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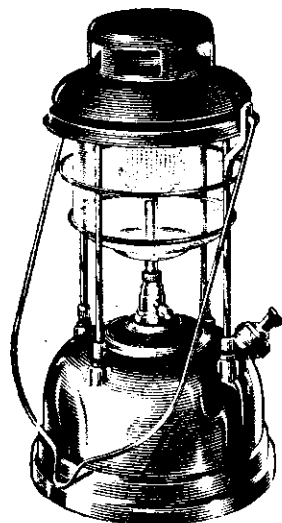
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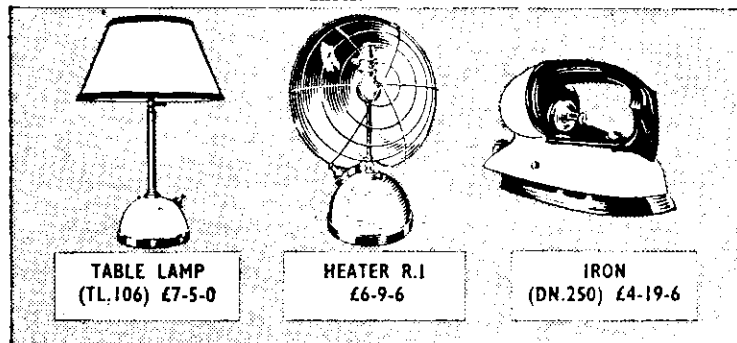


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## BOOKS

# Who Was Shakespeare?

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS BETTERS, by R. C. Churchill; Max Reinhardt, English price 21/-.

(Reviewed by F. J. Foot)

NEW ZEALAND is unique (I believe) in not having produced a book on the Baconian theory. The first printed claim that Bacon was Shakespeare was made in the 18th century in England, but the discussion soon crossed the Atlantic and after 1850 we have a flood of books. New York, San Francisco, Detroit, Philadelphia and Denver, Colorado were heard from. As to the other English-speaking countries, Canada was there in 1875, Australia in 1878, India in 1915, South Africa 1927. Frenchmen were early and enthusiastic contributors, evidently unimpressed by Voltaire's acid dictum on the Bard: "I was the first who showed to the French a few pearls which I had found in his enormous dunghill. I did not expect that what I had done would one day be used in assisting to trample under foot the crowns of Corneille and Racine and to place them on the brow of a barbarous mountebank."

Nor were the French deterred by the fact that a complete translation of Shakespeare had not (and has not yet) appeared. Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Denmark all followed. There are over 5000 books in all. Sweden was there by 1883. In the same year the Serbian V. Ilijc published his *Sekspir ili Bekon*. There are several books in Polish. Once in the Army I shared a tent with a Pole who was a fervent Baconian. The difficulty is that distrust of his arguments is inextricably mingled in my mind with the reaction to his pronunciation of the Poet's name as "Shekkerspiary." I am fairly sure he gave me to understand that this is correct usage in Poland.

England soon produced a Baconian club. (Englishmen always have a club for everything just as they all keep dogs.) This club or society sponsors books by Baconians. A brief history of these works and activities is set out in the first part of Mr Churchill's book without comment; the second criticises the main theories.

The Orthodox, among whom our author is to be included (that is, the people who believe that an actor-playwright named William Shakespeare lived at Stratford-on-Avon and wrote the plays) were at first relieved to find that the Baconian heretics were violently at odds with each other. There broke off numerous coteries (most of which still exist) claiming that the plays (or the sonnets) were written by Robert Cecil, the Earl of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Sir Philip Sidney, Drayton, Dekker, Green, Daniel, Nashe, Lodge, Kyd, Griffin, the Earls of Derby, Oxford, Southampton, Pembroke and Rutland; Munday, Webster, Chettle, Heywood, Porter, Middleton, Fletcher and Wilson, or some or all of them in teams. I believe I've said Fletcher twice. Splinter groups formed on the lunatic fringe, attributing authorship to Anthony Bacon (the brother), Anne Hathaway, Patrick O'Toole of Ennis, the Countess of Pembroke, and the Jesuits, and claiming Bacon also wrote Don Quixote and Shakespeare was the creator of Free Masonry. Some said Shakespeare was a lawyer since the plays



"Two authors claim him as an Irishman"

show an intimate knowledge of the law and on this question the lawyers have profoundly disagreed. Lord Penzance, Lord Campbell, Judge Webb of New York, Mr Crump, Q.C., formerly Editor of the *Law Times*, and many others have had a shot. Some of them said he had no knowledge of law, others that Portia's pleading in the Merchant of Venice showed knowledge of Italian but not English law. Some of these lawyers are Baconian, some Orthodox and some lunatic.

Where were we? Oh yes. There is also Shakespeare's seamanship and his knowledge of travel. Both are said to be phenomenal when they are not being represented as non-existent, and the same may be said of his military acumen, his political sagacity, his grace as a courtier and his fluency in French. At least two authors claim him as an Irishman. His knowledge of Latin is lauded and derided. Some say he knew none because it's all rather well done and therefore he must have mugged it up.

With all this Mr Churchill deals most gracefully, wittily and well. Alas, however, for the hopes of the Orthodox from these divisions. While the heretics fought each other with a venom unparalleled in any controversy other than theological, they were ready (and still are) to fall on and tear the Orthodox at the slightest suggestion of resuming Conformity; and their vigour and rancour showed (and shows) no diminution from their own divisions.

It may be noted that two Orthodox books have appeared in English since Mr Churchill's, short as is the time. There is the important *Shakespeare Retrouvé* by the Comtesse de Chambrun now translated into English for the first time and available in New Zealand despite the book shortage (or perhaps because we become more discriminating). There is also the current best-seller in New York on the Baconian cyphers by Colonel and Mrs William F. Friedman. They are both professional cryptanalysts. The Colonel contributed the article on cryptology to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He also broke the Japanese code after Pearl Harbour and was awarded 100,000 dollars by Congress for services which, a Congressional Committee declared, "shortened the war and

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 1, 1958.