

SHAKESPEARE v. SHAKESPEARE

(née Ann Cooke), was sister to Sir William Cecil's wife (Lady Burleigh); from fourteen onwards the Earl of Oxford was a member of the Cecil household; on his marriage with Ann Cecil (1571) he became first cousin by marriage to the young Francis Bacon. All their lives they moved in Cecil surroundings: both by Lord Burleigh's influence were entered as law students at Gray's Inn, both from time to time held chambers there Both travelled on the Continent, and had contact with the Court of France—Oxford from 1575 to 1576, Bacon from 1576 to 1579.' And so on. So much of the evidence which seems to favour an aristocratic authorship of the plays could apply to either one or the other.

Perhaps the most intriguing theory is the 'group theory'. According to Gibert Standen's little book on *Shakespeare Authorship*, already referred to, this was put forward by Delia Bacon, who suggested, besides Francis Bacon, the Earl of Oxford and others as authors of the plays. The idea has gained ground lately, chiefly through the work of Colonel B. R. Ward and the members of the 'Shakespeare Fellowship', a society formed to unite those 'who desire to see the principles of scientific and historical criticism applied to the problem of Shakespeare authorship'. Briefly, the idea is that the plays, the historical plays in particular—were propaganda put out to keep up the national morale during the struggle with Spain, and were the work of a group which had the Earl of Oxford at the head, and included Bacon, the Earl of Derby, and Shakspeare the actor. The latter is supposed to have replaced Marlowe in the group after Marlowe's death in 1593. It is known, of course, that Marlowe was engaged in Secret Service work, and it has been discovered from Elizabethan Exchequer documents that Oxford was receiving about £1000 a year for many years from a secret fund. The name 'Shakespeare' is presumed to have been chosen because its war-like suggestion of 'shaking a speare' at the enemy fitted with the name of a real person who could pass as the author. This exciting theory with its suggestion of secret service and its gathering up of all the claimants into a group, should give satisfaction all round, but is unlikely to please either the ardent Baconians