

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SHAKESPEARE.

An article appeared recently in 'Frazer's Magazine,' attempting to prove that Lord Bacon was the real author of Shakespeare's plays; and the question, strange to say, has attracted considerable attention. The American Press has lately devoted columns to the matter; and amongst its utterances we notice an article in the 'Boston Post,' headed, "Who was Shakesphere?" Into the merits of this question our limits forbid us to enter at length; but some of the running comments of our contemporary, which seem to endorse the sceptical side of the question, require correction. Here is one of the passages referred to:—

"We know absolutely nothing about him. We are more familiar with the lives of every literary man of his generation. Of Greene and Marlowe, of Masinger, and Ben Johnson, of Beaumont, Fletcher, and Southampt—nay, of the poets and historians of more than a century before—we have ample and satisfactory records. Of Shakespeare's life, in its most ordinary details, we have simply nothing; not a scrap of the manuscripts of his plays is extant; of his hand-writing there are but two bare signatures, "William Shakespeare," and not a line or dot more."

Now this as it stands is not true. Although we do not know all that may be desired about the life of William Shakespeare, we do know a great deal—as much, on the average, as of that of any literary man of his time, and very much more than of Philip Massinger, one of the names cited by our friend of the 'Post,' who apparently forgets that the only mortuary record left of Massinger was the touching entry in the parish register, "Phillip Massinger, a stranger."

Of Shakespeare, we do know the date of his birth, the name of his school and schoolmaster, the freaks of his boyhood, the probable period of his arrival in London—that he leased theatres there, and was *de facto* a man of substance and "no vagabond," that he published and dedicated two poems to Lord Southamptom (by the way, who is the Southampton our friend places among the literary men?) that he purchased property at Stratford and farmed land there by the agency of his brothers. We know, moreover, that he made his fortune and retired early on an income, as money goes with us to-day, of upwards of 10,000 dollars per annum, that he buried his son Hamnet, a boy of ten years of age, and had his two daughters, Susannah and Judith, married respectively. Finally, we are all familiar with his last will and testament (where his name is signed four or five times), and with the facts of his death, burial-place and tomb. We also emphatically deny that he was laughed at by his contemporaries.

It is true his rival Greene calls him "Shakescene," in an offensive and libellous pamphlet, which proves nothing but Shakespeare's popularity and Greene's exacerbation. He patronised Ben Johnson, instead of being patronised by the latter, as the 'Post' has it.

It was by him, in his capacity as stage manager, that Ben Johnson, who had tried bricklaying, soldiering and acting with no success, was introduced as a dramatist, and the fact does no little honor to his judgment. Ben and he were the two sovereign spirits that kept the "table in a roar" at the "Mermald," the celebrated club founded by Raleigh, and frequented by the choice spirits of that day. But let us hear what Ben Johnson, who knew him well and intimately as a man and an author, says of him:—

"Soul of the age!

The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!
My Shakespeare rise! I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further off, to make thee room!
Thou art a monument without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give!"

Sir William Davenant relates that Shakespeare received from Lord Southampton, on account of the dedication of his two poems, £1000, equal, probably, to five times the amount to-day—rather strong evidence, we apprehend, of his standing in the ranks of the poets. The same Sir William was willing to have it believed that he was Shakespeare's son, even at the expense of his mother's honor—another fact suggestive of inferences.

When Archbishop Whately wrote his "Historic Doubts of the Existence of Napoleon Buonaparte," he admirably satirised the sceptical march of our century. Where will incredulity end? Did Columbus discover America? Newton, attraction? Harvey, the circulation of the blood? Morse, the electric telegraph? The negative of every one of these facts is capable of elaborate argumentation; and of such negatives are new theories made. The question of Bacon *vs.* Shakespeare is one for a literary expert. There is, we apprehend, sufficient internal evidence in the acknowledged composition of each to put the question of their dissimilarity or identity beyond a doubt. A great poet and critic has summed up Shakespeare's style thus: "All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily. Those who accuse him of having wanted learning give him the greater commendation. He needed not the spectacles of books to read nature." Is this true of Shakespeare, and if so, does it hold with regard to the elaborate Lord Bacon?—'Pilot.'

MARVELS OF MEMORY.

We have most of us heard of Joseph Scaliger, who learned the twice twenty-four books of the Iliad and Odyssey in three weeks; of Avicenna, who repeated by heart the whole of the Koran at the age of ten; of Lipsius, who was willing to recite the histories of Tacitus word for word, giving any one leave to plunge a dagger into his body if he made a mistake—an idle license, for few would have cared to run the resultant risk; of the youth of Corsica of good appearance, mentioned by Muretus, who recited all the barbarous words the latter had written till he was tired of writing, and stopped at last, as it was necessary to go somewhere, while the youth, like Oliver, asked for more

"Certainly," says Muretus, "he was no boaster, and he told me could repeat in that way thirty-six thousand words. For my own part, I made trial of him after many days, and found what he said true." This Corsican, as those others, was no doubt of a soul disdainful silver and gold, or he might have made his fortune by offering his services to an emperor. Of Francis Suarez, who after the witness of Strada, could quote the whole of Augustine (the father's works would fill a small library), from the egg to the apple. Of Dr. Thomas Fuller, who could name in order all the signs on both sides of the way from Pater-noster Row at Ave Maria Lane to the bottom of Cheapside to Stock's market, now the Mansion House. Of Magliabecchi, whose name is pleasantly and permanently associated with spiders and the proof of the lost MS. Of William Lyon, who for a bowl of punch—a liquor of which he was exceedingly fond—repeated a "Daily Advertiser," in the morning, which he had read once only, and then in the course of a debauch overnight. We might extend this paper far beyond its normal dimensions by mention of such names as Jadediah Buxton, who, if his witness be true, could, by some strange mnemotechny of his own, multiply thirty-nine figures by thirty-nine without paper, and amused himself, when at the theatre, by a compilation of the words used by Garrick, and at another time by that of the pots of beer drank during twelve years of his life; of Zerah Colburn, a mere child, of whom there remains on record a testimony that he could tell the number of seconds in fifty-eight years in less time than the question could be written down; or of that prodigy of parts, Pascal, who is said to have forgotten nothing thought, read, or done during his rational age. "This," says the author of the essay on the "Conduct of the Human understanding," "is a thing so wholly inconsistent with our experience of human nature, that to doubt it is no reprehensible stretch of scepticism."—'The Cornhill Magazine.'

JOHN MITCHEL'S DAUGHTER.

It may not be generally known that the eldest daughter of this illustrious Irishman was received into the Catholic Church, and died in that faith. In his "Journal," under date Choisy-le-roi, January, 30, 1861, Mr Mitchel thus records her conversion and subsequent death at Paris:—

"Our eldest daughter Henrietta, has this winter become a Catholic. It was no new whim on her part; for, long since, while we were living at Washington, she had formed the same wish, very strongly influenced, as I suppose, by her intimacy with two young ladies of a Maryland Catholic family who were our next-door neighbors. I know, also, that she was greatly influenced by her very strong Irish feelings, and had a kind of sentiment that one cannot be thoroughly Irish without being Catholic. For that time, however, we had objected to any public step being taken in that direction. She was too young to have duly studied the question and to know her own mind thoroughly; but I said that if, after two or three years, she should still entertain the same wish, I would not utter one word to dissuade her. Since our arrival in France, she has been placed at school in the convent of the *Sacree Cœur*, and has become greatly attached to one of the good ladies of the house, Madame D—, a very excellent and accomplished woman. This condition of things was not calculated to abate her Catholic zeal; and, in short, the time came when my poor daughter declared that she must be a Catholic; could not live without being a Catholic. I did not think her parents had the right, and, indeed, they had not the disposition to cross her wish any farther. So, on a certain day, she and another young lady were to be baptized in the chapel of the convent. The Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Morlot, heard of it, and wrote to the reverend mother of the house to the effect that, as several conversions of Protestant pupils which had lately taken place in the convents had given rise to imputations of undue influence and conversion by *surprise*, as it were, and had afterwards given umbrage to the relatives, he should require that, before any further steps were taken, I should be asked for a written consent. For this acquiescence I was most earnestly blamed by some of my connections in the North of Ireland, who wrote to me, urging that I ought to exert my authority to stop such an apostacy. What would they have had me to do? Shut up my daughter in her room, and give her the Westminster Confession to read! How should I like this usage myself? Here was a girl of nineteen, full of intelligence and spirit, gentle and affectionate; who had never given to her father or mother one moment's uneasiness upon her account, deliberately declaring that she desired to embrace the faith of her forefathers. In short, I believe that I acted aright. For the short remainder of her days she lived a devout Catholic—and so died. She lies buried in the cemetery of Mont Parnasse.

The Roman correspondent of the 'Boston Pilot' writes the following with reference to the arch-conspirator Garibaldi:—"The Caprera exile furnishes a striking example of the force of the public voice. That man has been made a hero by the power of newspaper writing. No one knows particularly of any great act of personal daring accomplished by Garibaldi, and yet journalism has wreathed a laurel crown around his gloomy brows. Successful as a conspirator he entered Sicily and Naples when the way was prepared for him, and he appeared in the vicinity of Rome in 1867, when he strove to seize the city by force of conspiracy. Song writers and republican journalists cry him up as a demi-god, and fools accept him as such. He is ill, with no one seems to know what, and republican affection is made sad at the news. Rome must send him a doctor; does not Rome love him as a father? The new Syndic Venturi telegraphs immediately to know shall he send a doctor. There is no answer. Consternation sits upon Municipal faces; and Venturi is censured for not having sent the doctor first. Two days pass; an answer comes, and the city governors are so glad that they cannot contain their joy: they spread the news on large posters throughout the city. The hero is better and thanks Rome for every thing. Grateful hero, wonderful municipality. The panegyrics prepared for the death of the great Garibaldi are returned to their pigeon-holes, and the world is saved from a deluge of lies for some time longer.