

THE MYSTERY OF FRANCIS BACON

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The mystery of Francis Bacon by William T. Smedley

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WILLIAM T. SMEDLEY

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FRANCIS BACON**

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C. K. OGDEN

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OF
FRANCIS BACON

BY
WILLIAM T. SMEDLEY.

Ad D.B.

"Si bene qui latuit, bene vixit, tu bene vivis :
Ingeniumque tuum grande latendo patet."

—*John Owen's Epigrammatum*, 1612.

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RACQUET COURT, FLEET STREET E.C.

—
1912.

“But such is the infelicity and unhappy disposition of the human mind in the course of invention that it first distrusts and then despises itself: first will not believe that any such thing can be found out; and when it is found out, cannot understand how the world should have missed it so long.”

—“NOVUM ORGANUM,” Chap. CX.

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PREFACE.

Is there a mystery connected with the life of Francis Bacon? The average student of history or literature will unhesitatingly reply in the negative, perhaps qualifying his answer by adding :—Unless it be a mystery that a man with such magnificent intellectual attainments could have fallen so low as to prove a faithless friend to a generous benefactor in the hour of his trial, and, upon being raised to one of the highest positions of honour and influence in the State, to become a corrupt public servant and a receiver of bribes to pervert justice. —It is one of the most remarkable circumstances to be found in the history of any country that a man admittedly pre-eminent in his intellectual powers, spoken of by his contemporaries in the highest terms for his virtues and his goodness, should, in subsequent ages, be held up to obloquy and scorn and seldom be referred to except as an example of a corrupt judge, a standing warning to those who must take heed how they stand lest they fall. Truly the treatment which Francis Bacon has received confirms the truth of the aphorism, “The evil that men do lives after them ; the good is oft interred with their bones.”

It is not the intention in the following brief survey of Bacon's life to enter upon any attempt to vindicate his character. Since his works and life have come prominently before the reading public, he has never been without a defender. Montagu, Hepworth Dixon, and Spedding have, one after the other, raised their voices against the injustice which has been done to the memory

of this great Englishman; and although Macaulay, in his misleading and inaccurate essay,² abounding in paradoxes and inconsistencies, produced the most powerful, though prejudiced, attack which has been made on Bacon's fame, he may almost be forgiven, because it provided the occasion for James Spedding in "Evenings with a Reviewer," to respond with a thorough and complete vindication of the man to whose memory he devoted his life. There rests on every member of the Anglo-Saxon race an obligation—imposed upon him by the benefits which he enjoys as the result of Francis Bacon's life-work—to read this vindication of his character. Nor should mention be omitted of the essay by Mr. J. M. Robertson on "Francis Bacon" in his excellent work "Pioneer Humanists." All these defenders of Bacon treat their subject from what may be termed the orthodox point of view. They follow in the beaten track. They do not look for Bacon outside his acknowledged works and letters. Since 1857, however, there has been steadily growing a belief that Bacon was associated with the literature of the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, and that he deliberately concealed his connection with it. That this view is scouted by what are termed the men of letters is well-known. They will have none of it. They refuse its claim to a rational hearing. But, in spite of

² Attention is drawn to one of the inaccuracies in "An Introduction to Mathematics," by A. W. Whithead, Sc.D., F.R.S., published in the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge. The author says: "Macaulay in his essay on Bacon contrasts the certainty of mathematics with the uncertainty of philosophy, and by way of a rhetorical example he says, 'There has been no re-action against Taylor's theorem.' He could not have chosen a worse example. For, without having made an examination of English text-books on mathematics contemporary with the publication of this essay, the assumption is a fairly safe one that Taylor's theorem was enunciated and proved wrongly in every one of them."

this, as years go on, the number of adherents to the new theory steadily increases. The scornful epithets that are hurled at them only appear to whet their appetite, and increase their determination. Men and women devote their lives with enthusiasm to the quest for further knowledge. They dig and delve in the records of the period, and in the byeways of literature. Theories which appear extravagant and untenable are propounded. Whether any of these theories will come to be accepted and established beyond cavil, time alone can prove. But, at any rate, it is certain that in this quest many forgotten facts are brought to light, and the general stock of information as to the literature of the period is augmented.

In the following pages it is sought to establish what may be termed one of these extravagant theories. How far this attempt is successful, it is for the reader to judge. Notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, by far the greater part of Francis Bacon's life is unknown. An attempt will be made by the aid of accredited documents and books to represent in a new light his youth and early manhood. It is contended that he deliberately sought to conceal his movements and work, although, at the same time, he left the landmarks by which a diligent student might follow them. In his youth he conceived the idea that the man Francis Bacon should be concealed, and be revealed only by his works. The motto, "*Mente videbor*"—by the mind I shall be seen—became the guiding principle of his life.