1838

Lord Bacon, Part III : His Character, and Writings

Lucian Minor

LORD BACON.

HIS CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS.

PART III.

Common sense, the ruling principle of Bacon's philosophy. Contrast, between a Baconian and a Stoic. Importance attached by Bacon to the physical sciences---His contempt for the schoolmen's *metaphysical subtleties, morals and theology.* The inductive method, not invented by him—he only taught a more accurate use of it. His temperament, sanguine—his mind, at once comprehensive and microscopic--averse to disputation—eloquence, and wit, in his writings—poetical spirit—resemblance to Burke, in one respect--remarks on Bacon's Essays--The *Novum Organum* his greatest work—concluding reflections.

Great and various as the powers of Bacon were, he owes his wide and durable fame chiefly to this, that all those powers received their direction from common sense. His love of the vulgar useful, his strong sympathy with the popular notions of good and evil, and the openness with which he avowed that sympathy, are the secret of his influence. There was in his system no cant, no illusion. He had no anointing for broken bones,—no fine theories *de finibus*,—no arguments to persuade men out of their senses. He knew that men, and philosophers as well as other men, do actually love life, health, comfort, honor, security, the society of friends; and do actually dislike death, sickness, pain, poverty, disgrace, danger, separation from those to whom they are attached. He knew that religion, though it often regulates and moderates these feelings, seldom eradicates them; nor did he think it desirable for mankind that they should be eradicated. The plan of eradicating them by conceits like those of Seneca, or syllogisms like those of Chrysippus, was too preposterous to be for a moment entertained by a mind like his. He did not understand what wisdom there could be in changing names where it was impossible to change things—in denying that blindness, hunger, the gout, the rack, were evils, and calling them *αποπροηγμενα**—in refusing to acknowledge that health, safety, plenty were good things, and dubbing them by the name of *αδιαφορα*.† In his opinions on all these subjects, he was not a Stoic, nor an Epicurean, nor an Academic, but what would have been called by Stoics, Epicureans, and Academics, a mere *ιδιωτης*,—a mere common man. And it was precisely because he was so that his name makes so great an era in the history of the world. It was because he dug deep that he was able to pile high. It was because, in order to lay his foundations, he went down into those parts of human nature which lie low, but which are not liable to change, that the fabric which he reared has risen to so stately an elevation, and stands with such immoveable strength.

We have sometimes thought that an amusing fiction might be written, in which a disciple of Epictetus and a disciple of Bacon should be introduced as fellow-travellers. They come to a village where the small-pox has just begun to rage; and find houses shut up, intercourse suspended, the sick abandoned, mothers weeping in terror over their children. The Stoic assures the dismayed population that there is nothing bad in the

* 'Insignificant circumstances.'

† 'Things neither good nor evil,—things wholly indifferent.'

small-pox, and that to a wise man diseases, deformity, death, the loss of friends, are not evils. The Baconian takes out a lancet and begins to vaccinate. They find a body of miners in great dismay. An explosion of noisome vapors has just killed many of those who were at work; and the survivors are afraid to venture into the cavern. The Stoic assures them that such an accident is nothing but a mere αποπροηγμενον. The Baconian, who has not such fine word at his command, contents himself with devising a safety-lamp. They find a shipwrecked merchant wringing his hands on the shore. His vessel with an inestimable cargo has just gone down, and he is reduced in a moment from opulence to beggary. The Stoic exhorts him not to seek happiness in things which lie without himself, and repeats the whole chapter of Epictetus προς τους την απορίαν δεδοικοτας.* The Baconian constructs a diving-bell, goes down in it, and returns with the most precious effects from the wreck. It would be easy to multiply illustrations of the difference between the philosophy of thorns and the philosophy of fruit—the philosophy of words and the philosophy of works.

Bacon has been accused of overrating the importance of those sciences which minister to the physical well-being of man, and of underrating the importance of moral philosophy; and it cannot be denied that persons who read the *Novum Organum* and the *De Augmentis*, without adverting to the circumstances under which those works were written, will find much that may seem to countenance the accusation. It is certain, however, that, though in practice he often went very wrong, and though, as his historical work and his essays prove, he did not hold, even in theory, very strict opinions on points of political morality, he was far too wise a man not to know how much our well-being depends on the regulation of our minds. The world for which he wished was not, as some people seem to imagine, a world of water-wheels, power-looms, steam-carriages, sensualists, and knaves. He would have been as ready as Zeno himself to maintain, that no bodily comforts which could be devised by the skill and labor of a hundred generations would give happiness to a man whose mind was under the tyranny of licentious appetite, of envy, of hatred, or of fear. If he sometimes appeared to ascribe importance too exclusively to the arts which increase the outward comforts of our species, the reason is plain. Those arts had been most unduly depreciated. They had been represented as unworthy of the attention of a man of liberal education.

This opinion seemed to him 'omnia in familia humanâ turbasse.' It had undoubtedly caused many arts which were of the greatest utility, and which were susceptible of the greatest improvements, to be neglected by speculators, and abandoned to joiners, masons, smiths, weavers, apothecaries. It was necessary to assert the dignity of those arts, to bring them prominently forward, to proclaim that, as they have a most serious effect on human happiness, they are not unworthy of the attention of the highest human intellects. Again, it was by illustrations drawn from these arts that Bacon could most easily illustrate his principles. It was by improvements effected in these arts that the soundness of his principles could be most speedily and decisively brought to the test, and made manifest to common understandings. He acted like a wise commander who thins every other part of his line to strengthen a point where the enemy is attacking with peculiar fury, and on the fate of which the event of the battle seems likely to depend. In the *Novum Organum*, however, he distinctly and most truly declares that his philosophy is no less a moral than a natural philosophy, that, though his *illustrations* are drawn from physical science, the *principles* which those illustrations are intended to explain are just as applicable to ethical and political inquiries as to inquiries into the nature of heat and vegetation.

He frequently treated of moral subjects; and he almost always brought to those subjects that spirit which was the essence of his whole system. He has left us many admirable practical observations on what he somewhat quaintly called the *Georgics* of the mind—on the mental culture which tends to produce good dispositions. Some persons, he said, might accuse him of spending labor on a matter so simple that his predecessors had passed it by with contempt. He desired such persons to remember, that he had from the first announced the objects of his search to be not the splendid and the surprising, but the useful and the true,—not the deluding dreams which go forth through the shining portal of ivory, but the humbler realities of the gate of horn.

True to this principle, he indulged in no rants about the fitness of things, the all-sufficiency of virtue, and the dignity of human nature. He dealt not at all in resounding nothings, such as those with which Bolingbroke pretended to comfort himself in exile; and in which Cicero sought consolation after the loss of Tullia. The casuistical subtleties which occupied the attention of the keenest spirits of his age had, it should seem, no attractions for him. The treatises of the doctors whom Escobar afterwards compared to the four beasts, and the four and twenty elders in the Apocalypse, Bacon dismissed with most contemptuous brevity: 'Inanes plerumque evadunt et futiles.'* Nor did he ever meddle with those enigmas which have puzzled hundreds of generations, and will puzzle hundreds more. He said nothing about the grounds of moral obligation, or the freedom of the human will. He had no inclination to employ himself in labors resembling those of the damned in the Grecian Tartarus,—to spin forever on the same wheel round the same pivot,—to gape forever after the same deluding clusters,—to pour water forever into the same bottomless buckets,—to pace forever to and fro on the same wearisome path after the same recoiling stone. He exhorted his disciples to prosecute researches of a very different description; to consider moral science as a practical science—a science of which the object was to cure the diseases and perturbations of the mind,—and which could be improved only by a method analogous to that which has improved medicine and surgery. Moral philosophers ought, he said, to set themselves vigorously to work for the purpose of discovering what are the actual effects produced on the human character by particular modes of education, by the indulgence of particular habits, by the study of particular books, by society, by emulation, by imitation. Then we might

* 'To those who fear poverty.'

* 'They are generally worthless and empty.'

hope to find out what mode of training was most likely to preserve and restore moral health.*

What he was as a natural philosopher and a moral philosopher, that he was also as a theologian. He was, we are convinced, a sincere believer in the divine authority of the christian revelation. Nothing can be found in his writings, or in any other writings, more eloquent and pathetic than some passages which were apparently written under the influence of strong devotional feeling. He loved to dwell on the power of the christian religion to effect much that the ancient philosophers could only promise. He loved to consider that religion as the bond of charity; the curb of evil passions; the consolation of the wretched; the support of the timid; the hope of the dying. But controversies on speculative points of theology seem to have engaged scarcely any portion of his attention. In what he wrote on church government he showed, as far as he dared, a tolerant and charitable spirit. He troubled himself not at all about Homoousians and Homoiousians, Monothelites and Nestorians. He lived in an age in which disputes on the most subtle points of divinity excited an intense interest throughout Europe; and nowhere more than in England. He was placed in the very thick of the conflict. He was in power at the time of the Synod of Dort, and must for months have been daily deafened with talk about election, reprobation, and final perseverance. Yet we do not remember a line in his works from which it can be inferred that he was either a Calvanist or an Arminian. While the world was resounding with the noise of a disputatious philosophy, and a disputatious theology, the Baconian school, like Alworthy seated between Square and Thwackum, preserved a calm neutrality,—half scornful, half benevolent, and, content with adding to the sum of practical good, left the war of words to those who liked it.

We have dwelt long on the end of the Baconian philosophy, because from this peculiarity all the other peculiarities of that philosophy necessarily arose. Indeed, scarcely any person who proposed to himself the same end with Bacon could fail to hit upon the same means.

The vulgar notion about Bacon we take to be this,—that he invented a new method of arriving at truth, which method is called induction; and that he exposed the fallacy of the syllogistic reasoning which had been in vogue before his time. This notion is about as well founded as that of the people who, in the middle ages, imagined that Virgil was a great conjurer. Many who are far too well informed to talk such extravagant nonsense, entertain what we think incorrect notions as to what Bacon really effected in this matter.

The inductive method has been practised ever since the beginning of the world by every human being. It is constantly practised by the most ignorant clown, by the most thoughtless schoolboy, by the very child at the breast. That method leads the clown to the conclusion, that if he sows barley he shall not reap wheat. By that method the schoolboy learns, that a cloudy day is the best for catching trout. The very infant, we imagine, is led by induction to expect milk from his mother or nurse, and none from his father.

Not only is it not true that Bacon invented the inductive method; but it is not true that he was the first person who correctly analysed that method and explained its uses. Aristotle had long before pointed out the absurdity of supposing that syllogistic reasoning could ever conduct men to the discovery of any new principle; had shown that such discoveries can be made by induction, and by induction alone; and had given the history of the inductive process, concisely indeed, but with great perspicuity and precision.*

What Bacon did for the inductive philosophy may, we think, be fairly stated thus. The objects of preceding speculators were objects which could be attained without careful induction. Those speculators, therefore, did not perform the inductive process carefully. Bacon stirred up men to pursue an object which could be attained only by induction, and by induction carefully performed; and consequently induction was more carefully performed. We do not think that the importance of what Bacon did for inductive philosophy has ever been overrated. But we think that the nature of his services is often mistaken, and was not fully understood even by himself. It was not by furnishing philosophers with rules for performing the inductive process well, but by furnishing them with a motive for performing it well, that he conferred so vast a benefit on society.

To give to the human mind a direction which it shall retain for ages, is the rare prerogative of a few imperial spirits. It cannot, therefore, be uninteresting to inquire, what was the moral and intellectual constitution which enabled Bacon to exercise so vast an influence on the world.

In the temper of Bacon—we speak of Bacon the philosopher, not of Bacon the lawyer and politician—there was a singular union of audacity and sobriety. The promises which he made to mankind might, to a superficial reader, seem to resemble the rants which a great dramatist has put into the mouth of an oriental conqueror half-crazed by good fortune and by violent passions:

> 'He shall have chariots easier than air,
> Which I will have invented; and thyself
> That art the messenger shall ride before him,
> On a horse cut out of an entire diamond,
> That shall be made to go with golden wheels,
> I know not how yet.'

But Bacon performed what he promised. In truth, Fletcher would not have dared to make Arbaces promise, in his wildest fits of excitement, the tithe of what the Baconian philosophy has performed.

The true philosophical temperament may, we think, be described in four words—much hope, little faith; a disposition to believe that anything, however extraordinary, may be done; an indisposition to believe that anything extraordinary has been done. In these points the constitution of Bacon's mind seems to us to have been absolutely perfect. He was at once the Mammon and the Surly of his friend Ben. Sir Epicure did not indulge in visions more magnificent and gigantic. Surly did not sift evidence with keener and more sagacious incredulity.

Closely connected with this peculiarity of Bacon's temper was a striking peculiarity of his understanding. With great minuteness of observation he had an amplitude of comprehension such as has never yet been

* *De Augmentis*, Lib. 7, Cap. 3.

* See the last chapter of the Posterior Analytics, and the first of the Metaphysics.

vouchsafed to any other human being. The small fine mind of Labruyère had not a more delicate tact than the large intellect of Bacon. The 'Essays' contain abundant proofs that no nice feature of character, no peculiarity in the ordering of a house, a garden, or a court-masque, could escape the notice of one whose mind was capable of taking in the whole world of knowledge. His understanding resembled the tent which the fairy Paribanou gave to Prince Ahmed. Fold it, and it seemed a toy for the hand of a lady. Spread it, and the armies of powerful Sultans might repose beneath its shade.

In keenness of observation he has been equalled, though perhaps never surpassed, but the largeness of his mind was all his own. The glance with which he surveyed the intellectual universe resembled that which the Archangel, from the golden threshold of heaven, darted down into the new creation.

> 'Round he surveyed—and well might, where he stood
> So high above the circling canopy
> Of night's extended shade,—from eastern point
> Of Libra, to the fleecy star which bears
> Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
> Beyond the horizon.'

His knowledge differed from that of other men, as a terrestrial globe differs from an atlas which contains a different country on every leaf. The towns and roads of England, France, and Germany, are better laid down in the atlas than in the globe. But while we are looking at England we see nothing of France; and while we are looking at France we see nothing of Germany. We may go to the atlas to learn the bearings and distances of York and Bristol, or of Dresden and Prague. But it is useless if we want to know the bearings and distances of France and Martinique, or of England and Canada. On the globe we shall not find all the market-towns in our own neighborhood; but we shall learn from it the comparative extent and the relative position of all the kingdoms of the earth. 'I have taken,' said Bacon, in a letter written when he was only thirty-one, to his uncle Lord Burleigh—'I have taken all knowledge to be my province.' In any other young man, indeed in any other man, this would have been a ridiculous flight of presumption. There have been thousands of better mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, physicians, botanists, mineralogists, than Bacon. No man would go to Bacon's works to learn any particular science or art; any more than he would go to a twelve-inch globe in order to find his way from Kensington turnpike to Clapham Common. The art which Bacon taught was the art of inventing arts. The knowledge in which Bacon excelled all men, was a knowledge of the mutual relations of all departments of knowledge.

The mode in which he communicated his thoughts was exceedingly peculiar. He had no touch of that disputatious temper which he often censured in his predecessors. He effected a vast intellectual revolution in opposition to a vast mass of prejudices; yet he never engaged in any controversy:—nay, we cannot at present recollect, in all his philosophical works, a single passage of a controversial character. All those works might with propriety have been put into the form which he adopted in the work entitled *Cogitata et visa*—'Franciscus Baconus sic cogitavit.'—These are thoughts which have occurred to me:—weigh them well—and take them or leave them.

Borgia said of the famous expedition of Charles the Eighth, that the French had conquered Italy, not with steel, but with chalk; for that the only exploit which they had found necessary for the purpose of taking military occupation of any place, had been to mark the doors of the houses where they meant to quarter. Bacon often quoted this saying, and loved to apply it to the victories of his own intellect.* His philosophy, he said, came as a guest, not as an enemy. She found no difficulty in obtaining admittance, without a contest, into every understanding fitted, by its structure and by its capacity, to receive her. In all this we think that he acted most judiciously—first, because, as he has himself remarked, the difference between his school and other schools was a difference so fundamental that there was hardly any common ground on which a controversial battle could be fought; and, secondly, because his mind, eminently observant, pre-eminently discursive and capacious, was, we conceive, neither formed by nature, nor disciplined by habit, for dialectical combat.

Though Bacon did not arm his philosophy with the weapons of logic, he adorned her profusely with all the richest decorations of rhetoric. His eloquence, though not untainted with the vicious taste of his age, would alone have entitled him to a high rank in literature. He had a wonderful talent for packing thought close and rendering it portable. 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 equal,—not even Cowley,—not even the author of Hudibras. Indeed, he possessed this faculty, or rather this faculty possessed him, to a morbid degree. When he abandoned himself to it without reserve, as he did in the *Sapientia Veterum*, and at the end of the second book of the *De Augmentis*, the feats which he performed were not merely admirable, but portentous, and almost shocking. On those occasions we marvel at him as clowns on a fair-day marvel at a juggler, and can hardly help thinking that the devil must be in him.

These, however, were freaks in which his ingenuity now and then wantoned, with scarcely any other object than to astonish and amuse. But it occasionally happened that, when he was engaged in grave and profound investigations, his wit obtained the mastery over all his other faculties, and led him into absurdities into which no dull man could possibly have fallen. We will give the most striking instance which at present occurs to us. In the third book of the *De Augmentis* he tells us that there are some principles which are not peculiar to one science, but are common to several. That part of philosophy which concerns itself with these principles, is, in his nomenclature, designated as *philosophia prima*. He then proceeds to mention some of the principles with which this *philosophia prima* is conversant. One of them is this. An infectious disease is more likely to be communicated while it is in progress than when it has reached its height. This, says he, is true in medicine. It is also true in morals; for we see that the example of very abandoned men injures public morality less than the example of men in whom vice has not yet extinguished all good qualities. Again—he tells us that in music a discord ending in a concord is agreeable, and that the same thing may be noted in the affections. Once more he tells us, that in physics the energy with

* *Novum Organum*, Lib. 1, Aph. 35, and elsewhere.

which a principle acts is often increased by the antiperistasis of its opposite; and that it is the same in the contests of factions. If this be indeed the *philosophia prima*, we are quite sure that the greatest philosophical work of the nineteenth century is Mr. Moore's 'Lalla Rookh.' The similitudes which we have cited are very happy similitudes. But that a man like Bacon should have taken them for more,—that he should have thought the discovery of such resemblances as these an important part of philosophy,—has always appeared to us one of the most singular facts in the history of letters.

The truth is, that his mind was wonderfully quick in perceiving analogies of all sorts. But, like several eminent men whom we could name, both living and dead, he sometimes appeared strangely deficient in the power of distinguishing rational from fanciful analogies,—analogies which are arguments from analogies which are mere illustrations,—analogies like that which Bishop Butler so ably pointed out between natural and revealed religion, from analogies like that which Addison discovered between the series of Grecian gods carved by Phidias, and the series of English kings painted by Kneller. This want of discrimination has led to many strange political speculations. Sir William Temple deduced a theory of government from the properties of the pyramid. Mr. Southey's whole system of finance is grounded on the phenomena of evaporation and rain. In theology this perverted ingenuity has made still wilder work. From the time of Irenæus and Origen, down to the present day, there has not been a single generation in which great divines have not been led into the most absurd expositions of Scripture, by mere incapacities to distinguish analogies proper,—to use the scholastic phrase—from analogies metaphorical.* It is curious that Bacon has himself mentioned this very kind of delusion among the *idola specus*; and has mentioned it in language which, we are inclined to think, indicates that he knew himself to be subject to it. It is the vice, he tells us, of subtle minds to attach too much importance to slight distinctions;—it is the vice, on the other hand, of high and discursive intellects to attach too much importance to slight resemblances; and he adds, that when this last propensity is indulged to excess, it leads men to catch at shadows instead of substances.†

Yet we cannot wish that Bacon's wit had been less luxuriant. For,—to say nothing of the pleasure which it affords,—it was in the vast majority of cases employed for the purpose of making obscure truth plain—of making repulsive truth attractive—of fixing in the mind forever truth which might otherwise have made but a transient impression.

The poetical faculty was powerful in Bacon's mind; but not, like his wit, so powerful as occasionally to usurp the place of his reason, and to tyrannize over the whole man. No imagination was ever at once so strong and so thoroughly subjugated. It never stirred but at a signal from good sense. It stopped at the first check from good sense. Yet though disciplined to such obedience, it gave noble proofs of its vigor. In truth, much of Bacon's life was passed in a visionary world,—amidst things as strange as any that are described in the 'Arabian Tales,' or in those romances on which the curate and barber of Don Quixote's village performed so cruel an *auto da-fe*,—amidst buildings more sumptuous than the palace of Aladdin,—fountains more wonderful than the golden water of Parizade,—conveyances more rapid than the hippogryph of Ruggiero,—arms more formidable than the lance of Astolfo,—remedies more efficacious than the balsam of Fierabras. Yet in his magnificent day-dreams there was nothing wild,—nothing but what sober reason sanctioned. He knew that all the secrets feigned by poets to have been written in the books of enchanters, are worthless when compared with the mighty secrets which are really written in the book of nature, and which, with time and patience, will be read there. He knew that all the wonders wrought by all the talismans in fable were trifles when compared to the wonders which might reasonably be expected from the philosophy of *fruit*; and, that if his words sank deep into the minds of men, they would produce effects such as superstition had never ascribed to the incantations of Merlin and Michael Scot. It was here that he loved to let his imagination loose. He loved to picture to himself the world as it would be when his philosophy should, in his own noble phrase, 'have enlarged the bounds of human empire.* We might refer to many instances. But we will content ourselves with the strongest—the description of the 'House of Solomon' in the 'New Atlantis.' By most of Bacon's contemporaries, and by some people of our time, this remarkable passage would, we doubt not, be considered as an ingenious rhodomontade,—a counterpart to the adventures of Sinbad or Baron Munchausen. The truth is, that there is not to be found in any human composition a passage more eminently distinguished by profound and serene wisdom. The boldness and originality of the fiction is far less wonderful than the nice discernment which carefully excluded from that long list of prodigies every thing that can be pronounced impossible; every thing that can be proved to lie beyond the mighty magic of induction and of time. Already some parts, and not the least startling parts, of this glorious prophecy have been accomplished, even according to the letter; and the whole, construed according to the spirit, is daily accomplishing all around us.

One of the most remarkable circumstances in the history of Bacon's mind, is the order in which its powers expanded themselves. With him the fruit came first and remained till the last: the blossoms did not appear till late. In general, the development of the fancy is to the development of the judgment what the growth of a girl is to the growth of a boy. The fancy attains at an earlier period to the perfection of its beauty, its power, and its fruitfulness; and, as it is first to ripen, it is also first to fade. It has generally lost something of its bloom and freshness before the sterner faculties have reached maturity; and is commonly withered and barren while those faculties still retain all their energy. It rarely happens that the fancy and the judgment grow together. It happens still more rarely that the judgment grows faster than the fancy. This seems, however, to have been the case with Bacon. His boyhood and youth appear to have been singularly se-

* See some interesting remarks on this subject in Bishop Berkeley's 'Minute Philosopher.' Dialogue IV.

† *Novum Organum*, Lib. 1, Aph. 55.

* 'New Atlantis.'

date. His gigantic scheme of philosophical reform is said by some writers to have been planned before he was fifteen; and was undoubtedly planned while he was still young. He observed as vigilantly, meditated as deeply, and judged as temperately, when he gave his first work to the world as at the close of his long career. But in eloquence, in sweetness, and variety of expression, and in richness of illustration, his later writings are far superior to those of his youth. In this respect the history of his mind bears some resemblance to the history of the mind of Burke. The treatise on the 'Sublime and Beautiful,' though written on a subject which the coldest metaphysician could hardly treat without being occasionally betrayed into florid writing, is the most unadorned of all Burke's works. It appeared when he was twenty-five or twenty-six. When, at forty, he wrote the 'Thoughts on the causes of the existing Discontents,' his reason and his judgment had reached their full maturity; but his eloquence was still in its splendid dawn. At fifty, his rhetoric was quite as rich as good taste would permit; and when he died, at almost seventy, it had become ungracefully gorgeous. In his youth he wrote on the emotions produced by mountains and cascades; by the master pieces of painting and sculpture; by the faces and necks of beautiful women; in the style of a parliamentary report. In his old age, he discussed treaties and tariffs in the most fervid and brilliant language of romance. It is strange that the essay on the 'Sublime and Beautiful,' and the 'Letter to a Noble Lord,' should be the productions of one man. But is far more strange that the essay should have been a production of his youth, and the letter of his old age.

We will give very short specimens of Bacon's two styles. In 1597, he wrote thus:—'Crafty men contemn studies; simple men admire them: and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use: that is a wisdom without them, and won by observation. Read not to contradict, nor to believe, but to weigh and consider. *Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.* And therefore if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, have a present wit; and if he read little, have much cunning to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise, poets witty, the mathematics subtle, natural philosophy deep, morals grave, logic and rhetoric able to contend.' It will hardly be disputed that this is a passage to be 'chewed and digested.' We do not believe that Thucydides himself has any where compressed so much thought into so small a space.

In the additions which Bacon afterwards made to the 'Essays,' there is nothing superior in truth or weight to what we have quoted. But his style was constantly becoming richer and softer. The following passage, first published in 1625, will show the extent of the change:—'Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction and the clearer evidence of God's favor. Yet, even in the Old Testament, if you listen to David's harp you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath labored more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon. Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. We see in needle works and embroideries it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome ground. Judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart by the pleasure of the eye. Certainly virtue is like precious odors, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed; for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue.'

It is by the 'Essays' that Bacon is best known to the multitude. The *Novum Organum* and the *De Augmentis* are much talked of, but little read. They have produced indeed a vast effect on the opinions of mankind; but they have produced it through the operations of intermediate agents. They have moved the intellects which have moved the world. It is in the 'Essays' alone that the mind of Bacon is brought into immediate contact with the minds of ordinary readers. There, he opens an exoteric school, and he talks to plain men in language which every body understands, about things in which every body is interested. He has thus enabled those who must otherwise have taken his merits on trust to judge for themselves; and the great body of readers have, during several generations, acknowledged that the man who has treated with such consummate ability questions with which they are familiar, may well be supposed to deserve all the praise bestowed on him by those who have sat in his inner school.

Without any disparagement to the admirable treatise *De Augmentis*, we must say that, in our judgment, Bacon's greatest performance is the first book of the *Novum Organum*. All the peculiarities of his extraordinary mind are found there in the highest perfection. Many of the aphorisms, but particularly those in which he gives examples of the influence of the *idola*, show a nicety of observation that has never been surpassed. Every part of the book blazes with wit, but with wit which is employed only to illustrate and decorate truth. No book ever made so great a revolution in the mode of thinking—overthrew so many prejudices—introduced so many new opinions. Yet no book was ever written in a less contentious spirit. It truly conquers with chalk and not with steel. Proposition after proposition enters into the mind,—is received not as an invader, but as a welcome friend,—and though previously unknown, becomes at once domesticated. But what we most admire is the vast capacity of that intellect which, without effort, takes in at once all the domains of science,—all the past, the present, and the future,—all the errors of two thousand years,—all the encouraging signs of the passing times,—all the bright hopes of the coming age. Cowley, who was among the most ardent, and not among the least discerning followers of the new philosophy, has, in one of his finest poems, compared Bacon to Moses standing on Mount Pisgah. It is to Bacon, we think, as he appears in the first book of the *Novum Organum*, that the comparison applies with peculiar felicity. There we see the great law-giver looking round from his lonely elevation on an infinite expanse; behind him a wilderness of dreary sands and bitter waters in which successive generations have sojourned, always moving, yet never advancing, reaping no harvest and building no abiding city; before him a goodly land, a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. While

the multitude below saw only the flat sterile desert in which they had so long wandered, bounded on every side by a near horizon, or diversified only by some deceitful mirage, he was gazing from a far higher stand, on a far lovelier country,—following with his eye the long course of fertilizing rivers, through ample pastures, and under the bridges of great capitals,—measuring the distances of marts and havens, and portioning out all those wealthy regions from Dan to Beersheba.

It is painful to turn back from contemplating Bacon's philosophy to contemplate his life. Yet without so turning back it is impossible fairly to estimate his powers. He left the University at an earlier age than that at which most people repair thither. While yet a boy he was plunged into the midst of diplomatic business. Thence he passed to the study of a vast technical system of law, and worked his way up through a succession of laborious offices to the highest post in his profession. In the meantime he took an active part in every Parliament; he was an adviser of the Crown; he paid court with the greatest assiduity and address to all whose favor was likely to be of use to him; he lived much in society; he noted the slightest peculiarities of character and the slightest changes of fashion. Scarcely any man has led a more stirring life than that which Bacon led from sixteen to sixty. Scarcely any man has been better entitled to be called a thorough man of the world. The founding of a new philosophy, the imparting of a new direction to the minds of speculators,—this was the amusement of his leisure, the work of hours occasionally stolen from the Woolsack and the Council Board. This consideration, while it increases the admiration with which we regard his intellect, increases also our regret that such an intellect should so often have been unworthily employed. He well knew the better course, and had, at one time, resolved to pursue it. 'I confess,' said he in a letter written when he was still young, 'that I have as vast contemplative ends as I have moderate civil ends.' Had his civil ends continued to be moderate, he would have been, not only the Moses, but the Joshua of philosophy. He would have fulfilled a large part of his own magnificent predictions. He would have led his followers, not only to the verge, but into the heart of the promised land. He would not merely have pointed out, but would have divided the spoil. Above all, he would have left not only a great, but a spotless name. Mankind would then have been able to esteem their illustrious benefactor. We should not then be compelled to regard his character with mingled contempt and admiration,—with mingled aversion and gratitude. We should not then regret that there should be so many proofs of the narrowness and selfishness of a heart, the benevolence of which was yet large enough to take in all races and all ages. We should not then have to blush for the disingenuousness of the most devoted worshipper of speculative truth,—for the servility of the boldest champion of intellectual freedom. We should not then have seen the same man at one time far in the van, and at another time far in the rear of his generation. We should not then be forced to own, that he who first treated legislation as a science was among the last Englishmen who used the rack,—that he who first summoned philosophers to the great work of interpreting nature was among the last Englishmen who sold justice. And we should conclude our survey of a life placidly, honorably, beneficently passed, 'in industrious observations, grounded conclusions, and profitable inventions and discoveries,'* with feelings very different from those with which we now turn away from the checkered spectacle of so much glory and so much shame.

* From a letter of Bacon to Lord Burleigh.