

**LACON IN
OUNCIL**

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Lacon in council by J. F. Boyes

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J. F. BOYES

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OUNCIL**

BEQUEST OF
REV. CANON SCADDING, D. D.
TORONTO, 1901.



LACON IN COUNCIL.



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" Il y a des gens propres à trouver des vérités; d'autres qui sont
propres à trouver des images aux vérités, comme des comparaisons;
d'autres qui sont propres à trouver des vérités aux images."

NICOLE, *Pensées*.

" Rather to excite your judgment briefly than to inform it te-
diously."--BACON, *Articles of Union between England and Scotland*.

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H. Kinsley

LACON IN COUNCIL.

BY

J. F. BOYES,

AUTHOR OF ILLUSTRATIONS OF ÆSCHYLUS,
LIFE AND BOOKS, ETC.



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LONDON :

BELL AND DALDY, 186, FLEET STREET.

1865.



PREFACE.

*We are come with willingness to bear
What torturing death or punishment you please.*

Old Play of Edward III. 1596.

*Une préface est presque toujours une prétention,
quand elle cesse d'être une précaution.*

ULDACH, Susan Duchemin.

IN preface-writing we resemble the celebrated Mayor of Calais either in his first or second attitude. We either sound the trumpet of defiance and non-surrender, or we present ourselves with the key of our meaning in our hands and the halter of submission round our necks; of which articles, however, the former is often far from answering its purpose, and the latter is rarely intended to do so.

After this I have very little business with any introductory matter; however, I shall just venture upon a few words.

On my last volume, somewhat resembling that now offered to the reader, many most favourable and encouraging criticisms were passed; the most liberal, however, agreeing in this, that the venture of a volume of isolated thoughts was a bold one. The present venture is still bolder, from the comparisons and contrasts which it appears to challenge, every original passage being introduced, and many of them followed too by the utterance of some well-known author—hence the title which I have adopted. This arrangement, besides answering what I believe to be a better purpose, has forced me to strive to do my best, in order not greatly to disgrace my introductions. The presenters at court are generally more worthy of observation than the presented; and the guarantors of respectability have for the most part more of that quality than those who cite them. In the humbler position of the two I very willingly take my stand, too glad if I can refract or reflect any of the brightness of my chosen companions.

“In the writing of aphorisms,” says Bacon, “discourse of illustration is cut off, recitals of examples are cut off, . . . descriptions of practice are cut off.” These being just the “cuttings off” I can least afford, if I am to take Bacon’s conditions as laws (very hard ones, I believe, he would himself have found them), I renounce all claim to the dignity of an aphorist. The

book is, in fact, a medley of maxims, similes, prose epigrams, *conceits*, and opinions generally backed by evidence.*

A *pensée* writer has many perils; some from himself. One of the greatest of these is indicated by Chamfort, a famous member of the fraternity, who, no doubt, spoke from experience. He says that a man collecting his isolated thoughts for publication resembles a child with a dish of fruit before it,—he first takes the best, but his taste gradually condescends till he has finished all of them.

When the greatest self-severity has been exercised there will still, no doubt, remain a sufficient number of weak passages to require the pardon of even the favourable reader.

* The following requirements occurring in a critical review some years back appear very reasonable as applied to a volume of *Pensées* :—

“We do not demand brand new moral truths; they are not so easily found; any man who could produce half a dozen such, really would be the greatest man of his age. A writer can now aim at little more than to give fresh images, amusing or unexpected illustrations, to cite very remarkable examples, to throw the light strongly on one facet of a diamond truth, to show an unperceived root or a fresh ramification, to make up complements that have been omitted by others, to abbreviate the results of a wide induction into as few words as possible and as strong, to call some authoritative witness against a widespread fallacy.”

But a vast number of readers are *not* favourable to the abstract, especially when offered in the form of continually renewed assertion, however skilfully that form may be varied, and often such a shock is given to individual opinion as causes the reader to throw down the volume in final displeasure.

Not that men of a dogmatical turn necessarily dislike the dogma in others; on the contrary, the positive often seeks the opposing positive as its natural food and exercise,* because, to use the American orator's vivid image, "it gives one such a tremendous wrench to kick out hard at nothing."

But, irrespective of agreement or disagreement, the passion of the age is for narrative; we are at the

* I know there are exceptions. Nicole, who has provided me with one of my mottoes, the collaborator with Pascal in the renowned "Provincials," and himself a "magister sententiarum," was impatient with his friend's "Pensées," and says,—
 "Je pourrais faire aussi plusieurs objections sur ces pensées, qui me semblent quelquefois un peu trop dogmatiques, et qui incommoient ainsi mon amour propre, qui n'aime pas à être régenté si fièrement."

Of men in general I believe Pope's words are true:—

"Men must be taught as though you taught them not;
 And things unknown proposed as things forgot."

And Shaftesbury: "The temper of the pedagogue suits not with the age; and the world, however it may be taught, will not be tutored."