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ESSAYS

ESSAYS OF FRANCIS BACON
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS BACON—Baron Verulam and Viscount St. Albans—was born at York House, Strand, January 22, 1561, the younger son, by his second wife, of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal.

Almost from birth Francis was a delicate child, and suffered from prolonged ill-health, a circumstance to which some biographers have attributed the gravity of manner, even in youth characteristic of him. Probably it was due rather to his intense absorption, even in early childhood, in studies commonly assigned to youths considerably his seniors. Though his earlier boyhood is almost a blank to us, save that he spent it between the family residence in London, situated near the present Strand and the Thames, and the country seat at Gorhambury in Hertfordshire,¹ yet we obtain interesting light upon the facts of his career, when he emerges from the domestic seclusion of home to proceed in his thirteenth year with his brother Anthony, two years his senior, to Trinity College, Cambridge.

At Cambridge he remained three years, and as Macaulay says, "departed, carrying with him a profound contempt for the course of study pursued there, a fixed conviction that the system of academic education in England was radically vicious, a just scorn for the trifles on which the followers of Aristotle had wasted their powers, and no great reverence for Aristotle himself."²

Already he had been introduced to Court life. The high station occupied by his father and the influential family connections of the lad rendered this easy. Besides, the facts are matter of history that Elizabeth on more than one occasion visited her Lord Keeper in his stately home at Gorhambury, and amidst the immemorial oaks and elms of the beautiful Hertfordshire demesne the scene may have occurred in which the flattery-loving Queen, in response to a graceful compliment on the part of the youth, styled him, with reference to his grave demeanour, "her young Lord Keeper." That he was early familiar with the etiquette and customs of Court is manifest from the first draft of the "Essays," "On Ceremonies and Respects,"³ and "On Honour and Reputation."⁴ His advice regarding conduct in high station towards superiors, inferiors, and equals is characterised not only by sound reason but by a wise expediency, which looks upon the rendering of respect to superiors not as an act of

¹ Spedding's *Life of Bacon*. Cf. Nichol and Montagu.

² Essay on Bacon.

³ p. 154.

⁴ p. 160.

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servility but of practical duty demanded from us by our relative stations in the social hierarchy. If we do not render respect to superiors, can we expect inferiors to tender respect to us?

As both Anthony and Francis looked forward to a diplomatic career, to be prepared for it they were admitted "ancients" at Gray's Inn in June 1576, where they shortly afterwards erected the lodging which the latter continued at frequent intervals throughout his life to occupy. Three months later Francis crossed over to Paris in the suite of Sir Amyas Paulet, the English ambassador, to begin his practical training in diplomacy. The studies he pursued in Continental politics and diplomacy supplied material for those "Notes on the State of Europe" which are printed in most editions of his works. France at that time was in the throes, and Catholic and Huguenot were arrayed against each other in civil strife, by whose cruel scenes some of the most pertinent reflections in the Essay on "Faction" were suggested; "Kings had need beware how they side themselves, and make themselves as of a faction or party; for leagues within the State are ever pernicious to monarchies; for they raise an obligation paramount to obligation of sovereignty, and make the king *tanquam unus ex nobis*: as was to be seen in the League of France."¹

But Bacon's stay in the French capital was not destined to be long, though doubtless long enough to enable him to acquire that ready facility in the use of the language he, in after life, displayed. He was suddenly recalled by his father's death, and hurried home to find his prospects decidedly overcast. To him the loss was to prove irreparable in more senses than a parental one. In vain he applied to the government, represented by his uncle, Lord Burghley, for employment in some official capacity—a claim not unreasonable in view of the late Lord Keeper's services. The jealousy of the Cecils barred the way. To the study of law Bacon therefore devoted himself anew, and with such industry, that he was called to the bar in 1582, and became a Bencher of Gray's Inn in 1586.

For some years he drudged on in obscurity, aided by no one, and eating his heart out in unavailing regrets, as the years passed by, to others bringing promotion, to him only empty promises. In the meantime, hoping to better his circumstances through other channels than the Cecils, he entered Parliament in 1584, as representative of Melcombe Regis, and sat successively for Taunton in 1586, Liverpool, 1588, and Middlesex in 1593. His political creed can be stated very briefly, consisting as it did in a persistent advocacy of a *via media* in all things, a middle course between popular privilege and royal prerogative, or, to express it more definitely, moderation in secular reform with toleration in religion alike to Puritan and Papist. This policy he supported in two pamphlets. The first, entitled "The Greatest

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Birth of Time," published in 1585, was chiefly devoted to advocating mildness of treatment towards the recusants; the second, in 1589, dealt with the divisions in the Anglican Church over the Marprelate and other controversies. In both he pleaded for greater elasticity in matters of doctrine and of discipline.

Two pieces of preferment, if such they can be called, came to him at this time—he was admitted a Queen's Counsel Extraordinary, while the Cecils, wearied by his continual importunity, were at last shamed into procuring for him the reversion of the Registrarship of the Star Chamber on the death of the occupant. As this event did not take place for many years, Bacon, like Walter Scott with his Clerkship, experienced all the humiliation of waiting to fill dead men's shoes. Surprise has been expressed that, considering the reputation of the late Sir Nicholas Bacon, his son, even in spite of the apathy of the Cecils, should not have received some marks of favour from the Queen. The young politician, however, in his zeal for the defence of popular privileges, had attacked, in the House, the attempt to force on the Commons a conference with the Lords, on a question of Supply; while he also had opposed the demand for large subsidies. Such offences were unpardonable without apologies the humblest, which do not appear to have been offered. Burghley and his son—Sir Robert Cecil—made the most of this "insubordination." They fanned the spark of irritation in the Queen's mind into the flame of indignation. Any solicitations on Bacon's part for promotion, therefore, were met with chilling silence or polite refusal.

Bacon now resolved to be the suitor for his kinsmen's good offices no longer. He therefore transferred his allegiance to the party of the Earl of Essex, that brilliant but impetuous young nobleman, who, after climbing so high into the favour of the Queen, fell so disastrously through conduct that had not even the merit of opportunism to palliate it. But at this time he was the rising star in English politics, and the rival of the great Burghley himself. For Bacon, the young Earl conceived an affection both warm and sincere. With the advancement of his friend's fortunes Essex specially charged himself, making request so persistently to the Queen, first for the Attorney-Generalship, next for the Solicitor-Generalship, and finally for the post of "Master of the Rolls," that her Majesty begged him to speak on some other topic! When all these offices were put past Bacon, greatly to his chagrin, his patron consoled him with the gift of an estate at Twickenham, valued at £2000. They appear to have lived on terms of the closest intimacy, Bacon sharing in the social pleasures of Essex House, to aid which he wrote the Masque "The Conference of Pleasure"—a line of work for which Bacon evinced special aptitude, as witness his "Palace of Learning" and contributions to the "Gesta Grayorum," written at the request of the Benchers of Gray's Inn. How profoundly he had studied even the art of

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amusing people is evident from his Essay on "Masques and Triumphs,"¹ published in the 1625 edition of the work.

The question of the degree of Bacon's culpability in undertaking a part at least of the prosecution of Essex, when, upon the failure of the latter in 1599 to suppress Tyrone's rebellion in Ireland, and after his absurd attempt to raise an insurrection, he was impeached on a charge of high treason, is too vexed a problem to be discussed here. While on the one hand Bacon had certainly been placed in possession of the facts of Essex's treasonable negotiations with the King of Scots, on the other he exhibited unnecessary rancour against his former benefactor, twice interposing to keep the Court in view of the main facts of the case, from which Coke's confusion had allowed the examination to wander.² Professor Gardiner's opinion is perhaps the fairest summary of both sides of the matter: "That the course Bacon took indicates poverty of moral feeling cannot be denied. Yet our sentiment on the precedence of personal over political ties is based on our increased sense of political security, and is hardly applicable to a state of things in which anarchy, with its attendant miseries, would inevitably have followed on the violent overthrow of the Queen's right to select her Ministers."

Essex was convicted, condemned, and executed. So threatening, however, was the attitude of the people, to whom he appeared a national hero by his capture of Cadiz, that Elizabeth quailed before it, and insisted on an official "declaration" of Essex's treason being prepared, which was entrusted to Bacon. In it he persistently takes the blacker view of his late friend's conduct, refusing to admit any palliation of the crimes with which he was accused. Whether pricked in conscience over his conduct, or stung into irritation by the taunts of the friends of Essex, he issued immediately thereafter a justification of his action, which savours not a little of Jesuitical casuistry. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse!* There is reason to believe that the passage in the Essay on "Friendship," written in 1607, and beginning, "There be some whose lives are, as if they perpetually played upon a stage, disguised to all others, open only to themselves. But perpetual dissimulation is painful, and he that is all fortune and no nature is an exquisite Hirelinge, &c.,"³ which was omitted in the 1625 edition, had direct reference to Essex.

In 1597 the first edition of his "Essays" was published. The volume, which was of small octavo size, and dedicated to his brother Anthony, contained the following ten papers:—(1) Of Studies. (2) Of Discourse. (3) Of Ceremonies and Respect. (4) Of Followers and Friends. (5) Of Sutors (suitors). (6) Of Expense.

¹ p. 115.—Cf. Nichol and Spedding.

² Essex's recriminations upon Bacon at his trial—but charges never denied by the latter. Cf. Nichol's *Bacon* and Macaulay's Essay.

³ Cf. Arber's *Harmony of the Essays of Bacon*, wherein the several editions are printed in parallel columns.

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(7) Of Regiment of Health. (8) Of Honour and Reputation. (9) Of Faction. (10) Of Negotiating. The pregnancy of the thought and the pithiness of the style rendered the book well-nigh an epoch-making one. Its popularity was great, almost from the day of issue. But of this more anon.

Elizabeth was now come to the end of her memorable reign. All her older Ministers had predeceased her. Burghley, the greatest of all, had died in 1598, and was succeeded by his son.

Scarcely had the King of Scots had time to seat himself on the throne of England, than, with all a supple courtier's adaptability, Bacon sought to win the new monarch's goodwill by every wile he could employ. He received the honour of knighthood in 1603, followed by a pension of £60 a year, in consideration of James's respect for his late brother Anthony's (who had died in 1601) staunch championship of the Scottish succession. He was also appointed a "King's Counsel," with an annual gratuity of £40. The means whereby he flattered the King's Caledonian sympathies, in largest measure, however, were by advocating, both in Parliament and with his pen, a scheme for the Union of the Kingdoms as well as the Crowns of England and Scotland. His "Articles touching the Union" is a skilful collection of all historical and scientific analogies bearing on the conclusion he sought to prove, viz., that "there is a consent between the rules of nature and the true rules of policy; the one being nothing else but an order in the government of the world, the other an order in the government of an estate." The germs of his essay on "The True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates,"¹ in the form it assumed in the edition of 1612, are undoubtedly to be found in his "Articles touching the Union." The fact may also be of interest that, when in October 1604 James adopted the title of "King of Great Britany"—abbreviated into "Great Britain"—he assumed the name suggested by Bacon. The arguments of the latter, moreover, were so cogent that the Joint Committee, which met to discuss the terms of Union, came to an almost unanimous agreement. The majority of the Commons were also won over, and had not the King obstinately stood out for vesting the right of conferring letters of naturalisation in the Crown, the Union might have been consummated 100 years prior to the date of its actual accomplishment.

In 1605 Bacon issued the first of his great philosophical treatises, the *Advancement of Learning*—afterwards translated and expanded into the Latin dissertation, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*—a noble review of the state of learning in his age, its defects, the emptiness of many of the studies chosen, and the means to be adopted to secure improvement. His essays "On

¹ p. 89. The form in which we now possess this Essay differs materially from that in the edition of 1612.

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Seeming Wise,"¹ "On Custom and Education,"² and "On Studies"³ are all concerned with topics indicated rather than treated of in the *Advancement of Learning*, but which are nevertheless to be found there.

At the mature age of forty-five, Bacon took to wife an alderman's daughter, named Alice Barnham, and his marriage brought him a moderate fortune, acceptable to a man as deeply in debt as he was. The ceremony was celebrated with great pomp, the bridegroom being "clad from top to toe in purple, and hath made himself and his wife such store of fine raiments of cloth of silver and gold that it draws deep into her portion." For fifteen years Bacon's married life appears to have flowed along placidly, until after his fall, when an estrangement took place between him and his wife which was never healed.

Thirteen months after his marriage Bacon at last obtained legal office, when he became Solicitor-General (June 25, 1607). For the next two or three years he was employed in adjusting differences between the two great parties in the land, the High Anglicans, who urged the enforcement of the whole doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, and the Puritans, who, where not Nonconformists, were so Low Church as to approximate nearer to them than to any other party within or without its pale. Bacon urged toleration on both parties as well as upon the King. The irreconcilability of Cartwright and his followers tended to change Bacon's views somewhat, causing him to lean in the future rather to the Erastian than the Nonconformist side. His opinions on this topic may be read in his Essay "On Unity in Religion." It is significant that as the paper originally appeared in 1612 it was entitled "On Religion," and dealt more with doctrine than divisions. His experiences at this stage and later in the reign led him to rank "unity" as one of the cardinal doctrines in religion, so much so that in the 1625 draft of the Essay in question he felt compelled to add the following sentences: "Religion being the chief band of human society, it is a happy thing when itself is well contained within the true band of unity . . . nothing doth so much keep men out of the Church and drive men out of the Church as breach of unity."⁴ Also in the Essays "On Atheism"⁵ and "On Superstition"⁶ he refers to religious divisions, their causes and their effects, in terms that show how correctly he gauged the extent of the mischief they wrought.

Bacon also advocated at first the adoption of a *via media* with reference to the great controversy regarding the *jus divinum*, otherwise the respective limits of the royal prerogative and of popular privilege—a controversy which, commencing in the reign of James, culminated in the Civil War and the execution of Charles I. The dispute, however, started so many side issues,

¹ p. 78.

² p. 8.

³ p. 119.

⁴ p. 49.

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⁵ p. 150.

⁶ p. 52.

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that insensibly Bacon was led to modify his tolerant liberalism until he could actually affirm from his place in Parliament: "The King holdeth not his prerogative of any kind from the law, but immediately from God as he holdeth his Crown." In his Essay "On Empire" he makes an observation somewhat analogous: "Princes are like to heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration but no rest. All precepts concerning kings are in effect comprehended in those two remembrances: '*Memento quod es homo*' and '*Memento quod es Deus*,' or '*Vice Dei*'; the one bridleth their power and the other their will."¹

Despite all these engrossments his literary activity was not allowed to slacken. Every moment of his time that could be spared from Parliament and the Law Courts was devoted to the pursuit of letters. In 1609 the "Wisdom of the Ancients" appeared, in which he explains the classic fables and mythology on allegorical principles; while new editions of his "Essays" were published in 1607 and 1612. The latter was designated a *revised* edition, many of the papers being rewritten. Several new Essays also were added, bringing the total number up to thirty-eight.

Sir Robert Cecil, Bacon's cousin, who had recently been created Earl of Salisbury, died somewhat suddenly in 1612. Among the Essays recently added to his collection had been one on "Deformity,"² in which he was supposed to have sketched his relative's character to the life.³ Bacon made a bold bid to the King for the dead man's place, offering, as he said, "to manage parliaments and to obtain supplies without concerting undignified bargains as Salisbury had done." James did not accept the offer, being, perhaps, a little apprehensive as to what lengths the applicant's ideas on toleration might lead him. In his desire to secure the office of "Master of the Wards" also, Bacon was fated to suffer disappointment. In 1613, however, he was consoled with the long-sighed-for Attorney-Generalship. The Essay "On Great Place"⁴ is certainly written out of the fulness of his own weary experience, especially the sentence: "The rising into Place is laborious, and by paines men come to greater pains, and it is sometimes base; and by indignities men come to dignities, &c."

Previous to this, he had been appointed president of a new Court called "The Verge," instituted to deal directly with offences committed within a range of twelve miles around the King's residence in London. His opening charge is remarkable for the earnestness wherewith he condemns "Duelling" as a national crime—"Life is grown too cheap in these times," he cries indignantly. When he became Attorney-General he went further, and proposed that the offender—whether by sending or

¹ p. 61.

² p. 131.

³ Nicholas Chamberlain, *Court and Times of James I.*

⁴ p. 31.

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accepting a challenge, or even acting as second—should be permanently banished from the Court. The "Addled Parliament" saw the extinction of Bacon's political influence. Its dissolution in 1614 and the estranged relations ensuing between King and Commons, during the time when Parliament was unconvoked, entailed the destruction of that feeling of mutual sympathy arising from identity of interests, which Bacon had long striven to foster between the "first" and the "third" Estates of the realm. The Essay on "Seditions and Troubles"¹ deals characteristically with this question among others.

At this time Bacon showed his keen prevision and skill in reading the signs of the times, by severing the ties of friendship binding him to the King's "reigning" favourite—Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset—and espousing the cause of the rising one—George Villiers, afterwards Duke of Buckingham. His foresight was justified. Somerset fell along with his Countess, both steeped in the infamy of the Overbury murder; Villiers rose like a rocket over the ruined splendour of his predecessor, being materially assisted by Bacon in the early stages of his upward course. Bacon's allusion to royal "favourites" in his Essay on "Ambition" is esteemed to refer to James's partiality for them. With characteristic servility he so far palliates the practice with the words: "It is counted by some a weakness in princes to have favourites; but it is of all others the best remedy against ambitious great ones."²

Whatever services Bacon rendered, Buckingham amply repaid them, in exerting his influence to procure rapid promotion for him. In June 1616 Bacon was sworn in of the Privy Council, and in March 1617, on the retirement of Lord Brackley, he was appointed Keeper of the Great Seal. The address delivered by him before his Court on taking his seat was characterised by lofty nobility of sentiment and dignified oratory. On the official ladder only one step now remained for him to mount, and that one he was not long in ascending. In January 1618 he was appointed Lord Chancellor of England. Other honours were showered on him. In July of the same year he was raised to the peerage as Lord Verulam, the designation being taken from the Latin name of St. Albans, near which town his estate of Gorham-bury was situated.

Possessed now of a very large income, he maintained great power and state in his household arrangements. January 1620 saw him entering his 60th year, and he celebrated the occasion at York House by a gathering of his friends, whose congratulations he received with manifest pleasure. Ben Jonson was of the party, and commemorated the scene in lines at once flattering and felicitous. In October 1620 he published the *Novum Organum*, or the New Instrument for the Interpretation of Nature and the Discovery of Truth—a volume which, in the words of Macaulay,

¹ p. 42.

² p. 114.

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drew forth the warmest expressions of admiration from the ablest men in Europe; while a further honour was conferred on him in January of the succeeding year, when he was created Viscount St. Albans.

This brought him to the pinnacle of his career. Honours, dignities, wealth, praise, public esteem, all were his. But, alas, with his sense of these, there must have been the humiliating consciousness of shameful acts of tyranny committed at the instigation of James and Buckingham. He consented to the death of Raleigh—the greatest Englishman of his age next to Shakespeare and himself; he deserted his own friend, Attorney-General Yelverton, when the latter was tried for inserting unauthorised clauses in the charter of the City of London; he supported the Spanish alliance, when he had already advocated a treaty, offensive and defensive, with the Netherlands, and although he knew the heart of the nation loathed everything associated with Spain; he approved of oppressive "Monopolies" by which the people were unjustly taxed, and he permitted Buckingham to influence the course of justice in the Chancery Courts. There is a passage in his Essay "On Negotiating" beginning: "It is better dealing with men in appetite¹ than with those that are where they would be. If a man deal with another upon conditions, the start or first performance is all," *et seq.*,² which seems to be written with designed obscurity, yet which is undoubtedly a protest against the degrading servility he had been obliged all his life to display, first towards the Cecils and then towards James and his favourites.

But the day of reckoning, if long delayed, came at last. Parliament, after being unsummoned from 1614 to 1621, had at length to be convoked, and among the first acts of the Commons was to table a demand for reform in connection with the oppressive Monopoly-patents, under cover of which Buckingham and his creatures had pillaged the nation. From these, instigated by Bacon's enemy, Coke, whose dismissal from the Chief-Justiceship of the Queen's Bench he had effected during his Attorney-Generalship, the Commons passed on to criticise the state of the Courts of Justice, and direct charges of accepting bribes were tabulated against the Chancellor. Bacon, scenting mischief in Coke's attitude, tried to urge the King to resistance with words that read strangely prophetic of the fate of Charles I. eight and twenty years thereafter: "Those that will strike at your Chancellor, it is much to be feared will strike at your Crown."

But all was in vain. The King could do nothing beyond imprisoning Coke, for Bacon had practically no defence to offer. The evidence against him was overwhelming. Yet this was the man who in his Essay "On Judicature" had expressed such lofty sentiments on the necessity for unbiassed justice. The

¹ "Men in appetite"—men whose desires have not been gratified.

² p. 144.

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whole paper is his condemnation, but more especially these sentences: "Above all things integrity is their (judges') portion and proper virtue . . . one foul sentence doth more hurt than many foul examples, for these do but corrupt the stream, the other corrupteth the fountain. . . . The place of justice is a hallowed place, and therefore not only the bench but the footpace and precincts and purprise thereof ought to be preserved without scandal and corruption." ¹

The Chancellor at last came to recognise his case as hopeless, and probably under the influence of feelings such as he describes in his Essay "On Wisdom for a Man's Self," ² which contains obvious references to the relations formerly existing between the King, Buckingham, and himself—for the practice of bribe-taking was general, from the King on the throne to the lowest lackey in his service—he wrote a letter throwing himself on the mercy of his peers, evidently hoping that James and Buckingham would save him to save themselves. The epistle manifests a strange mingling of pathos and petulance, of noble aspirations after greater purity in "the fount of justice" with ignoble aspersions on those who assailed him.

But what he had caused Yelverton to suffer he was now to suffer himself. He was left to his fate, although it is hard to see how James could have moved in the matter. The sentence pronounced upon the Lord Chancellor was that he be fined £40,000, imprisoned in the Tower during the King's pleasure, declared incapable of holding office in the State or of sitting in Parliament, and that he should not come within the verge of the Court. No sooner, however, was the sentence pronounced than it was mitigated by royal order; he was released from the Tower and retired to Gorhambury. Thereafter the fine was remitted and the prohibition against his presence at Court revoked, but the bar against sitting in Parliament was never removed.

From a literary and philosophical point of view the last period of Bacon's life was the most glorious. "The virtue of Prosperity is temperance; the virtue of Adversity fortitude, which in morals is the more heroical virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction and the clearer revelation of God's favour." ³ These sentences, written after his fall, show the effect it had produced upon him. By no student of Bacon's works can this Essay "On Adversity" be read without emotion. Smarting under his disgrace, Bacon turned with eagerness to the intellectual pursuits his official duties had interrupted. In profound study he found an anodyne, and his delight in such labours is finely reflected in his Essay "Of Nature in Men."

His activity was phenomenal. Five months after his fall he completed his *History of Henry VII.*, which received the praise of Grotius and Locke as a model of philosophical history-writing;

¹ p. 162.

² p. 72.

³ p. 15.

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he began his *History of Henry VIII.*, sketched the outline of his *History of Great Britain*, made notes for his *Digest of the Laws of England and Scotland*, and prepared his *Dialogue on the Sacred War*.¹ In 1623 appeared the *De Augmentis*, the Latin translation with expansion of the *Advancement of Learning*, and his unfinished philosophical romance "New Atlantis," designed as a half-practical, half-poetical suggestion of a College of Thinkers, partially realised afterwards in the Royal Society. Not the least important work was the final revision of his famous *Essays*, with as many new papers added as raised the total number to fifty-eight. This was his last literary undertaking, and was published a few months before his death.

For some time he had been growing increasingly feeble; yet he did not remit his labours. He died indeed a singular martyr to science. On a bitterly cold day he descended from his carriage, purchased a fowl, killed it, and with his own hands stuffed it with snow, to see if cold would prove an agent in arresting putrefaction. Scarcely was this done, than he felt a chill striking through his system. Too ill to return home, he was carried to the house of Lord Arundel, where, exactly a week later, on April 9, 1626, he passed peacefully away. He was buried, as he desired, near his mother, in the Church of St. Michael, St. Albans.

Bacon was intellectually great, but morally weak. His marvellous versatility renders it difficult to present a critical estimate which embraces all the varied aspects of his personality, as lawyer, politician, scientist, philosopher, historian and essayist. In theology and in church politics he was a curious investigator too, while the ambiguous phrase, "be kind to concealed poets"—a phrase on which the Bacon Shakespeare theory has laid stress—raises the suspicion that he wooed the muse in more ways than that shown in the two or three masques he wrote. In a word, he took all knowledge for his province.

Bacon's philosophical "system," which is to be studied in his *Advancement of Learning*, the *De Augmentis*, and the *Novum Organum*, may be said to aim primarily at a review, classification, and methodisation of all knowledge. To speak of him as formulating a "system," or as founding a "school," is erroneous. He who only builds the porch cannot be said to have erected a mansion. Comprehensive though his intellect was, he had diffused his energies over so many fields that in his own half-sad, half-humorous saying, "he had done nothing more than to ring the bell to call the wits together."

Now about the "Essays." No one can study them with care without discovering that every paper is the fruit of his own experience, distilled through the alembic of his marvellous mind.

¹ Not a prior "suggestion" for a work like Bunyan's "Holy War," as some writers rather amusingly have stated, but an endeavour to stimulate Europe into forming a League of Extermination against the Barbary pirates and the Turks.

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There is scarcely a single Essay which, in some sentence or another, does not point its affirmations and conclusions by some subtle reference, expressed or understood, to his own life. It is one of the few volumes that may be designated "world-books"—books that are more cosmopolitan than patriotic, adapted not to an age but to all time. In it, supreme intellectual force is united to Protean variety of interests and sympathies. All types and temperaments of humanity may find some affinity to themselves therein. Easy would it have been for Bacon to make his volume merely a study of English traits, of local men and manners, like Hall's *Characterismes*, or Overbury's *Characters*, or Earle's *Microcosmographie*. In that case, however, none but Englishmen could have adequately entered into its spirit and sentiments. But now, its sphere of influence is well-nigh coterminous with the world's boundaries, since none can fail to enjoy where all are able to understand.

The *Essays* of Francis Bacon, in the form or text now presented to our readers, may be said to have passed through *three* distinct stages of evolution, represented by the editions of 1597, 1612, and 1625. Numbering at first only ten papers, as we have seen (the volume being eked out with "Religious Meditations"),¹ they were increased to thirty-eight in 1612, the original *Essays* having been thoroughly revised and in many cases rewritten. From then until the year before his death, when they were issued in their final form and number—fifty-eight—Bacon kept the book constantly beside him, adding, altering, compressing, or expanding as he saw fit. Some of the early *Essays* passed through many drafts. As his opinions suffered modification through the incidents and accidents of life, so the sentiments expressed in the *Essays* had to be changed. The papers "On Suitors," "On Faction," and "On Friendship" were altered very materially during the course of the editions, the last-named one being entirely rewritten in view of the issue of 1625.

From the first, their popularity was great. Their brevity was a recommendation to readers with limited leisure, their compactness of thought and conciseness of expression a virtue, passing meritorious, in an age when looseness alike in thought and language was the rule rather than the exception. While the *Essays* may not, as a whole, display the stately music of Donne or of Hooker, the florid ornateness of Burton or of Browne, the sustained grandeur of Johnson—a grandeur at times verging on grandiloquence—or the sinewy flexibility of Selden, they unite in themselves a portion of the excellences of all the six. The qualities of his age—the word-painting of Jacobean diction, the involution of thought even beyond the border line of conceits, the quaint humour and the sparkling wit, all have their place in the *Essays*. The sharp, antithetic form in which he elected to present his thoughts in the earlier essays necessarily contributed as much

¹ Written in Latin, but translated into English in 1598.

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to the pregnancy of their matter as to the epigrammatic precision of their manner. While some of the earlier *Essays* read, in places, like extracts from the *Book of Proverbs*, others among the later ones exhibit all the brightness, the colour, and the vivid word-painting of Sidney's *Arcadia* or Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*. As an example of the first-named type, we select at random from the Essay "On Studies" the following sentences: "To spend too much time on studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation. . . . Crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them;"¹ and from the Essay "On Suitors" the following: "To be ignorant of the value of a suit is simplicity; as well as to be ignorant of the right thereof, is want of conscience."² Now contrast with the antithetic compactness, almost reaching baldness, characteristic of both the aforementioned papers, the wealth of diction and felicitous power of description displayed in the Essays "On Building"³ and "On Gardens."⁴ A passage like this comes to one like the breath of a cool mountain breeze amid the sultry stillness of a midsummer's afternoon: "Because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air. . . . Of bean flowers I speak not, because they are field flowers; but those which perfume the air most delightfully, not passed by as the rest, but being trodden upon and crushed, are three; that is, burnet, wild thyme, and water-mints; therefore, you are to set whole alleys of them, to have the pleasure when you walk or tread."⁵

As one of the world's epoch-making books, Bacon's *Essays* have done much to mould and direct the character of many individuals. With Montaigne's *Essays* they almost inevitably challenged comparison, inasmuch as only some seventeen years separated the publication of their first editions. Montaigne's *Essays* appeal to broader social sympathies and cover a larger area of human action, as the sphere of their observation and criticism. But we miss the firm intellectual grip, the bone and sinew of compact thought, the comprehensive survey over the entire domain of knowledge, the almost preternatural acumen displayed in detecting far-reaching analogies, and the polymathic acquaintance with the entire range of the learning of his age, evinced by Bacon. He lacked Montaigne's lightness of touch and piquant picturesqueness in stating obvious truths so as to make them look like new; while Montaigne in turn was entirely destitute of the great English Essayist's marvellous penetration into the very soul of things, and of his superb ratiocinative faculty. If Montaigne were the greater literary artist, Bacon was the profounder moral and intellectual force.

That Bacon had read Montaigne when the first book of the

¹ p. 140.

² p. 142.

³ p. 138.

⁴ p. 137.

⁵ p. 138.

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latter's *Essays* was published in 1580 is strongly probable, though he does not personally mention him until 1625. Both Essayists have treated several topics in common. Bacon has an Essay "On Ceremonies and Respects," Montaigne one "On Ceremonies in the Interview of Kings"; both writers have an Essay "On Friendship"; Bacon writes on "Vain Glory," Montaigne on "Glory" and on "Vanity"; Bacon treats of "Studies," and Montaigne of "Books," but the subject under discussion in both is much the same. Bacon in his Essay on "Friendship" says, "It is a strange thing to observe how high a rate great kings and monarchs do set upon this fruit of friendship whereof we speak: so great as they purchase it many times at the hazard of their own safety and greatness, for princes in regard of the distance of their fortune from that of their subjects and servants, cannot gather this fruit except (to make themselves capable thereof) they raise some persons to be, as it were, companions and almost equals to themselves, which many times sorteth to inconvenience."¹ On the same question Montaigne says to us, through the translation of John Florio: "There is nothing to which Nature hath more addressed us than to Societie. And Aristotle saith that perfect Lawgivers² have had more regardful care of friendship than of justice. And the utmost drift of its perfection is this. For generally all those amities which are forged and nourished by voluptuousness or profit, publike or private need, are thereby so much the less faire and generous, and so much the lesse true amities, in that they intermeddle other causes, scope and fruit with friendship, than itself alone."³

Further, Bacon's Essays, viewed in their entirety, may be said to group themselves round three great principles. These are: (1) Man in his relations to the World and Society; (2) Man in his relations to himself; (3) Man in his relations to his Maker. These divisions cannot be said to be altogether mutually exclusive. Some of the Essays, therefore, may be ranked under more than one of the headings. But this basis of division enables us to attempt some sort of classification, in accordance with which the Essays may be methodically studied in closely allied groups.

The first-named class is of course the largest, including as it does the relations of mankind to the physical world and also those mutual relations constituting Society as a whole. As representative of the papers that would fall under this category may be named those on "Seditions and Troubles," "Great Place," "Empire," "Friendship," "Plantations," "Parents and Children," "Building," "Gardens," "Suitors," "Judicature," "Discourse," "Faction," &c.

Under the second group would be ranked the papers dealing

¹ p. 81.

² Published in 1603.

³ Lawgivers—also translated Rulers or Princes, which makes the resemblance to Bacon's words more remarkable.

⁴ Montaigne's *Essays*, Bk. I. xxvii.

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with Man the individual, in his intellectual and moral relations. The Essays regarded as representative of this class would be such as: "Regiment of Health," "Studies," "Ambition," "Wisdom for Man's Self," "Seeming Wise," "Adversity," "Revenge," "Honour and Reputation," "Deformity," &c.

Under the third heading, Man's relation to his Maker and the Unseen World, such papers as these would be ranked: "Death," "Unity in Religion," "Atheism," "Superstition," "Prophecies," "Nature in Men," "Goodness," &c.

Finally, Bacon's *Essays* are the work of a man who, in precept, at least, had a deep reverence for moral principle. None other than one entertaining such sentiments could have said as he has done: "A man that hath no virtue in himself ever envieth virtue in others."¹ "Power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring, for good thoughts (though God accept them) yet towards men are little better than good dreams, except they be put in act;"² and "The desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall; the desire of knowledge in excess caused man to fall; but in charity (goodness) there is no excess, neither can angel or man come in danger by it."³ The writer of these *Essays* was also a man who theoretically cherished a profound love and respect for justice: "The principal duty of a judge is to suppress force and fraud;"⁴ "Let no man weakly conceive that just laws and true policy have any antipathy, for they are like the spirits and sinews that one moves with the other;"⁵ "Suspicions amongst thoughts are like bats amongst birds; they ever fly by twilight. They dispose kings to tyranny, husbands to jealousy, wise men to irresolution and melancholy."⁶

Bacon, moreover, always maintains the Sanctity of Truth alike in scientific investigation and the intercourse of life: "Truth which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the enquiry of truth which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature;"⁷ or in moral conduct: "It is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth."⁸

And so we leave Francis Bacon! Had he left us no other literary legacy than those wonderful *Essays*, he would have established a claim upon the gratitude, not alone of his fellow-countrymen, but of his fellow-men—a claim the years will ever strengthen and time will ay confirm!

¹ p. 24.
² p. 165.

³ p. 31.
⁴ p. 100.

⁵ p. 37.
⁶ p. 4.

⁷ p. 162.
⁸ p. 4.

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The following list gives the chief editions of Bacon's works:—

- Essays**, 1597; 2nd Edition, 1598; 3rd Edition, 1606; 5th Edition, newly written, 1625.
Advancement of Learning, 1605, 1629, 1633.
De Sapientia Veterum, 1609, 1617, 1633, 1634.
The Wisdome of the Ancients, done into English by Sir A. G. Knight, 1619, 1658.
(The) New Atlantis, 1660.
Novum Organum, 1620, 1645.
Life of Henry VII., 1622, 1629.
De Augmentis Scientiarum, 1623, 1635, 1645, expanded from the *Advancement of Learning*, translated in Latin under the supervision of Bacon.
Apophthegmes, New and Old, 1624 [B.M. 1625].
Sylva Sylvarum, published after the author's death by W. Rawley, 1627, 1635.

COLLECTED WORKS

- Opera omnia quæ extant. Philosophica, Moralia Politica, Historica**, 1665.
Opera Omnia. Life of Francis Bacon, by Dr. Rawley. Edited by J. Blackbourne, 1730.
Bacon's works, with *Life*, Mallet's, 1740 and 1753. Montagu's, 17 vols., 1825-1826.
Works, originally collected and revised by R. Stephens and J. Locker, published after their deaths by T. Birch, 5 vols., 1765.
Works, collected and edited by J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis and D. D. Heath, 14 vols., 1857-1874.