BLADES WILLIAM

SHAKSPERE & TYPOGRAPHY

William Blades
Shakspere & Typography

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Shakspere & Typography:

Содержание

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The INTRODUCTION

In the good old days when printing was better recognized as a mystery than as an art, one could call a printer 'a man of letters' without being guilty of a pun. Books were for the few then, and the man who would print them must be somewhat of a scholar himself.

To-day, amid the whirr of many presses, and the hurrying to and fro of the printing office, the printer finds little or no time for literary pursuits, despite the fact that printing is, in very truth, the handmaid of literature. It is the more admirable, therefore, when a successful printer attains to a degree of scholarship – particularly scholarship in matters that enlighten and dignify his own handicraft.

Such a printer was *William Blades*. During fifty years of active business life he contributed to the history of printing, a goodly number of books and a mass of miscellaneous articles. Among these is the most complete and authoritative life of Caxton, England's first printer, representing an immense amount of study and research.

The book from which the following pages are reprinted is

perhaps the least familiar of Blades' works, and it evidently was written as a literary recreation. The thought that reading it may afford recreation to those busied about the making of books, and the comparative scarcity of the only edition, are the excuses for reprinting the more interesting portion.

The first chapter (merely a resumé of the theories that have been advanced by various professions and callings to claim Shakspere for their own) has been omitted; likewise the appendix, which is a suggestion that many of the obscurities in the text of Shakspere may be cleared up by a study of the typographical errors in the first editions. With these exceptions, the work is given here entire, and, it is hoped, in such form as accords with the spirit of the author, whose tastes were those of the scholarly printer.

Editorial Dept.
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The PREFACE

The First Chapter of this Tractate is designed to show, in a succinct manner, the numerous and contradictory theories concerning Shakspere's special knowledge, the evidence for which has been created by 'selecting' certain words and phrases from the mass of his writings.

The Second and Third Chapters, erected on a similar basis of 'selection', are intended to prove that Shakspere had an intimate and special knowledge of Typography.

Old Printers can still call to mind that period of our history when a stalwart Pressman, on his way to work, ran considerable risk in the streets of London of being seized by another kind of pressmen, viz., the Press-gang, and forced nolens volens *into the service of the King. Some readers (not Printers) may think that I have exercised over quotations from Shakspere's works a similar compulsion, by pressing into my service passages whose bearing is by no means in a typographical direction. They may even go so far as to strain somewhat the self-accusation of Falstaff (Henry IV, iv, 2), and bring against me the charge that*

> I have misused the King's press most damnably, by printing such evidences.

I can only reply that if, notwithstanding a careful consideration of the proofs here laid before him, the reader should consider my

case 'not proven', I must submit with all humility to his penetration and judgment.

At the same time, since my proofs that Shakspere was a Printer are at least quite as conclusive as the evidence brought forward by others to demonstrate that he was Doctor, Lawyer, Soldier, Sailor, Catholic, Atheist, Thief, I would claim as a right that my opponent, having rejected my theory that he was a Printer, should be consistent, and at once, reject all theories which attribute to him special knowledge, and repose upon the simple belief that Shakspere, the Actor and Playwright, was a man of surpassing genius, of keen observation, and never-failing memory.

W. B.

I. SHAKSPERE IN THE PRINTING OFFICE

In November, 1589, the company acting at the Blackfriars Theatre thought it would be advantageous to their interests to send in to the Privy Council a memorial, certifying that they had never given cause of displeasure by introducing upon the stage 'matters of State or Religion'. The actors who signed this memorial styled themselves 'Her Majesty's Poor Players', and among them appears the name of William Shakspere. We here meet the Poet's name for the first time after he had left his home at Stratford-on-Avon, about four years previously. What his employment had been in the intervening period is a question which few of his biographers have cared to ask, and which not one has answered.

It is usually supposed that immediately upon his arrival in London he became in some way associated with the Stage, – but there is no evidence of this. On the contrary, we shall give reasons for believing that coming to London poor, needy, and in search of employment, he was immediately taken into the service of Vautrollier the Printer.

Thomas Vautrollier, entitled in his patents 'typographus Londinensis, in claustro vulgo Blackfriers commorans', was a Frenchman who came to England at the commencement

of Queen Elizabeth's reign. He was admitted a brother of the Stationers' Company in 1564, and commenced business as Printer and Publisher in Blackfriars, working in the same premises up to the time of his death, which occurred in 1588. His character as a scholar stands high, and his workmanship is excellent. He had a privilege, or monopoly, for the printing and sale of certain books, as all the chief Printers then had. Shortly before his death he married his daughter to Richard Field, who for this reason, and because he succeeded to the premises and business of the widow, is erroneously supposed by Ames to have served his apprenticeship to Vautrollier. But why bring in the name of Richard Field? The reply is important. Field was Shakspere's own townsman, and being of about the same age and social rank, the boys probably grew up together as playfellows. Field's father, Henry Field, was a Tanner at Stratford-on-Avon, and Halliwell says 'a friend of Shakspere's family'. Early in 1578 young Field came up to London, and at Michaelmas was apprenticed for seven years to George Bishop, Printer and Publisher. Being in the same trade as Vautrollier, Field would naturally become acquainted with him; and in 1588, a year after he was out of his time, he married Vautrollier's daughter. Here, then, we seem to have a missing link supplied in the chain of Shakspere's history. In 1585 Shakspere came up to London in a 'needy' state. To whom would he be more likely to apply than to his old playmate Richard Field. Field, a young man nearly out of his apprenticeship, on terms of intimacy

with Vautrollier, could do nothing better than recommend him to the father of his future wife. Once introduced we may be sure that Shakspere, with his fund of wit and good humour, would always be a welcome guest; and that this friendly feeling was maintained between him and the Vautrollier-Field families receives confirmation from the fact that Richard Field, who succeeded to the shop and business soon after the death of his father-in-law, actually put to press the two first printed works of the great Poet, the 'Venus and Adonis', 1593, and the 'Lucrece', 1594.

Here then, in Vautrollier's employ, perhaps as a Press-reader, perhaps as an Assistant in the shop, perchance as both, we imagine Shakspere to have spent about three years upon his first arrival in the metropolis. Placed thus in Blackfriars, close to the Theatre, close to the Taverns, close to the Inns of Court, and in what was then a fashionable neighbourhood, Shakspere enjoyed excellent opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of men and manners.

Field did not succeed Vautrollier immediately upon his death. His widow endeavoured for some time to carry on the business alone; but for some unknown reason the Stationers' Company withheld their license; and after a fruitless effort to obtain it, she was succeeded by her son-in-law. These business changes would probably be the occasion of which Shakspere eagerly availed himself to join the Players at the neighbouring theatre.

The Sonnets, although not printed until 1609, are generally

acknowledged to be among Shakspere's earliest efforts, and we cannot help imagining that Sonnet XXIV was written while in the employment of Vautrollier; or at any rate, while the shop, hung round with prints, was fresh in the Poet's memory. May be some of their warmth was inspired by the charms of the buxom widow herself who was apostrophised by the Poet when wishing her

> To find where your true image *pictured* lies,
> Which in my bosom's *shop* is hanging still,
> That hath his *windows* glazed with thine eyes.
>
> *Sonnet xxiv.*

At any rate, we have here in three lines as many metaphors, and all derived from just such employment as we suppose Shakspere at that time to have been engaged in.

Then, again, to a Printer's widow, not over young, what more telling than the following reference?

> Or what strong hand can hold Time's swift foot back?
> Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
> O, none, unless this miracle have might,
> That in *black ink* my love may still shine bright.
>
> *Sonnet lxvi.*

Note here, that the jet black ink which everybody admires in old manuscripts was much too thick for a running hand, and had long been superseded by a writing fluid which, in the 16th

century, was far from equalling the bright gloss of Printing Ink.

Before turning to the internal evidence supplied by Shakspere's writings in support of our theory, let us glance at the list of works printed and published by Vautrollier, and see if Shakspere reflected any trace of their influence upon his mind.

From Herbert's 'Typographical Antiquities' we find that in the 'Shop' would be the two following works:

> *A brief Introduction to Music. Collected by P. Delamote, a Frenchman; Licensed.*
> *London, 8vo., 1574.*

> *Discursus Cantiones; quæ ab argumento sacræ vocantur, quinque et sex partivm. Autoribus Thoma Tallisio et Guilielmo Birdo. Cum Privilegio.*
> *London, oblong quarto, 1575.*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.