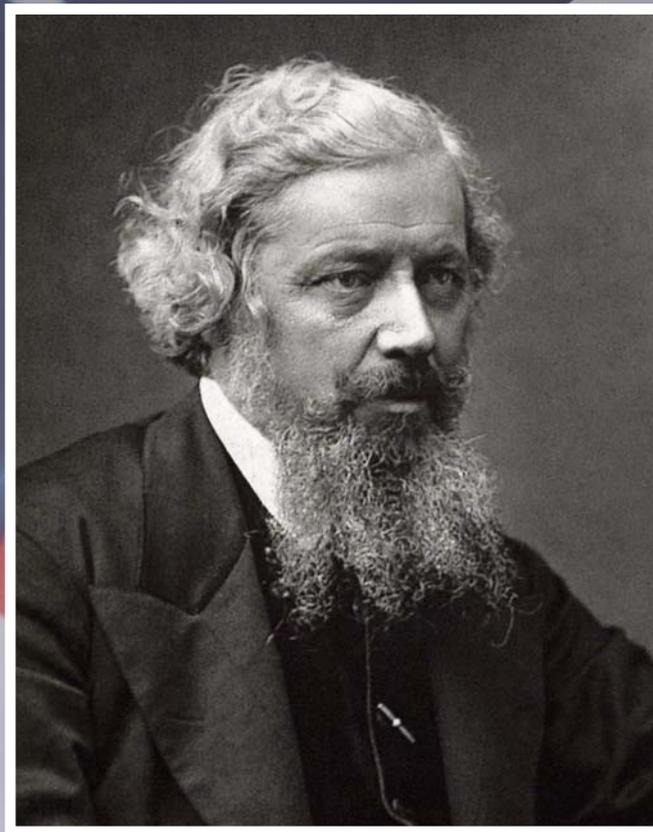


O BRAVE NEW WORLD?

Shakespeare and George Dawson in America

Ewan Fernie and Katherine Scheil



Cadbury Research Library Special Collections, University of Birmingham

George Dawson.

"O brave new world / That has such people in't!" So says Shakespeare's cast-away Miranda in *The Tempest* when faced with human society for the first time. Her father, Prospero, wearily replies, "'Tis new to thee." But in the middle of the nineteenth century, George Dawson and the founders of the world's first great Shakespeare library really believed Shakespeare could regenerate English culture in the rising industrial town of Birmingham. Dawson regarded the plays as "the newest Bible, the sweetest, truest teachings of the truths of the future that the world ever had." When he crossed the Atlantic to visit the "brave new world" of America in 1874, he catalysed Shakespearean connections which would have a powerful effect on Anglophone culture in general. But Dawson's visit to America also exposed significant limitations to his "everything to everybody" ethos and to democracy in America.

SHAKESPEARE AND GEORGE DAWSON IN AMERICA

The idea that Shakespeare might help create a new social world goes back at least as far as 1769, when the leading eighteenth-century actor, David Garrick, hosted his famous Shakespeare Jubilee in the town of the playwright's birth and death: Stratford-upon-Avon. Although – like so many outdoor festivities in Britain – it was ultimately rained off, this was the first great Shakespeare festival, and the stimulus for all that followed. It transformed Stratford from an obscure market-town in the English Midlands into a world-heritage site. And it marked the beginning of Shakespeare's own metamorphosis into the national poet and representative genius of world culture. The Jubilee also, quite literally, took Shakespeare *to the streets*. And Garrick encouraged festival-goers to wear a rainbow-ribbon symbolic of the playwright's potential to unite people of all creeds and parties.

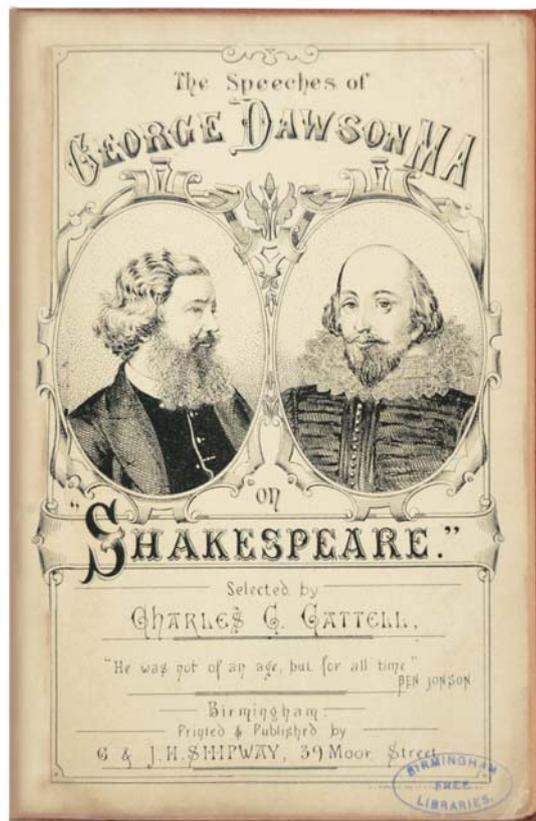
Shakespeare for the people got a further boost in nineteenth-century Britain when the Chartists – who were campaigning for votes for all men – enlisted the Bard. One of the most prominent Chartist leaders, Thomas Cooper, went so far as to call himself the “Shaksperean General,” telling his “Shakspere Brigade” that “the unequalled wool-stapler's son belongs to us.”

Meanwhile, the association of Shakespeare and cultural democracy was being actively promoted in the United States, although in a way which consistently favoured European settlers and excluded Indigenous peoples and communities. “Shakespeare is of course the great author of America,” wrote the creator of *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper, in 1828, implying that his young country itself had been dreamt up by the Bard. In *Democracy in America*, the historian and political commentator, Alexis de Toqueville, observed that he had found “hardly a pioneer's hut which does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare.” Cowboys and miners, mountain men and soldiers, as well as their wives

and daughters, all read and loved Shakespeare, and theatres were built on the Western frontier as a sign of advancing “civilization.”

The most democratic tribute to Shakespeare, on the occasion of his three-hundredth birthday in 1864, was the foundation of the Shakespeare Memorial Library in Birmingham. This was the first great Shakespeare Library in the world, and utterly unique in that it belonged to all the people of the city. It was established thanks to the advocacy

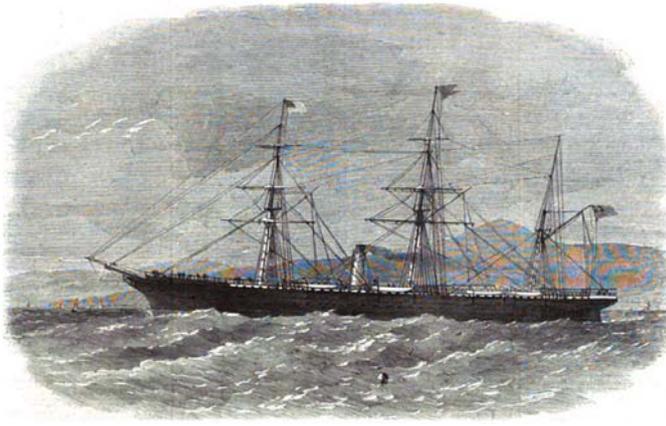
and efforts of the radical preacher, lecturer and activist who first came to town in 1844: George Dawson. By the time he set sail for America in 1874, Dawson had helped to make Birmingham “the chief centre of civilization, the chief town of democracy, the town from which liberty radiates to all the world.” Given the growing enthusiasm for ways of “civilizing” the frontier in the post-Civil War era, it is no surprise he was wanted there. He got to the States less than a decade after the end of the Civil War, when issues of citizenship and national and racial unity were to the fore, as was the question of how to build and sustain a new and durable civilization, one which would effectively repurpose America's English inheritance.



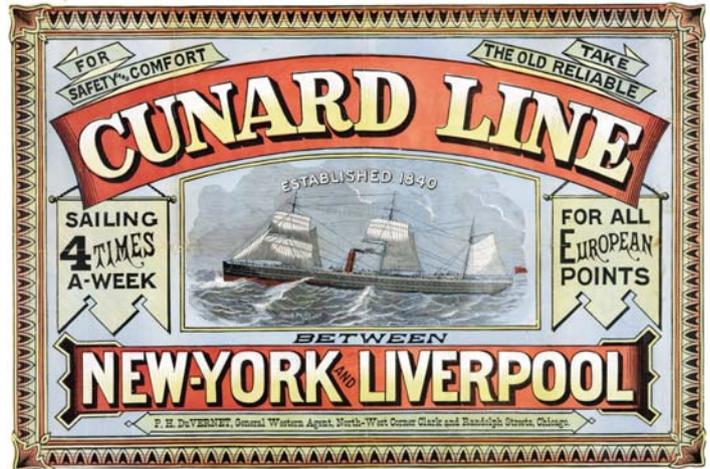
The Speeches of George Dawson on Shakespeare.

It is well-known even today that Birmingham in this period was “the workshop of the world”; what is less well-known is that it produced new ideas and social practices as well as material exports. In 1874, the Mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, sent Dawson across the Atlantic as Birmingham's Ambassador to America – as if the town were an international cultural power in its own right. Dawson went down a storm in the States, and his trip was enthusiastically reported back home. And yet, this significant cultural event has been almost entirely forgotten, even though Dawson was the premiere speaker on the most popular lecture tour in the country that year.

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The S.S. China, which Dawson took from Liverpool to New York on the Cunard Line.



Birmingham's Ambassador to America

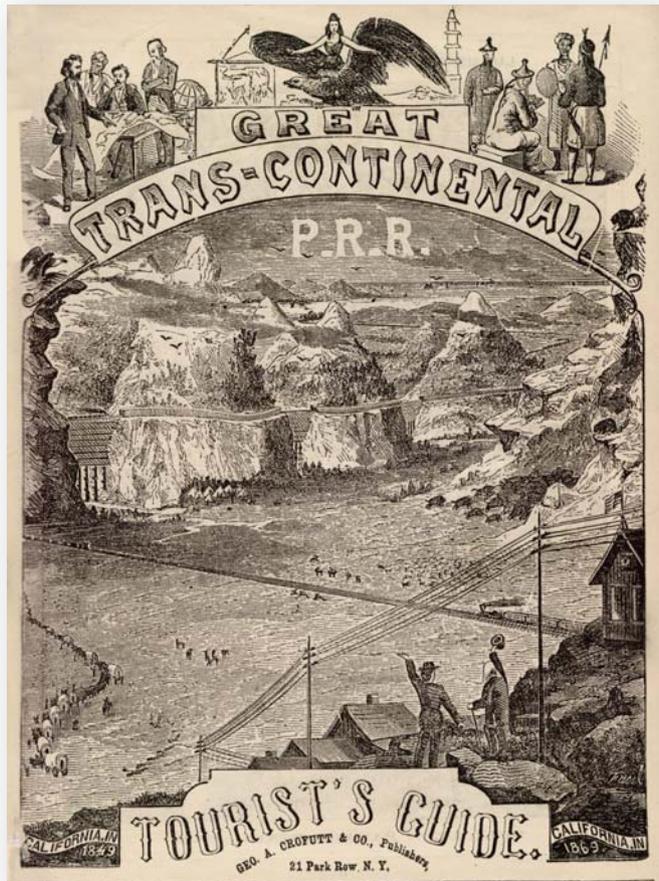
In the summer of 1874, Birmingham hosted two lavish dinners to celebrate George Dawson's departure on his American lecture tour. If Chamberlain called Dawson "the ambassador of the people of Birmingham to the people of America," John Laurence Toole – the first actor ever to have a West End theatre named after him – went one better in saying he fully expected Dawson to become President.

Dawson had wanted to make the trip for years. He was, as he put it, "desirous of seeing what the new world was like." Fellow founder of the world's first great Shakespeare Library, the Birmingham lawyer Alfred Hill, joined Dawson on the ten-day passage across the Atlantic on the S.S. China, and Dawson first set foot on American soil when they landed in New York on the 29th of August, 1874.

Dawson had two purposes in going to America. He was a featured speaker in James Redpath's "Star Lecture Course," which gave him a chance to bring his Birmingham doctrine of cultural enrichment and social improvement to American audiences; but he also wanted to see as much as possible of "the new world" of America's amazing landscapes, varied populations, and novel institutions. Near the end of his journey, he wrote to Timmins, "I have been very diligent in my investigations and puzzle some of my friends with questions they cannot answer. I have been in churches, law courts, schools, theatres, seances." A great appetite for exploring American life was awakened in him, and he said, on several occasions, that he wanted to return.

The Logistics of Travel

Dawson and Hill's initial and ambitious plan was to sail from Liverpool to New York, take a train from New York to Chicago, and then make their way to the American West, eventually as far as San Francisco and the Yosemite Valley in California. This would have entailed a trip on the very latest mode of transport: the Transcontinental Railroad, which had first joined the east to the west coast by rail only a few years before, in 1869.



The Great Transcontinental P.R.R. Tourist's Guide, 1870.

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It is possible that Dawson's desire to cross America by train was inspired by an 1868 article by the American minister and advocate for the abolition of slavery, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, published in the monthly British *Macmillan's Magazine*. Higginson linked the development of the American railway with the transport of ideas through the transcontinental lecture circuit. The opportunity to take part in what he too called "advancing civilization" would certainly have appealed to the visiting Brummie whose energy, industry and vision had helped establish Birmingham as a pioneering world city.

But, while he was in Chicago, preparing to go west, Dawson received an itinerary which sent him in the opposite direction, to the East Coast; he never made it to California.



Building the Transcontinental Railroad, Wyoming, 1868.

Dawson and the American Lecture Circuit

James Redpath, Dawson's "indefatigable and courteous agent," was a leading abolitionist, experienced journalist and educator, who advocated for black civil rights and education in the post-Civil War South.

In 1869, he had founded his Lyceum Bureau lecture series in Boston. This featured top speakers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (with whom Dawson had shared a platform in Manchester in the 1840s), and quickly became "the most prominent and commercially successful" lecture agency in the country. According to one historian, Redpath "converted the amateurish field of public speaking into a modern industry." He also remained committed to progressive politics, and his Lyceum Bureau was the first to include African American entertainers.

Redpath's background, as an abolitionist and advocate for women, ideally positioned him for developing an advance-guard

lecture series, and for enlisting even international speakers such as Dawson, who shared his progressive orientation. Building on his commercial success, Redpath set up a "Star Lecture Course" which would feature the most popular and expensive speakers, including Henry Ward Beecher, Mark Twain and P.T. Barnum. In September of 1874, Dawson was the opening speaker of the Star Lecture season in Boston. America welcomed "A Great English Speaker at Last," and Dawson's performances were universally acclaimed.

Dawson began his lecture tour in Boston's Music Hall (the original home of the Boston Symphony), and the next morning, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported the event "a pronounced success." The speaker was commended for his "strikingly handsome face," and his lecture was said to have "held the attention of the audience closely." He was praised for his "peculiarly friendly and winning smile and [way] of leaning forward on the desk and talking with his hands crossed, as if he were addressing a group of friends around a social fireside" – a trademark posture which can be seen today in the portrait of Dawson that hangs in the Birmingham and Midland Institute. The writer for the *Boston Daily Advertiser* could readily understand "why George Dawson is so great a favorite in his native land, and why his name is familiar in almost every household through the length and breadth of the United Kingdom."

Dawson spoke on a wide variety of subjects in America, from Beau Brummell to Oliver Goldsmith to Samuel Pepys. His second lecture in Boston, on Sunday 11 October 1874, was given in Horticultural Hall, and his topic was John Bunyan. This was a courteous nod to American Protestantism, but Bunyan also exemplified an important lesson for a country unencumbered by old-world vested interests: "the best fighting and singing, the best preaching and writing has been done by crestless, low-born, dirty, ignoble, hard-handed people, who have what folks call 'a mission' greater than the church's call." Dawson wanted to encourage the confidence and creativity that was impeded by "establishment" culture back home, and his American audiences were only too willing to listen.

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He drew an intensely personal portrait of his brilliant but unlettered subject, one which resonated with the insurgent individualism he found in Shakespeare and preached to America. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that the “the attention of the audience was not distracted for a minute.”

Dawson’s lectures in Philadelphia were no less successful. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* praised him for not having the “tragic outbursts” of some apparently more theatrical previous speakers, confirming that he “wins and retains the sympathy of his audience.” His demotic style resonated with his message: culture was (or should be) for everyone. Moreover, as a common treasury of human experience, it could help people live better now. In a country just beginning to work out its destiny as a reunited nation, it could bring on what Dawson called “the romance of the future.”

In Philadelphia, Dawson’s topic was “The Wives of Great Men,” and he encouraged his auditors to see their own marriages analogously to, say, Aristotle’s. Dawson always regarded his lectures as a Trojan horse to “inculcate great principles” and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* picked up the moral: “there can be no true marriages without friendship.”

It was a lecture that struck a chord with the American public, and was referred to in newspapers as far west as Texas. The *Galveston Daily News* praised Dawson as “a most popular preacher and lecturer” and explained that “his sarcasms on great public men pass current on the tongues of all the common people.” He was comical and grave, he was

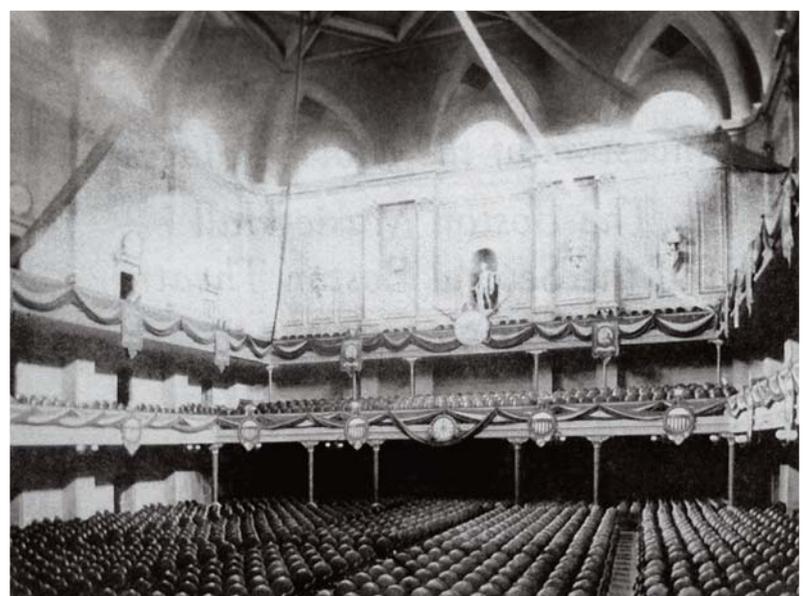
sceptical and earnest. Back at one of his send-offs in Birmingham, the actor Toole had not only said Dawson could become President; he also reckoned he would have made a good Hamlet. America certainly seems to have taken Dawson to its heart. In addition to his lectures, he preached in Philadelphia, reporting back to Birmingham that “every seat was taken, and many had to go away.”

One of the highlights of Dawson’s trip was the grand dinner in his honor, hosted on 20 November, by the Philadelphia lawyer Joseph Parker Norris, a keen Shakespeare collector and bibliophile, and a major supporter of Dawson’s and Birmingham’s Shakespeare Memorial Library. Parker Norris had prepared an elaborate event, with each dish comically paired with a Shakespearean quotation, as listed in the printed keepsake menu. Croquettes of Chicken were gamely matched up with Portia’s line “you must cut this flesh from off his breast, / The law allows it” from *The Merchant of Venice*, Chicken Salad was accompanied with Sir Andrew’s line “I warrant there’s vinegar and pepper in’t” from *Twelfth Night*, and fruit with Edgar’s “Ripeness is all” from *King Lear*. This extravaganza paralleled Dawson’s send-off dinners in Birmingham, as if it was a competition to see whether Birmingham or America was best at lionizing him. More importantly, it presented Shakespeare as a delightful way to come together, across international and political boundaries.

Kansas State Historical Society



James Redpath, 1870s.



Music Hall, Boston, where Dawson gave his first American lecture.

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Historic New England

Horticultural Hall, Boston, where Dawson delivered his second lecture.

Meeting the “Common People” in America

No doubt Dawson liked being feted in Philadelphia, but he also wanted his lecture tour to cover more ordinary parts of the United States, since he had a “strong desire to see those people in America who bear the chief burdens of national life, who work hard, and live and die unrecorded, and who are the strength of the State.” This was entirely in character. Back home, he was less interested in the burghers of Birmingham than in the ordinary industrial population. As a critic, he was as much concerned with the gravediggers as with Hamlet, pooh-poohing the French author and critic Voltaire for his fastidious distaste for the common characters in Shakespeare’s drama. Dawson’s left-leaning agent was happy to gratify his desire to meet salt-of-the-earth Americans, and he arranged a detour through the small towns of Ohio, en route to Marietta, where his client had been invited by the students of the senior class to lecture at Marietta College.

Dawson shared Redpath’s opposition to slavery, so it was fitting that Marietta was one of his major stops, since it was known as the birthplace of the Underground Railroad, and was located on the banks of the intersection of the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers, at the boundary between the free state of Ohio and the slave states of Virginia and Kentucky. At the time of Dawson’s visit, Ohio was still considered part of the “West,” and something of a new frontier for America.



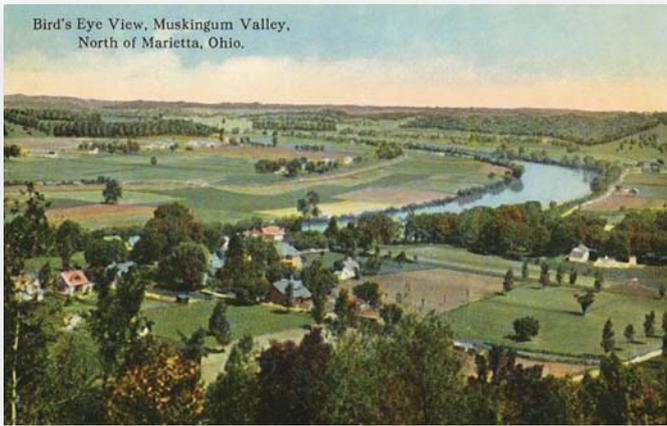
Caldwell, Ohio, which Dawson travelled through on the way to Marietta, Ohio.



Courtesy of the Ohio History Connection, image SC 894

Front Street, Marietta, Ohio.

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1915 postcard of the Muskingum Valley. Dawson noted that Marietta "is a picturesquely situated town at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers."

Before actually visiting America, Dawson had patronisingly described the country as "a nation, with no language, no creed, no grave-yards." But his experience of Boston, Philadelphia, and now Ohio, changed his mind. While travelling by train, he received an invitation to dinner at the railway superintendent's house. It was there he encountered what he described as "that frank, gracious, and hearty kindness so general among Americans." Indeed, so pleasantly surprised was Dawson by the warmth and richness of America's domestic life that he admired Philadelphia as the "City of Homes."

Meanwhile, the Ohio-based Shakespeare collector Joseph Crosby noted with dismay that he had missed seeing Dawson, which was particularly frustrating since he lived in Zanesville, relatively close to Marietta. Writing to Parker Norris – Dawson's Shakespearean host in Philly – Crosby lamented

that "I had no idea that Dawson was so near me, as Marietta. I should surely have run down & met him, had I known it." He went on, "I am very sorry I did not meet Dawson, as from all I learn about him, from yourself & elsewhere, he must be a 'brick,' – a real, clever, genial, amiable fellow."

It was indeed a shame they didn't meet, since Crosby, like Parker Norris, had already been appointed by Timmins to procure books for Dawson's great democratic Shakespeare library back in Birmingham.

Shakespeare in 1870s America

Given Dawson's commitment to the intellectual development of all citizens regardless of social status, he must have been delighted by the increasing presence of Shakespeare in the lives of ordinary nineteenth-century Americans. Shakespeare clubs and reading groups were well-established on the East Coast by the time he got there (the Shakespeare Society of Philadelphia, for example, dates back to 1851). But in the later nineteenth century Shakespeare increasingly became one of the forms of "civilization" most cultivated on the American frontier. And this exposes the uncomfortable coincidence between the spread of democratizing (European) culture and the displacement of Indigenous culture and peoples.

Dawson's 1874 lecture tour coincided with the burgeoning movement of grassroots Shakespeare clubs, which flourished right up till the Second World War. He was an advocate of women's education but, unlike Birmingham's Our Shakespeare Club of which he was life-president, American Shakespeare clubs were dominated by women. Over 500 of them existed in nearly each corner of every state, from the



Abilene, Texas Shakespeare Club, 1910.

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University Archives, University at Buffalo, the State University of New York



Silver Creek, New York Shakespeare Club, 1890.

isolated mining towns of Colorado to the rural South. For these citizen-Shakespeareans, Shakespeare was a sign of a new kind of European civilization and stability in the supposedly wild West. In one representative anecdote, an Oklahoma woman remarked that her husband had helped to start a Shakespeare club “as soon as he washed his hands after driving the stake on his lot.”

Dawson’s view of Shakespeare as a vehicle for personal development, morality, and civic engagement resonates with the mission of almost every American Shakespeare club. The goals of the all-female Portia Club of Avon, Illinois (population 700), for example, were “mutual improvement and self-reinforcement of members” and “promotion of the social and civic welfare of Avon

and community.” These women studied, memorized, and acted in Shakespeare’s plays, but they also advocated for education and for better food in schools. They fought for women’s right to vote. They “believed that an educated mother was a better mother, were devoted to their community, wanted to bring new ideas from all over the world, wrote essays by hand and by lamplight.”

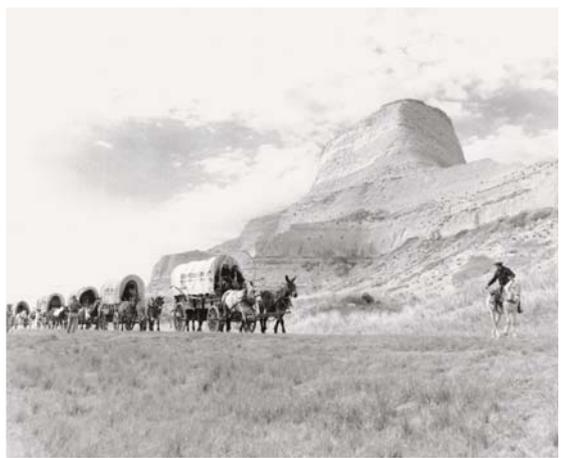
Near the end of his American tour, Dawson wrote to Timmins, “Had I no work, no home, no friends in the old country I should start off now for New Orleans, the Bahama Islands and Jamaica and not be back till May.” He never saw any of these places. Had he made it out West, he would have found further evidence of Shakespeare’s capacity for helping to set up American communities. Montana rancher Philip Ashton Rollins, in his memoir of cowboy life, confirmed de Toqueville’s report of a generation earlier, recording that a typical ranch owner had a “battered set of Shakespeare,” and that Shakespeare was frequently read aloud in gatherings of frontier settlers. And, as early as the 1860s, along the Oregon Trail, frontiersman James Bridger was celebrated for trading a yoke of cattle for Shakespeare’s complete works.

Three years after Dawson’s death in 1876, the town of Shakespeare, New Mexico was established, with its flagship Stratford Hotel, and its Shakespeare Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company.

Kansas State Historical Society



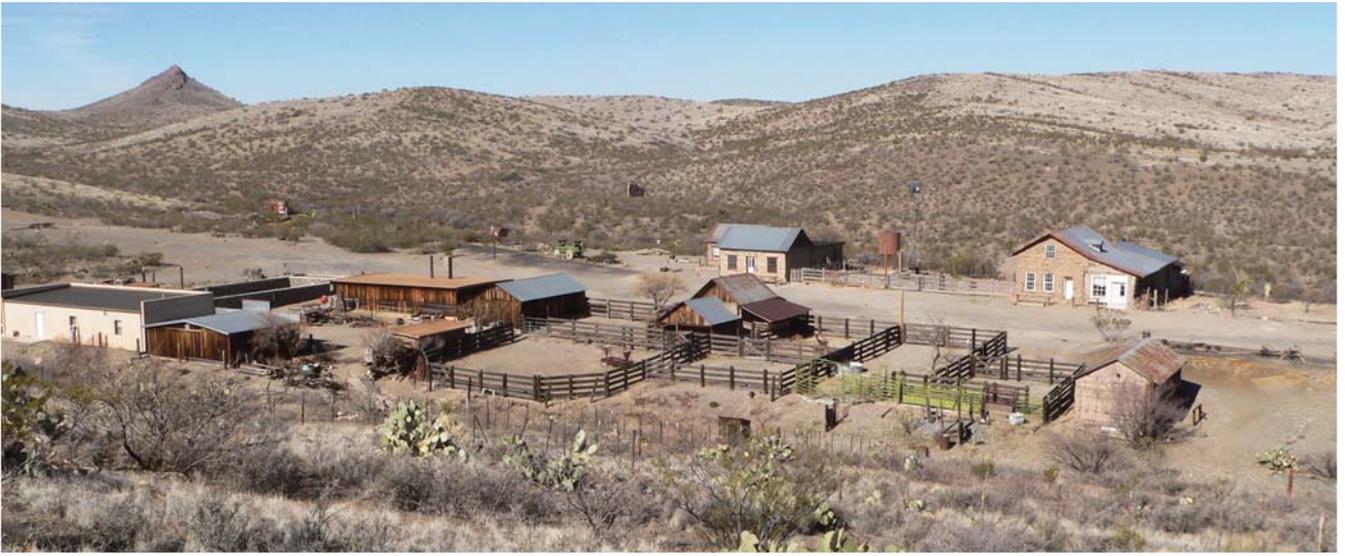
Cowboys at a chuck wagon, an ideal setup for reading Shakespeare during a lunch break.



The Oregon Trail, where Jim Bridger was able to trade his cattle for the Works of Shakespeare.

National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, Missouri

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Shakespeare, New Mexico, named 1879, now a ghost town.

The Legacy of Dawson's American Visit

After returning to Birmingham at the end of 1874, Dawson spoke about America all over England. He had impressed America, but it had impressed him as well. He told his Birmingham audiences that “the Americans were the most kind-hearted and hospitable people it had ever been his good fortune to meet,” and their “hospitality was patient, painstaking, and elaborate.” He recognized that the racial diversity of the new country was part of the “romance of the future,” commending “the great work of the United States in welding together a heterogeneous mass into a homogenous people.”

Several major American newspapers eulogized him after his death in November, 1876. The *New York Times* described him as “one of the most remarkable men of his time,” noting that “few public men in England have exercised greater influence for good than George Dawson.”

His influence across the Atlantic continued to be felt for a long time. The San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* for 18 March 1889 reprinted an excerpt from Dawson, as a sort of moral for readers:

May we prefer goodness to greatness;
pureness to pride; worthiness to wealth;
the doing of one good thing to the hearing
of many great ones.—George Dawson.

And the 1900 anthology *Modern Eloquence*, published in Chicago, reprinted Dawson's “Ill-Used Men” as an exemplary lecture for “touching deeply the feeling of the hour, stimulating its thought, awakening its conscience and dissipating its weariness,” and one that “served a wholesome and worthy end.”

“Ill-Used Men” was the lecture he had given at Marietta College in Ohio. As the gloss in *Modern Eloquence* suggests, it is the utterance of a learned but also wise and worldly man, the proponent not, as he had been in the 1840s, of out-and-out revolution, but rather of personal reform, firm judgement, and humane sympathy. It taught its audiences what Shakespeare in *As You Like It* calls “the uses of adversity,” and that no one – however famous, virtuous or talented – can escape hard times. It was a lecture which expressed an attitude of reforming idealism tempered by a hard-won realism, an attitude gleaned from reading and teaching Shakespeare and from trying to establish a “brave new world” in Birmingham.

After Dawson's death, the connections between Birmingham and American Shakespeareans continued well into the twentieth century, preparing the ground for the foundation of America's own great Shakespeare Library. During his tour of America, Dawson had commented that he “had seen a bit of English ivy carefully treasured in an American household,” praising the United States as a place where “they still cared for the old manners, the old words

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and the old books.” This confirms that, by this stage in his life, he was looking for a future that would make good on the promise of the past, thereby reconciling revolutionary and conservative instincts. Still, the fact is that, after Dawson died, many of the “old books” from America ended up in his Shakespeare Library in Birmingham, through the efforts of Samuel Timmins, Joseph Parker Norris, Joseph Crosby, and Horace Howard Furness.

Timmins was the other most important founder of Birmingham’s great Shakespeare Library, and Dawson’s best friend. Dawson wrote to him throughout his time in America, and it seems Timmins was originally intended to accompany him. In one of his letters, Dawson wrote to Timmins, “Furness greatly regrets that you are not with me.”

Timmins was the quiet industrious librarian to Dawson’s charismatic lecturer and preacher. He would have enjoyed the lavish Shakespearean gala Parker Norris threw for Dawson, but he might have felt awkward when confronted with his own photograph in Furness’s study, part of his gallery of inspirational Shakespearians. Even so, Furness and Timmins corresponded for over a quarter of a century, and Timmins regularly sent Furness Shakespeare-themed gifts.

The bookmark, which proudly commemorates Birmingham’s great Shakespeare Library, is now held in the Furness collection at the University of

Pennsylvania. Timmins gave it to his American correspondent in April of 1875, perhaps in return for Furness’s Christmas gift, sent in 1874, probably around the time of Dawson’s visit. Furness had commissioned buffalo “during the summer from hunters in Omaha.” He sent it to those he regarded as the greatest English Shakespearians, including Timmins, James Halliwell-Phillipps, John Payne Collier (the Shakespeare forger) and Clement Mansfield Ingleby (who exposed him, and was another founder of Birmingham’s Shakespeare Library). Furness wrote to Ingleby about the buffalo as follows:

“Dear old Collier’s servants regarded it with awe and superstition as the ‘*Devil’s hind leg*.’ Halliwell escorted his friends to the larder to examine it, & is to have the skin tanned for a carriage rug etc., & Timmins (heaven’s sunshine on his generous heart!) sent steaks all over the United Kingdom.”

Apparently, “everything to everybody” was a rubric extending to exotic edibles as well as Shakespearean books for Timmins. And he carried on his special friendship with Furness, sending him gifts such as a cylindrical wooden box, supposedly carved from a piece of Shakespeare’s mulberry tree.



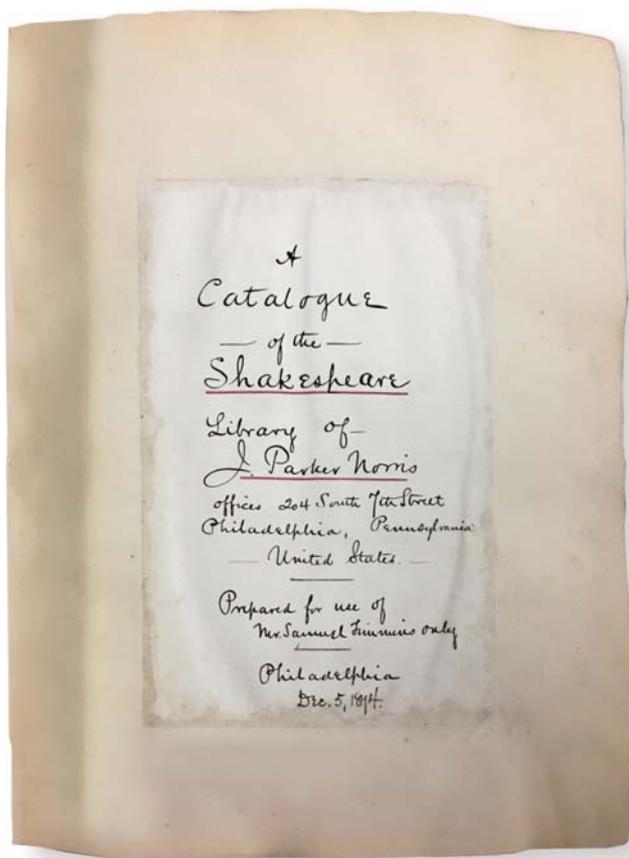
Ivory and metal bookmark given to Furness by Timmins, 1875.



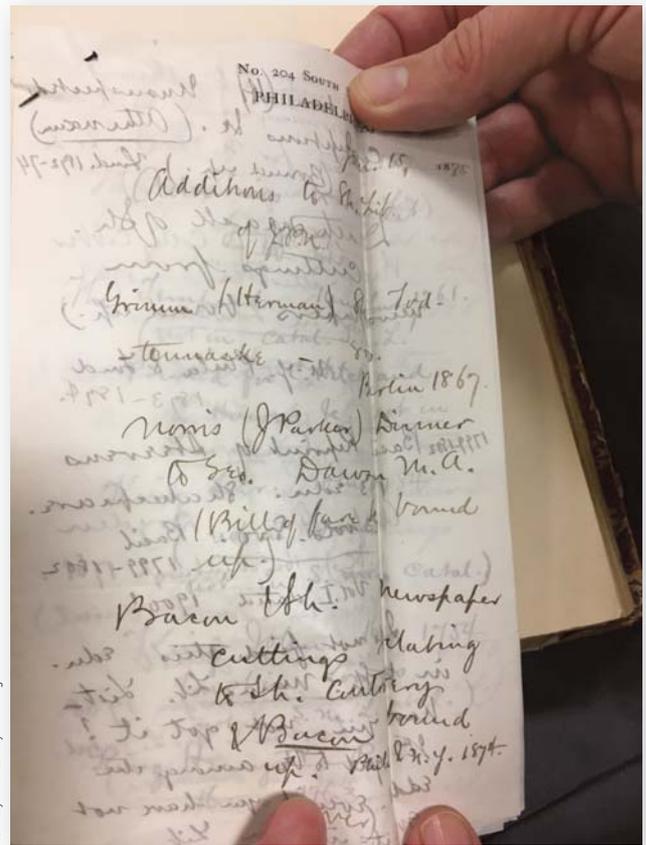
Cylindrical Wooden Box, supposedly from Shakespeare’s Mulberry Tree, given to Furness by Timmins, 1873.

SHAKESPEARE AND GEORGE DAWSON IN AMERICA

Courtesy of the Library of Birmingham



Catalogue of Joseph Parker Norris's library.



Courtesy of the Library of Birmingham

Addendum to Joseph Parker Norris's library.

Building America's Great Shakespeare Libraries

This transatlantic fellowship of Birmingham and American Shakespeareans built to something much more substantial than such memorabilia. Between them, Horace Howard Furness, Joseph Parker Norris, and Joseph Crosby possessed some of the best and most extensive Shakespeare collections in America, and the story of their acquisitions links the Shakespeare Memorial Library in Birmingham; the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC; and other important collections including those at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, and the University of Wisconsin.

Dawson and Timmins's Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library started to solicit American contributions for the library from the 1870s. A notice printed in the *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette* for 23 May 1873 urged Americans to send books and materials to Parker Norris or to Crosby, and noted that "famous Shakespearean scholars have contributed freely, and all ordinary works have been bought and many rare given, until the library is the largest of its kind."

Parker Norris printed an even more explicit plea for Birmingham's great Shakespeare Library, in his 1875 column "Shakespearean Gossip," in the *American Bibliopolist*. Parker Norris proclaimed, "As Americans are well known as great lovers of Shakespeare, as the great majority of visitors to the poet's birth-place, home and grave. And as the American literature concerning Shakespeare is so extensive and valuable, it has been deemed advisable to ask authors and publishers to contribute any Shakespearean works to a library where they will be highly valued, appropriately catalogued, and carefully preserved." His goal was that "America may be adequately represented in the great literary monument to Shakespeare's fame."

The transatlantic correspondence between Birmingham and American Shakespeareans, which was nurtured by sending Dawson to America, was purchased by Henry Clay Folger for his great Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., and it remains an important but understudied component of that world-significant collection. The letters between the Birmingham library's

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two American correspondents, Joseph Crosby and Joseph Parker Norris, over 250 of them, run to over 2500 manuscript pages, and have only been selectively published, while hundreds of letters from Timmins to Parker Norris have never seen print, nor have they been substantially quoted in any work of Shakespearean scholarship. But Henry Clay Folger clearly saw the importance of these “zealous Shakespearians,” as Furness referred to them. And Furness advised Folger on his own Shakespeare project.

One of the items in the Shakespeare Memorial Library in Birmingham is a handwritten list of books in Parker Norris’s library from Philadelphia, with an addendum still in its original envelope. The catalogue is inscribed “Prepared for use of Mr. Samuel Timmins only.” We have yet to confirm the likelihood that many of the books on the list now reside in the Birmingham library. Dated 5 December 1874, it is likely that it was brought back from America by Dawson himself, a harbinger of the books, materials, and support that Americans gave to Birmingham, a token of their mutual love for Shakespeare, and a lasting tribute to Birmingham’s Shakespearean ambassador and his American “romance of the future.”

Everything to Everybody?

In the mid-nineteenth century, Birmingham was an alternative centre in England. In formulating a new conception of what a great town could become, Dawson broke into the blue skies of the future. “The dreamers of society,” he recognized, “are the men from whom the greatest truth comes.” His efforts not just to theorize but actually to put into practice a new and more inclusive kind of culture – his efforts, that is, to give “everything to everybody” – have been too much forgotten, as has the definitively public nature of the first great Shakespeare Library in the world. What has also been overlooked is the importance of this for the development of

democratic culture beyond Birmingham. In 1870s America, George Dawson embodied the connection between Shakespeare and the drive for a new and better culture. His visit encouraged a mutual commitment to social improvement and to Shakespeare then underway on both sides of the Atlantic. But, sadly, it also revealed serious limitations in both American democracy and Dawson’s “everything to everybody” ethos itself.

As the featured speaker on James Redpath’s “Star Lecture Course” in 1874, Dawson was the star turn on a progressive roster which also featured the pioneering campaigner for women’s suffrage, Susan B. Anthony; and the abolitionist, activist and editor of the pro-women’s-suffrage journal, *The Agitator*, Mary Livermore. In adverts for the tour, Dawson’s name appears alongside that of the black American social reformer, abolitionist and statesman, Frederick Douglass, whom Dawson had perhaps heard speak at the start of his own career as a reforming lecturer, preacher and activist in Birmingham in the 1840s.

Redpath's Lyceum.
 ORGAN OF REDPATH'S LYCEUM BUREAU.
 BIRMINGHAM, MASS. [JULY, 1874]

LIST OF LECTURERS OF REDPATH'S LYCEUM BUREAU

LECTURERS AND SUBJECTS.

S, AZEL, JR. (M.D.)
 Subjects.—1. "Air, Water and Food." 2. "Adulterations of Food and Beverages." 3. "Causes of disease in our Homes." 4. "Adulterations of Food;" 5. "Adulterations of Beverages;" 6. "Poisons in our Homes;" 7. "Injurious Occupations."

REWS, WM. S.
 Subjects.—1. "Dialect Humor." 2. "Humorists" [New.]

HONY, SUSAN B.
 Subjects.—1. "The Power of the Ballot." 2. "Morals and Money." 3. "Guilty or Not Guilty."

KS, GEN. NATHANIEL P.
 Subjects.—1. "The Republic: Will it Endure?" 2. "American Volunteer Soldiers." 3. "Diplomatic Princes.—Cavour (Italy), Gortschakoff (Russia), Bismarck (Germany), Thiers (France), Castella (Spain)." 4. "Blue Stockings." 5. "What a Man Owes to the Town he lives in."

TWELL, SENATOR GEORGE S.
 Subjects.—1. "America before its Discovery by Columbus." 2. "A new lecture: subject to be announced hereafter."

LES, E. C.
 Subjects.—For separate lectures: 1. "The Microscope and what it Shows." 2. "A Drop of Ferns Blood." 3. "The Life of a Fly." 4. "Ferns and their Structure." 5. "The Microscopy of the Textile Fibres." 6. "What there is in a Flow of the Microscope." 7. "History and Construction of the Microscope." 8. "The Microscope in the Laboratory (Geology, Chemistry, &c.)." 9. "The Microscope in the Forest and Field." 10. "The Microscope in the Garden." 11. "The Microscope by the Pond Side and Sea Side." 12. "The Microscope and Insects." 13. "The Microscope, Crystallization and Polarized Light." 14. "Four separate lectures for 1874-'75 are in preparation and will be announced hereafter. All of these lectures are brilliantly illustrated by the calcium lantern and microscope."

INARD, CHARLES ROLLIN.
 Subject.—"Romance of a Winter in Florida."

LETON, WILL.
 Subjects.—1. "Dialect Poetry, with recitations of Original Ballads." 2. "The Nineteenth Century," a Poetical Lecture.

HALE, REV. EDWARD EVERETT.
 Subjects.—1. "The Man without a Country." 2. "My Double, and how he Us'd Me." 3. "Level Best." 4. "A Civil Servant." 5. "His Name." 6. "Back to Black." [New.] 7. "Hale's subjects are not lectures, but are written expressly for Lyceum audiences. No will not be published until after the lecture season closes."

HAVEN, BISHOP GILBERT.
 Subjects.—1. "A Ride through Palestine." 2. "Boskie and Brama." 3. "Why Not and Why [Woman Suffrage]." 4. "The Silver Land [Lecture on Mission]." 5. "Grip." [New.]

HAYES, DR. ISAAC I.
 Subjects.—1. "Arctic Adventure and Discovery 2. "Among the Icebergs." 3. "The Open Polar Sea, and the Polar Expedition." [New] 4. "Progress of Maritime Discovery." 5. "Iceland and the Northmen." [New.] 6. "Dav Livingstone, the Traveller." [New.] Dr. Hayes sailed, June 24, for Iceland, to attend the Millennial celebration of that country. I will return in time for the lecture season."

HILL, FRANK ALDEN.
 Subjects.—1. "California." 2. "Travels in the East." 3. "Leaves from Fanny's Book Sights." 4. "The Holy Land, with some account of Greece and Turkey." 5. "Somebody of What I saw in Russia, Finland, Sweden, a Norway." 6. "European Sights and Sound." 7. "Along the Northern Coast of Africa, through Spain to Paris." Mr. Hill is prepared to give his lectures illustrated by the stereograph. His photographs were bought in every country he visited, and are the finest that the world can show."

HIGGINSON, COL. T. W.
 Subjects.—1. "The Aristocracy of the Dowry." 2. "Literature in a Republic." 3. "After High School—What?" 4. "For and agt Darwin." [New.]

HOWE, MRS. JULIA WARD.
 Subjects.—1. "Paris." 2. "Men's Women Women's Women." 3. "Is Police So Police?"

LEONOWENS, MRS. A. H.
 Subjects.—1. "Siam, its Courts and Customs." 2. "The Buddha and Buddhism in Siam." 3. "Brahmanism, Ancient and Modern." 4. "The Fire-Worship of the Zend-Avesta, or the Fire-Worship of the Giant Temples of Maha Ongler V." 5. "The Seven-Headed Serpent." 6. "Ancient Women, Ancient and Modern." 7. "Christ schools, Mrs. Leonowens has a series of ten lectures, comprising an exhaustive descriptive series of the most famous valleys, castles, temples, palaces and sacred sites of Arabia and Palestine. A full synopsis of series will be found in subsequent pages."

DAWSON, GEORGE (OF ENGLAND)
 Subjects.—1. "Ill-used Men." 2. "Wires of Great Men." 3. "John Bunyan." 4. "Dr. Samuel Johnson." 5. "Oliver Goldsmith." 6. "William Cobbett." 7. "Beau Brummell." 8. "Daniel Defoe." 9. "Samuel Peppys and his Diary."

DOUGLASS, FREDERICK.
 Subjects.—1. "Santo Domingo." 2. "Self-made Men." 3. "Composite Nation." 4. "William the Silent." 5. "Reminiscences of the Anti-slavery Conflict." 6. "John Brown." 7. New lecture: subject to be announced hereafter."

DRURY, MOSS VICTOR.
 Subjects.—1. "The French Revolution." 2. "The Labor Problem." 3. "The Commune."

EGGLESTON, EDWARD.
 Subjects.—1. "Hoosier Sketches and Dialect Readings." 2. "The Discoverer of Childhood." 3. "Talk."

FERRETTE, BISHOP JULIUS.
 Subjects.—1. "Mohammed and the Koran." 2. "The Women of the East." 3. "The Old Catholics." 4. "Six Hundred Miles on a Raft from Diarbekir to Nineveh." 5. "Six Hundred Miles on a Camel from Bagdad to Damascus." 6. "The Arabian Nights."

FIELDS, JAMES T.
 Subjects.—Mr. Fields has ten literary lectures, the first six of which were given last season as a course at the Lowell Institute, Boston, the Peabody Institute, Baltimore, and in various colleges and towns. They comprise the first six lectures in the order named, and may be given either as a course or separately. 1. "Charles Lamb and his Friends." 2. "Sydney Smith, and his Work in Life." 3. "Christopher North, with Personal Recollections." 4. "Alfred Tennyson, the Man and the Poet." 5. "Fiction and its Eminent Authors." 6. "Literary and Artistic Society in London Twenty-five Years Ago." 7. "Masters of the Situation." 8. "A Plea for Cheerfulness." 9. "Longfellow." 10. "De Quincey, the English Opium Eater." [New.]

FISKE, PROF. JOHN.
 Mr. Fiske is now in Italy, but will return in time for the lecture season. He will have new lectures.

FITCH, HON. THOMAS.
 This brilliant Western orator will not be able to lecture next season, owing to professional engagements.

GOUGH, JOHN B.
 Subjects.—1. "Lights and Shadows of London Life." 2. "Eloquence and Orators." 3. "Peccolular People." 4. "Habit." 5. "Circumstances." 6. "Will it Pay?" 7. "Now and then." 8. "I have no new

Redpath's Lyceum Brochure.

SHAKESPEARE AND GEORGE DAWSON IN AMERICA

And yet, viewed through the lens of what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the fierce urgency of now,” Dawson’s visit to the United States raises some uncomfortable questions. His promotion of English culture on the frontier facilitated the American displacement of Indigenous culture. And he reportedly made racist remarks after visiting black schools.

Speaking as both an abolitionist and a pioneering advocate for comprehensive education, Dawson said, according to the *Birmingham Morning News*, that the “benevolent” founders of the establishments he visited in Philadelphia were “trying to see what the negro would come to in education” and that “they were perfectly right in trying it.” But the *News* went on to report that he admitted “he could not say he was one of the sanguine people about the negro” and that he doubted that, after the abolition of slavery, black people could take care of themselves. He suggested that “many wise men said the negro would die out in America,” because mixed-race

children had shorter lives. And he recalled the “quaint” and “charming sight” of “woolly heads” and “marvelous ebony faces.”

It is true that such sentiments were not unusual, even among abolitionists, but by expressing them Dawson betrayed his own “everything to everybody” ideal, as well as what he elsewhere imagined as the multicultural American “romance of the future.”

There are positive and negative lessons to be learned from the past. The “Everything to Everybody” Project – a three-year collaboration between the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund – has begun to recover the inspiring story of Birmingham’s great Shakespeare library. But it is vital to repudiate any racist or otherwise prejudiced aspects of this heritage in favour of a more enlightened world where black lives matter and we can try to give everything to everybody again. ●



Courtesy of the Library of Birmingham

Above: Shakespeare Memorial Room at the Library of Birmingham.

SHAKESPEARE AND GEORGE DAWSON IN AMERICA



Left and below: Views from the stacks which store Birmingham's great Shakespeare collection.



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© Alex Parré / Courtesy of Library of Birmingham

The "Everything to Everybody" Project will unlock the world's first great Shakespeare library for England's second city. Future publications will showcase fifty treasures from this unique collection of over 100,000 Shakespeare books, programmes, posters, production photographs, scores, scrapbooks, and more.

Originally founded in 1864, this public archive is now held across over a thousand shelves within the high-tech storage facilities of the iconic Library of Birmingham.

In partnership with public and grassroots organisations, "Everything to Everybody" will reinvent Birmingham's pioneering Shakespeare heritage for the twenty-first-century city.

It aims to make a substantial contribution to civic culture at a time when new forms of social solidarity and co-operation are urgently needed.



Ewan Fernie is Director of the National-Heritage-Lottery-Funded 'Everything to Everybody' Project and Chair, Professor and Fellow of the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham.



Katherine Scheil is American Lead and International Champion of the 'Everything to Everybody' Project and Professor of English at the University of Minnesota. Her ground-breaking book, *She Hath Been Reading: Women and Shakespeare Clubs in America* (Cornell, 2012), uncovers a network of nineteenth-century Shakespeare clubs which extended across America.



Using Birmingham's forgotten past to inspire our future:
Unlocking the world's first great people's Shakespeare Library for all



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WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY
PEOPLE OF IDEAS, INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE



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To get involved in the 'Everything to Everybody' Project please visit:
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