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An American Scholar Restores Shakespeare His Character

Professor Wallace's Remarkable Analysis of 3,000,000 Documents Which Prove The Immortal Bard Never To Have Been A Roistering, Reckless Profligate And Shows Just Where His Famous Theatre Stood:

PROFESSOR CHARLES WILLIAM WALLACE, of the University of Nebraska, has made a remarkable series of discoveries in London which throw new light on Shakespeare's character. They prove the poet to have been a good citizen, who took a kindly interest in all who were associated with him. They also show that he was a man of high standing in the community, looked up to by private persons and officials alike. They dispose of the ancient legends that he was a reckless roisterer who spent his days and nights in bibulous carousing with fellow poets and neglected his social and civic duties.

Documents examined by Professor Wallace establish beyond question the site of the Globe Theatre, which was built by Shakespeare and his associates. This is a matter which has generally been misunderstood by English authors and students of Shakespeare.

In the course of his investigations, Professor Wallace, assisted by his wife, has examined nearly 3,000,000 documents in the Public Record Office of London. He is now generally regarded as the highest living authority on the events of Shakespeare's life. He has found hundreds of documents mentioning Shakespeare's name which no modern investigator has ever seen. Shakespearean scholars have engaged in endless discussions about the poet, but it was too much labor to resort to that endless mine of original information, the Public Record Office.

So thorough have been Professor Wallace's labors that he has examined the records of the Sewer Commission for the Counties of Kent and Surrey since 1599 down to recent times, in order to establish the exact site of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

Of most human interest are Professor Wallace's researches into the private life of Shakespeare. People have always shown a strong tendency to dwell on the moral shortcomings of Shakespeare, which they kindly suggest must be overlooked on account of the greatness of his genius. Everybody recalls that he was punished for deer stealing in the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, near Stratford-on-Avon, in his youth, and that as a result of this and perhaps other similar episodes he was sent away from home in disgrace. More importance has been attached to these episodes than they warrant, for doubtless they were innocent outbreaks of high-spirited youth.

Then there is a strangely persistent impression that



Shakespeare Reading "Hamlet" to Queen Elizabeth and Her Court. An Indication of the High Esteem in Which He Was Held.

Shakespeare, while in London, was a heavy drinker. There is no doubt that many of the Elizabethan poets drank deeply, and several of them, like Christopher Marlowe and Robert Greene, came to a tragic end in consequence of reckless living. The amount of liquor they consumed at the Mermaid Tavern and other resorts seems to have been very large. Undoubtedly Shakespeare formed one of this merry company occasionally. There were no clubs or literary societies in those days, and the only place where a poet could meet his friends and unburden his soul was a tavern or inn. It is indeed curious to find how the drinking tradition clings to Shakespeare's name. The site of the house he occupied when he was lessee of the Globe Theatre is now occupied by a saloon or "public house," as the English now call a tavern. The site which English literary men have wrongly selected as that of the Globe Theatre is a modern brewery. All over the country there are inns called "The Shakespeare's Head."

Now, all Professor Wallace's minute researches have

tended to discredit these old prejudices and old legends, and to establish a splendid moral character for the world's greatest dramatist. The manner in which Shakespeare exerted himself to bring about a marriage between Mary Mountjoy, his landlord's daughter, and young Stephen Bellott, with whom she had had a misunderstanding, shows his kindness of heart and good moral principles. Again and again the records show the remarkably high esteem in which he was held by public officials in Southwark, self-important persons, who would certainly have had no consideration for a disreputable poet or play-actor. Professor Wallace lays stress on a document left by the commissioners appointed to make an investigation on the estate of Sir Thomas Brend, the deceased owner of the land on which the Globe Theatre stood. This report speaks of the site as being in the occupation of "William Shakespeare and others."

"This," writes Professor Wallace, "may fairly be taken as an incidental recognition of Shakespeare's eminence among

official residents of the immediate neighborhood. The commissioners lived there, close to the 'glory of the Bank' as Ben Jonson called the Globe, and knew the theatre and the genius that presided in it. They were all men of standing, who apparently knew Shakespeare so well for his plays that his name obscured the names of his associates. It was to them, indeed, Shakespeare's theatre. Their source of information was not simply the deeds, none of which thus singles out Shakespeare. It is as if they said:

"We, the undersigned, personally know William Shakespeare, the dramatist, as the most eminent man among the company who have recently built the Globe Playhouse in our midst."

The American scholar then calls attention to a deed of Oct. 7, 1601, which he has found. In this, Nicholas Brend, heir of Sir Thomas, conveys the theatre site in trust to certain persons as security for a debt. The description mentions only "Richard Burbidge and William Shakespeare gent" as tenants of "the playhouse," the dramatist and the principal actor of his plays thus both overshadowing the rest of the company—even the men who conducted the business affairs of the theatre.

"William Shakespeare gent!" That quaint, naive phrase is eloquent of the high position the bard held, in Professor Wallace's opinion. It means that he was accorded the social rank of a gentleman, which was a considerable distinction in the Elizabethan age. That a playwright and actor, of a calling that had hitherto been classed with vagabonds, should receive this distinction is particularly remarkable.

Chief among the documents that establish the exact and unquestionable location of the Globe Theatre is the lease of February 21, 1599, by Nicholas Brend, the landlord, and by Shakespeare and four associates, as lessees.

In brief, this lease establishes the fact that the Globe Theatre was just south of the Bankside, with Dead Man's Place on the east, Horseshoe Alley on the west and Maiden Lane on the south. The Bankside was the name of the southern bank of the Thames, in Southwark, just south of the City of London, a location near to the heart of the city, but cheap and not desired for dwelling purposes. It must have been a horrible spot, a stretch of mud surrounded by open sewers, a fact mentioned by Ben Jonson.

Proving the site of the Globe to be on the north side of Maiden Lane completely discredits the site which now bears an imposing inscription declaring that Shakespeare's theatre stood there. This memorial was placed on the wall of a brewery on the south side of Maiden Lane about four years ago. Sir Beerboom Tree, Sir James M. Barrie and some of the leading actors, playwrights and public men of England took part in the solemn ceremony of erroneously honoring the brewery.

Professor Wallace has found many entries in the records of the Sewer Commission that prove the location of the theatre. For instance, here is one showing very plainly that it was on the north side of Maiden Lane, sometimes called "Maid Lane":

It is Ordered that Burbidge and Heminges and others, the owners of the Playhouse called the Globe in Maiden Lane shall before the xxth day of April next pull up and take cleane out of the Sewar the props or postes wch stand vnder their bridge on the North side of Mayd-lane vpon paine to forf (elt).

This quaint little entry in itself means much to the student of the Elizabethan drama. It shows that the audiences of Shakespeare's theatre had to enter the building by crossing a bridge passing over an open sewer. Other disagreeable experiences awaited them, but they were a robust class. Most of them were herded in the pit of the theatre, where they drank and fought. Noblemen and other persons of quality sat on the stage, while the prosperous occupants of the galleries enjoyed the opportunity of throwing things at the mob in the pit and sometimes at the stage. We must not doubt, however, that many of this hardy race were inspired by high thoughts, for here they listened to "Hamlet" and to nearly all the immortal Shakespeare's plays.

Young Shakespeare Brought Before Magistrate Lucy for Deer Stealing. One of the Episodes That Have Been Used to Give the Poet a Profligate Character. Painting by A. Schröder.



The Curious Mulberry Wood Statuette of Shakespeare, the Only Known Contemporary Portrait. It Was Made by Gerard Johnson, Who Lived a Few Doors from the Globe Theatre When Shakespeare Was Manager.