

Western Mystagogue

Why should I bother writing about the great Huntington Library in Los Angeles-- it is so prominent that you probably know all about it-- when I can tell you about my own library discovery. I found it just a few feet away from my bedroom at the Claremont Faculty Club, and the strange thing is that a good fraction of the faculty doesn't know it is there. It is a little library assembled for the express purpose of fostering the theory that the works of Shakespeare were written by Bacon. Now Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and we know who he was (or do we?), and Bacon was Francis Bacon, essayist, philosopher, and Lord Chancellor of England.

The library is housed in a tiny building and consists of a collection of Baconiana, Elizabethiana, and working from there, of English literature and history

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quite generally. I had never heard of the Francis Bacon Library and I wandered in tentatively and signed the guest register. I found the reading room marvellously comfortable and attractive, a fine place to relax, and I knew I would be back every day while I was in Claremont.

I thought that my credentials as an Elizabethan scholar were a bit weak, though I could have faked it by asking for their holdings on Dr. Simon Forman and the Dark Lady, so I did not ask to see what they had under glass or behind bars and merely browsed in the open shelves. The books on the shelf were heavy on the literature and social scene of the Tudor period, and heavy also on certain topics that one would not have expected in a small library: ciphers, cryptography, Rosicrucianism, the Occult. The thought came to me gradually that here was a library dedicated to the purpose I mentioned a moment ago. I suggested as much to the librarian and she lit up like a forest fire but did not withdraw the hospitality of the place.

I spent a number of happy hours in that library during my week in Claremont. Whenever I would restore a book to the shelf, the sublibrarian would come up to me and gently remind me to leave it on the table. Was this to insure that the book would not be misfiled?

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No, she answered, it was to provide a record of the books that had been consulted.

In the Bacon, I discovered a new author, for me at least, whose works are well worth keeping on the night table. I discovered George Borrow, a mid-Victorian traveller, linguist and eccentric who liked to pretend that he was a Gypsy. Read "The Bible in Spain" or "Lavengro" for a vivid description of people and places and especially of gypsy life.

I never penetrated the mystery of the Bacon Library while on location in Claremont, I was too busy browsing in it. The Bacon-Shakespeare connection simmered on my back burner. Much can be done at a distance. In fact, distance can be useful in that it protects the amateur from being overwhelmed by primary material. You know my methods, Watson. Several months later, after I had returned East, I brought the Francis Bacon Library within the view of my telescope.

I recalled that the library had been established by a wealthy individual whose name I had forgotten. The Directory of American Libraries reminded me. The Francis Bacon Library is built around the collection of a man by the name of Walter Conrad Arensberg. I proceeded to bring Arensberg under microscopic focus.

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A few minutes spent with Who Was Who produced the crucial information. Walter Conrad Arensberg was born in Pittsburgh in 1878, graduated from Harvard in 1900, and was President of the Francis Bacon Foundation. He was the author of

The Cryptography of Dante, 1921

The Cryptography of Shakespeare, 1922

The Secret Grave of Francis Bacon at

Lichfield, 1923

Baconian Keys, 1927

The Shakespearean Mystery, 1928

The Magic Ring of Francis Bacon, 1930

The Skeleton Text of the Shakespeare Folio,
1952.

And there you have it, folks, the works of a mystagogue. From past experience I knew that this kind of book was low yield ore, and I didn't pursue them any further.

Before dropping the man entirely, I went to the Twenty Year Report of the Harvard Class of Ought Ought to see what Arensberg said about himself. Not very much. He had been a Section Man in English at Harvard for several years and had been art critic for the New York Evening Post. During World War I he worked in Washington for a Committee on Neurology and Psychiatry of the

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National Research Council.

Somewhere along the line the Bacon Bug bit him and sixty years later, this, in turn, led me to the discovery of George Borrow.



The author reaches the shores of the Pacific and looks East.