O'neill

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A BRIEF STUDY OF CHARACTERISTICS

BY THE

REV. GEORGE O'NEILL, S.J., M.A., F.R.U.I.

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One of these men is Genius to the other;
Which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? who deciphers them?"

Comedy of Errors, v, i.

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COULD BACON HAVE WRITTEN THE PLAYS?

It can hardly be denied that the question of the authorship of the Shakspearian plays has come to occupy a larger and larger place among literary problems of living interest. Among recent evidences and contributory causes of this fact one may specially notice Mr. Greenwood's lively and vigorous book and the attention it has excited. *The Shakspeare Problem Restated*, while deliberately stopping short of being a "Baconian" pleading, yet has certainly brought a considerable accession of strength to the Baconian camp, as well as to any others who happen to disbelieve in the Shakspearian authorship of the plays. It has done this particularly by its effective castigation of one or two prominent and somewhat swaggering champions of the orthodox theory. Henceforth no "Shakspearian," unless he be one of the unenlightened rank-and-file, will fly to Mr. Sidney Lee as to a tower of strength, or to any other champion whose groundless assumptions and air-built dogmatisms are like unto Mr. Sidney Lee's. Alas, these resolute "biographers" no longer stand "four-square to all the winds that blow!" This is how their friends now write of them: "The ingenuity of the biographers is pleasing and even plausible, but its projections are like the Shakspeare portraits—no two are alike; and the latest word of the last expert is that they are all fabrications, not to say impostures." "The explanations [of difficulties by the critics] leave nothing to be desired on the score of literary propriety, and the only possible objection to them is that they are quite unsupported by evidence, and that they are just a little bit too frequent."

The problem of Shakspeare is, in the present state of our knowledge, insoluble." So writes (among others) the violently anti-Baconian reviewer of the *Times* Literary Supplement (Jan. 7, 1909) in his discussion of Mr. Greenwood's volume. And thus *exeunt* Mr. Sidney Lee and his too, too dogmatic colleagues, who assured us that we possessed concerning the great dramatist "a mass of biographical detail which far exceeds that accessible in the case of any poet contemporary with Shakspeare"!

May we hope that, with the humbling of their Goliath, some sprinkling of modesty and controversial urbanity will fall upon certain other ruffling retainers of the orthodox Shakspearian creed? Of the need of such an aspersion the review just quoted from affords an excellent proof. The *Times* writer does not find space wherein to deal effectively with any of Mr. Greenwood's arguments, yet has he room for flowers of speech such as this (referring to early Baconian speculations): "The contortions and epileptic spasms of the first generation of the new illuminati." Does such a style as this befit the discussion of high literary problems? Is it the dialect of gentlemen and scholars? When the defenders of a theory seize on mere scurrility as a weapon, the suspicion promptly rises that other arms have failed their cause.

Any incident in the conflict which makes for peaceful and fair discussion, for communication of lights, for the enlarging of common ground of belief, must assuredly be welcomed by anyone who (like the present writer) is highly interested in the points contended for, while disclaiming the animus of a convinced and resolute partisan. The *Times* review reminds us in how unhelpful and unedifying a spirit the war has been waged hitherto. Its history might remind one of the tale of the ancient Norse invasions. Every now and then the "Baconians" have swept in upon the land with wild war-cries, strange weapons, and boundless acquisitiveness. The peaceful "Shakspearians," lulled in supine security by the undisturbed possession of their territory for three

hundred years, cluster together on the hill-tops and look down with bitter contempt on the small but resolute band of ravagers; or seize the armour of their sires, and charge upon the foe with outcries of furious hatred. There has been no parleying, no endeavour at mutual understanding or compromise. At least the endeavours towards peace have been hitherto weak and unavailing. To speak less metaphorically, what is regrettable in this intermittent literary *mêlée* is that the Shakspearian will not condescend to acknowledge the immense services in the way of research rendered by Baconians, while Baconians have developed something of the desperate spirit of outlaws and Ishmaels, and have made vast claims and sweeping assertions without sufficient care to build them upon solid evidence. Here we find a Shakspearian treating his opponents as fools and fanatics, from whom nothing can be learned and upon whom argument would be thrown away; there stands a Baconian, frightening off timid seekers after truth by abruptly claiming half of Elizabethan literature as the creation and property of his own divinity. Whether (to resume our Norse simile) the conflict is destined to end with the triumph and dynastic establishment of the invaders—whether or not we shall in half a century see a Canute calmly dogmatizing from the throne of the Ethelreds—is a point upon which this paper will not venture to vaticinate. But it seems to be growing clearer and clearer that the aggressive and constructive labours of the Baconians ought not to be treated with mere contempt or vituperation.

One curious feature in the controversy is that resolute Shakspearian partisans have in some notable recent instances contributed, quite against their intention, valuable material for the work of the Baconians. I refer especially to the investigations and conclusions of the scholar whose name was in the autumn of 1908 brought tragically before the public by the sad close of his career. Mr. Churton Collins's studies on the scholarship of Shakspeare were valuable,

though largely anticipated by inquirers belonging to that Baconian camp to which he was ever vehemently hostile. They were hailed with delight by the Baconians, for they so immensely swelled out the conventional idea as to the erudition possessed by the writer of the plays, that they also immensely increased the difficulty of believing that the man of Stratford could have written them. When their enemy insisted that Shakspeare the dramatist must have been well read at an early age in the original texts of many Latin and some Greek authors, not to speak of French and Italian texts, and not to mention his profound and accurate knowledge of law, the Baconians recalled the conclusions of Halliwell-Phillipps and other sober biographers that William Shakspeare's family were all (apparently) illiterate, that his father and his daughter were alike unable to sign their names, that there is no evidence of his having attended school for a single hour, but some that he did not attend after his fourteenth year, that there were perhaps not a dozen books to be found from end to end of Stratford, and that his will shows no development of bibliophile propensities in his later years. And no wonder if they got angrier than ever at being described (by poor Mr. Collins amongst others) as "fools" and "maniacs."

But it is not my intention to review in this paper the general condition of the Bacon-Shakspeare controversy. A single aspect of it is my concern; and even strict concentration on this sole aspect will still leave brevity a rather difficult achievement. What that aspect is, what my standpoint and purpose in these pages, must now be briefly stated. The thesis discussed shall be one occupying a place somewhere between the fortress defended by Mr. Greenwood's just-mentioned book and the camp of the professed pleaders for Baconian authorship. Mr. Greenwood devotes himself to proving that there is no good reason for believing that Shakspeare of Stratford wrote the plays attributed to him. The Baconian pleader maintains that Lord Bacon wrote those plays.

My enquiry shall be—whether Lord Bacon *could* have written those plays.*

That he could *not* has been a belief so firmly fixed in many minds as to have constituted one of the firmest bulwarks of Shakspearian orthodoxy against Baconian attacks. Bacon's utter incapacity for successful poetic effort has been a theme for vehement assertion, garnished with abusive rhetoric, on the part of notable English, German, and American critics. Mr. Churton Collins and Mr. R. G. White, for example, tell us (more or less in these words) that "Bacon was utterly devoid of the poetic faculty, even in a secondary sense. He was a cautious observer and investigator, ever looking at man and things through the dry light of cool reason, a logician, a formalist, without a spark of genial humour, without a trace of dramatic imagination, without any light play of wit and fancy, any profound passion, any æsthetic enthusiasm, anything in fact which goes to make up a poet." Professor Heusler, in Germany, tells us that "Bacon was not only not a poet, but his manner of thinking and feeling was eminently prosaic . . . and so are his most original images." Then there are other arguments, not wholly contemptible, to the same effect. Bacon was a busy lawyer, who could not have time or interest to spare for the quiet occupation of the

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* I am indebted in what follows to so many and various books, that I feel at liberty to mention none of them in particular. I may refer, however, to Mr. Reed's *Francis Bacon Our Shakspeare* as one of the best of "Baconian" pleadings; and I may say that I owe nothing to an excellent article of Mr. Stronach's in the *Fortnightly Review* on "Bacon as a Poet," which singularly coincides with many passages of the present paper. Of course, Spedding, Ellis, and Abbott are my chief authorities for Bacon's life and works.

At this point the question may be touched on whether it is lawful to speak of "Lord Bacon." Heraldically and pedantically it undoubtedly is not. But the expression has been freely used by the following among other standard writers of English:—Pope, Swift, Hume, Blair, Grattan, Dugald Stewart, De Quincey, Coleridge, Macaulay, Hallam, Shelley, Byron, Emerson, Lord Mahon, Alexander Smith, Edgar Allen Poe, Francis Palgrave, Stopford Brooke, Spedding, Ellis and Dixon (Bacon's biographers), Matthew Arnold and Thomas Arnold. And that ought to settle the question for every practical purpose!

Muses. He was a scientist, though (it must be confessed) a somewhat erratic one; he was the champion of a philosophy which aimed at bringing down speculation from soaring in the heavens to walk upon solid earth, and, therefore, was the offspring of an unpoetical mind. He was an ambitious man, full of Machiavellian prudence, keenly set on the winning of office, favour, and promotion; obviously the antithesis of a poet!

It appears to me that these views are due on the part of those who know something about Bacon and his writings to the blinding effect (sometimes extraordinary) of controversial passion, and on the part of the many who know little or nothing of him to a natural reluctance to accord to any individual pre-eminence in many things, and to an ignoring of the powers of great genius to break way for itself in many directions at once.

Let us begin, then, by remarking the evidence which Bacon, lawyer, judge, philosopher, and scientist as he was, gave, nevertheless, of his interest in works of pure literature, even of light literature. There seems no doubt that his propensities in that direction seriously hampered his advance in his chosen profession. He was looked upon as a dreamer and a theorizer, one from whom it was not safe to expect the concentration of the practical lawyer, or the tact and push of the man of business. Hence for long years he was by no means "a busy lawyer" (as we have seen him frequently styled), and, consequently, far indeed from being a wealthy lawyer. He was constantly in dire straits for money, and once nearly a prisoner for debt. I have spoken of the law as his "chosen profession"; but, in reality, as he did not choose it of his own free will, so neither did he love it at all for its own sake. He merely regarded it as a stepping-stone to power, wealth, and leisure which might when secured be utilized for far nobler aims than the practice of the law. He declared emphatically that he was born for literature rather than for active life. He had "taken all knowledge for his

province"; it was his ambition to promote "the highest good of all men"; and with that object in view, and no other, while acknowledging himself "more fit to hold a book than to act a part on the public stage," he embraced the law and became an importunate, a too importunate, suitor for advancement to high legal and political place. He tells us this himself; we know most of it from other sources also.

Still the literary proclivities of this bright and active mind were apparently too strong to be wholly kept from public manifestation. We possess various records of Bacon's share in the preparation of masques and other theatrical performances presented at the Inns of Court. In 1589 he designed the "dumbshow of the misfortunes of Arthur," performed before Queen Elizabeth. In 1592 he is one of the authors of the "Conference of Pleasure," a masque in which the story of Julius Cæsar is touched on (as his biographer Spedding remarks) in a manner suggestive of that developed in Shakspeare's "Julius Cæsar." In 1594 he writes the speeches of six councillors for the masque of the "Order of the Helmet," and speaks of himself in a letter to Essex as "drinking the waters of Parnassus." In 1595 he is part-author of the "Devise of the Indian Prince," which has been noted for an ingenious passage of flattery to Queen Elizabeth. A couple of years later he joins with Southampton and Tobie Matthew in writing and producing the "Devise of Philautia" in honour of Lord Essex. Again, he tells a friend how, although "he did not profess to be a poet," he had "indited a sonnet in honour of the Queen." When he becomes Solicitor-General, his fondness for active theatrical work does not desert him. In 1612 he occupies himself with a gorgeous masque entitled "The Marriage of Rhine and Thames," to celebrate the wedding of the Princess Elizabeth. As Attorney-General he is joint-author of a "Masque of Flowers" to greet the ill-omened union of Lady Essex and the royal favourite, Somerset. A curious and mysterious

proof of Bacon's general interest in the Muses is contained (apparently) in his brief letter to John Davies, afterwards Attorney-General for Ireland, and already well known both as poet and lawyer, which was written as James I was leaving Scotland for his new realm of England. Bacon's object is to engage Davies (as he says) to "imprint a good conceit and opinion of him in the King"; and he concludes: "So desiring you to be good to concealed poets, I continue your assured friend," &c. Spedding, like preceding biographers, admits his inability to explain these words.

We have in all this the evidence of strong taste for poetry and the drama, if not of distinguished poetic or dramatic faculty. That Bacon, however, was gifted with that dramatic faculty which Mr. Collins so expressly denies him, we find good reasons for thinking. He was a singularly versatile conversationalist. To quote what his biographer Mallet says of him: "In his conversation he would assume the most different characters, and speak the language proper to each with a facility that was perfectly natural; for the dexterity of the habit concealed every appearance of art." His friend Osborne speaks in still more striking terms: "I have heard him entertain a country lord in the proper terms relating to hawks and dogs; and at another time out-cant a London chirurgeon." The same gift was manifest in letters which he wrote in the name of others. Of these letters Dr. Abbott says: "The wonderful exactness with which he has caught the somewhat quaint, humorous, cumbersome style of (his brother) Anthony and the abrupt, incisive, antithetical, and passionately rhetorical style of Essex, makes the perusal of these letters a literary treat." "Few men," continues Abbott, "have shown equal versatility in adapting their language to the slightest change of circumstance and purpose." Elsewhere this careful biographer says that the leading peculiarity of Bacon's style is its sympathetic nature, its versatile adaptation to every variation of subject and sentiment. Such evidence as this should make us cautious

in our assertions as to what Bacon could or could not have done had he devoted himself to the drama.

Let us, in the next place, take by the horns a difficulty which meets every advocate of Lord Bacon as a poet. It is the argument that Bacon has actually committed himself to poetry in the strictest sense of the word; and that the few pieces known as his are so poor as to destroy the writer's claim to kinship with the Muses. We may ask, however, whether the production of two or three worthless pieces necessarily negatives the possibility of their author's being a great poet? If it were so, some of the most famous names in literature might suffer eclipse. If Milton were known only by his versions of the Psalms, who would not scoff at the rash speculator who should claim for him the authorship of *Paradise Lost*? There are few works of Shakspeare more certainly his own than the miserable epitaph on his grave, the paltry lines on John ACombe, and the disgusting lampoon on "Lousy Lucy." These are things far below any production credited to Bacon. But no one judges Shakspeare by them. In the next place, we may flatly deny the general badness of these acknowledged pieces of Bacon's. We shall find on our side the encouraging authority of Mr. Palgrave, editor of the *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*. In that admirably chosen anthology figure Lord Bacon's meditative stanzas beginning:

> The world's a bubble, and the life of man
> Less than a span;
> In his conception wretched, from the womb
> So to the tomb;
> Cursed from his cradle, and brought up to years
> With cares and fears.
> Who, then, to frail mortality shall trust
> But limns on water, or but writes in dust.*

That piece is fairly well known. But what of the translations of the Psalms? They are mostly poor; but they were

* There is no sufficient reason for questioning Bacon's authorship of this piece.

written, be it remembered, in Bacon's declining years, and to while away the enforced leisure of a sick bed. Few who have endeavoured, even in the height of their powers, to render in modern verse these sublime but obscure and abrupt songs of David, have enjoyed any greater success. "For our French versifiers," says a recent French critic in the *Etudes*, "it always seems to have been a superhuman task to translate the Psalms." The same might be said of English versifiers—and of English great poets, too. Here are some verses of Milton's, written in the prime of his powers, between *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*:

For cloyed with woes and trouble sore
Surcharged my soul doth lie;
My life at death's uncheerful door
Unto the grave draws nigh.

Thou dost my friends from me estrange
And mak'st me odious;
Me to them odious, for they change,
And I here pent up thus.

And here is one of Bacon's Psalms, which it seems worth while to give at length:

PSALM 137.

Whenas we sat all sad and desolate
By Babylon upon the river's side,
Eased from the tasks which in our captive state
We were enforcèd daily to abide,
Our harps we had brought with us to the field,
Some solace to our heavy souls to yield.

But soon we found we failed of our account;
For when our mind some freedom did obtain,
Straightways the memory of Sion's Mount
Did cause afresh our wounds to bleed again,
So that with present griefs and future fears
Our eyes burst forth into a stream of tears.

As for our harps, since sorrow struck them dumb,
We hang'd them on the willow trees were near;
Yet did our cruel masters to us come,
Asking of us some Hebrew songs to hear,
Taunting us rather in our misery,
Than much delighting in our melody.

Alas! (said we) who can once force or frame
His grievèd and oppressèd heart to sing
The praises of Jehovah's glorious name,
In banishment under a foreign king?
In Sion is His seat and dwelling-place,
Thence doth He show the brightness of His face.

Jerusalem, where God His throne hath set,
Shall any hour absent thee from my mind,
Then let my right hand quite her skill forget,
Then let my voice and words no passage find;
Nay, if I do not thee prefer in all
That in the compass of my thoughts can fall.

Remember Thou, O Lord! the cruel cry
Of Edom's children, which did ring and sound,
Inciting the Chaldeans' cruelty:
"Down with it, down with it, even unto the ground."
In that good day repay it unto them
When Thou shalt visit Thy Jerusalem.

And thou, O Babylon, shalt have thy turn
By just revenge, and happy shall he be
That thy proud walls and towers shall waste and burn,
And as thou didst by us so do by thee.
Yea, happy he that takes thy children's bones,
And dashes them against the pavement stones.

It seems to me that if Milton had written that, even Milton need hardly be ashamed of it.

The next set of evidences to be considered is that of contemporary panegyrics on Bacon's poetic powers. And here, though its importance has probably been exaggerated, I cannot pass over Ben Jonson's curiously worded testimony to Bacon's literary excellence. After Shakspeare's death Jonson had written of him:

When thy socks were on,
Leave thee alone, for the comparison
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

Now after Bacon's death Jonson writes of him: "He hath filled up all numbers and performed that in our tongue which may be compared or preferred either to insolent Greece or haughty Rome." Jonson was not a man usually short of words, and it is odd, unquestionably, that he should give to

the world two panegyrics so similarly worded on two persons apparently so different, and whom he knew so well, as the Chancellor and the Player.*

But if we refuse to attach much importance to these expressions of Jonson, a similar difficulty presently confronts us anew. We have to examine a singular and even mysterious cloud of witnesses. These are the various writers who, after the fashion of the time, composed elegiac verses on the death of Bacon, and whose efforts were collected and edited with a brief preface by Dr. Rawley, Bacon's chaplain and secretary. Here we have writer after writer apparently extolling the illustrious departed as a great poet. Among the writers are George Herbert, Henry Ferne, afterwards Bishop of Chester, and Thomas Randolph, the dramatist, then only twenty-one years old. Though they had appeared collected together in the forefront of Blackburne's edition of Bacon in 1730, no particular attention was paid to these elegies until 1896, when Dr. George Cantor, Professor of Mathematics and Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, a savant of European reputation, was struck by their peculiar form, and edited the longest of them. They appear to have led Dr. Cantor into the Baconian camp, of which he is now a chief ornament.†

* Still more, however, has been made by Baconian advocates of the fact that the panegyric bestowed on the Chancellor should seem of the two the one better fitted for the Player. For, "to fill up all numbers," said of Bacon, seems a natural expression of praise only for a poet. "Numeri" in Latin, "numbers" in English, applied to literature mean nothing else than verse, and even seem to exclude prose. Thus Tibullus writes: "Numeris ille, hic pede libero scribit" (One writes in verse, another in prose). And Shakspeare has the same antithesis in *Love's Labour Lost* (iv., 3): "These numbers I will tear and write in prose." Yet all this does not settle the matter. For "numeri" is also used in the sense merely of "parts." Pliny speaks of a prose work as perfect in all its parts: "omnibus numeris absolutus." And Cicero says of a plan of life: "omnes numeros virtutis continet" (it contains every element of virtue). So that Jonson may have merely meant to say in slightly pedantic phrase that Bacon had passed away, "all parts fulfilled," the expression actually used by Pope in ironic praise of Queen Caroline.

† They have been minutely examined in *Baconiana*, 1905-6, by Rev. W. Sutton, S.J.

Yet I think there are respectable reasons against our allowing them to carry us so far. The Baconian argument is that these elegies point so distinctly to Bacon as a poet—a great poet—that their writers must have held him to be the author of some mighty poetical works that have not come down to us under his name. But against this position there is an obvious attack: How is it that so many men could have known or at least guessed his authorship of these mysterious works, and not have published their knowledge of the secret, or at least allowed it to leak out by the ordinary channels of human indiscretion? Again, if these mysterious great works were really the Shakspearian plays, we come into conflict with another portion of the Baconian argument, namely, that those plays were not then (about 1625) at all looked upon as the great works they have since come to be considered, and that consequently their true authorship might remain undetected and uninquired into. Here, on the contrary, we are asked to believe that these funeral versifiers knew the secret, and looked to the plays as an unsurpassed title to fame. We cannot allow our Baconian friends to build arguments on premises that are mutually destructive. At the same time, it must be allowed that these elegies are curiosities, and deserve more than the limited amount of attention that has lately been bestowed on them. One begins:

Plangite jam vere Clio, Cliusque sorores:
Ah decima occubuit Musa, decusque chori.

Now weep indeed, Clio, and ye sisters of Clio; the tenth Muse has sunk in death, the glory of your choir.

Another describes Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy and elegy, as indignant with the cruel Fates, and hails Bacon as "Musarum phosphorus," "the morning star of the Muses," and now "the grief of Apollo." Another declares that Apollo will henceforth have to be content with nine Muses! But another indignantly asks: "Thinkest thou, foolish passer-by, that the leader of the choir of the Muses and Apollo lies buried in this cold marble? No; he has gone

to join their company on Olympus, a Muse more rare than the noted nine." Another calls him "reconditarum gemma pretiosa litterarum" (the precious gem of hidden or abstruse letters)—an expression which, as we might expect, has been eagerly seized on by the Baconian advocates. Another exclaims: "If thou wilt claim, O Bacon, all thou hast given to the world and to the Muses, then love, the earth, the Muses, Jove's treasury, prayer, heaven, song, incense, grief will become bankrupt." Nothing about science or law; it is with love, the Muses and song, that Bacon has enriched the world! Another, the dramatist Randolph, declares that "Phœbus did not heal Bacon lest he (Bacon) should become king instead of himself." Another poet exclaims: "Yield, then, ye Greeks; give place, O Virgil, first in Latin story." All this reads like language that had oddly missed its address when it found its way to the tomb of a lawyer, a philosopher, and a scientist. Curious, too, is a lament where the imagery of the drama is employed in connexion with Bacon's treatment of philosophy, and where Aristotle, of all unlikely people, is brought in to swell the chorus of praise: "Verulam found philosophy creeping on low socks (the footgear of comedy); he rose on a loftier cothurnus; and Aristotle alive again, flourishes in the *Novum Organum*." And finally we have this curious panegyric: "He taught the Pegasean arts to grow, he grew like the spear of Quirinus, and in a short time was a bay tree . . . and therefore no ages shall dim his glory." The Pegasean arts are, we must suppose, the arts of poetry. "But why," asks Dr. Cantor, "is the spear dragged in here apropos of growing, and whence comes the significant name Quirinus, the spear-shaker?" We need not follow Dr. Cantor along the daring path of conjecture thus opened up, if we are satisfied that the spear of Quirinus might come in here appositely enough without any *arrière-pensée* about "Shakspeare," that the Muses are here taken as the patrons of learning and genius in general, and that an age of undeveloped criticism confounded learning

and poetry in a way that for us has become impossible. One recalls the well-known passage concerning "the thrice three Muses in mourning for the death of Learning late deceased in beggary," and an Elizabethan lyric beginning, "O that the learned poets"—that is, simply, the *great* poets. I confess, however, that this explanation hardly seems adequate to explain the vehemence and insistence of the language in these panegyrics.

Passing on from these outbursts of valedictory grief, we scarcely again find the distinctively poetic laurel assigned to Bacon with the same emphatic fervour. Praised as a poet he continues to be, but it is as a poet in the broader sense of the word—a poet because of the poetic spirit throbbing beneath the prose veil of the *Novum Organum* and the *Fables of the Ancients*. The denial to him of any poetic spirit whatever was reserved for polemical critics of our own day. Addison finds that Bacon "possessed at once all those extraordinary talents which were divided amongst the greatest authors of antiquity. . . . One does not know," he says, "which most to admire in his writings—the strength of reason, force of style, or brightness of imagination." "His prayers and private devotions are more like the devotion of an angel than of a man." Among other eighteenth-century panegyrists we may quote Pope, who, besides his rather notorious and oft-misquoted antithesis concerning the "wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind," also said that Lord Bacon was "the greatest genius that England or, perhaps, any other country produced." But perhaps my reader will discount the verdict of the eighteenth century, will say that their notions of genius, of imagination, of poetry destroy the value of their poetic diploma. Well, then, let us hasten on to the "romantic" poets and critics of the nineteenth century; and here we meet Macaulay, whose deplorable exaggerations concerning Bacon's life and philosophy need not destroy the value of his opinions on Bacon's literary characteristics. "No man ever had an imagination," says Macaulay, "at once

so strong and so thoroughly subjugated. . . . In truth, much of Bacon's life was passed in a visionary world, amid things as strange as any that are described in the Arabian Tales. . . . The small fine mind of La Bruyère had not a more delicate tact than that large intellect of Bacon. His understanding resembled the tent which the fairy gave to Prince Ahmed—fold it, and it seemed the toy of a lady; spread it, and the armies of a powerful Sultan might repose beneath its shade." Mackintosh assigns to Bacon "the utmost splendour of imagination." Doctor Shaw remarks that "in his style there is the same quality that is applauded in Shakspeare—a combination of the intellectual and the imaginative, the closest reasoning in the boldest metaphor." Sir Alex. Grant says: "It is as an inspired seer, as the prose-poet of modern science, that I reverence Bacon." Lord Lytton found Bacon's "thoughts and style pervaded and permeated with poetry." Taine declares that "Bacon thinks in the manner of artists and poets, and speaks after the manner of prophets and seers." Very interesting is the dictum of Alexander Smith, himself a poet and an essayist, in reference to the Essays, which I consider (in opposition to Mr. Stronach) as amongst the least poetic of Bacon's works: "Bacon seems to have written his Essays with the pen of Shakspeare." More striking still is the splendid testimony given by Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*. It is true, of course, though the Baconians hardly refer to the fact, that in that Essay Shelley shows the broadest charity in his application of the name "Poet"; in one place going so far as to say that "all great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets." Yet this, though it impairs, does not destroy the dignity of the special rank he assigns to Bacon. In one passage he ranks him with the supreme poets and artists, in antithesis to such leaders of positive thought as Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and Rousseau. Benefactors of humanity as these undoubtedly were, according to Shelley, still the world could have got on

without them. "But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakspeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated"; and so forth. Here this most quintessential poet sets Bacon among the typical poets, between Calderon and Milton, near Shakspeare and Raphael. Elsewhere in the same eloquent Essay he says: "Lord Bacon was a poet. His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm which satiates the sense no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect; it is a strain which distends and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy." Shelley's meaning may not be very transpicuous, but his general purport is plain enough for our present purpose.

Confronted with these critical utterances, and with the facts on which they are based, some of the depreciators of Bacon's poetical glory adopt subtler plans of attack than flat negatives or pointless ridicule. Bacon was not really (they say) a great poet, but only an excellent counterfeit. His contemporaries testified that he had the tongue of a splendid orator; we find that he has the pen of a splendid rhetorician. He had a rare imagination—of a kind, but not that of a poet. "We must not," says Professor Kuno Fischer, "mistake the enthusiasm of the orator for the sacred fire of poetry."

Well, let us take some of his images and see whether, except for their prose garb, they essentially differ from those of the acknowledged great poets.

Thus Shakspeare writes—what we all quote:

> There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune, ...
> And we must take the current as it serves
> Or lose our ventures.

Bacon writes:

"In the third place, I set down reputation, because of the peremptory tides and currents it hath, which, if they be not taken in their due time, are seldom recovered."

It is surely fine poetry when the love-sick Orsino recalls the enchanting strain of music: "O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet south [or is "sound" the reading?] that breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odours."

But is our unpoetical Bacon so far behind? "The breath of flowers," he writes, "is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand."

Again, the heedless, thoughtless Shakspeare, opposed by Mr. Grant White to the judicious Bacon, was wise enough to write:

> Before the times of change . . . men's minds mistrust
> Ensuing danger; as, by proof, we see
> The waters swell before a boisterous storm. (*Rich. III*, II, iii.)

And the unpoetical Bacon of the same Mr. White expresses with no ungraceful brevity the same image:

> As there are . . . secret swellings of seas before a tempest, so there are in states. (*Essay on Sedition.*)

Let me bring forward a few more bricks as proof of the house. This is how our "prosaic" Chancellor writes in the dedication of a grave legal treatise: "The reasons of laws, severed from the grounds of nature, manners, and policy, are like wall-flowers, which, while they grow high upon the crests of states, yet have no deep roots." Can we find in any poetic couplet a happier union of profound truth and apt fancy? When Bacon refers to the earth-circling navigators of his day, he does it in this style: "Memorable voyages after the manner of heaven about the globe of the earth." In this phrase the harmonious words seem trembling into verse. So also when he speaks of the themes of the antiquary: "Remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time."

Again, he speaks of the unchanging "ocean, the solitary handmaid of eternity." Has any singer thrown a lovelier flower upon ocean? All the poetry of the sea appealed to him, as I could show by many quotations. But Bacon has not merely short swallow-flights of poetic expression; he has also sustained elevations. Take his famous passage on the "end of studies"; observe its grandeur of moral sentiment as well as of imagination. "Other errors there are in the scope that men propound to themselves . . . in the mistaking or misplacing of the last and furthest end of knowledge. For men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge sometimes upon a natural curiosity and imaginative appetite, sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight, sometimes for ornament and reputation, and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction, and most times for lucre and profession, and seldom to give a true account of their gift of reason to the benefit and use of man, as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereon to rest a searching and restless spirit; or a terrace for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a fort or a commanding ground for strife or contention; or a shop for profit and sale; and not a rich store-house for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate."

This wealth of imagery, never diluting but always enriching the thought, cannot, I think, be fairly ranked as the mere exuberance of the rhetorician.

Nor is Bacon incapable of sympathetic and tender strains. He does not lack that "sense of tears in mortal things" without which a poet is but a tinkling cymbal. Read, for proof, Bacon's pathetic exposition of the fable of Memnon, son of the dawn goddess, early slain and turned to ashes beside the walls of Troy. He sees, pictured in all the mythical details, the unfortunate destinies of young men "who," he says, "like the sons of Aurora, puffed up with the glittering show of vanity and ostentation, attempt actions

above their strength. For among all disasters that can happen to mortals, there is none so lamentable and so powerful to move compassion as the flower of virtue cropped with too sudden a mischance. . . . Lamentation and mourning flutter around their obsequies, like those funeral birds around the pyre of Memnon."*

Or hear his tribute to the value of true 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. . . . It is a mere and miserable solitude to want friends, without which the world is but a wilderness." One is reminded of an exquisite passage in *Prometheus Unbound*, where Shelley speaks of the happiness which comes with the voice

> of one beloved, heard in youth alone,
> And leaves this peopled earth a solitude
> When it returns no more;

and wonders whether, had these conceptions and images of Bacon's had the good fortune to be ranged in verse by a Shakspeare, we might not have ranked them with the noblest passages of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

I can only touch briefly in this paper on those profounder aspects of Bacon's character and work which affect the question of his poetic equipment.

As to his character, without entering into the vast difficulties which its study raises, one may observe by a glance through his most authorized biographers how much of the distinctively poetical peculiarities he held engrained. His inattention to facts, combined with power of observation, his prehensile yet slippery memory, the self-possession and self-satisfaction with which he wraps himself up in a world of his own, his "sanguine and restless disposition," his zeal for the abstract and remote, combined with his assiduity in walking the crookedest paths of the courtier, his "portentous

* Bacon wrote this passage in Latin; the translation is the work of one of the "able pens" employed by him.

power of adapting his mind to the mind of others," his high-flown ambitions and daring purposes, his combination of eloquence and humour with the speculative faculty—all these become more and more evident to the student of his life and character; and all these belong to the marks and the promise of a poet.

Is it true that in certain important respects Bacon's views on human life are not those of a poet, that they are antithetical in particular to those of Shakspeare? It is well known, and has been often referred to, that Tennyson declared that the same man could not have written the *Essay on Love* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Two modern editors of Bacon's Essays have taken up this cue, telling us that the author "knows nothing of the valuable influence of unselfish and holy love. . . . His prudential treatment of the whole subject is scarcely better than the sneers of La Rochefoucauld. . . . His cold philosophic nature was incapable of feeling or even imagining the loves of a Cornelia and Paulus, a Posthumus and Imogen." One might at once ask, by way of retort—whether the treatment of love in *Troilus and Cressida* is much better than the sneers of La Rochefoucauld? And one might point out that in that cynical play one at least of the "cold philosophic" maxims of the Essay is reproduced in verse:

> Amare et sapere vix Deo conceditur. (*Essay.*)
> But you are wise
> Or else you love not; for to be wise and love
> Exceeds man's might; that dwells with gods above.
>
> (*Tr. and Cres.* III, ii, 162.)

But the question demands and admits of fuller and deeper consideration. Such it has received in a book called *Shakspeare Studies in Baconian Light*, by Mr. R. M. Theobald, who has studied in a singularly acute and convincing manner the views of love put forward in the Baconian and the Shakspearian writings. Only a very imperfect summary of his careful exposition can here be given; but it cannot be altogether passed over.

The most striking contention made by Bacon in the Essay —the most striking because the most unconventional and unpopular—is the close connexion of love with folly in practical affairs. He notes how love "checks with business, troubleth men's fortunes," leads to loss of both riches and wisdom; how "the stage is more beholding to love than the life of man"; how "they do best who if they cannot but admit love, yet make it keep quarter and sever it wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life."

Now, is the treatment of love in the plays really alien from all this? Do they, firstly, show as a whole no indication of revolt against the custom of dramatists to make their stage excessively "beholding to love"? Is it not well known that one of the reasons why the Shakspearian dramas are particularly suited to the school-stage is that the treatment of love is in them usually quite subordinate? And when sexual love occurs, is it not often bereft to an unusual degree of romance or fascination? Is it not often presented in just such a manner as to bring home to the thoughtful the very maxims of Bacon?

Take *Romeo and Juliet* itself, the play named by Tennyson, the play in which youthful romantic passion seems to be allowed freest scope. The lover himself finds his passion full of paradox—something neither wise nor practical:

> O heavy lightness! serious vanity,
> Misshapen chaos of well-seeeming forms!
> Feather of lead! bright smoke! cold fire! sick health!
> Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!

The wise and benevolent Friar laments the follies it leads to:

> Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou art,
> Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote
> The unreasonable fury of a beast:
> Unseemly woman in a seeming man,
> Or ill-beseeming beast in seeming both. . . .
> Fie, fie! thou sham'st thy shape, thy love, thy wit, . . .
> Thy wit, that ornament to shape and love,
> Misshapen in the conduct of them both.

This is extremely like saying, as Bacon does, that "love is the child of folly." Again, hear the Friar on the mischiefs of being "transported to the mad degree of love," as Bacon phrases it:

> These violent delights have violent ends,
> And in their triumph die; like fire and powder
> Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey
> Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
> And in the taste confounds the appetite.
> Therefore love moderately!

What is this but to say, as Bacon does, "In life it doth much mischief, sometimes like a Siren, sometimes like a Fury"? Nor is this the last of the Baconian saws which *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates. The lyric exuberance of this love-drama, its abounding metaphors, antitheses, and hyperboles, are characteristics exactly, if dryly, commented on by Bacon's remark: "It is a strange thing to note the excess of this passion, and how it braves the nature and value of things by this, that the speaking in a perpetual hyperbole is comely in nothing but love."

Take another early and "romantic" play. Surely *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is such! Yet *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* gives a most genuinely Baconian view of love; it displays the passion as a source of weakness and folly, as spoiling its votary for the true business of life:

> To be in love, where scorn is bought with groans,
> Coy looks with heart-sore sighs, one fading moment's mirth
> With twenty watchful, weary, tedious nights:
> If haply won, perhaps a hapless gain,
> If lost, why then a grievous labour won;
> However, but a folly bought with wit,
> Or else a wit by folly vanquished . . .
> Even so by love the young and tender wit
> Is turned to folly.

Again:

> Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphosed me,
> Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
> War with good counsel, set the world at nought,
> Made wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought.

Julia's own impressions are not very different :

> Fie, fie, how wayward is this foolish love,
> That, like a testy babe, will scratch the nurse,
> Then presently, all humbled, kiss the rod!

The special marks of a lover, enumerated at length by Speed for the benefit of Sir Proteus, are every one of them in the spirit of Bacon's sayings that love is a "weak passion" (*i.e.* weakening), "troubleth men's fortunes, and maketh men that they can no ways be true to their own ends."

Take, again, the unromantic *Merry Wives of Windsor*. There the point of the play is brought out in Falstaff's summary judgment of his own love-adventures: "I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass." Baconian surely!

Is it not extraordinary that the fairy fantasies of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* should circle around a Baconian philosophy of love? Yet so it is. "The play" (says Brandes, quoted by Theobald) "is a lightly flowing, sportive, lyrical fantasy, dealing with love as a dream, a fever, an illusion, an infatuation. . . . Shakspeare is far from regarding love as an expression of human reason." Bottom, indeed, evidently voices for the nonce the poet's own thought when he says to Titania: "Reason and love keep little company now-a-days; the more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends." "The germs of a whole philosophy of life," continues Brandes, "are latent in the wayward love-scenes of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*." But this philosophy of life is the Baconian philosophy of love!

Go on to one of the latest of the comedies. We shall find the same philosophy of love as related to life in *The Winter's Tale*. Prince Florizel illustrates the "mad degree of love"; his passion "checks with business," and makes him "untrue to his own ends." He will surrender all, and defy all. When he is flinging aside his royal inheritance, the

wise councillor Camillo says to him, "Be advised"; the enamoured Crown-Prince retorts:

> I am, and by my fancy: if my reason
> Will thereto be obedient, I'll have reason;
> If not, my senses, better pleased with madness,
> Do bid it welcome.

Here is clearly a case illustrating Bacon's remark: "He that preferred Helena quitted the gifts of Juno and Pallas; for whoever esteemeth too much of amorous affection, quitteth both riches and honour." But Shakspeare presently shows still stranger extremities of self-abasement, which illustrate the Baconian maxim: *Amare et sapere vix Deo conceditur.*

> The gods themselves,
> Humbling their deities to love, have taken
> The shapes of beasts upon them. Jupiter
> Became a bull and bellowed; the green Neptune
> A ram and bleated; and the fire-robed god,
> Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain.

Turn to the great tragedies. In *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, the interest of sexual love is almost or entirely neglected in favour of what Bacon looked on as grander themes. *Antony and Cleopatra* presents us with Bacon's own chosen exception to the rule that "great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion." For he adds: "You must except nevertheless Marcus Antonius, the half-partner of the Empire of Rome." The opening lines bring before us a great spirit mastered and ruined by "this weak passion."

> Nay, but this dotage of our General's
> O'erflows the measure!

And so on. Bacon writes: "They do best who, if they cannot but admit love, yet make it keep quarter, and sever it wholly from their serious affairs and actions of life." This is precisely what Antony failed to do; and hence disaster and ruin are shown by the dramatist as overtaking the lovers and all who are swayed by them. The Essay and the Play fit one another as text and pictorial illustrations.

I will pursue this theme no further, not merely because space forbids my tracking the interesting parallelism of thought through all the Shakspearian plays, but also because I believe I have proved quite enough for my present purpose. Mr. Theobald, in the able study I have been following, wishes to drive home conviction that the Essay and the Plays were written by the same man. My intention has been merely to show the utter absence of an asserted incongruity between the Essay and the Plays. And that incongruity I have shown to be absolutely imaginary and non-existent. For completeness' sake, however, I will try to find space for a beautiful passage* occurring in a little-known work, of which Bacon was at least part-author—a passage which goes to show that the finer and nobler aspect of sex-love—that which Shakspeare has glorified in an Imogen, a Ferdinand, and some other beautiful types, was not unknown to the "prosaic" Chancellor, not unappreciated and uncelebrated by the "cold, prudential philosopher."

As for other affections, they be but sufferings of nature; they seek ransoms and rescues from that which is evil, not enjoying an union with that which is good. . . . But love is a pure gain and advancement in nature; it is not a good by comparison, but a true good; it is not an ease of pain, but a true purchase of pleasure; and, therefore, when our minds are soundest, when they are not, as it were, in sickness and therefore out of taste, but when we be in prosperity, when we want nothing, then is the season and the opportunity and the spring of love, and as it springeth not out of ill, so it is not intermixed with ill; it is not like the virtues which by a steep and rugged way conduct us to a plain, and are hard taskmasters at first, and after give an honourable hire; but the first aspect of love and all that followeth is gracious and pleasant.

It may be safely asserted that this tribute to *la grande passion* is more unlike the Essay than anything that could be culled from the Shakspeare Plays.

Turning with very brief observation to Bacon's manner of treating more abstract and speculative questions, we meet a characteristic we have already glanced at—his irrepressible,

* Quoted by Theobald. It occurs in *The Conference of Pleasure*, a masque presented at the Inns of Court in 1592.

incurable propensity to quit the cold abstractions of philosophy or science in order to construct fairy worlds from elements supplied by imagination. Thus, for example, Bacon seeks to explain to us the supposed origin of the world from atoms, and how?—by an original interpretation of the classical myth of Cupid. His explanation of the fable sets forth a form of the atomic theory which he flatters himself is "more severe and sober than that of Democritus"; but never surely was weighty doctrine set forth in guise less severe or sober! Cupid stands for matter itself in its most elementary conception. He has (according to Bacon's version of the story) no parents; that is to say, primary matter has no natural cause of any kind, *cum sit, post Deum, causa causarum, ipsa incausabilis.* "Nothing," he continues, "has more corrupted philosophy than inquiry after the parents of Cupid." Philosophers (we are to understand) decline to take things simply as they are in nature, but confuse issues with dialectical and mathematical notions. Then Bacon quotes Scripture to explain why Cupid was fabled to be sprung from an egg hatched by Night: "God made all things beautiful in their seasons, and gave the world to their disputes." Yet, though human investigation is thus divinely provided for, the supreme law of being can only be understood by the human intellect through negative, not positive demonstration; consequently, as negative demonstrations are a kind of ignorance and night, "the truths proved by them are justly signified by eggs hatched by Night."

Take, for another illustration, Bacon's development of the myth of Pan. The god Pan represents (so he expounds) the aggregate of earthly things. These are doomed to be transient, and a definite period of duration is assigned to them by nature. Therefore the Parcae or Fates are the sisters of Pan. The horns of Pan are pointed upwards; and in like manner does nature ascend from individuals to species, and from species to genera, after the fashion of a pyramid. These horns, retaining their pyramidal form, reach to the

sky; thus do the highest generic ideas lead from physics to metaphysics, from physics to speculative theology. The body of Pan is covered with hair; this symbolizes the rays of light that emanate from shining bodies. It is composed of the human and the brute forms, to correspond to the transition from lower to higher grades and to that mingling of them that everywhere appears in nature. The goats' feet of Pan, suited as they are for steep climbing, denote the upward tendency of the terrestrial bodies. His pipes express the harmony of the world; the seven reeds signify the seven planets; the curved staff represents the "circular" operations of Providence (which Bacon elsewhere explains). Lastly, Echo, the spouse of Pan, is a symbol of science; for science should be the echo and reproduction of the cosmic order.

Here, surely, we have the "fairy tales of science" in their most shining glorification! Dr. Kuno Fischer is indignant at the "utter worthlessness" of these interpretations. "Bacon is no more an interpreter of the myths" (he says) "than Æsop is a zoologist." We may sympathize more or less with his indignation. But at any rate these are but specimens (few among many) of Bacon's prevailing methods of scientific and philosophic investigation. The very titles which he strews throughout his most grave and abstruse works tell the same story of his prevalent turn of mind. "The thread of the labyrinth," "the male offspring of time," "the antechambers of death," "the ladder of the intellect"—such are his descriptions of treatises on the greatest and (we might suppose) driest topics, where the discussion is sometimes more strangely fanciful than even the fanciful title could have led us to anticipate.

Whatever, then, may be the value of Bacon's contributions to science and philosophy from the point of view of the scientist and the philosopher, when we come to estimate them with the eyes of the literary student, we can hardly resist Taine's verdict: "This man thinks in the manner of artists

and poets, and speaks after the fashion of prophets and seers." His imagination, his fancy, his wit, like those of Shakspeare, are his companions in his treatment of the profoundest themes, sometimes leading him into absurdities into which no dull man would have fallen, but commonly brightening the obscure, gilding the austere, crystallizing thought or principle into gems treasurable for ever. His philosophy, like that of Lucretius, may have been essentially prosaic and materialist, but that does not prevent his standing forth, like Lucretius, as a poet among philosophers.

The severest judgment we may be inclined to pass upon Bacon's life-work will hardly be severer than that delivered by Joseph de Maistre from his standpoint as a conservative Catholic philosopher. Yet his two volumes of hostile analysis are none the less an eloquent testimony to Bacon's poetic temperament and poetic power. "Rarement il résiste," says De Maistre, "à l'envie d'être poète." An image, an analogy, a fanciful trope presents itself to Bacon's mind, and he seeks no better argument, but rather proceeds to prop up fancies with sophisms. "C'est la manière éternelle de Bacon." It is an element in nearly all the misdemeanours wherewith De Maistre charges him. The stern champion of conservative orthodoxy, running full tilt against the *Novum Organum*, and the dreamy revolutionist Shelley, who would enthrone the philosopher Bacon beside the "divine" philosopher Plato, are at one in their recognition of Bacon as a poet. Neither of them had heard of the "Bacon-Shakspeare" theory; but they would assuredly have been both equally amazed at such unfortunate specimens of literary criticism as those we quoted at the outset from some prominent "anti-Baconian" controversialists.

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