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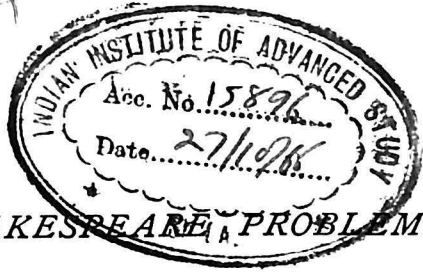
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THE REAL SHAKESPEARE A PROBLEM

OF recent years 'there has been much throwing about of brains,' as the author of *Hamlet* remarked, in the effort to ascertain who that author really was. During the last nine years Sir George Greenwood has contributed five volumes containing in the aggregate some 1600 pages, to what he styles 'this wearisome "Shakespearean" controversy.' The most recent of them takes the form of 'Some Words of Criticism' on a number of isolated passages in Sir Sidney Lee's *Life of Shakespeare*.¹ All the points taken bear in one way or another on the main issue, namely whether the Stratford actor, the story of whose life Sir Sidney tells, was in fact the author of Shakespeare's plays. On this main issue Sir George Greenwood's case was very fully presented in *The Shakespeare Problem Re-Stated* (1908). Eight years later he followed this up with another re-statement named *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?*—a title calculated to rouse some apprehension in the reader's breast. He may rest assured, however. Sir George Greenwood has not been pursuing a phantom all this while. There really is a Shakespeare problem. But, audacious as the statement may seem, Sir George does not appear to realise what it is. One side of it, indeed, he grasps and expounds with remarkable thoroughness and force: that, namely, which consists in the difficulties which lie in the way of accepting William Shakespeare of Stratford as the author of the plays and poems usually known by his name. These difficulties are considerable, but they by no means exhaust the problem, which, in fact, consists in a balance of probabilities, or rather of improbabilities. Granted that it seems improbable that Shakespeare wrote the plays, can it be shown to be equally or more improbable that any other person or group of persons did so? That is the real Shakespeare problem, and in his failure to face it lies the deficiency of Sir George Greenwood's work. The suggestion that if he denies the Shakespearean authorship he should put forward some definite theory in its place he dismisses with 'What nonsense!'² And he rather plumes himself on

¹ *Sir Sidney Lee's New Edition of a Life of William Shakespeare: Some Words of Criticism* is the full title.

² *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* (1916), p. 3.

having dealt solely with 'the negative case, and said no word in support of any alternative hypothesis, Baconian or otherwise.'³

Yet this abstention, so far from being a merit, detracts materially not merely from the positive value of his work but even from its conclusiveness as an argument on the negative side of the question to which he confines himself. He brings forward a number of considerations to show that it is unlikely that Shakespeare of Stratford was the author of the plays. So far so good. But until a similar test has been applied to at any rate some other possible authorships, we have not only failed to solve the problem, but we are not even in a position to say that Sir George Greenwood has proved his own negative case. He cannot say 'Never mind who actually was the author, I have at least cleared one competitor off the field.' He has not even done that, because the reader cannot appreciate the force of the arguments against Shakespeare until he sees how the same or similar arguments would affect other candidatures for the authorship. I venture to suggest that if these were subjected to as keen and searching a test as Sir George has applied to the Shakespearean theory they would appear even more improbable. And, therefore, on the balance of probabilities, Shakespeare would after all come out as a less unlikely author than any other who could be suggested.

Whether this would in fact be the outcome of such a comparison or not, the criticism holds good that even Sir George Greenwood's limited and negative argument is quite inconclusive, because we know that some one must have written the plays, and he gives no material on which to form a judgment whether the Shakespearean authorship is more or less likely than any other. Merely to show, at however great length, that there are difficulties in accepting the 'orthodox' theory is an achievement of little value if the obstacles in the way of any other solution are as great or greater. For this reason his work is less satisfactory than that of the Baconians among whom he insists so strongly that he is not to be enrolled. By stating their reasons for believing Bacon to have been the author they enable the reader to compare Shakespeare's claims with those of his most popular rival, and so to form some judgment not merely on the Baconian but also on the Shakespearean hypothesis.

It must, however, be recorded that Sir George Greenwood, while as a rule 'content to rest upon the negative case,'⁴ does at one point make some approach to a positive theory, surmising that 'not only one but several writers found it convenient to publish under that name [i.e. Shakespeare] and came to an understanding with Shakspeare [the actor] in the matter'⁵. Yet

³ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. ix. ⁴ *Ibid.* p. 471. ⁵ *Ibid.* p. 467.

in the same chapter he makes it clear that this syndicate theory, as it may be called, affords no approach to a solution of the real problem. Modern criticism allows that some considerable part of the body of literature which we call by the general name of 'Shakespeare' is the work of lesser minds. But most readers, including Sir George Greenwood, retain the conviction that there was also a single 'Master Mind' from whom the plays derive their individual character. Other men may have written plays or parts of plays, but the unmistakable and surpassing quality which we recognise as Shakespearean is not to be accounted for by assuming a syndicate. Of *The Merchant of Venice* Sir George Greenwood writes⁶: 'Shakespeare took Ser Giovanni's novel, transmuting baser metal into purest gold as he alone knew how' (my italics). And again 'Who was the author [my italics] of *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Othello* and *Macbeth*? That is a question which I make no attempt to answer.'⁷ So too in his latest work when discussing Shakespeare's legal knowledge he says 'Let us be careful to restrict our studies to those plays, or parts of plays, which are undoubtedly to be classed as Shakespearean, otherwise we may be grievously misled.'⁸ It appears, therefore, that the syndicate theory though it may help us to account for the volume and wide range of the work known as Shakespeare's, and for its unevenness in point of merit, brings us no nearer a solution of the real problem, the identity of the Master Mind, of whose existence the plays themselves are a sufficient proof.

Sir George Greenwood's thesis, then, is that, whoever else provided the Master Mind, Shakespeare the actor did not. And he develops it at portentous length and sometimes with rather more acrimony than the nature of the inquiry would appear to warrant. One of his favourite charges against 'the Stratfordians,' as he calls them, is that, while agreeing in the main conclusion that the Stratford player was also the dramatist, they differ among themselves as to various subsidiary matters connected with his life and times. They 'are really worse than the "theologians" in their internal dissensions'⁹ he exclaims; and still more plaintively, 'Oh dear! oh dear! How I do wish these high authorities could be found to agree on some one point of criticism.' 'That, in fact, is one of the great difficulties of "unorthodox" criticism. One does not know which of many inconsistent arguments are to be regarded as articles of the true faith.'¹⁰ And again, of a conclusion in which Mr. J. M. Robertson differs from Sir Sidney Lee: 'This is the Stratfordian

⁶ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 97.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 470.

⁸ *Some Words of Criticism*, pp. 17-18.

⁹ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 436.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 417-18.

faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be sane.'¹¹ In his latest work he carries this line of argument still further, and is at pains even to point out that the reviewers of Sir Sidney Lee's new edition are 'at variance' among themselves.¹²

Yet obviously all this about a 'true faith' is only Sir George's fun. He does not really suppose that those who hold the 'Stratfordian' theory are bound to agree in all minor points of the controversy, or that their main contention is seriously affected if they do not. Such an argument could be turned with at least equal force against the anti-Stratfordian position. Writers who agree that William Shakespeare did not write the plays have held inconsistent and even diametrically opposite views on all sorts of relevant matters, from the late Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence who pilloried Shakespeare the actor as a 'mean, drunken, ignorant, and absolutely unlettered rustic,'¹³ to Sir George Greenwood who holds that the actor was sufficiently educated to have been at any rate part-author of the plays. Another anti-Stratfordian, the late Lord Penzance, is commended by Sir George for his 'fine intelligence, his clear and logical mind, his great power of marshalling facts, and his remarkable grasp of legal principles.'¹⁴ These desirable qualities led his lordship to conclude that Bacon wrote the Preface to the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's works, and that there is 'good reason' to conclude that a well-known passage in Chettle's *Kind Hartes Dream* refers to Shakespeare.¹⁵ Yet in his most recent, as in his earlier books on the subject, Sir George Greenwood holds it certain that Ben Jonson wrote the Preface in question, and that the person to whom Chettle alludes 'could not possibly have been' Shakespeare.¹⁶ If these discrepancies occurred among the 'orthodox' how he would cry out 'Oh dear! oh dear!' and bewail the difficulty of discovering the authorised version of the true faith. Again, he cites two anti-Stratfordians who, he says, 'differ greatly' between themselves as to the manner in which Shakespeare's extant signatures were produced, 'though they both agree in the conclusion that Shakespeare was unable to write. To that opinion I am entirely unable to subscribe.'¹⁷ Such a complicated difference of opinion on what is clearly a question very relevant to the main issue, puts the variances of Stratfordians and theologians quite in the shade. The list of anti-Stratfordian discrepancies might be almost indefinitely prolonged,

¹¹ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 120.

¹² *Some Words of Criticism*, p. 37. ¹³ *Bacon is Shakespeare*, 1909, p. 82.

¹⁴ *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, p. vii.

¹⁵ *The Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy*, 1902, pp. 198 and 104.

¹⁶ *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, p. 308; cf. *Some Words of Criticism*, pp. 27 and 22-3.

¹⁷ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 331.

but the task would be a barren one, for Sir George himself supplies a complete answer to the argument founded upon it when he describes as a 'fallacy' the view that 'if one accepts a writer as an authority upon one thing one must so accept him upon all things—that if one agrees with him upon one point one must agree with him on all points, and *vice versa*.'¹⁸ If he had kept the fallacious nature of this contention more constantly in mind he might have succumbed less frequently to the temptation to exult over the disagreements of his opponents. But as he so often lays stress on these disagreements it has seemed desirable to point out that they are, to say the least, equalled by the differences between those who agree with him on the main issue.

Let us now step aside from the heat of this *mêlée*, and for a little while consider, as dispassionately as may be, the problem itself. I suggested above that, when looked at fairly, it would be found to consist in a balancing of probabilities. The real case against what Sir George Greenwood calls the Stratfordian authorship may be summed up in the phrase of Emerson 'I cannot marry [his life] to his verse.' In other words the facts of William Shakespeare's life, as far as we know them from record or tradition, make it appear very unlikely that he was the author of some of the world's greatest literature. As regards the effect of tradition something will be said later in this article. But here it may be observed that Sir George's remark that the 'orthodox' school 'cling to tradition when it suits them, and reject it when it is not palatable,'¹⁹ is equally true of the 'anti-Stratfordians.' Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence is only an extreme instance of those who swallow with avidity every scrap of evidence which can be twisted to support the belief that Shakespeare was 'an uneducated rustic never able to read a single line of print.'²⁰ Sir George Greenwood on the other hand, holding that the actor was accepted by a good many people as the writer of the plays, and probably did in fact share in their authorship, is bound to reject such legends.

Turning to the known facts of the player's life, we must allow that they, like the traditional stories, do not suggest the sort of man that we should naturally suppose the author of the plays to have been. And the anti-Stratfordians are perfectly justified in making the most of this inference. In fact they are bound to do so, for it is on this apparent inconsistency between the life of the man and his reputed works that their case rests. When that is said all is said. There is no other evidence that the traditional authorship is not also the true one.

And even this evidence may be and often is very much over-

¹⁸ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 143.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 317.

²⁰ *Bacon is Shakespeare*, p. 46.

stated. For instance, in his chapter on Shakespeare's will Sir George Greenwood writes 'The only reasonable conclusion is that Shakespeare died without books or manuscripts in his possession.'²¹ This conclusion he draws from the fact that the will contains a few specific bequests of the testator's sword, his 'silver-gilt bole,' and the like, and a residuary bequest to his daughter and son-in-law. From this it is certainly a legitimate inference that he possessed books which are included in the residuary clause. Whether this conclusion or Sir George's is the more likely may be matter for argument. But to say that either of them is 'the only reasonable' one is to overstate the case very considerably.

Again, he lays a good deal more stress than it will bear on the argument from Manningham's Diary. John Manningham was a young student of law who in 1602 saw, and was apparently impressed by, what is believed to have been the first performance of *Twelfth Night*. A few weeks later he records an anecdote the point of which lies in Shakespeare the actor referring to himself as 'William the Conqueror,' and to make the joke quite clear the diarist adds 'Shakespeare's name William.' From this Sir George Greenwood deduces that Manningham had no idea that the actor was also the author of the play he had recently admired. The inference is not at all certain. In telling a story about an author's private life one does not necessarily allude to his works. But even if Sir George is right in his inference it adds nothing to the anti-Stratfordian case. He regards Manningham as 'a cultured and well-educated man of the world,' 'typical of the small circle' who might be expected to take an interest in the question of the authorship of the plays he saw acted. This is not the impression his Diary produces upon me. But whatever else that curious document proves, it certainly shows that he was an eager collector of gossip and anecdote. And I find it difficult to believe that if he had had any suspicion that plays were being written and fathered upon Shakespeare of which he was not the real author, he would have omitted to chronicle such a choice tit-bit.

On the other hand he may have believed the play to be Shakespeare's, or he may have neither known nor cared who wrote it. Both suppositions are quite consistent with the Diary, but the latter is, perhaps, the more likely, for if he had been interested in the authorship he would presumably have said something about it when describing the play. In any case the incident when looked at a little more closely fails utterly to support Sir George's contention.

Yet when an reasonable allowance has been made for exaggeration and mistaken inference, the circumstances of Shake-

²¹ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 315.

speare's life still supply the anti-Stratfordian armoury with its one formidable weapon. And when closely examined it turns out to be by no means an Excalibur. We may put aside the supposition that Shakespeare was an ignorant yokel who could neither read nor write. For those who hold it no question of his authorship, of course, can exist. But, as Sir George Greenwood perceives, such writers are engaged in sawing off the branch on which they sit. If the plays were written by a concealed author who desired to remain anonymous, only one thing is less likely than that he should have selected an illiterate rustic for their putative father, and that is that the imposture should for a single moment have been successful. Reasonable anti-Stratfordians are compelled by their hypothesis to admit that Shakespeare must at any rate have possessed sufficient education and culture to pass as a leading dramatist. And Sir George himself cites with approval the statement that 'the attempt to exclude Shakespeare *totally* from the immortal plays is most absurd.'²² This is a position which appears to weaken considerably the argument based on the facts of his life and environment. The more fitted Shakespeare was to pose as the author of the plays—to say nothing of his actually being a collaborator in them—the more fully, we must needs suppose, was he equipped with the knowledge and culture which would be required to sustain such a character.

Sir George Greenwood manifests some displeasure against those who as he says 'ingeminate "Genius, genius"' as the all-sufficient explanation of the problem. Yet he himself declares that 'genius may give the power of acquiring knowledge with marvellous facility.'²³ If this be so, we have at once advanced some way towards a solution of the puzzle. For a good deal of the difficulty lies in the fact of an uneducated rustic (as we are asked to assume) having acquired sufficient knowledge to write such a play as *Love's Labour's Lost* within some four years of his arrival in London. In the phrase just quoted Sir George accommodatingly provides us with the answer. Nor is it necessary to suppose that the poet burnt the midnight oil in order to acquire all this learning from books.

In this age of cheap printed information [says Professor Raleigh] we are too apt to forget how large a part of his knowledge he must have gathered in talk. Books were licensed and guarded; but in talk there was free trade. . . . The knowledge that he gained from such talk, if it was sometimes remote and curious, was neither systematic nor accurate, and this is the knowledge reflected in the plays.²⁴

This theory that a man brought up as Shakespeare was, and living as he lived (so far as we can reconstruct his bringing-up

²² *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 469 n.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 284.

²⁴ *Shakespeare*. 'English Men of Letters Series,' 1907, p. 58.

and his life) could not possibly have written the plays is in fact the consequence, one might say the Nemesis, of the exaggerated veneration with which it became the fashion to regard him under the influence of the romantic revival in this country and in Germany. In England this fashion was set by Coleridge²⁵ and Hazlitt. They and their followers delighted in piling up the wonder of the miracle by which the Stratford rustic became 'the myriad-minded man' who unconsciously and without effort attained not only supreme mastery of every kind of writing but superhuman acquaintance with every department of knowledge; drawing information of every kind as well as all poetic excellence from 'the unfathomable depths of his own oceanic mind.' The contrast appealed to their artistic sense, and the more they could heighten it the better they were pleased. The saner, more restrained, criticism of the eighteenth century was often, it must be admitted, petty and pedantic, but it gave on the whole a more correct view of the dramatist and his genius than did the extravagant ebullitions of the romantic school. Sir George Greenwood's strictures on some biographies of Shakespeare written under the influence of this school are not altogether undeserved. And modern critics, such as Professor Raleigh in the work just cited, have shown that it is possible to account for the knowledge which Shakespeare displays on a more reasonable hypothesis.

It was said of a Victorian statesman that he had a second-rate mind in a first-rate state of effervescence. That of the author of Shakespeare's plays might be defined as a first-rate mind in a first-rate state of effervescence. We may reasonably conclude that he was always on the alert, picking up information, often consciously, often, it may be, unconsciously, always with that 'marvellous facility' which Sir George Greenwood assigns as a quality of genius: constantly observing, comparing, deducing, and storing away the results for future use. It is now recognised that what used to be called the 'encyclopaedic knowledge,' which won him the reputation of a universal expert in every subject, is not the exhaustive and accurate learning with which he was formerly credited, but just the sort of general information which would

²⁵ In *Some Words of Criticism* (p. 38), Sir George Greenwood includes Coleridge among those who have found it difficult to reconcile Shakespeare's life with his writings. This conclusion appears to be founded on a misapprehension of some sentences from one of Coleridge's essays on Shakespeare, which Sir George quotes in *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* (p. 281). If read in their context, these sentences will be found to bear no such meaning. They form the climax of a passage in which he is extolling Shakespeare's judgment as against the then common notion that he was a 'wild, irregular genius.' There is nothing to show that any reference to the facts of his life was intended, and from his other writings on Shakespeare it is clear that Coleridge found no difficulty in accepting the Stratford actor as the dramatist.

be acquired at that time by a quick, receptive mind of this description, transmuted under the white heat of the poet's genius. The word genius, despite Sir George Greenwood's objections, is inevitable here, but it is not now prayed in aid of a deficient education and culture. The explanation suggested is that if, as Sir George seems to admit, Shakespeare possessed these in sufficient measure to pass as the author of the plays and actually to collaborate in them, we are entitled to assume that genius would enable him to do the rest.

This is at least as intelligible and legitimate a theory of the authorship as any that can be put forward by the anti-Stratfordians. As soon as they leave the shelter of negative criticism and suggest an alternative solution their theories are seen to be vague, shifting and inconsistent. It was shown above that the hypothesis of a syndicate brings us no nearer to a solution of the real problem of the Master Mind. And when individual candidates for the authorship are brought forward their claims will be found to break down when closely scrutinised. Mr. Andrew Lang²⁶ in a brief analysis of Bacon's career had little difficulty in showing that after accounting for his achievements in philosophy and science, law and politics, to say nothing of minor avocations, the production of some of the world's greatest literature in the time left over would have been beyond the power even of 'large-brow'd Verulam.'

Even if the argument is confined to weighing the difficulties which lie in the way of the Shakespearean authorship against the difficulties in the way of any other the Stratfordians may claim a verdict on the balance. But to stop here would be to ignore the strongest point in their case, the fact, namely, that it is the only one for which any positive evidence can be adduced. The arguments for every other theory are negative, conjectural, inferential. The Shakespearean authorship is supported by a body of direct contemporary witnesses. In addition to the difficulties of proving their own theories the anti-Stratfordians are faced with the task of explaining away a number of passages written by contemporaries of Shakespeare the actor, identifying him with the dramatist. Referring to an extant document in which the writer mentions William Shakespeare of Stratford Sir George Greenwood says 'Unfortunately he never alludes to him as poet or dramatist. *Nobody ever did.*'²⁷ When he wrote the words which I have italicised he must have temporarily forgotten these passages, though he discusses them later in the same book. On pp. 352-3 he assures us that he has 'never denied that most if not all of the contemporaries who wrote in praise of the works of

²⁶ *Shakespeare, Bacon, and the Great Unknown* (1912).

²⁷ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 271, n.

Shakespeare in all probability supposed Shakspeare the player to be the author of those works.'

And this fact leads naturally to the conclusion that the identity of the actor and the dramatist was accepted, apparently as a matter of course, not only by the writers in question but by the public that read their works. Sir George enters the proviso that some, perhaps many, writers 'simply lauded the works without knowing or troubling at all about the author of them.' But this would scarcely apply to such a man as Thomas Heywood, himself a playwright and an actor, who, Sir George allows, 'probably' identified Shakespeare of Stratford with the dramatist. Still less would it apply to Ben Jonson, who, still in Sir George's words, does 'undoubtedly to all outward seeming, make the same identification.'²⁸ And so, again according to Sir George, did 'the players.'

Now, the apparent belief of all these men, the intimate associates of William Shakespeare of Stratford, that he was the author of the plays known by his name, undoubtedly forms a strong body of testimony. And it is reinforced by the writings of other contemporaries who allude to the Stratford player as the dramatist though they do not appear to have known him personally. Such were John Davies of Hereford who in an epigram written about 1611 speaks of Shakespéare the actor as a dramatist, Edmund Howes who in 1615 published a continuation of Stow's *Chronicle*, Leonard Digges the writer of the verses prefixed to the Shakespeare Folios of 1623 and 1640, and several others. In reply to all this Sir George Greenwood can only urge that 'the belief of some of Shakespeare's contemporaries (of whom Sir Richard Baker was *not* one), though all due weight must, of course, be given to it, cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of the question of authorship.'²⁹

The Sir Richard Baker here referred to wrote a *Chronicle*, published in 1643, in which he speaks of Shakespeare the dramatist as an actor. When Sir George italicised the word '*not*' in the sentence just quoted, he must have overlooked the fact that Baker was born in 1568, which certainly appears to make him a contemporary of Shakespeare who was born in 1564. Most of the plays in question were produced somewhere between Baker's twentieth year and his forty-fifth, and he was an educated and cultivated man of the world, as well as an historian. Altogether it would seem that he was in a position to know what he was talking about in such a matter, and that Sir George Greenwood somewhat underrates the weight to be given to his evidence.

In fact these allusions seem to dispose of the suggestion which Sir George puts forward in rather tentative form that possibly

²⁸ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 410.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 354.

'some few men in the inner and upper circle of literature knew that' the name Shakespeare denoting the author or authors of the plays 'stood for something more than' Shakespeare of Stratford.³⁰ Even if Heywood was outside this circle it must needs have included Jonson, whose utterances, as Sir George frankly recognises, are a formidable obstacle in the anti-Stratfordian path.

It would be a very irregular circle indeed to include Manningham and exclude Sir Richard Baker. And even apart from the question of the composition of the circle of those who were in the know, this theory raises difficulties considerably graver than those it is intended to overcome. It puts rather too strong a strain on our credulity to be asked to believe that the secret was so well kept that not only had the rest of the world no suspicion of it at the time, but none of the parties to it ever let it out in later life when those principally concerned were dead. One of the most curious secrets in the history of literature, as this would be if it were true, was known to a circle wide enough to include such a gossip as Manningham, and was allowed to die out so completely that for the next two centuries no one even suspected its existence. To adopt one of Sir George Greenwood's favourite quotations, *Credat Judaeus, non ego*. Like the 'unorthodox' in other fields the anti-Stratfordians can only escape from the difficulties of the accepted 'faith' by devising theories which involve them in greater difficulties still.

And the next generation is in the same tale. Less than twenty years after Shakespeare's death Milton was writing about him 'warbling his native wood notes wild,' clearly supposing the poet to be the man of Stratford. Thomas Fuller was born in the same year as Milton, 1608, and makes the same identification. Neither these writers nor any single one of their contemporaries, as far as we know, ever doubted that the poet and the actor were the same man, or found anything surprising in the fact. And they must have been in close touch with many survivors from Shakespeare's lifetime, some of whom would have known him personally. And for the next two hundred years the tradition is unanimous and unbroken, and it is one that the anti-Stratfordians are compelled to ignore altogether.

Yet in doing so they show a very defective appreciation of the place of tradition in normal historical belief. As Dr. J. N. Figgis has said with reference to another subject, this neglect to take tradition into account 'serves to illustrate how woefully we may go astray if we isolate each document or fact and consider them apart from the total picture and from popular tradition. . . . Further it is not to be doubted that even in regard to the most

³⁰ *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* p. 465.

thoroughly "documented" of historical facts tradition plays a large part in our belief. Creighton said somewhere that apart from tradition there was not sufficient evidence to prove that Julius Caesar ever existed.³¹ Even so strong and widespread a tradition as that now in question does not of itself afford irrefragable proof, but it does create a strong presumption which cannot be overlooked without being 'false to the first principles of forming the most ordinary historical judgments.'³²

To sum up: the whole problem as was suggested above resolves itself into a balance of improbabilities. It is improbable that such wonderful plays should have been written at all. But written they were, and as far as their imperishable qualities are concerned they are the work of a single author whose literary activity lay between—roughly—1585 and 1615. There are difficulties in the way of accepting William Shakespeare as this author, and Sir George Greenwood has stated these difficulties as clearly and forcibly as they are ever likely to be stated. But they are not insurmountable, and when other theories of the authorship are as keenly scrutinised they are found to present equal or even greater difficulties. Thus, even on the negative side the Shakespearean theory appears the least improbable. But it is also supported by the only definite and positive contemporary evidence that exists, and by the unanimous tradition of more than two hundred years. The final conclusion, then, appears to be that, while Sir George Greenwood has justly criticised some biographers of Shakespeare and their free and easy method of jumping at conclusions, his assaults have left the main Shakespearean position unbroken.

GORDON CROSSE.

³¹ *Civilisation at the Cross Roads* (1912), pp. 238-9.

³² *Ibid.* p. 241.



