

V

FRANCIS BACON AS MAN OF LETTERS

WHEN inquisitive Polonius asked Hamlet what he was reading, the disillusioned Prince replied, "words, words, words." Because of the scope and execution of the lectures which have constituted the bulk of this course, there is no need now to discuss the personality of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, or to recapitulate the facts, achievements, failures, catastrophes and tragedy of his career, but it is in the nature of things that they who read his exalted words should register in their minds an inquiry whether there is or is not sincerity of purpose behind and within the words. That brilliant sad career, that broken bough which might have grown full straight, that life and fall of Bacon, must inevitably be in the backgrounds of consciousness when the "Essays", the "Advancement of Learning", the "New Atlantis", and the "History of Henry VII" are under perusal, and out of the recollection there is likely to spring the inquiry, or at least the thought, whether or not this human wisdom, keen analysis, applied learning, admonition and utterance are only "words", or something substantive. Much about Bacon is controversial, but concerning the sincerity of his writing there cannot be two opinions.

Possibly Bacon's was an intellectual rather than a spiritual earnestness. His religion was genuine, but somewhat more of the head than heart. His writings are saturated in reverence for the Supreme Being and the primary

authority of revelation, but the attitude is more theological than devotional, as there be doctors of divinity most tenacious of their creeds, stoutly resourceful in the defence thereof, even impassioned when they meet and combat opposition, who would, however, be startled and embarrassed if there should arise in the congregation some sin-stricken wretch who should proclaim his need for personal salvation—even as it is related, in the threadbare story, that an old woman who had wandered by chance into the gallery of a fashionable church presently began to sway and moan; whereupon a watchful official hastened to her and demanded that she conduct herself with decorum. “But I got religion”, groaned the enthusiast. “Madam, this is no place to get religion”, was the answer. “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”, is a mood, or expression thereof, foreign to the Baconian temperament.

But this does not abate the reality of his zeal for knowledge, the master passion of his better self. There are few quotations in the English language more familiar than the words of the young Bacon, inheritor of quickenings of the new learning and already conscious of the necessity of a new method of scientific research, “I have taken all knowledge to be my province”, and long afterwards he wrote that “the Sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge”. In his personal career he was allured by the splendors of his age, too compliant with the almost universal habit of what we now call “graft”, too solicitous for princes’ favors, and hence the victim of his own ambitions, for which he has been penalized in perpetuity. This is the Bacon of whom one of his biographers writes, “The life of Francis Bacon is one which it is a pain to write or to read”. But there is that other Bacon who loved knowledge for its own sake and for its power to advance civilization, and was

dedicated thereto completely. The very skepticisms of the true man of science are marks of his sincerity—not religious skepticisms, not flaunted denials of matters which in their nature cannot be proved—but suspended judgments concerning phenomena until the final test has validated a conclusion. Not the show of things, but the thing itself is that which concerns the man of science, and so it was with Bacon the Bookman, the disciple of knowledge.

Like most men of letters, Bacon was a stylist, understood word values and sentence rhythm, played on an instrument of varied harmonies. In the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, it would have been especially strange had it been otherwise. For men were discovering the capacities of the English language for prose, as its poetic possibilities had been sensed centuries before; Richard Hooker, John Lyly, the authorized translators of the Scriptures, to mention few of many, were progressively revealing the latent power of the language for prose, and both in terseness and in grandeur Bacon ranks with the best of them—with Hooker and the translators. One does not forget his preference for Latin as the medium for distribution of his weightier thoughts. But in all probability this preference was based upon utility rather than upon an under-valuation of his native speech; he wished his ideas to circulate in a larger audience, especially of the learned, than those who read English. Latin was still the language of erudition. But no one could have used the English language with Bacon's power without being aware of its resources.

With all of Bacon's mastery of English prose, there is singularly little of verbal display—as there is, for instance, in Lyly, or even Sir Philip Sidney. Whether he is writing in epigram or in incremented periodic structure, there is

the main object, to convey thought, to traffic in ideas, and to use words primarily as a means of communication. J. M. Robertson, who has closely studied and anatomized the Baconian prose, remarks that Bacon stands "as a witness to the root truth in regard to all writing, that to be great it must be sincere. And this, with his large faculty for phrase, cadence, and diction, makes him one of the greatest writers inasmuch as he habitually makes style a vesture for thought, and not a decoration of it. But he was an artist in spite of himself". Ben Jonson, Bacon's contemporary, referring to him as a speaker, said, "No man ever . . . suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered". And Bacon himself wrote in the "Advancement of Learning" that "the first distemper of learning is when men study words and not matter; for words are but the images of matter; and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture". Again in the "Advancement of Learning" he referred to rhetoric as "an empty and verbal art".

Sensitiveness to what Tennyson called "the glory of words" is essential to the making of literature, but oversusceptibility to the charm and allurements of words tempts a writer into what Ben Jonson termed "emptiness", a floral or sentimental or too fluent expressionism—a temptation which frequently overcame Tennyson himself and enchanted Swinburne in the manner of the lady of Keats in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

In Bacon, as in Edmund Burke, to cite the first analogy that comes to mind, there is harmony and balance of matter and expression—high thought clothed in language that is both adequate and pleasurable, but language always subordinated to the argument or exposition. Bacon and Burke

might be designated as entirely masculine writers, as contrasted with such a prose master as Ruskin, in whom there was an element of pure æstheticism which, for want of a closer analysis, we sometimes call "feminine"; by no means an exact delineation, as is proven by women of business or profession or affairs—so direct, so matter-of-fact, with so firm a hold on realities as to give countenance to the somewhat modern generalization that the weaker sex is masculine, not feminine. But whatever we nominate the element in Bacon, there is an invariable mastery of feeling by reason. He had a grand imagination—and the word "grand" is intended here to have its original connotation before it was depleted by overusage and debased by slang. Imagination was a faculty which most writers of Bacon's age possessed. It ran away with some of them, but Bacon mastered it with curb and rein, and used it, as he used words, for rational purposes. In short, Bacon wrote like a man who moved about in the big world of affairs, apart from the seclusion of the lyricist who sings his sweetest with his bosom pressed against a thorn.

Bacon's avowed principle and the application of it in his writing should be strong evidence against the theory that "Bacon wrote Shakespeare", as the phrase runs. For among the masters of literature there was never a more persistent word-monger, a more devoted lover of words for themselves, their magic or mystery or quaintness, than the author of the plays in the accepted Shakespeare corpus from "Love's Labour's Lost" on down to "Julius Caesar", that is to say, during the earlier periods of the authorship, or ever something from without or within sobered the dramatist, and impressed him with the meaningfulness of human existence and oppressed him with its dire possibilities. As there will be no return in this lecture to the so-

called Baconian theory, it may be permissible now to remark briefly on two or three other obvious aspects of the matter:

First, Ben Jonson's and other contemporaries' acceptance without question of the plays as the product of a professional from Stratford, without suspicion that the eminent Lord Chancellor was using the Stratford gentleman as a stool pigeon, and the cognate fact that for more than two hundred years after the actor and the Lord Chancellor had ended life's fitful fever, nobody else grew suspicious.

Secondly, the vast classic learning of the Baconian admitted writings, and the lack thereof in the plays. Even in the English compositions of Bacon, with which only are we concerned today, the writers of ancient Rome are always at his pen's tip either by allusion or in direct quotation; whereas in the plays these matters are sufficiently rare for the editors to pause and note that such easy grammar school Latin as "*hic et ubique*" is exceptional. Certainly, Latin is more in place in an essay than in a popular play, but the reflex of the learning would be apparent in the plays—as it is in Ben Jonson's plays.

Thirdly, in the "Advancement of Learning", Bacon alludes briefly to learning in the drama, and passes quickly on to graver matters of statesmanship and philosophy with the remark, "But it is not good to stay too long in the theatre"—the typical attitude of the man of affairs, to whom the theatre appears trivial in comparison with earth's actualities.

Fourthly, the commonplaceness of Bacon's avowed verse is not a good prognosis for the assumption that he wrote the poetry which is spoken by Juliet and Macbeth and Othello and Cleopatra.

Finally, and most important, the quality of mind in the

Baconian prose is analytical, either in the manner of science or philosophy, while the mind that operates in the plays is poetically creative.

Admittedly, no one of these points is unanswerable; but the fact remains that the assumption of the Baconian authorship of the plays raises more difficult problems than the acceptance of the Shakespearean authorship, and requires belief in such watertight dualism of personality as has not been discovered in any proven authorship. Perhaps the most brilliant and versatile author of the present English-speaking world is Mr. Bernard Shaw. He knows more things than either Bacon or Shakespeare knew, because there are more things now to know, and he writes of them sometimes in plays, sometimes in exposition, but he is the same Bernard Shaw in all forms—does not present the miracle or monstrosity of a creature thinking in one style in one medium and in an entirely different style in another medium.

Shakespeare has one of his dramatic characters observe that "Brevity is the soul of wit", but he himself, and especially in the earlier periods of his authorship, continually and consistently violated the maxim with prodigal splendor, multiplying words and images, not because of feebleness of thought, garrulity, or prolixity, but primarily because of the passion for words, which he delighted to accumulate and manipulate, as the juggler manifests his skill in the simultaneous handling of many objects, not for any useful purpose but because he delights in the exercise and display of his virtuosity. Bacon, on the other hand, more particularly in the essays, wrote with what someone has aptly called a "disdainful" brevity, using words as counters, and sentences as conveyors of compacted thoughts, suggesting more than they express. It would have been easy, at times

it seems almost necessary, that Bacon should have amplified these curt sentences and expanded these brief essays into treatises, but his plan and temper were to say succinctly what he had in mind, even though the individual sentence and the accumulated essay are frequently overloaded.

Bacon was a master of epigrams and apothegms, but he used them rather as an economist of language than a person desiring to show how clever he was. He thought clearly and vigorously and therefore was able to condense his observations into little space. Hence the memorable opening sentences of so many of the essays. Here are a few, familiar to you as your own front door, and one interesting thing about them is that, with a single exception, you could deduce from the first sentence what it is that the author purposes to talk about, even if the essay bore no title: "Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark". What should be the title of an essay which so begins except "Of Death"? "Revenge is a kind of wild justice", and you know he is going to talk "Of Revenge". "He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune"—a fitting start for an essay "Of Marriage and Single Life". "I had rather believe all the fables in the legends, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind", and the subject-matter is naturally "Of Atheism". An essay "Of Superstition" properly commences with the sentence, "It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of Him." What could be the title but "Of Travel" of an essay beginning "Travel in the younger sort is a part of education; in the elder a part of experience"? We should scarcely guess that "It is a miserable state of mind to have few things to desire and many things to fear" is the opening gun of an essay "Of Empire", but what attentive mind

would fail to find in the pregnant sentence "Suspensions amongst thoughts are like bats amongst birds, they ever fly by twilight" the commencement of a disquisition "Of Suspicion"? And though it is not inevitable, it is plausible that "Of Beauty" shall be the title of an essay with the initial sentence, "Virtue is like a rich stone, best plain set". It is unavoidable that "Of Gardens" shall be the subject of an essay which opens with the statement that "God Almighty first planted a garden". Such are the opening sentences of a few of the essays—condensed thought rather than smart epigrams, attention-arresting introductions to preconceived disquisitions on higher wisdom or practical common sense.

Surely it is necessary only to contrast these compact, but unsensational apothegms with the glittering epigrams of some of the modern phrase-makers to be convinced of the sincerity of Bacon as a thinker and writer. Some of the current epigrams startle us, but the more we think about them the less they mean; they are blank cartridges which neither hit nor miss but vanish in smoke, whereas the more we think of Bacon's phrases the more solid substance do we find within.

Sentence condensation is not Bacon's only style. He is always pithy but not always epigrammatic. Robertson, contrasting the Shakespearean and the Baconian prose, observes that Shakespeare's prose is staccato while Bacon's prose is characterized by what Robertson neatly names an "enchainment of clauses", and illustrates his dictum by the opening sentence of the "History of the Reign of Henry VII"—a complex sentence, made up of interwoven clauses, closely related, the whole compact, coherent and skillfully arranged to lay the emphasis where it belongs. Here is the sentence—if you find nothing remarkable in it, that

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is partly due to the fact that Bacon himself was one of those who taught moderns to write thus naturally and in form, instead of in the loose dangling sentences which prevailed before it came to be understood that prose as well as poetry should be structured: "After that Richard, the third of that name, king in fact only, but tyrant both in title and regiment, and so commonly termed and reputed in all times since, was by the Divine Revenge, favoring the design of an exiled man, overthrown and slain at Bosworth Field, there succeeded in the kingdom the Earl of Richmond, thenceforth styled Henry the Seventh". Robertson punctuates this with a series of separative commas, merely to show clause relationship to the reader. It is with what Wordsworth called "a shock of mild surprise" that we turn to the collective edition of Bacon's works, bearing the honored name of Spedding as one of the coëditors, and observe a pedantic semi-colon splitting the sentence, as a grammarian mutilates a poet's phrase to expose the syntax, the skeleton within the rose-flushed flesh.

As the sentence stands in its original completeness it is interestingly modern. It has that quality of the finer current journalism (and this is not low praise) wherein an article opens with a complex, modulated sentence containing the gist of all that follows. You perhaps observed in the sentence as it was read how Richard III enters at the opening of the sentence and is superseded by Henry VII—even as it occurred in history. It is a case of perfect sentence emphasis: Richard opens the sentence, by a series of clauses diminishes and perishes, and the last words of the sentence are "Henry the Seventh", and this Henry is to be the subject of the book.

Long ago and far away, a college graduate who had become a reporter on a metropolitan newspaper, wrote back

to one of his instructors in English composition that he was "busy learning to write". The instructor was a bit uneasy, for he had supposed that he and his colleagues were teaching that subject, but the more he studied the newspaper, the more he realized what the young man meant, including just this close-knit, structured introductory sentence, which enables a busy citizen to snatch at a glance the drift of an article. He knew, did the instructor, that for his own part, he had given too little attention to that sort of thing—though Bacon's works were on his shelves to tutor him. A modern copy editor would blue-pencil much that Bacon wrote, but scarcely his opening sentences—sometimes abrupt, sometimes complex, but always signposts to that which follows.

Bacon as man of letters falls under two aspects—a man who wrote great books for his own time, and one small book (the "Essays") for all time. The verdict would have displeased him, for he accounted the "Essays" a small matter compared with the "Novum Organum" and the "Advancement of Learning". But the big books have been superseded by others written in the fuller light of that same knowledge which he sought to advance, acquired by that same method with which he sought to acquaint the world—a method not invented by him, but the knowledge of it dispensed by him.

The "Essays", however, approach much nearer to familiar discourse; are, as it were, his own self sitting down to talk with us of things that belong to the business and bosoms of men. When a great man writes himself into a book, he writes that which will not become obsolete, which abideth the times, which entereth not into rivalry with other men's books past or to come. In the varied literature of this present day and hour there is a revival of the familiar

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essay, and honorable practitioners thereof, but they have not usurped the seats of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Bacon, Charles Lamb, Emerson, and the host of ancients and moderns, whose little books have continuous value. These have only widened the circle around the spacious fireside, as conversationalists shift their chairs to make room for a new comer, with no thought of effacing themselves.

The "Advancement of Learning" is a great book, a monumental book. Historically, it is one of the supreme prose classics which emerged from the Elizabethan-Jacobean era—perhaps without a peer except Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity" and the Authorized Translation of the Scriptures. Ostensibly it is dedicated to His Majesty, but in substance and execution it is dedicated to the dignity and worth of knowledge, the devotion to which was Bacon's finest trait. In the fragmentary "New Atlantis" we have a more readable book for moderns, a book into which Bacon projected much of himself. But the "Advancement of Learning" is a greater book in purpose and execution, and there probably exists no better example of Bacon's power of analysis combined with exalted enthusiasm. In his tribute, in the First Book, to what he calls "the excellency of knowledge and learning" he makes a searching inquiry into current prejudices against learning, some of them still existent, and warrants the strong language used by Dean Church (whose dispraise is frequent and corrosive): "He was one of the most wonderful of thinkers and one of the greatest of writers".

We may even assent to John Nichol's estimate of the book, that for nobility of thought combined with nobility of expression it has but one peer in classic English prose, John Milton's "Areopagitica", wherein Milton pleads for

freedom of speech as Bacon pleads for freedom of knowledge. Never stooping to popular arts of appeal, he is again and again, by the sheer glory of his vision, lifted into passages of abiding eloquence: "I do not take upon me", he writes, "to obtain by any perorations or pleadings of this case touching learning, to reverse the judgment either of Aesop's cock that preferred the barley-corn before the gem; or of Midas, that being chosen judge between Apollo, president of the Muses, and Pan, president of sheep, judged for plenty; or of Paris, that judged for pleasure and love against wisdom and power: for these things must continue as they have been, but so will that also continue whereupon learning hath ever relied as on a firm foundation that cannot be shaken—*justificata est sapientia a filiis suis*" (wisdom is justified of her children). That is the concluding paragraph of the first book of the "Advancement of Learning", and it might not be an unworthy motto for a university in these times of confusion of counsel as to what is meant by education.

This is not the sole note in Bacon, but it is the authentic voice of Bacon at his best. He was also a politician with a very mundane side to him. As politician, and rated by the modern differentiation, he was a "realist" rather than an "idealist", sometimes Machiavellian in his frank avowal of what is called "practical politics", a little more frankly stated than the modern practical politician dares, and so he said, "The politician, as such, must study human nature as it is, its vices with the rest, and take things as they are, not as they ought to be".

It was this acceptance of the *status quo* which prevented Bacon from being a leader in those reformations which to-day make impossible the political corruptions which were so notorious in his day. From the time of the English

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Revolution down through the establishment of a World Court and a League of Nations, there has been a steady pressure of public opinion which has compelled those who direct public affairs so to act as to make governments conduct themselves at least with a show of responsibility, unrecognized in Bacon's day. Bacon, for instance, regarded war as a necessary evil, and not one of the greatest evils at that. He was not of the stuff to employ his prodigious genius in an effort to better the conditions whose evil is recognized.

With all of this bowing in the House of Rimmon, he had one great and consistently high motive, the advancement of learning. Had he been a less versatile man, a man less occupied with many things, a man whose limitations required him to concentrate on a single pursuit, his name to-day would probably be untarnished. The very range and variety of his talents and ambitions betrayed him. He was a victim of his own greatness. One must ransack the ages to find an intellect equal to his, but the character was not equal to the intellect.

The book, the "Advancement of Learning", has been spoken of historically, and without extravagance, but, when all is said, it must be admitted that it is a recondite book, seldom read nowadays, displaced by other books, in large part debtor to it.

When we turn to the "Essays" we are on more human soil. The subjects are, for the most part, of permanent interest: "Truth", "Death", "Adversity", "Friendship", "Riches", "Ambition"—to name at random half a dozen of the fifty-eight topics. In a sense they were chips from a philosopher's workshop, written at intervals covering a long period of years. Ten were published when the author was thirty-seven years of age, thirty-eight when he was

fifty-two years of age, and the fifty-eight, or completed collection, appeared the year before his death, that is to say, in 1625, when he was sixty-four years of age. Thus, all of them are products of ripeness of experience, the "recreations", so he considered them, of an enormously busy man, an amazingly versatile man, and a shrewd observer of life as well as an eager participant therein. To be a participant rather than an onlooker was germane both to his genius and his philosophy. Almost startling, yet true, are his own words, "Men must know that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and the angels to be lookers-on". Certainly Bacon, with all his gift for rumination (he possessed nearly all the gifts), was no looker-on. There are two ways of going to hell, or to speak in more moderate language, of achieving failure—to be too inactive and to be too active. The first was Hamlet's, the second Bacon's.

It may seem impertinent to compare and contrast Bacon's essays with Emerson's, and yet there is a point of difference between these famous vital books so striking that it seems to press for notice—the spiritual wisdom of Emerson in contrast with the worldly wisdom of Bacon. In Emerson there was inherent Yankee common sense, just enough to keep his thought from exploding into star-dust, but the main thought is centered in the individual spirit and that which makes or mars it, that whereby it grows or shrivels. There is a sense in which Bacon's essays are closer to the thought of to-day, practice, the art of getting on in the world, the means of making psychology, human contacts, behavior, promotive of self-advancement. Emerson's essays dealt more with pure ideas, Bacon's with ideas in application. Perhaps, though this has not been proven by a census of the essays, there are more sentences in Bacon than in Emerson which the Florida promoters would find useful

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as "slogans". In Bacon there is more mixture of the lofty and the applicable.

It is so even in the notable essay on "Friendship". True, there are some chilling sentences in Emerson's essay on the same subject, but there is no suggestion of calculation as there is in Bacon's essay. The first half of Bacon's essay is pitched on a noble plane, as of one who had long meditated on the inward secrets of this all-important relationship, friendship: "A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love". So wrote this man who mingled so assiduously in the crowded places where self-seekers foregathered—wrote it doubtless out of the bitterness of experience and from inward illumination. And again, "It is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness". And once more, mingling high imagination with true perception, "Those that want friends to open themselves unto are cannibals of their own hearts"—a startling and original way of saying that he eats out his own heart who cannot speak freely with friends. And so with one acute perception after another, clad in language and imagery worthy of the great theme, the essay proceeds through its first half, but presently learned allusions to antiquity encroach upon these intuitional perceptions, and we have a sense of something begun in the open air then taken indoors to be completed at a desk where the lamp smokes and there is the stuffiness of scholasticism and the odor of old books that are being thumbed. And what is worse, we find him slipping into his worldly-wise mood, and telling how we can make our friends useful to us—the politician ousting the poet-philosopher, though the essay concludes with a master-sentence, suited to either aspect, the idealistic or the

self-advancement idea, "If a man have not a friend, he may quit the stage".

This intermingling of the lofty and selfish is characteristic of the essays. It is as if the writing of the philosopher was continually interlineated by the seeker after "Great Place". The essay so entitled, "Of Great Place", contains the sentence, "It is a strange desire to seek power and to lose liberty", but the bulk of the essay is practical advice to those who occupy great place, concluding with the Machiavellian observation that "All rising to great place is by a winding stair, and if there be factions it is good to side a man's self whilst he is in the rising, and to balance himself when he is placed". The essay "Of Cunning" opens and concludes with sentences deprecating cunning, but the body of the essay is an explication of the successful wiles of men cunning in business and statecraft, which is as if Fagin had preceded his instructions to his young pupils in thievery with a disquisition on the iniquity of theft. Searching and understanding are Bacon's observations on the subtler, baser human traits, for he knew human nature, its ulcers and the roots of the malignity: the little essay "Of Nobility", about the length of a freshman theme, is compact with the knowledge of one who moved among mankind without illusions. It were hard to say whether the perpetuation of the essays as literature is due more to the higher wisdom in them or to the shrewd counsels for getting on in the world. Bacon was practical. The beautiful essay "Of Gardens" is not a rhapsody but clear advice as to how to make a garden, and the essay "Of Travel" is as matter-of-fact as a tourists' handbook.

Bacon's penetrating knowledge of human nature, which is equal to his erudition, is different from a great playwright's knowledge of human nature: the one is generalized,

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the other particularized. The playwright dramatizes an individual character or a particular mood, but Bacon expounds human traits without individualization. It is the imagination of the dramatist which lifts character-judgment into the region of art. It is not enough to understand, there must also be the sympathetic-creative faculty, the power to make the character walk and talk as an independent individual. A discerning man of affairs might have foreseen and foretold Macbeth's downfall, might have recognized the insecurity of the foundations even in the hour of Macbeth's supreme triumph. But it is the sympathetic imagination of the poet which follows Macbeth through all his downward career and visualizes not only *what* he is, but *why* he is. What Bacon *tells* us, the dramatist *shows* us.

Men of science like Huxley, statesmen like Gladstone, jurists like Blackstone have, by natural affinity for letters and power of literary discourse, not infrequently challenged the supremacy of the litterateurs. It is in some such society that Bacon belongs, rather than among the avowed men of letters. Literature was an incident in his many-sided career. It is amazing that one with so many activities should have found time to make literature at all, and still more astonishing that he should have created so noble an English style. But his thoughts were for the most part too recondite for pure literature, too deeply absorbed in statecraft, jurisprudence, science, and philosophy. In a course of lectures commemorative of the three hundredth anniversary of his death it was fitting that one of the selected topics should concern him as a man of letters, but either because of the incidental character of the literature which he created, or because of the person assigned to treat the topic, this final lecture in the course becomes not a

culmination, but a postscript. A Bacon enthusiast, which the present lecturer is not, would have made much more of the subject, but it is possible that a Bacon enthusiast would have thrown the matter out of perspective. We may accept Dean Church's dictum that Bacon was "one of the greatest of writers", and yet hold to the conclusion that he was only derivatively a man of letters. His knowledge and wisdom, his thoughts and phrases have been taken up by other men of letters for the enrichment of their products but *in esse* Bacon is not in the front rank of men of letters. With all his power of thought and imagination he is not among those preëminently dear in English literature. The name of Charles Lamb was used earlier in this talk, and when setting it down there was a sense of disproportion, a feeling that Lamb was not big enough for the company into which he was being introduced. Yet it is a fact that the humble clerk of India House has appealed to the affections of people as the conspicuous Lord Chancellor never has.

Who reads the "Advancement of Learning" to-day? Who except those who must? It is a "monumental" piece of literature, but that is a somewhat dubious term. Monuments are markers for the dead. The "Advancement of Learning" is a great book of the *past*—a "*classic*"—which so often means something which everybody owns and nobody reads. The "New Atlantis", so excellent in narrative style, will always be read by those interested in literary accounts of perfected commonwealths, but it belongs among the "curiosities of literature" rather than among the vital things of literature. As a piece of imaginative writing, or inventional writing, it has not that irresistible impression of reality which belongs to such a book as "Gulliver's Travels". Doubtless, the historians of England account themselves in duty bound to read "Henry VII", but the

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rest of us can get along very well without it—unless perhaps we are so circumstanced that we must write a paper on Bacon as Man of Letters. The essays are alive, and within them there is no sign that they will ever decay, but is it not true that we admire them rather than love them? In attested truth of experience, in wisdom drawn from associations with the living and the dead, in ingenuity of invention, in succinctness of expression, in stylistic excellence, even in their cynicisms, they are such things as could have proceeded only from a very great mind. But do they insinuate themselves in our affections? Do they radiate human happiness?

Not an altogether sympathetic review is this, and certainly a superficial one, but is it not true that Bacon is a conspicuous name in letters rather than a dynamic force? He was a great writer. Yes. But was he a great spirit? Among the makers of books that live within themselves and quicken the life in others have been men whose deeds you disapprove, Coleridge, Shelley, Walt Whitman. But within each something remained intact; within the ashes a flame which could not be quenched, and that flame continues to lighten other torches. But in Bacon, among the most gifted of men, there was a shrivelling; there was what Gamaliel Bradford would call a "damaged soul". Bacon informs us, enlightens us, but does he inflame us? Hardly so.

STOCKTON AXSON.



