

WHAT WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

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What we really know about Shakespeare by Mrs. Caroline Healey Dall

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MRS. CAROLINE HEALEY DALL

**WHAT WE REALLY
KNOW ABOUT
SHAKESPEARE**

1887
1886

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ABOUT

SHAKESPEARE.

BY

MRS. CAROLINE HEALEY DALL,

AUTHOR OF "HISTORICAL PICTURES RETOUCHEE;" "THE COLLEGE,
MARKET, AND COURT;" "EGYPT, A PRESENTATION;"

"LETTERS HOME FROM COLORADO, UTAH, AND
CALIFORNIA," ETC.

"All that he doth write
Is pure his own."

LEONARD DIGGES, 1640.

SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.

1886.

PREFACE.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE MANUFACTURE OF THIS HANDBOOK.

A FEW years since a gentleman of some scholarly reputation was asked to deliver an address, on Shakespeare's birthday, before a Shakespeare club of which I had long been a member. He spoke before two or three hundred people. He represented Shakespeare as "wilely born," — the son of a butcher, apprenticed to a butcher, without education, a pot-house brawler, loafing about with poachers, until he got himself into such serious discredit that, after an enforced early marriage, he was obliged to fly from his native town. He then proceeded to glorify that Divine Spark of Genius, given to its possessor without regard to his deserts, which had set this pot-house brawler above all mortal men. What was my amazement to find that among his audience no one beside myself was prepared to question any of these statements.

As the public discussion of the Baconian origin of Shakespeare's Plays has proceeded, the principal argument of its supporters has been found in our ignorance of Shakespeare's life, and in the assumption that most of the above statements are true. Whoever proves them to be mainly unfounded will therefore help to form a rational public opinion.

During the last winter I listened to three different addresses from the author of "Atlantis," who thinks he has discovered a cipher in the First Folio, and that the story concealed by this cipher claims the Plays of Shakespeare as the work of Lord Bacon!

Mr. Donnelly had a large audience, and on one of these occasions he addressed a literary club, and was answered at some length by two or three fair Shakespeare scholars. He stated in substance that Shakespeare was low-born, vilely bred, led an obscure life, and was a man who might easily be hired to cloak the personality of a superior who feared political disgrace.

Many of Mr. Donnelly's statements have been long ago as effectually refuted as the story of Shakespeare's relationship to Sir William Davenant; but I observed that when his opponents rose, no one of them was prepared to controvert his statements with hard facts, but each spoke in an

indefinite and weakly way, chiefly about his own opinions.

To bring forward these facts became my duty on the 23d of April, 1885, when I was asked to address the Shakespeare Club in the city of Washington. I care very little for adult people who are ignorant of what is now well known to every student of Shakespeare. It is true that of the books put forth by Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, Dr. Ingleby, and Mr. French, only small editions were printed, and the volumes are very expensive; but in this country, at least, the many public libraries furnish all sincere students with the opportunities needed.

It was to the young and untaught that I spoke. What I said was received with much enthusiasm, and I was asked by several of the best-read men whether I could not put it into a handbook which every child could buy.

This I am now trying to do.

1. Shakespeare's origin is said to have been obscure. He is sneered at as the son of a butcher.

I expect to show that his family took root in the yeomanry of England, and that on both sides it looked back upon a reputable history.

2. It is stated that his education was deficient, that he was taken early from school, and apprenticed to a butcher!

I expect to show, by the testimony of those who knew him, that his education was considered deficient only in a technical sense; also that his removal from school on account of his father's poverty is a deduction from circumstances which have been exaggerated; also that there is no proof that he was ever apprenticed to anybody; while it is much more likely to be true "that he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger dayes a schoolmaster in the countrie,"—a statement made by Aubrey in a manuscript of 1680, and never before quoted as having significance, so far as I know.

3. It is stated that his character was low and his companions of the baser sort.

I expect to show that for the age in which he lived, his character was remarkable for steadiness, moderation, and thrift, and that his intimates, so far as known to us, were of the best sort.

4. It has been stated that he was little known to his contemporaries.

I expect to show that he was widely known and much beloved. In a time when there was no newspaper and no magazine, when the modern "interviewer" had never been heard of, Dr. Ingleby finds one hundred and eighty-five references to Shakespeare on record within the century, and

fifty-seven of these were made during his lifetime. If we omit the testimony of the newspapers and magazines, if we remember how few people of his period could read and write, would Tennyson or Longfellow make a better showing?

5. The uncleanness of Stratford is brought forward in this discussion, as if to sustain the statement that Shakespeare was of low birth. Without pausing to argue the matter, I would suggest, that, in the reign of Elizabeth, London was as filthy as Stratford. The fresh rushes strewn daily over the floors of her Majesty's palace covered the worst abominations of the kennel and the pig-sty. If Southampton had ever gone down to New Place, he would have found nothing to astonish him. Among the early settlers of Massachusetts Bay, there were many men sprung, like Shakespeare, from the ranks of British yeomanry, and others of higher estate still, who crossed the ocean in search of fresh air and "faire water," where it might be possible to rear their infant children. These emigrants came not from Stratford but from Essex, Lincoln, Northumberland, and Devon.

As my outline of the Life of Shakespeare pretends to small originality, I have not paused to use quotation marks even when I use the very words of better authorities. My own individual specula-

tions I hope I have made sufficiently clear. I did not consider it necessary to incorporate into the *Life* the appearance in print of every Play. Those who desire to follow the public career of the poet will find ample material in the noble volumes of Halliwell-Phillipps. My first object was to give to the *Life* a mortal body; to show what sort of man the poet was as he walked through the world.

In the Appendix I have desired as far as possible to condense and abbreviate whatever I have quoted. I frequently reduce a page to a few lines, or a few lines to a phrase, but I have had no deliberate intention of altering words or their spelling. I have done this at times involuntarily, to simplify the understanding of them for young readers.

The scholar who for this cause complains of my method, will not be the student for whom these pages are written.

CAROLINE H. DALL.

1567 THIRTY-FIRST STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

May, 1885.