

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Vinci
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Freud Zola Lawrence Dickens Harte
Kant Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Hesse
London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Cooke
Poe Aristotle Wells Shakespeare
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Cooke
Bunner Shakespeare Shakespeare Irving
Richter Chambers Irving
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Bacon

R. W. (Richard William) Church

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PREFACE.

In preparing this sketch it is needless to say how deeply I am indebted to Mr. Spedding and Mr. Ellis, the last editors of Bacon's writings, the very able and painstaking commentators, the one on Bacon's life, the other on his philosophy. It is impossible to overstate the affectionate care and high intelligence and honesty with which Mr. Spedding has brought together and arranged the materials for an estimate of Bacon's character. In the result, in spite of the force and ingenuity of much of his pleading, I find myself most reluctantly obliged to differ from him; it seems to me to be a case where the French saying, cited by Bacon in one of his commonplace books, holds good—"Par trop se d'écouter, la vaine gloire perd."¹ But this does not diminish the debt of gratitude which all who are interested about Bacon must owe to Mr. Spedding. I wish also to acknowledge the assistance which I have received from Mr. Gardiner's *History of England* and Mr. Fowler's edition of the *Novum Organum*; and not least from M. de Ronsard's work on Bacon, which seems to me the most complete and the most just estimate both of Bacon's character and work which has yet appeared; though even in this clear and dispassionate survey we are reminded by some misconceptions, strange in M. de Ronsard, how what one nation takes for granted is incomprehensible to its neighbour; and what a gap there is still, even in matters of philosophy and literature, between the whole Continent and ourselves—

"Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos."

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CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE.

The life of Francis Bacon is one which it is a pain to write or to read. It is the life of a man endowed with as rare a combination of noble gifts as ever was bestowed on a human intellect; the life of one with whom the whole purpose of living and of every day's work was to do great things to enlighten and elevate his race, to enrich it with new powers, to lay up in store for all ages to come a source of blessings which should never fail or dry up; it was the life of a man who had high thoughts of the ends and methods of law and government, and with whom the general and public good was regarded as the standard by which the use of public power was to be measured; the life of a man who had struggled hard and successfully for the material prosperity and opulence which makes work easy and gives a man room and force for carrying out his purposes. All his life long his first and never-sleeping passion was the romantic and splendid ambition after knowledge, for the conquest of nature and for the service of man; gathering up in himself the spirit and longings and efforts of all discoverers and inventors of the arts, as they are symbolised in the mythical Prometheus. He rose to the highest place and honour; and yet that place and honour were but the fringe and adornment of all that made him great. It is difficult to imagine a grander and more magnificent career; and his name ranks among the few chosen examples of human achievement. And yet it was not only an unhappy life; it was a poor life. We expect that such an overwhelming weight of glory should be borne up by a character corresponding to it in strength and nobleness. But that is not what we find. No one ever had a greater idea of what he was made for, or was fired with a greater desire to devote himself to it. He was all this. And yet being all this, seeing deep into man's worth, his capacities, his greatness, his weakness, his sins, he was not true to what he knew. He cringed to such a man as Buckingham. He sold himself to the corrupt and ignominious Government of James I. He was willing to be employed to hunt to death a friend like Essex, guilty,

deeply guilty, to the State, but to Bacon the most loving and generous of benefactors. With his eyes open he gave himself up without resistance to a system unworthy of him; he would not see what was evil in it, and chose to call its evil good; and he was its first and most signal victim.

Bacon has been judged with merciless severity. But he has also been defended by an advocate whose name alone is almost a guarantee for the justness of the cause which he takes up, and the innocence of the client for whom he argues. Mr. Spedding devoted nearly a lifetime, and all the resources of a fine intellect and an earnest conviction, to make us revere as well as admire Bacon. But it is vain. It is vain to fight against the facts of his life: his words, his letters. "Men are made up," says a keen observer, "of professions, gifts, and talents; and also of *themselves*." ² With all his greatness, his splendid genius, his magnificent ideas, his enthusiasm for truth, his passion to be the benefactor of his kind; with all the charm that made him loved by good and worthy friends, amiable, courteous, patient, delightful as a companion, ready to take any trouble—there was in Bacon's "self" a deep and fatal flaw. He was a pleaser of men. There was in him that subtle fault, noted and named both by philosophy and religion in the *ἄρεσκος* of Aristotle, the *ἀνθρωπᾶρεσκος* of St. Paul, which is more common than it is pleasant to think, even in good people, but which if it becomes dominant in a character is ruinous to truth and power. He was one of the men—there are many of them—who are unable to release their imagination from the impression of present and immediate power, face to face with themselves. It seems as if he carried into conduct the leading rule of his philosophy of nature, *parendo vincitur*. In both worlds, moral and physical, he felt himself encompassed by vast forces, irresistible by direct opposition. Men whom he wanted to bring round to his purposes were as strange, as refractory, as obstinate, as impenetrable as the phenomena of the natural world. It was no use attacking in front, and by a direct trial of strength, people like Elizabeth or Cecil or James; he might as well think of forcing some natural power in defiance of natural law. The first word of his teaching about nature is that she must be won by observation of her tendencies and demands; the same radical disposition of temper reveals itself in his dealings with men: they, too, must be won by yielding to them, by

adapting himself to their moods and ends; by spying into the drift of their humour, by subtly and pliantly falling in with it, by circuitous and indirect processes, the fruit of vigilance and patient thought. He thought to direct, while submitting apparently to be directed. But he mistook his strength. Nature and man are different powers, and under different laws. He chose to please man, and not to follow what his soul must have told him was the better way. He wanted, in his dealings with men, that sincerity on which he insisted so strongly in his dealings with nature and knowledge. And the ruin of a great life was the consequence.

Francis Bacon was born in London on the 22d of January, 1560/61, three years before Galileo. He was born at York House, in the Strand; the house which, though it belonged to the Archbishops of York, had been lately tenanted by Lord Keepers and Lord Chancellors, in which Bacon himself afterwards lived as Lord Chancellor, and which passed after his fall into the hands of the Duke of Buckingham, who has left his mark in the Water Gate which is now seen, far from the river, in the garden of the Thames Embankment. His father was Sir Nicholas Bacon, Elizabeth's first Lord Keeper, the fragment of whose effigy in the Crypt of St. Paul's is one of the few relics of the old Cathedral before the fire. His uncle by marriage was that William Cecil who was to be Lord Burghley. His mother, the sister of Lady Cecil, was one of the daughters of Sir Antony Cook, a person deep in the confidence of the reforming party, who had been tutor of Edward VI. She was a remarkable woman, highly accomplished after the fashion of the ladies of her party, and as would become her father's daughter and the austere and laborious family to which she belonged. She was "exquisitely skilled in the Greek and Latin tongues;" she was passionately religious, according to the uncompromising religion which the exiles had brought back with them from Geneva, Strasburg, and Zurich, and which saw in Calvin's theology a solution of all the difficulties, and in his discipline a remedy for all the evils, of mankind. This means that his boyhood from the first was passed among the high places of the world—at one of the greatest crises of English history—in the very centre and focus of its agitations. He was brought up among the chiefs and leaders of the rising religion, in the houses of the greatest and most powerful persons of the State, and naturally, as their

child, at times in the Court of the Queen, who joked with him, and called him "her young Lord Keeper." It means also that the religious atmosphere in which he was brought up was that of the nascent and aggressive Puritanism, which was not satisfied with the compromises of the Elizabethan Reformation, and which saw in the moral poverty and incapacity of many of its chiefs a proof against the great traditional system of the Church which Elizabeth was loath to part with, and which, in spite of all its present and inevitable shortcomings, her political sagacity taught her to reverence and trust.

At the age of twelve he was sent to Cambridge, and put under Whitgift at Trinity. It is a question which recurs continually to readers about those times and their precocious boys, what boys were then? For whatever was the learning of the universities, these boys took their place with men and consorted with them, sharing such knowledge as men had, and performing exercises and hearing lectures according to the standard of men. Grotius at eleven was the pupil and companion of Scaliger and the learned band of Leyden; at fourteen he was part of the company which went with the ambassadors of the States-General to Henry IV.; at sixteen he was called to the bar, he published an out-of-the-way Latin writer, Martianus Capella, with a learned commentary, and he was the correspondent of De Thou. When Bacon was hardly sixteen he was admitted to the Society of "Ancients" of Gray's Inn, and he went in the household of Sir Amyas Paulet, the Queen's Ambassador, to France. He thus spent two years in France, not in Paris alone, but at Blois, Tours, and Poitiers. If this was precocious, there is no indication that it was thought precocious. It only meant that clever and promising boys were earlier associated with men in important business than is customary now. The old and the young heads began to work together sooner. Perhaps they felt that there was less time to spare. In spite of instances of longevity, life was shorter for the average of busy men, for the conditions of life were worse.

Two recollections only have been preserved of his early years. One is that, as he told his chaplain, Dr. Rawley, late in life, he had discovered, as far back as his Cambridge days, the "unfruitfulness" of Aristotle's method. It is easy to make too much of this. It is not uncommon for undergraduates to criticise their text-books; it was the fashion with clever men, as, for instance, Montaigne, to talk

against Aristotle without knowing anything about him; it is not uncommon for men who have worked out a great idea to find traces of it, on precarious grounds, in their boyish thinking. Still, it is worth noting that Bacon himself believed that his fundamental quarrel with Aristotle had begun with the first efforts of thought, and that this is the one recollection remaining of his early tendency in speculation. The other is more trustworthy, and exhibits that inventiveness which was characteristic of his mind. He tells us in the *De Augmentis* that when he was in France he occupied himself with devising an improved system of cypher-writing—a thing of daily and indispensable use for rival statesmen and rival intriguers. But the investigation, with its call on the calculating and combining faculties, would also interest him, as an example of the discovery of new powers by the human mind.

In the beginning of 1579 Bacon, at eighteen, was called home by his father's death. This was a great blow to his prospects. His father had not accomplished what he had intended for him, and Francis Bacon was left with only a younger son's "narrow portion." What was worse, he lost one whose credit would have served him in high places. He entered on life, not as he might have expected, independent and with court favour on his side, but with his very livelihood to gain—a competitor at the bottom of the ladder for patronage and countenance. This great change in his fortunes told very unfavourably on his happiness, his usefulness, and, it must be added, on his character. He accepted it, indeed, manfully, and at once threw himself into the study of the law as the profession by which he was to live. But the law, though it was the only path open to him, was not the one which suited his genius, or his object in life. To the last he worked hard and faithfully, but with doubtful reputation as to his success, and certainly against the grain. And this was not the worst. To make up for the loss of that start in life of which his father's untimely death had deprived him, he became, for almost the rest of his life, the most importunate and most untiring of suitors.

In 1579 or 1580 Bacon took up his abode at Gray's Inn, which for a long time was his home. He went through the various steps of his profession. He began, what he never discontinued, his earnest and humble appeals to his relative the great Lord Burghley, to employ him in the Queen's service, or to put him in some place of inde-

pendence: through Lord Burghley's favour he seems to have been pushed on at his Inn, where, in 1586, he was a Bencher; and in 1584 he came into Parliament for Melcombe Regis. He took some small part in Parliament; but the only record of his speeches is contained in a surly note of Recorder Fleetwood, who writes as an old member might do of a young one talking nonsense. He sat again for Liverpool in the year of the Armada (1588), and his name begins to appear in the proceedings. These early years, we know, were busy ones. In them Bacon laid the foundation of his observations and judgments on men and affairs; and in them the great purpose and work of his life was conceived and shaped. But they are more obscure years than might have been expected in the case of a man of Bacon's genius and family, and of such eager and unconcealed desire to rise and be at work. No doubt he was often pinched in his means; his health was weak, and he was delicate and fastidious in his care of it. Plunged in work, he lived very much as a recluse in his chambers, and was thought to be reserved, and what those who disliked him called arrogant. But Bacon was ambitious—ambitious, in the first place, of the Queen's notice and favour. He was versatile, brilliant, courtly, besides being his father's son; and considering how rapidly bold and brilliant men were able to push their way and take the Queen's favour by storm, it seems strange that Bacon should have remained fixedly in the shade. Something must have kept him back. Burghley was not the man to neglect a useful instrument with such good will to serve him. But all that Mr. Spedding's industry and profound interest in the subject has brought together throws but an uncertain light on Bacon's long disappointment. Was it the rooted misgiving of a man of affairs like Burghley at that passionate contempt of all existing knowledge, and that undoubting confidence in his own power to make men know, as they never had known, which Bacon was even now professing? Or was it something soft and over-obsequious in character which made the uncle, who knew well what men he wanted, disinclined to encourage and employ the nephew? Was Francis not hard enough, not narrow enough, too full of ideas, too much alive to the shakiness of current doctrines and arguments on religion and policy? Was he too open to new impressions, made by objections or rival views? Or did he show signs of wanting backbone to stand amid difficulties and threatening prospects? Did Burghley see something

in him of the pliability which he could remember as the serviceable quality of his own young days—which suited those days of rapid change, but not days when change was supposed to be over, and when the qualities which were wanted were those which resist and defy it? The only thing that is clear is that Burghley, in spite of Bacon's continual applications, abstained to the last from advancing his fortunes.

Whether employed by government or not, Bacon began at this time to prepare those carefully-written papers on the public affairs of the day, of which he has left a good many. In our day they would have been pamphlets or magazine articles. In his they were circulated in manuscript, and only occasionally printed. The first of any importance is a letter of advice to the Queen, about the year 1585, on the policy to be followed with a view to keeping in check the Roman Catholic interest at home and abroad. It is calm, sagacious, and, according to the fashion of the age, slightly Machiavellian. But the first subject on which Bacon exhibited his characteristic qualities, his appreciation of facts, his balance of thought, and his power, when not personally committed, of standing aloof from the ordinary prejudices and assumptions of men round him, was the religious condition and prospects of the English Church. Bacon had been brought up in a Puritan household of the strictest sect. His mother was an earnest, severe, and intolerant Calvinist, deep in the interests and cause of her party, bitterly resenting all attempts to keep in order its pretensions. She was a masterful woman, claiming to meddle with her brother-in-law's policy, and though a most affectionate mother she was a woman of violent and ungovernable temper. Her letters to her son Antony, whom she loved passionately, but whom she suspected of keeping dangerous and papistical company, show us the imperious spirit in which she claimed to interfere with her sons; and they show also that in Francis she did not find all the deference which she looked for. Recommending Antony to frequent "the religious exercises of the sincerer sort," she warns him not to follow his brother's advice or example. Antony was advised to use prayer twice a day with his servants. "Your brother," she adds, "is too negligent therein." She is anxious about Antony's health, and warns him not to fall into his brother's ill-ordered habits: "I verily think your brother's weak stomach to digest

hath been much caused and confirmed by untimely going to bed, and then musing *nescio quid* when he should sleep, and then in consequent by late rising and long lying in bed, whereby his men are made slothful and himself continueth sickly. But my sons haste not to hearken to their mother's good counsel in time to prevent." It seems clear that Francis Bacon had shown his mother that not only in the care of his health, but in his judgment on religious matters, he meant to go his own way. Mr. Spedding thinks that she must have had much influence on him; it seems more likely that he resented her interference, and that the hard and narrow arrogance which she read into the Gospel produced in him a strong reaction. Bacon was obsequious to the tyranny of power, but he was never inclined to bow to the tyranny of opinion; and the tyranny of Puritan infallibility was the last thing to which he was likely to submit. His mother would have wished him to sit under Cartwright and Travers. The friend of his choice was the Anglican preacher, Dr. Andrewes, to whom he submitted all his works, and whom he called his "inquisitor general;" and he was proud to sign himself the pupil of Whitgift, and to write for him—the archbishop of whom Lady Bacon wrote to her son Antony, veiling the dangerous sentiment in Greek, "that he was the ruin of the Church, for he loved his own glory more than Christ's."

Certainly, in the remarkable paper on *Controversies in the Church* (1589), Bacon had ceased to feel or to speak as a Puritan. The paper is an attempt to compose the controversy by pointing out the mistakes in judgment, in temper, and in method on both sides. It is entirely unlike what a Puritan would have written: it is too moderate, too tolerant, too neutral, though like most essays of conciliation it is open to the rejoinder from both sides—certainly from the Puritan—that it begs the question by assuming the unimportance of the matters about which each contended with so much zeal. It is the confirmation, but also the complement, and in some ways the correction of Hooker's contemporary view of the quarrel which was threatening the life of the English Church, and not even Hooker could be so comprehensive and so fair. For Hooker had to defend much that was indefensible: he had to defend a great traditional system, just convulsed by a most tremendous shock—a shock and alteration, as Bacon says, "the greatest and most dangerous that can

be in a State," in which old clews and habits and rules were confused and all but lost; in which a frightful amount of personal incapacity and worthlessness had, from sheer want of men, risen to the high places of the Church; and in which force and violence, sometimes of the most hateful kind, had come to be accepted as ordinary instruments in the government of souls. Hooker felt too strongly the unfairness, the folly, the intolerant aggressiveness, the malignity of his opponents—he was too much alive to the wrongs inflicted by them on his own side, and to the incredible absurdity of their arguments—to do justice to what was only too real in the charges and complaints of those opponents. But Bacon came from the very heart of the Puritan camp. He had seen the inside of Puritanism—its best as well as its worst side. He witnesses to the humility, the conscientiousness, the labour, the learning, the hatred of sin and wrong, of many of its preachers. He had heard, and heard with sympathy, all that could be urged against the bishops' administration, and against a system of legal oppression in the name of the Church. Where religious elements were so confusedly mixed, and where each side had apparently so much to urge on behalf of its claims, he saw the deep mistake of loftily ignoring facts, and of want of patience and forbearance with those who were scandalised at abuses, while the abuses, in some cases monstrous, were tolerated and turned to profit. Towards the bishops and their policy, though his language is very respectful, for the government was implicated, he is very severe. They punish and restrain, but they do not themselves mend their ways or supply what was wanting; and theirs are "*injuriæ potentiorum*"—"injuries come from them that have the upperhand." But Hooker himself did not put his finger more truly and more surely on the real mischief of the Puritan movement: on the immense outbreak in it of unreasonable party spirit and visible personal ambition—"these are the true successors of Diotrefes and not my lord bishops"—on the gradual development of the Puritan theory till it came at last to claim a supremacy as unquestionable and intolerant as that of the Papacy; on the servile affectation of the fashions of Geneva and Strasburg; on the poverty and foolishness of much of the Puritan teaching—its inability to satisfy the great questions which it raised in the soul, its unworthy dealing with Scripture—"naked examples, conceited inferences, and forced allusions, which mine into all certainty of religion"—"the word, the bread of

life, they toss up and down, they break it not;" on their undervaluing of moral worth, if it did not speak in their phraseology—"as they censure virtuous men by the names of *civil* and *moral*, so do they censure men truly and godly wise, who see into the vanity of their assertions, by the name of *politiques*, saying that their wisdom is but carnal and savouring of man's brain." Bacon saw that the Puritans were aiming at a tyranny which, if they established it, would be more comprehensive, more searching, and more cruel than that of the older systems; but he thought it a remote and improbable danger, and that they might safely be tolerated for the work they did in education and preaching, "because the work of exhortation doth chiefly rest upon these men, and they have a zeal and hate of sin." But he ends by warning them lest "that be true which one of their adversaries said, *that they have but two small wants—knowledge and love.*" One complaint that he makes of them is a curious instance of the changes of feeling, or at least of language, on moral subjects. He accuses them of "having pronounced generally, and without difference, all untruths unlawful," forgetful of the Egyptian midwives, and Rahab, and Solomon, and even of Him "who, the more to touch the hearts of the disciples with a holy dalliance, made as though he would have passed Emmaus." He is thinking of their failure to apply a principle which was characteristic of his mode of thought, that even a statement about a virtue like veracity "hath limit as all things else have;" but it is odd to find Bacon bringing against the Puritans the converse of the charge which his age, and Pascal afterwards, brought against the Jesuits. The essay, besides being a picture of the times as regards religion, is an example of what was to be Bacon's characteristic strength and weakness: his strength in lifting up a subject which had been degraded by mean and wrangling disputations, into a higher and larger light, and bringing to bear on it great principles and the results of the best human wisdom and experience, expressed in weighty and pregnant maxims; his weakness in forgetting, as, in spite of his philosophy, he so often did, that the grandest major premises need well-proved and ascertained minors, and that the enunciation of a principle is not the same thing as the application of it. Doubtless there is truth in his closing words; but each party would have made the comment that what he had to prove, and had not proved, was that by follow-

ing his counsel they would "love the whole world better than a part."

"Let them not fear ... the fond calumny of *neutrality*; but let them know that is true which is said by a wise man, *that neuters in contentions are either better or worse than either side*. These things have I in all sincerity and simplicity set down touching the controversies which now trouble the Church of England; and that without all art and insinuation, and therefore not like to be grateful to either part. Notwithstanding, I trust what has been said shall find a correspondence in their minds which are not embarked in partiality, and which *love the whole letter than a part*"

Up to this time, though Bacon had showed himself capable of taking a broad and calm view of questions which it was the fashion among good men, and men who were in possession of the popular ear, to treat with narrowness and heat, there was nothing to disclose his deeper thoughts—nothing foreshadowed the purpose which was to fill his life. He had, indeed, at the age of twenty-five, written a "youthful" philosophical essay, to which he gave the pompous title "*Temporis Partus Maximus*," "the Greatest Birth of Time." But he was thirty-one when we first find an indication of the great idea and the great projects which were to make his name famous. This indication is contained in an earnest appeal to Lord Burghley for some help which should not be illusory. Its words are distinct and far-reaching, and they are the first words from him which tell us what was in his heart. The letter has the interest to us of the first announcement of a promise which, to ordinary minds, must have appeared visionary and extravagant, but which was so splendidly fulfilled; the first distant sight of that sea of knowledge which henceforth was opened to mankind, but on which no man, as he thought, had yet entered. It contains the famous avowal—"I have taken all knowledge to be my province"—made in the confidence born of long and silent meditations and questionings, but made in a simple good faith which is as far as possible from vain boastfulness.

"MY LORD,—With as much confidence as mine own honest and faithful devotion unto your service and your honourable correspondence unto me and my poor estate can breed in a man, do I commend myself unto your Lordship. I wax now somewhat ancient: one and thirty years is a great deal of sand in the hour glass. My health, I thank God, I find confirmed; and I do not fear that action shall impair it, because I account my ordinary course of study and meditation to be more painful than most parts of action are. I ever bare a mind (in some middle place that I could discharge) to serve her Majesty, not as a man born under Sol, that loveth honour, nor under Jupiter, that loveth business (for the contemplative planet carrieth me away wholly), but as a man born under an excellent sovereign that deserveth the dedication of all men's abilities. Besides, I do not find in myself so much self-love, but that the greater parts of my thoughts are to deserve well (if I be able) of my friends, and namely of your Lordship; who, being the Atlas of this commonwealth, the honour of my house, and the second founder of my poor estate, I am tied by all duties, both of a good patriot, and of an unworthy kinsman, and of an obliged servant, to employ whatsoever I am to do you service. Again, the meanness of my estate doth somewhat move me; for though I cannot accuse myself that I am either prodigal or slothful, yet my health is not to spend, nor my course to get. Lastly, I confess that I have as vast contemplative ends as I have moderate civil ends; for I have taken all knowledge to be my province; and if I could purge it of two sorts of rovers, whereof the one with frivolous disputations, confutations, and verbosities, the other with blind experiments and auricular traditions and impostures, hath committed so many spoils, I hope I should bring in industrious observations, grounded conclusions, and profitable inventions