

**SIR FRANCIS BACON;
POET, PHILOSOPHER,
STATESMAN, LAWYER,
WIT**

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Sir Francis Bacon; poet, philosopher, statesman, lawyer, wit by Parker Woodward

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PARKER WOODWARD

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—LAWYER—WIT

BY

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PREFACE

MR. JAMES SPEDDING, in addition to editing the philosophical works of Francis Bacon, devoted years to the examination of Bacon's letters and unprinted pamphlets with a view to obtaining all the light available upon Bacon's career as a philosopher. To that general object he remained faithful. So that the "Life and Letters of Bacon" which Mr. Spedding printed in several most valuable volumes were not studied from the other points of view of Bacon as a man of the world in peculiar relationship with Queen Elizabeth or as a "concealed poet."

Francis Bacon's fame was unfortunate in the fact that his great biographer reviewed it so long ago instead of to-day, when so much additional information has been unearthed from concealment.

Conscious of the little he really knew, Mr. Spedding became alarmed at the position of authority concerning Francis Bacon with which he was credited. But he had become a pundit in spite of himself, and although later in life he found that Bacon had the habit of mind which constitutes the making of a poet, his (Spedding's) declaration about the Shakespeare Plays which he made in 1867 has been persistently quoted as a final and authoritative pronouncement :

"I believe that the author of the Plays published in 1623 was a man called William Shakespeare.

It was believed by those who had the best means of knowing, and I know nothing which should lead me to doubt it."

In view of the hundreds of parallelisms between the words and thoughts expressed by Bacon and those in "the Shakespeare Plays," and which have been printed by Edwin Reed, W. F. Wigston, Gervinus, and many others, Mr. Spedding only displayed the ignorance of which he felt conscious when he proceeded to comment:

"I doubt whether there are five lines together to be found in Bacon which could be mistaken for Shakespeare, or five lines in Shakespeare which could be mistaken for Bacon by one who was familiar with the several styles, and practised in such observation."

I have elsewhere shown (*Baconiana*, July, 1916) that Spedding did another injustice to Bacon, by attributing to Lambarde, instead of to the former, one of the finest treatises upon a branch of English History and Law ever compiled. I refer to the manuscript included both by Blackbourne in his "Bacon's Works," 1730, and by Basil Montagu entitled "An Account of the Office of Compositions for Alienation."

If the reading public will agree with Mr. Spedding, that upon the subject of Francis Bacon he was far from infallible, they may spare a short space of their valuable time to the study of the memoir I have ventured to put forward in the following pages.

In "Evenings with a Reviewer" (Preface), Mr. Venables stated that Mr. Spedding was in the habit of saying "that he (Spedding) got undeserved credit for knowledge because no one

would believe that such a man could be so profoundly ignorant."

It is more than probable that three hundred years after Bacon's death some pronouncement will be made about him by those authorised to do so, so that this memoir is nothing more than an essay in research after the truth of the matter. Not that readers generally will welcome the truth. On page 143 of "The Amethyst Ring," a book by Anatole France, the subjects of truth and error are discussed :

"Do you not think," said M. Leterrier, "that Truth contains a power that renders her invincible, and sooner or later ensures her final triumph?"

"It is precisely what I personally do not think," returned M. Bergeret. "On the contrary, I opine that in the majority of cases Truth is likely to fall a victim to the disdain or insults of mankind, and to perish in obscurity. I could give you many instances of this. Remember, my dear sir, that Truth has so many points of inferiority to Falsehood as practically to be doomed to extinction. To begin with Truth stands alone. That is not her only shortcoming. She is inert, is not capable of modification, is not adapted to those machinations which would enable her to win her way into the hearts and minds of men. Falsehood, on the other hand, possesses the most wonderful resources. She is pliant and tractable, and she is natural and moral. She is natural as being the product of the working of the senses, the source and fountain-head of all illusion; she is moral because she fits in with the habits and customs of the human race, who, living in common as they do, founded their ideas of good and evil, their human and divine

laws, upon the oldest, most sacred, most irrational, most noble, most barbarous, and most erroneous interpretations of natural phenomena. Falsehood is the principle of all that is beautiful and of good report amongst men. They lend a willing ear only to the lies of the poets. What makes you wish to destroy Falsehood and to seek Truth ?

“Such an enterprise can only be inspired by decadent curiosity and culpable intellectual temerity. It is an attempt against the moral nature of man and the laws of society.

“It is a sin against the sentiments as well as the virtues of the nations.”

If, therefore, in presenting these pages representing long researches and study of Sir Francis Bacon's career and literary performances, I sin against the sentiments as well as the virtues of the English-speaking peoples, I must claim to have been inspired by “decadent curiosity,” if not mainly by desire to do justice to the real truth of the matter.

My observations about Gosson, Watson, Spenser, Peele, Marlowe, Lyly, Shakespeare, Bright, Burton, Whitney, Webbe, and other matters are set out at greater length in a book called “Tudor Problems,” published some years ago. My notes on the “Florio Montaigne,” on Thomas Lodge, and queries concerning the authorship of “Don Quixote,” are to be found in a small serial publication called “Baconiana.” Those concerning the sigils or revealing numbers used by the secret literary fraternity of the Rosy Cross up to about the year 1740 are given in a book in the preparation of which I was associated with my brother, Frank Woodward, entitled “Secret Shakespearcan Seals,” published by Mr. B. Halliday of Highercross Street, Leicester.

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