

ly infer that he received what we may call a fair common school education; that after leaving Stratford, he passed several years in humble circumstances, rising at length to the position of a successful stage manager. But to maintain that the shrewd man of business who controlled the Globe theatre, was the sole author of the Shakespearian plays, is a task that presents many difficulties.

Can we assume that Shakespeare had sufficient qualifications for the work of writing these plays? That he received more than the rudiments of an education at the Stratford school rests on insufficient grounds. A third of England's population is to-day illiterate, and at that time the proportion was doubtless much larger. Public libraries were then scarce, and circulating libraries quite unknown. And, further, boys did not commence to attend school so soon as they do now, and Shakespeare, as we have already seen, married at an early age. It is probable, therefore, that the facilities of the Stratford school were very ordinary, even for the sixteenth century, and that Shakespeare's school days were few in number and soon ended. It is, moreover, under the circumstances we have just mentioned, a rather far-fetched argument which would assume, that in a small village like Stratford, there was any note-worthy degree of culture to encourage the literary ambition that Shakespeare is assumed to have had.

We have said that the author of the plays was necessarily a man of varied and profound acquirements; but where is the positive proof that Shakespeare was an accomplished scholar? If we freely admit that he was by nature a great genius, he difficulty will not all be removed. His portraiture of scenes in ancient Greece and Rome would then have been ideal and not true to nature. Without the aid of a vast fund of information, no one, despite the character of his native abilities, could have entertained such broad and comprehensive views of humanity, appli-

cable to all ages, and, we might add, to all people, as are embodied in the Shakespearian plays.

But, it may well be asked, why should one try to disturb the presumptive evidence in favor of Shakespeare's claim? Until within the last thirty years, but few doubts were advanced. Let us illustrate. When a drama is acted nowadays, playbills are distributed among the audience. Sometimes, but not always, the author's name is seen on them. We are often in complete ignorance, therefore, as to what person wrote the play we are about to see acted. In Shakespeare's time still less was known. It does not appear that playbills were circulated in the Globe theatre, and daily newspapers, with their dramatic columns, did not exist. If Shakespeare wished to have the writings considered his own, there were few who could question his claim.

Who then, wrote these plays if Shakespeare did not? It is doubtful if this question can ever be answered. Perhaps Bacon wrote them; perhaps Raleigh: or, again, they may have been the work of several persons. Most of those who doubt Shakespeare's claim, lean to the opinion that Sir Francis Bacon was the real author. His writings teem with thought; so do the Shakespearian plays, especially those of a later date. If, in other respects, a dissimilarity of style is noticeable, the objection may be met by the reasonable assumption that the plays were altered to adapt them to the stage. If Bacon wrote them, he cared little, we may presume, as to their disposition. It was not his forte to clothe philosophy in the garb of fiction. He wrote for pay, and the prosperous stage manager would have been a ready purchaser of his writings.

One more question arises; what was Shakespeare's relation to these works if he was not the author? He was a stage manager merely, like those of to-day. It was his business to find plays that would prove popular to those who frequented