

On certain Modern Shakespeariana.¹

THE most generally esteemed of all writers on Shakespearian historical matters is, I suppose, the late Mr. Halliwell Phillipps; and the one especial quality of his writing which it is dangerous to dispute is that of accuracy. In all matters of purely antiquarian research this reputation is, so far as I am acquainted with his multifarious publications, thoroughly well deserved. His reprints of documents are mostly correct, *verbatim et literatim*; and he never introduces forged expressions or statements of his own concoction, though he freely uses and endorses those of his intimate friend, Mr. Collier. But when he ventures beyond this safe ground and attempts the higher duties of the biographer or historian, he plainly shows an incapacity to grasp more than minute details and absolute inability to co-ordinate his materials. As an instance, I will take his account of Shakespeare's proceedings in 1597. In p. 239 of his *Life of Shakespeare* (second edition), he speaks of him as being in the service of Lord Cobham in the spring of that year:—"Lord Cobham, under whom the poet then served," are his exact words. I do not wish to be hypercritical and will not press the minor points that actors, not poets, "served" under the patrons of theatrical companies, and that Cobham never was the patron of any such company known to history. I am content with the plain statement that Shakespeare was attached to Cobham's service at that date. In p. 88 of the same work we are told that "Shakespeare's company," after certain Court performances "made a tour through Sussex and Kent, visiting Rye in August and acting at Dover on the 3rd of September." This paragraph gave me much trouble. The dates of the Court performances, "New Year's Day, Twelfth Night, Shrove Sunday and Shrove Tuesday," are particularized by Mr. Phillipps, but he quotes no authority for them, and they are unknown to any antecedent writer on the subject. As, however, the only companies who performed at Court at that time were

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the Admirals' and Lord Hunsdon's, I had no doubt that Mr. Phillipps had unearthed some entry previously neglected concerning the latter company, of which Shakespeare was then a prominent member. But it was not till I came to p. 316 of this remarkable book that I found that the company which visited Rye, Dover, &c., was Pembroke's company, which never numbered Shakespeare among its actors at all, and which had, as I afterwards proved, been dislodged from the Curtain Theatre and gone a-travelling to make room for those very men of Lord Hunsdon's, Shakespeare's true company, with whom they are by Mr. Phillipps on this occasion confused. On p. 365, when Mr. Phillipps is arguing that *Romeo and Juliet* was acted by Hunsdon's men at the Curtain in 1597, he seems fully aware of this, because he wanted to support his interpretation of a line in Marston's *Satires*. At p. 88 it was more convenient to make Shakespeare a member of Pembroke's company, because this point was a necessary basis for his attribution to Shakespeare of the authorship of *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard Duke of York*—an absurd conclusion, which has been bolstered up by a transatlantic society.

This Cerberus personification of Shakespeare, as a member of Hunsdon's company in London, of Pembroke's on the Kentish coast, and of Cobham's at Kennaqhair, may here suffice as a sample of Mr. Phillipps' biographical work. I may add an illustration of his acquaintance with the contemporary dramatists. In 1860 he published a reprint of *The Doctors of Dullhead College*, being a droll formed out of the "lost play" of *The Father's own Son*; thirty copies only were printed, and these fetch high prices from collectors. The book, however, is worthless, the "lost play" being Fletcher's well-known *Monsieur Thomas*. How this first escaped the observation of careful and indefatigable Dyce, whose editions of the dramatists still remain the best we have (when untinkered by subsequent and incompetent hands), I cannot explain.

Next to Mr. Phillipps' *Life of Shakespeare*, the book most often referred to as an authority is Mr. Collier's *Annals of the Stage*. This unfortunate treatise has probably done more to confuse the minds of historical students than any other similar production. When I first pointed out the enormous number of erroneous statements in this work, I was received with a storm of abuse, which has not yet fully subsided. There are still distant rumblings audible in America.

In this country, however, the numerous forged documents included therein are now well recognized. And yet, even now, there is one large class of forgeries undealt with. Mr. Collier, among his numerous "discoveries" found MSS. of verse in considerable numbers—ballads, elegies, and the like, of which I will here mention one instance. In vol. i., p. 386, he gives us a spirited ballad on *The Wreckage of the Cockpit Theatre in Drury Lane*. This playhouse was occupied by the Lady Elizabeth's servants, and in the ballad a play (by Heywood), *The Fair Maid of the West*, is alluded to as one of the pieces performed there, which indeed it probably was. But other plays are also alluded to, Heywood's *Silver Age*, for instance, which belonged to Queen Anne's players of the *Red Bull*, and *Rollo*, written by Fletcher and others, which belonged to the King's men. Neither of these could possibly have been acted at the Cockpit. The ballad cannot be authentic. The question still remains: who wrote it? My lamented friend, Dr. Ingleby, who first directed my attention to this question, thought that Collier himself forged these spurious ballads, and adduced a volume of early poems published by him in evidence of his capacity to do so. I could not and cannot agree with him. That volume was poor stuff indeed, and many of the forgeries are cleverly versified, sometimes rising into genuine poesy, and in this very ballad I find evidence confirming me in my judgment. For the forger, along with his allusions to other plays by Heywood, introduces some to his *Iron Age*, in which Priam and Troilus are conspicuous characters; but Collier, in his note, entirely mistakes this and thinks that "this might be Shakespeare's play surreptitiously acted at the Cockpit," but admits that "possibly it was a different play on the same subject," evidently meaning Dekker and Chettle's *Troilus and Cressida*, which was acted at the Fortune. My inference is that Collier was not the forger, but the utterer, of these spurious documents. The name of Peter Cunningham might much more plausibly be appended to them. In any case, the multitudinous errors in this our only stage history of our early drama (I counted 2,000 and got tired of counting), prove that the most pressing necessity for students is the production of a trustworthy account of the histrionic details, without which any chronological study of this most important section of our literature is an impossibility.

This statement is conclusively confirmed by a study of Professor A. W. Ward's *History of Dramatic Literature*, a work which, if cleared of the inevitable errors induced by his being compelled to refer to Collier for his facts connected with the stage, would rank with the greater histories in the language. Its lucid style and the calm clear tone of its criticisms based on solid judgment and extensive reading, place this work in the foremost rank and I sincerely hope that it will not be re-edited until a trustworthy history of the stage shall have appeared, so that its otherwise almost faultless perfection may be cleared of this one defect.

Of subsidiary books I have small space to treat here. I had hoped to include the *Dictionary of National Biography* among the books worthy of commendation; but the lives of dramatic authors as yet included in it preclude such hope. They repeat the old errors and, where not founded on Dyce's excellent memoirs prefixed to his admirable editions, are misleading and incomplete.

One subsidiary book, which I can hardly pass over, because it has been forced into ephemeral notice by the extravagant praise of Mr. Phillipps, is *The Chronological order of Shakespeare's Plays*, by the Rev. H. P. Stokes. This gentleman's work will never suffer the condemnation of faint praise which it bestows on me; that of being "too ingenious"; it is rather too ingenuous in its wholesale adaptation of the baseless guesses of his master. He assumes, for instance, as known facts that Ecclestone and Gough were actors in *All's Well that Ends Well*; Cross in the *Comedy of Errors*; Rossil and Harvey in *Henry IV.*; simply because Mr. Phillipps had said so. 'It will be hardly believed that the sole foundation for these wild assertions is that the names Rossil and Harvey occur as prefixes in place of Bardolph and Peto, being evidently the names borne by those characters in the original version of the play, that S. Cro. is met with once as a misprint for S. Dro., i.e., Dromio of Syracuse, and that Ecclestone and Gough have been manufactured out of the Captains E. and G. of the drama. Yet so it is; and this one instance at once shows what *ignes fatui* (I adapt Mr. Phillipps' own words applied by him to my theories in his *Life of Shakespeare*) "have enticed" this "deluded traveller out of the beaten path into strange quagmires;" and the too ingenuous manner in which he was followed by his simple-minded pupil. But he has surpassed his master, who was

content with making Captain G. either Gough or Gilburne (is there not an M in Macedon and Monmouth?); he has made him into both Gough and Gilburne. See p. 196 of this remarkable book, which contains more errors than it does pages. One curious thing in the language of Mr. Halliwell Phillipps, above quoted, is the elegance of its metaphor. When an expression similar to that applied by him to me was directed against himself by Dr. Furnivall, he was up in arms at once, and applied to Robert Browning (of all people in the world), as President of the New Shakspeare Society, to make him hold his tongue. But he did not.

I do not here take note of *Primers* or other compilations; and have in conclusion only to ask your forbearance to one so many-wise unfitted to occupy the position with which I have been honoured on this occasion; but as old Shirley's Humorous Courtier would have said:

“I was ordained to be the man to talk
And have been craned up to this altitude.”

F. G. FLEAY.

