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BACON'S ESSAYS

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PREFACE.

IN preparing this edition of Bacon's *Essays*, I have had two objects in view. In the first place I have endeavoured to provide the general reader with information which shall enable him to understand the Essays, and in the second place I have endeavoured to convey the information in such a form that he may read them with enjoyment. It is only the advanced scholar who can understand Bacon without the aid of threefold explanations,—explanations of the language, of the thought, and of the allusions. With regard to Bacon's language, Mr Reynolds says that 'almost every page of the Essays bristles with difficulties, some of them the more likely to mislead because even a careful reader, not familiar with the language of Bacon's age, might fail to detect them for what they are.' I have therefore added footnotes which explain these verbal difficulties and furnish an English rendering of the numerous Latin quotations. From these footnotes the reader can obtain the interpretation of Bacon's language without repeatedly turning the pages to hunt for words in a Glossary. Interruptions of this sort inevitably rob a book of much of its charm, and one aim of this edition is to make it possible, as we said, for Bacon to be read with enjoyment.

B.

b

But when the stumbling-blocks have been removed from the vocabulary, it happens now and then that the thought remains obscure. Sometimes the relevance of a remark is not obvious: sometimes the terseness of a sentence conceals its drift. In such cases an explanation or a paraphrase is given in the Notes.

Lastly, though obscurities of diction and of argument may have been cleared away, Bacon's historical and mythological allusions cause perplexity. Of such allusions the number contained in the whole series of Essays exceeds three hundred. In the 19th Essay there are forty; in the 27th there are close upon thirty. An Index of Proper Names furnishes the necessary details respecting every person and place mentioned in Bacon's text and a reference to the Essay in which the allusion occurs. As a means of making the Essays intelligible to the ordinary student, I believe that this Index will be found of far greater service than disquisitions upon Bacon's politics, morals, or philosophy.

The student who understands Bacon's language, the drift of his argument, and the point of his allusions, has attained the principal object with which, presumably, he read Bacon's book. But there are some readers for whom questions of grammatical usage possess considerable interest, and a classified enumeration is therefore supplied in the Appendix of the differences between the English of the Essays and the English of our own day.

As we are concerned in the Essays with Bacon only as the man of letters, I have said nothing of his work in philosophy or of his political career. I have also abstained from quoting at length parallel passages from his other writings. Bacon was careful of his good things and when he had said them once he liked to say them again. Δὲς ἡ τρίς τὰ καλά.

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PREFACE.

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A repetition, from the *Advancement of Learning* or from the *History of Henry VII.*, of remarks which already figure in the *Essays* seems unnecessary. The desire to economise space has led me to supply, as a rule, merely the numbered reference to passages in other authors.

For the spelling I have generally followed Mr Aldis Wright's text, but I have modified the punctuation by removing some thousands of stops which, at the present day, are a source only of embarrassment. After a short acquaintance with the book, the reader will find no difficulty in the profusion of capital letters and the liberal disregard of orthographical conventions, but will probably like his old-world author all the better in the author's old-world dress.

To Mr Aldis Wright, Dr Abbott, and Mr S. H. Reynolds, among the many editors of Bacon's *Essays*, my indebtedness is very great. I have also made use occasionally of the Notes furnished by Mr Hunter, Mr Selby, and Messrs Storr and Gibson. An acknowledgment in this general form will, I trust, be accepted as covering particular instances in which I may have borrowed without making explicit reference to the source. My thanks are due to Mr John Sargeaunt, of University College, Oxford, for helpful suggestions on several points respecting which I have asked his advice.

A. S. WEST.

January 1st, 1897.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHAT Bacon meant by the word 'Essay' he has told us himself. 'The want of leisure,' he says, 'hath made me choose to write certain brief notes, set down rather significantly than curiously, which I have called ESSAYS. The word is late, but the thing is ancient. For Seneca's Epistles to Lucilius, if one mark them well, are but Essays,—that is, dispersed meditations, though conveyed in the form of Epistles.'

Montaigne's *Essays* had appeared in 1580. The first edition of Bacon's *Essays* was published in 1597. Bacon was acquainted with Montaigne's work, though he refers to Montaigne by name only once. In the Essay on Truth, which was a new contribution to the third edition of 1625, he quotes Montaigne, and quotes him with characteristic inaccuracy. 'Mountaigny saith prettily,' he writes; but the pretty saying is Plutarch's, not Montaigne's, and is mentioned by Montaigne as the remark of 'un ancien.' Between the Essays of Bacon and the Essays of Montaigne there is little in common, 'except their rare power of exciting interest, and the unmistakable mark of genius which is impressed on both¹.'

Short jottings on great subjects,—jottings thrown together without any serious attempt at elaboration, completeness, or methodical arrangement,—jottings 'of a nature whereof a man

¹ Prof. T. Fowler.

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shall find much in experience but little in books,'—jottings which 'come home to men's business and bosoms,'—such are Bacon's Essays, described pretty much in his own terms.

Compositions of this sort naturally suffer now and then from the lack of method and precision. Bacon sometimes employs a word in ambiguous senses. Thus, when he writes about Truth, the term 'Truth' stands at first for the correspondence of thought with fact, and afterwards for the virtue of truthfulness, which is quite a different matter. 'Envy' is used to denote, not only what we commonly understand by the name, but also malevolence and popular discontent. Within the limits of a short Essay, Beauty is variously analysed with curious inconsistency¹.

Bacon's strength appears to the best advantage in his speculations on character and conduct,—in the practical sagacity (not always wisdom of the highest order,) of his maxims for managing one's fellow men. Here we have the teaching of an expert whose career had familiarised him with the wiles and artifices of courtiers and officials,—the teaching of one who had himself been an 'actor upon the stage,' and who was also a shrewd observer of life.

In the history of English literature, Bacon ranks among the creators of our modern prose². His position as a classic is secure. With greater versatility than Ascham, or Sidney, or Hooker, he produced masterpieces in more styles than one. Yet it was almost an accident that he wrote in English at all. He felt no confidence in the enduring stability of his native tongue. If a book of his was to 'live and be a citizen of the world, as English books are not,' it must be translated into Latin. 'These modern languages,' he says, 'will at one time or another play the bank-rowte with books.'

Though his style, varying with the requirements of his

¹ For the substance of the remarks contained in this paragraph and the next I am indebted to Mr Reynolds (Introduction to *Bacon's Essays*, pp. xxii—xxv). The whole of Mr Reynolds's Introduction deserves careful and repeated reading.

² See *Bacon's Essays*, edited by Messrs Storr and Gibson, Introduction, pp. lxxii—lxxiv.

INTRODUCTION.

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subject, is sometimes rich and ornate, sometimes solemn and majestic, sometimes penetrating and concise, the quality of superb self-confidence is seldom absent. What he conceives as a poet, he utters as a prophet, and as a prophet who delivers his message and disdains controversy. He speaks as one having authority: '*Franciscus Baconus sic cogitavit*. These are thoughts which have occurred to me; weigh them well, and take them or leave them¹.'

His expressions are often obscure. Perhaps the obscurity was sometimes intentional. At any rate the fault was of old standing. His mother forwards to her son Anthony one of his brother's letters. 'Construe the interpretation,' she says: 'I do not understand his enigmatical folded writing².' Usually however the want of clearness is due to the terseness of his utterance. Thoughts which a writer of our own day would distil over a page, Bacon condenses into a sentence. What he writes is meant, not 'to be swallowed' in a hurry, but 'to be chewed and digested' with deliberation. No man ever packed so much matter into smaller compass.

Dean Church says of Bacon's Essays that 'they are like chapters in Aristotle's Ethics and Rhetoric on virtues and characters; only Bacon takes Aristotle's broad marking lines as drawn, and proceeds with the subtler and more refined observations of a much longer and wider experience. But these short papers say what they have to say without preface, and in literary undress, without a superfluous word, without the joints and bands of structure: they say it in brief, rapid sentences, which come down, sentence after sentence, like the strokes of a great hammer³.'

Bacon's fertility of imagination was immense. 'In wit, if by wit be meant the power of perceiving analogies between things which appear to have nothing in common, he never had an

¹ Macaulay, *Essays*, Vol. I. p. 409. Cf. Reynolds, *Bacon's Essays*, Introduction, p. xii.

² Quoted in Mr Reynolds's Introduction, p. xxii.

³ *Bacon*, 'English Men of Letters,' pp. 215—16.

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equal¹. Ingenious metaphors abound in his writings. Some of his expressions have obtained currency as quotations among people of education. Even the man in the street can speak of children as 'hostages to fortune,' though he might be puzzled to fix the phrase on its right author. Whatever the subject of discourse, Bacon has an illustration at hand.

Not only does he give us an illustration, but the chances are that he will throw in a quotation as well. He quotes with the copiousness and magnificent inaccuracy of many a modern journalist. His quotations fall into two classes,—Quotations and Misquotations, and one cannot decide off-hand which class is the more numerous. Sometimes he was inaccurate because his memory played him false and he was too indifferent about trifles to verify his quotations. Sometimes he deliberately tampered with an author to bring the quotation into harmony with its new context. In his quotations, as in his philosophy generally, exactness of detail was sacrificed to width of range.

¹ Macaulay, *Essays*, Vol. I. p. 410.

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THE
ESSAYES
OR
COVNSELS,
CIVILL AND
MORALL,
OF
FRANCIS LO. VERVLAM,
VISCOVNT St. ALBAN.

Newly enlarged.



LONDON,
Printed by IOHN HAVILAND for
HANNA BARRET, and RICHARD
WHITAKER, and are to be sold
at the signe of the Kings head in
Pauls Church-yard. 1625.

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TO
 THE RIGHT
 HONORABLE MY
 VERY GOOD LO. THE DVKE

*of Buckingham his Grace, Lo.
 High Admirall of England.*

EXCELLENT LO.

SALOMON saies, *A good Name is as a precious oyntment;* And I assure my selfe, such wil your Grace's Name bee with Posteritie. For your Fortune and Merit both have beene Eminent. And you have planted Things, that are like to last. I doe now publish my *Essayes*; which of all my other workes have beene most Currant; For that, as it seemes, they come home to Men's Businesse and Bosomes. I have enlarged them, both in Number and Weight; So that they are indeed a New Worke. I thought it therefore agreeable, to my Affection and Obligation to your Grace, to prefix your Name before them, both in English and in Latine. For I doe conceive, that the Latine Volume of them, (being in the Universall Language) may last, as long as Bookes last. My *Instauration*, I dedicated to the King: My *Historie of HENRY the Seventh*, (which I have now also translated into Latine) and my *Portions of Naturall*

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xviii *THE EPISTLE DEDICATORIE*

History, to the Prince : And these I dedicate to your Grace ;
Being of the best Fruits, that by the good Encrease, which God
gives to my Pen and Labours, I could yeeld. God leade your
Grace by the Hand.

*Your Grace's most Obliged and
faithfull Servant,*
FR. ST. ALBAN.

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