Plots and Devices" is quite sufficient to educate those who claim too much for Bacon, into a recognition of the distinction between the literary and artistic styles of two great men, so different in genius and in aspiration.

The sixteenth century legal students, and their friends, or some of them, pronounced in favour of Bacon's "Councillors", posterity has preferred Shakespeare's "Errors".

¹) On Dec. 6th 1895, some gentlemen at Gray's Inn reproduced "The Comedy of Errors" in their Hall under the direction of Mr. Poel of "The Elizabethan Stage Society". A full notice appeared in "The Times" of 7th Dec. 1895, in which it is taken for granted that the first representation took place under the direction of the Prince of Purpoole, which is evidently not the case. The Times correspondence ensuing, on the 13th December and later dates, discusses whether there was a stage or not; and other points concerning the first representation of that play in that Hall.