

BACONIAN ESSAYS

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Baconian essays by E. W. Smithson & Sir George Greenwood

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E. W. SMITHSON & SIR GEORGE GREENWOOD

**BACONIAN
ESSAYS**

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BY

E. W. SMITHSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND TWO ESSAYS

BY

SIR GEORGE GREENWOOD

LONDON

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INTRODUCTORY

HENRY JAMES, in a letter to Miss Violet Hunt, thus delivers himself with regard to the authorship of the plays and poems of "Shakespeare" * :—"I am 'a sort of' haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world. 'The more I turn him round and round the more he so affects me."

Now I do not for a moment suppose that in so writing the late Mr. Henry James had any intention of affixing the stigma of personal fraud upon William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. Doubtless he used the term "fraud" in a semi-jocular vein as we so often hear it made use of in the colloquial language of the present day, and his meaning is nothing more, and nothing less, than this, viz., that the belief that the plays and poems of "Shakespeare" were, in truth and in fact, the work of "the man from Stratford," (as he subsequently, in the same letter, styles "the divine William") is one of the greatest of all the many delusions which have,

* *Letters of Henry James*. Macmillan, 1920, Vol. I., p. 432.

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from time to time, afflicted a credulous and "a patient world." He believed that when, in the year 1593, the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* to the Young Earl of Southampton was signed "William Shakespeare," that signature did not, in truth and in fact, stand for the Stratford player who never so signed himself, but for a very different person, in quite another sphere of life, who desired to preserve his anonymity. He believed that when plays were published in the name of "Shake-speare" that name did not, in truth and in fact, stand for "the man from Stratford," but again for that same person—or it might be, and in certain cases certainly was, for some other—who desired to publish plays under the mask of a convenient pen-name. And if the authorship of these poems and plays came, in course of time, to be attributed to William Shakspeare, the player from Stratford-upon-Avon, who himself never uttered a word, or wrote a syllable, or took any steps whatever to claim the authorship of those poems and plays for himself, but was content merely to play the part of "William the Silent" from first to last, there is, surely, no reason to brand him as a cheat and a "fraud" upon that account, and we may be quite sure that that highly-gifted and distinguished man of literature, Henry James—one of the intellectuals of our day—had no intention of so branding him.

A lady, a short time ago, wrote a book to explain the play of *Hamlet* in quite a new light, by making reference to the special political circumstances of the time when it appeared, such as the "Scottish succession," the character