



Life, Literature and Education.



Francis Bacon.

Seldom, perhaps, in one personality has the dual character of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde been so strongly exemplified as in that of Francis, Lord Bacon.

He was born at York House, The Strand, Jan. 22nd, 1561, coming thus into the world at a time when it was thrilled, as probably it has never since been thrilled, by the passion for learning and discovery. It was not long since Columbus had come upon the New World, and the news of explorations and dreams of possible isles still beyond the sea were yet exciting men's imaginations and firing their ambitions. Moreover, the researches of such investigators as Galileo were opening a new world in Nature and the Universe; while, simultaneously, the power of the Renaissance, the great Revival of Learning, the new light thrown upon the literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, was beckoning to the student with an impelling fascination. In the career of Bacon may be found trace of the influence of all these forces.

From babyhood the lad was precocious. At twelve years of age he was to be found at Trinity College, Cambridge, gravely listening, along with classmates of twice his age, to the lectures in the great University; and two years later he was quite as gravely beginning the study of law at Gray's Inn. At the age of fifteen he went to Europe, where he remained for three years, and so acute were his observations, even at that tender age, that he found it possible at a later date to embody many of them in his essay, "Of the State of Europe."

Almost from the dawning of his manhood Bacon seemed to realize the

enormity of his capabilities, at the same time recognizing, with a keenness that cut deeply, the handicap under which, by reason of poverty and ill-health, he must, unless aided by some exceptional stroke of good fortune, struggle. His father, Sir Nicholas Bacon, had left him nothing. He must perforce work for his bread, and his mind, seized with a passion not only for acquiring knowledge, but for passing it on to all men, chafed at the treadmill in which he was obliged to walk. To obtain a competence by which he would be provided at once with the extravagant living which he craved and with leisure in which to carry out his great plans, became his mania and his curse.

But one avenue to all this seemed open to him. He had influential relatives at Court, the Cecils, chief of whom was Lord Burghley; through them he might achieve his desires. He lost no time, at least, in making the attempt, but it is nowhere evident that he met with any success; evidently these practical men thought him a dreamer of wild dreams. Nevertheless, though cut to the soul, he was by no means abashed. From the Cecils he turned to others whose influence might avail, and it is to his lasting discredit that through long bitter years he revealed himself the importunate beggar, the servile courtier, the least independent of men, fawning on sovereignty, professing love and loyalty where he could little have felt either.

And yet, with a persistence which compels admiration, in spite of rebuff and neglect, during all those years he never for one moment lost sight of his great object, nor relaxed in his preparations for it. He committed every thought, every motive, every plan to "notes," and these notes, which throw a strange light on his methods and working, are still in existence. Among a medley of pages and paragraphs, telling in detail even such trifles as how he cared for his health, and his plans for winning favor with Elizabeth, or Burghley, or Buckingham, or James, appear chance thoughts or phrases which pleased him—a multitudinous array of scraps of knowledge and passing theories or observations, detailed plans for his future works, with here and there a flash of the mission to which he felt himself called. "I have taken all knowledge for my province," he says. "Now, among all the benefits that could be conferred upon mankind, I found none so great as the discovery of new arts, endowments and commodities for the bettering of man's life."

He was, in short, uplifted by the wonders of the physical world which were revealing themselves, though dimly, to him, and he had conceived the idea that by proper observation and experiment he might know all things in Nature, reveal to all men all things, make the minds of all men on a same level, to the everlasting glory of the race. Man should not only understand but command Nature, and Britain should indeed shine as a "gem set in a silver sea." Bacon's plans were thus, it will be seen, far from selfish; and yet, in his endeavors to secure personal advancement, he appears as the most selfish of men, condescending to means

which at the present day seem nothing short of disgusting, to win his ends. However, it must not be forgotten that the position of suppliant to the great was not in his day so unknown a quantity as it is now, nor, perhaps, looked upon as so despicable a one.

Little help, however, he received for long enough. The Cecils, as has been said, evidently did not like him; neither did Queen Elizabeth, nor, at a later date, James, although the latter was eventually brought, for some time, to depend upon him. His first real friend was the Earl of Essex, who fought hard to secure several offices for him. But Essex fell out of favor with Elizabeth, and was accused of treason. To remain his friend was to incur the wrath of the Queen; and Bacon, the politic, to his everlasting dishonor, not satisfied even with remaining neutral, threw his influence against his friend.

Essex was executed, but Bacon's part in the affair did not bring him the favor he expected, and it was not until after the death of Elizabeth that his fortunes improved. Then he became Attorney-General, but lived in such princely splendor that he saved little. As an instance of his extravagant tastes, it is told that, at the marriage of the Earl of Somerset, his contribution was the presenting of a play, "The Masque of Flowers," which cost him £2,000. Even here, however, it may be surmised that his fawning was for a purpose; Somerset might avail in procuring for him the promotions which he craved.

This appears to have been the busiest time of Bacon's life. In addition to his labors as Attorney, he was writing busily, accomplishing a tremendous amount of work, planning and amplifying his "Great Instauration," and attempting to revise the laws of the land. Finally he secured in some sort the favor of the king's pet, Buckingham, who, apparently recognizing his ability, presently secured for him the Lord Chancellorship, and, in fast succession, the titles Lord Verulam and Viscount St. Albans.

As Chancellor, Bacon brought about many reforms. Yet, from a court filled with abuses, he did not purge all, nor did he keep his own skirts clean. He allowed wealthy suitors to give him large presents in money, and it was not long until the charge of accepting bribes was laid upon him. There seems to have been no settled plot against him. Abuses had simply reached a climax when he came to office, and the reaction was inevitable; yet suddenly he found the whole Court of Chancery in the balance before the House of Commons, and, against himself in particular, under the vigorous prosecution of his old enemy, Coke, twenty-eight explicit charges drawn up. Strangely enough, he made no protest. Like a leaf in the scorching sun he wilted, and declined to stand his trial. Appeals for mercy were now of no use. He was fined £40,000, ordered to the Tower, and shorn of all his offices.

He was only kept in The Tower a few days, but his public life was over. Nevertheless, his Bacon's energy was not crushed. He turned

himself again to his writings, and even dared to hope for reinstatement into the king's favor. But this was not to be. In April, 1626, while driving over the snowy roads, he became impressed with the possibility of arresting putrefaction by cold, and, by way of experiment, bought a hen at a farmhouse and stuffed it with snow. Already in precarious health, the chilling was too much for him; he became rapidly worse, and in a few days died.

Lord Bacon's published works are: "Meditationes Sacrae"; his great, unfinished "Instauratio Scientiarum" (consisting of "Of the Advancement of Learning and Novum Organum"; "Of the Wisdom of the Ancients"; "New Atlantis"; "History of King Henry VII."; and his Essays, probably the best known of his works.

To-day Bacon's name stands, as may be judged, almost as a reproach. A man who, while writing and declaiming the noblest of sentiments, could go on, even in his high place as Chancellor, with corruptions which should have been spurned by the lowest magistrate in the land; one who, while expatiating as a Damon or a Pythias on the privileges and obligations of "Friendship," hounded his best friend to the block—meets naturally with the obloquy which he deserves. Even as a scientist, his life-work, according to the ideals of to-day, was a failure. He made many mistakes, taught wrong theories; yet he was the first to insist upon the necessity, in science, of deducing only from observation. He gave the greatest impetus of his time, or any time, to investigation, and has on that account well been called the Father of Science.

As a philosopher on subjects other than scientific, his reasoning—though with a reasoning which reminds us sometimes of Lord Chesterfield's—is, in general, sound, and his works marked with a clearness and conciseness which, after nearly three hundred years, have kept his writings not only in print, but in demand. After Shakespeare, he is still regarded as the most gifted man of his day, and so enthusiastic have been his admirers that, even of late years, attempts have been made to prove that he, and not Shakespeare, wrote several of the immortal dramas. These claims have not, of course, been substantiated; nevertheless, the mere attempt shows the estimation in which posterity, as Bacon himself foretold, has held this wonderful, inexplicable man.

Our Literary Society.

Owing to the great number of "studies" which have been received, it was impossible to publish the "Three Fishers" answers this week. Next week, however, we shall be able to do this.

Will all contributors to the Literary Society columns kindly keep one name in mind? All names of members, with pen-names, are entered on our List, and any change in the original entry is likely to lead to confusion.