

Francis Bacon's Essays.

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Some men are born to bear the burden of their genius. They see more deeply into things than the common flock of their contemporaries, and they pay dearly for their insight. One such man was Francis Bacon. Born in the midst of that period usually referred to with the vague word Renaissance, he was one of the first men to be reborn and to open his eyes to a new sense of man, of the Universe, and of their relationship.

The Renaissance has suffered much from the romantic and admiring way in which it was looked upon by the men of the last century and the beginnings of the present one. The word Renaissance used only with reference to artistic productions was employed for the first time around 1850 by a Spanish painter, Díaz by name, who while living in Paris, wrote a series of articles dealing with the new kind of art that appeared in Italy at the end of the XIVth Century. If the word Renaissance is used only with this concept of «renaissance of the arts», it is perfectly valid, but to use it with reference to the whole civilization of a period, rather ill defined in time, is not only invalid, but quite misleading,¹ since the breaking up with the Middle Ages was not a common phenomenon in Europe, either in time, space, or subject matter.

Of the main cultural activities of the European man,

1. Cf. Ortega y Gasset, J. «La idea de principio en Leibniz», Buenos Aires, 1958, p. 254.

Art, is the only one of which with all propriety may be said that came into a Renaissance. In the realms of Theology and Literature, rather than a re-birth, there was a wish to be reborn, they wanted to go back to the maternal womb. The ideal of the Reformist and of the Humanist did not lay in the future, but in the past. As for the new European Literatures, I barely think that one can speak of Renaissance, but of a development after a period of gestation that took several centuries, into full maturity. Philosophy had for many centuries, been for most practical purposes a dead body, and it did its best to keep its artificial life going. One gigantic figure, though, was produced by the XVIth Century, Giordano Bruno, but, born too soon to be understood, his life was little else than a long series of struggles, disillusionments, and rebuffs from Catholics, Protestants and Calvinists, all crowned by an eight-year-long agony at the hands of the Roman Inquisition, and his being burned at the stake in 1600. The sciences were born between the semi-magic attitudes of Alchemy and the first attempts to move rational approaches and methods. The work *De Natura Rerum Iuxta Propria Principia*, by Bernardino Telesio was included in the Index because of Telesio's opinion that the experimental method is superior to a blind reliance upon Aristotle's authority.

All in all, the XVIth Century was one of the most effervescent periods in the history of mankind, divided by the most opposite opinions, wars, absurdities, bigotry, cruelty, pedantry and stupidity, but at the same time it produced some of the best works of art and literature that have ever been produced.

Into this century was born in 1560 Francis Bacon. Very young, in 1573, he went to Trinity College in Cambridge full of desire to learn all that men knew, but soon found himself disappointed. In those years, the English Universities were perhaps the most powerful strongholds

of Scholasticism, up till such and absurd point that «Bachelors and Masters of Art were fined five shillings for each disagreement with the premises of Aristotle's Organon.»²

But in this scholarly environment Bacon was to have the first insight of the real vocation of his life. He was not yet fifteen, as he stated later to Dr. Rowley,³ when he was struck by the idea that if philosophy was such a barren science in relation to practical purposes for the betterment of mankind, and two thousand years of scholastic discussions had not produced a single advancement in the sciences, it was necessary to deduce that something was wrong with its method, and that a new one should be devised in order to make Natural Philosophy a sensible science.

From now on this was going to be the main purpose and line of his life, and the source of an infinite number of frustrations, since he did not always have the time and peace of mind to devote himself wholeheartedly to his purpose, being assailed by almost constant financial worries from the death of his father, when he was eighteen, for over twenty-five years.

It is nothing but logical that he would first think that the best way to implement his revolutionary ideas on education was to attain an important post in the Court and schools. His father, Sir Nicholas Bacon, had been and school. His father, Sir Nicholas Bacon, had been commissioned by Henry the VIII to prepare a plan for the reform of education aimed mainly at providing the country with a proper body of lay administrators, made necessary because of the break with the medieval church. Sir Nicholas drew his plan, and although it was not put into

2. A. D. Inerti «The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast», trans. by, Rutgers Univ. Press, New Jersey, 1964.

3. Spedding, J. «The Works of Francis Bacon», London, 1861. Vol. VIII, p. 4.

effect by Henry, it finally took shape during Elizabeth's reign, under the direction of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, as a project for a University of London about 1570.⁴

This scheme included languages as an important part of the formation of the student; Latin, Greek and Hebrew, to give him an outlook of the old world, and Spanish, French, and Italian to make him familiar with the new, as well as training in the practical arts to make him useful in a country that was undergoing what amounts to its first industrial revolution. We may quite safely assume that the project would be often mentioned in Sir Nicholas' home, and that this may have been a factor in the early interests of his predilect son for a practical use of Philosophy and in his faith in the administrative reform of education.

A factor that may have increased Bacon's distaste for the traditional Philosophy is the visit of Giordano Bruno to London from 1583 to 1585. The Nolan philosopher went to London with a royal letter of recommendation from Henry to the Marquis de Mauvissière, the French Ambassador to Elizabeth's court from 1575 till 1585. Mauvissière was a pious Catholic but endowed with the rare virtues of understanding and tolerance. He was most kind host to Bruno and soon after his arrival he had introduced him to the literary and scientific circles in London, and even took him on several of his visits to the Queen, who was known to like the use of the Italian language in her Court, Although I haven't found direct evidence of it, there is little doubt that Bacon, then a young man of twenty-three, full of intellectual interests and trying to get a permanent official position in order to free himself for his real vocation, must have met Bruno. Among those who formed the circle in which Bruno moved in London — Florio, Sir Philip Sidney, Greville, Raleigh, Sackville

4. Farrington, B. «The Philosophy of Francis Bacon», Liverpool. Univ. Press, 1964, pp. 12-13.

and many others — some were relatives, some friends or acquaintances of Bacon, and it is most likely that through one or other of them he must have had the opportunity to know the great Italian philosopher. There is no doubt, though, that many of their basic ideas are quite similar. While «it is Bruno's belief that if man wishes to ascertain truth, he must approach theology, philosophy and science without any preconceived attitudes»,⁵ Bacon, in his *The Refutation of Philosophies* will affirm: «If you will be guided by me, you will deny, not only to this man (Aristotle) but to any mortal now living or who shall live hereafter, the right to dictate your opinions... Do not follow anybody indiscriminately in everything, like blind men following a guide... Apply yourselves to the study of things themselves. Be no for ever the property of one man.»⁶ For both thinkers, the relentless search of truth in the part of man will be the guaranty of his union with God. «The interference that we may draw from Bruno's *Lo Spaccio* is that the more deeply man penetrates into the laws of nature, by virtue of his intellect, the closer will he come to an understanding of the unity that exists between him and the immanent principle.»⁷ While Bacon says: «Undoubtedly a superficial tincture of philosophy may incline the mind to atheism, yet a further knowledge brings it back to religion; for on the threshold of philosophy, where second causes appear to absorb the attention, some oblivion of the highest cause may ensue; but when the mind goes deeper, and sees the dependance of causes and the works of Providence, it will easily perceive, according to the mythology of the poets, that the upper link of Nature's chain is fastened to Jupiter's throne.»⁸

5. Inerti, op. cit., p. 31.

6. «The Refutation of Philosophies», Trans. by Farrington in op. cit., pp. 114-15.

7. Inerti, op. cit., p. 46.

8. Bacon, F. «The Advancement of Learning», Book I, p. 5. Colonial Press, New York, 1900.

Bacon's hopes to implement his new ideas on science and education through some high administrative post were considerably diminished in 1593 when he incurred the Queen's displeasure because of his opposition in Parliament to Elizabeth's pressure for increased subsidies. «The poor men's rent — said he — is such as they are not able to yield it, and the general commonalty it a not able to pay so much upon the present. The gentlemen must sell their plate and the farmers their brass pots ere this will be paid. And as for us, we are here to search the wounds of the realm and not to skin them over; wherefore we are not to persuade ourselves of their wealth more than it is.»⁹ This was a very noble attitude to be taken on Bacon's part, but Elizabeth would not forgive him for it. In Farrington's words: «Those brass pots cooked Bacon's goose.»¹⁰ So if his ideas were to be known, he would have to find other channels for them, since time was starting to be pressing; «I wax now somewhat ancient; one and thirty years is a great deal of sand in the hour glass», Bacon writes to his uncle Lord Burghley in a rather melancholy way. But the fire of his convictions can not be quenched, and further on in the same letter, his tone becomes alive when he touches upon his predilect subject: «I have taken all knowledge to be my province; and if I could purge it of two sorts of rovers, whereof the one with frivolous disputations, confutations and verbosities, the other with blind experiments and auricular traditions and impostures hath committed so many spoils, I hope I should bring in industrious observations, grounded conclusions and profitable inventions and discoveries; the best state of that province. This, whether it be curiosity, or vain glory, or nature, or (if one take it favourably) philanthropia, is so fixed in my mind as it cannot be removed.»¹¹

9. Spedding, op. cit. Vol. VIII, p. 223.

10. Farrington, op. cit., p. 14.

11. Spedding, op. cit. Vol. VIII, p. 109.

But in the meantime, he had to carry on with his hopes of court office, hopes that were indeed renewed through his friendship with Essex, struggling with his creditors, and keeping alive the main line of his life. To this effect, he used all the possibilities that chance offered him; when Essex began organizing his «Devices» to entertain the Queen, Bacon immediately stepped in and became an active collaborator in the redaction of the script of the Devices. Through these scripts he tried to convey to the Queen and the Court his philosophical ideas. On November the 17th, 1592, the Queen's day,¹² Essex set up a Device, part of which was a «Praise of Knowledge» by Bacon. It starts in this way: «Silence were the best celebrations of that which I mean to commend; for who would not use silence, where silence it not made, and what crier can make silence in such a noise and tumult of vain and popular opinions?»¹³ A point that he would develop further a few years later in his *Refutation of Philosophies*: «Furthermore, the popular fancy about the worth of universal approval is unreliable and misleading... Men have but flocked together, not agreed together... Without a doubt, sons, in matters of mind the roost of all omens is popular agreement.»¹⁴ And his often repeated accusation against the uselessness of the current philosophy, appears already in this early text: «Would anybody believe me, if I should verify this upon the knowledge that is now in use? Are we the richer by one poor invention, by reason of all the learning that hath been these many hundred years? The industry of artificers maketh some small improvements of things invented; and chance sometimes in experimenting maketh us to stumble upon somewhat which is new; but all the disputation of the

12. Vide Spedding. Vol. VIII, pp. 119-122, for the discussion of the date.

13. Sped., op. cit. Vol. VIII, p. 123.

14. Farrington, op. cit., p. 114.

learned never brought to light one effect of Nature before unknown.»¹⁵ He also attacks Alchemy in a way that includes the essence of his later criticism: «That (philosophy) of the alchemists hath the foundation in imposture, in auricular traditions and obscurity; it was catching hold of religion, but the principle of it is: *Populus vult decipi.*»¹⁶

A few years later, in December 1594, he was called upon to provide a script for a public spectacle that was organized at Gray's Inn as part of its Christmas festivities, and that took place on Friday, the 3rd of January, 1595, with the attendance of the Lord Keeper, the Lord Treasurer, the Vice-Chamberlain, a number of Privy Councillors, and a large number of other important people. Obviously, Bacon, at the time busy with the redaction of his *Promus of Formularies and Elegancies* (begun on Dec. 5th. 1594), was not going to let pass such an opportunity to make again his ideas public, and he wrote a Device where a series of Counsellors advise their Prince on the *Exercise of War, the Study of Philosophy, Eternizement and Fame by Buildings and Foundations, Absoluteness of State and Treasure, Virtue and a Gracious Government, and on Pastimes and Sports*. Here are some of the thoughts that the gentle audience in Gray's Inn heard on that January night: «I will wish unto your Highness the exercise of the best and purest part of the mind, and the most innocent and meriting conquest, being the conquest of the works of nature; making this proposition, that you bend the excellency of your spirits to the searching out, inventing, and discovering of all whatsoever is hid and secret in the world.»¹⁷ «Have care that your intelligence, which is the light of your state, do not go out or burn dim or obscure; advance men of virtue

15. Sped. Vol. VIII, pp. 123-4.

16. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 124.

17. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 334.

and not of mercenary minds.»¹⁸ «Trust not to your laws for correcting the times, but give all strength to good education; see to the government of your universities and all seminaries of youth.»¹⁹

Still, on the 17th of November, 1595 as, part of the celebrations of the Queen's day, a new Device written by Bacon was presented before the Court. This time, he brought forward his ideas about the life of the courtier through the lips of a Hermit, a Soldier, a Statesman, and a Squire, the latter being the judge of the others' opinions.²⁰

That Bacon thought these Devices could be useful, and that he devoted some time to the consideration of their purely technical and choreographic aspects, can be deduced from his essay on «Masques and Triumphs,» the XXXVIIth Essay of the 1625 edition.

But, in spite of all his efforts, his social advancement and the recognition of his ideas were slow. The year 1596, immediately preceding the publication of his Essays,²¹ did not bring any furthering of his hopes. Of this time, we have left quite a few less than rosy notes from his creditors, and some letters of his, asking as usual for time. By now, he must have been quite convinced that he would never be able to liberate himself of the «ordinary practice of the law,» and rather willing to increase his practice in an effort to get rid of his financial problems, and find more room for his philosophical enterprises.

One may wonder why he had not tried before to publish some of his ideas, but he must have feared a failure that could spoil all his further efforts. Let us not

18. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 339.

19. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 340.

20. From a letter by Rowland White to Sir Robert Sidney on 22, Nov. 1595, we know the names of the actors that played these parts, among them Toby Matthew who played the part of the Squire. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 374. Matthew translated Bacon's Essays into Italian in 1618.

21. The «epistle dedicatorie» of the first edition is dated «this 30 of Ianuarie, 1597».

forget that he considered himself rather unable to bring forward his own values in front of other people: «I am not yet greatly perfect in ceremonies of court» he writes to his aunt Lady Burgley in 1580,²² and in the same year, in a letter to Lord Burgley, he refers to «the disadvantage of my nature, being unapt to lay forth that simple store of these inferior gifts which God tath allotted unto me most to view.»²³ Six years later, in another letter to Lord Burgley, we still find the same hint of a rather inward character. «Indeed I find in my simple observation that they which live as it were *in umbra* and not in public and frequent action, how moderately and modestly soever they behave themselves, yet *laborant invidia*. I find also that such persons as are of nature bashful (as myself is), whereby they want that plausible familiarity which others have, are often mistaken for proud.»²⁴

At any rate, in 1596, he decided to overcome his bashfulness and to start publishing his work. He must have been moved into doing it, on one hand by the lack of success of his suits for official employ, and on the other, by some unknown circumstance, according to the hint given in the introductory letter of the first editions of his Essays: «I doe nowe like some that haue an Orcharde il neighbored, that gather their fruit before it is ripe, to preuent stealing.»²⁵ The same idea is repeated by his brother Anthony in a letter to the Earl of Essex, written shortly after the publication of the book.²⁶

Whatever his immediate reasons for publication may have been, Bacon's first published work appeared in 1597, in a small octavo volume, with the following title:

Essayes, Religious Meditations. Places of perswasion

22. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 12.

23. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 15.

24. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 59.

25. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 523.

26. Sped. Vol. VIII, p. 521.

and dissuasion, Seene and allowed. At London, Printed for Humphrey Hooper, and are to be sold at the blacke Beare in Chauncery Lane, 1597.

The book was made up of three different works: the *Essays*, in English, the *Religious Meditations*, in Latin, and *Of the Coulers of Good and Evil; a fragment*, in English.

The *Essays* of this original edition were shorter than the ones in the definitive edition, and only ten in number (as opposed to the fifty-eight in 1625). Their titles were the following:

1. Of Studie
2. Of Discourse
3. Of Ceremonies and respects
4. Of Followers and friends
5. Sutors
6. Of Expence
7. Of Regiment of health
8. Of honour and reputation
9. Of Faction
10. Of Negotiating

To these, one more should be added, namely the *Essay on Atheism*, which although appearing in this edition among the *Meditationes Sacrae*, in the 1612 edition of the essays appears among them with the number 14.

This book was reprinted in 1598, 1604 and 1606 without any alterations but the substitution of an English translation for the original Latin text of the *Meditationes Sacrae*. In 1612, a new edition of the *Essays* was published, this time without the company of the other works. Their numbers had grown to thirty-four; the original 10 (11) had been in most instances considerably enlarged, one had been suppressed («Of Honour and Reputation,» that reappears in the edition of 1625), and the new brief title *The Essaies of Sir Francis Bacon Knight*, speaks for both the more sureness in the author, and the popularity of the book.

Finally, in 1625, one year before Bacon's death, the

definitive edition appeared, with the number of Essays raised to fifty-eight.

Bacon's Essays are really nothing more than a treatise on common sense. He expressed in them the result of his experiences, his meditations and observations in a way that could be useful to his fellow human beings. «I do now publish my Essays; — he says in the introductory letter of the 1625 edition — which of all my other works, have been most current; for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms», and a little further, he tells us that he thinks them to be «of the best fruits that by the good encrease which God gives to my pen and labours I could yield.»²⁷

The Essays are essentially man-centered. Of the 58 titles only four deal directly with.

God / Religion:	Untie in religion Athelisme Superstition Prophecies
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All the rest are devoted to purely human questions that can be divided into the following headings. I agree that this division is tentative and can be perfected, but perhaps it may be used as a starting point.

Ethical:	Revenge Simulation Envie Love Boldnesse Goodnesse Nobilitie Ambition Vaîne Glory Anger
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27. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 373.

Intellectual:	Truth Nature in Men Cunning Wisdom Seeming Wise Discourse Counsell Suspicion
Economic:	Bullding Riches Fortune Usury Negotiating
Social:	Marriage Great Place Travalle Delaies Innovations Dispatch Friendship Expence Health Masks Friends Sutours Ceremonies Praise Fame Honor
Educational:	Parents and children Education Youth and age Studies
Political:	Kingdomes Iudicature Seditions Empire Faction
Human problems:	Vicissitude of things Adversitie Death

Esthetics:

Beautle
Deformitie
Gardens

The style of the essays experienced a deep transformation from the first edition till the last one. The 1597 essays remind the reader of the Book of Proverbs, and Kempis' *De Imitatione Christi*, because of the short-cut, antithetic form of its sentences, pregnant with meaning. A few examples may help us to see it:

- Of Studies:** «Reade not to contradict, nor to belleue, but to waigh and consider.»
«Reading maketh a full man, conference a readye man, and writing an exacte man.»
- Of Discourse:** «He that questioneth much shall learn much:»
«If you disseemble sometimes your knowledge of that you are thought to knowe, you shall be thought another time to know that you know not.»
- Of Ceremonies and Respectes:** «He that is onely reall had need haue exceeding great parts of vertue, as the stone had need be rich that is set without foyle.»
- Of Followers and Friends:** «Costly followers are not to be liked, least while a man maketh his traine longer, hee make his wings shorter.»
«To be gouerned by one is not good, and to be distracted with many is worse; but to take adulse of friends is ever honorable.»
- Of Regiment of Health:** «Those that put their bodies to endure in health, may in most sicknesses which are not very sharpe, be cured onelye with diet and tendring.»
- Of Faction:** «Meane men must adheare, but great men that haue strength in themselves

were better to maintaine themselves indifferent and neutrall.»

Of Negotiating: «In dealing with cunning persons we must euer consider their endes to interpret their speeches, and it is good to say little to them, and that which they least looke for.»

But, when we look at the style of the 1625 edition, although all the strength, and pregnancy of conceit are still there, we may find passages of a much richer style, with flowing sentences of perfect elegance, as in the following excerpts:

Of Adversity: «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 odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed: for Prosperity doth best discover vice, but Adversity doth best discover virtue.»

Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature: «If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shews he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins to them. If he be compassionate towards the afflictions of others, it shews that his heart is like the noble tree that is wounded itself when it gives the balm.»

Of Gardens: «God Almighty first planted a Garden. And indeed it is the purest of human pleasures... And because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than

to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air. Roses, damask and red, are fast flowers of their smell...»

**Of Vicissitude
of things:**

«In the youth of a state, arms do flourish; in the middle age of a state, learning; and then both of them together for a time; in the declining age of the state, mechanical arts and merchandise. Learning hath his infancy, when it is but beginning and almost childish: then his youth, when it is luxuriant and juvenile: then his strength of years, when it is solid and reduced: and lastly, his old age, when it waxeth dry and exhaust. But it is not good to look too long upon these turning wheels of vicissitude, lest we become giddy.»

But the Essays not only changed in style as they went through their successive editions. As Bacon's opinions were modified with the hardships and experience of his life, so his Essays underwent modifications, becoming in this way an invaluable help for the study of his thought and personality.

Essays like the ones on «Suitors» or «Factions» (what today we would call «pressure groups»), underwent significant modifications brought about by a few changes and many additions, but since the avatars of Bacon's life were so very much subject to the influences of friends, it is in the Essay on «Followers and Friends» where we are able to notice the most striking changes.

The Essay «Of Followers and Friends» in the 1597 edition contains 353 words that were increased to 524 in the 1625 edition. The main addition has to do with false followers, probably an echo of bitter experience: «Likewise glorious followers, who make themselves as trumpets of the commendation of those they follow, are full of inconvenience; for they taint business through want of

secrecy; and they export honour from a man, and make him a return in envy. There is a kind of followers likewise which are dangerous, being indeed espials; which inquire the secrets of the house, and bear tales of them to others. Yet such men, many times, are in great favour; for they are officious, and commonly exchange tales.»

When dealing with the several kinds of followers, he makes an affirmation, that may appear strange at first sight coming from his pen: «And besides, to speak truth, in base times active men are of more use than virtuous» but whose truth is made evident by men like Raleigh Drake, Alba or Spinola.

But besides these changes in the Essay itself, he produced a new Essay on Friendship, that appeared for the first time in the 1612 edition, and made the number thirteen of the Essays in such edition, and, since the Essay on «Followers and Friends» had come to deal almost exclusively on followers and on how to avoid the worst kind of them, this new Essay is mainly devoted to the praise of true friendship, with an undertone of yearning for it.

«There is no greater desert or wildernes then to be without friends — he wrote in this Essay. For without friendship, society is but meeting... There bee some whose lives are, as if they perpetually plaid upon a stage, disguised to all others, open onely to themselves... Live not in continuall smother, but take some friends with whom to communicate... It is good to retaine sincerity, and to put it into the reckoning of Ambition, that the higher one goeth, the fewer true friends he shall have... It is Friendship, when a man can say to himselfe, I love this man without respect of utility. I am open hearted to him, I single him from the generality of those with whom I live; I make him a portion of my owne wishes.»

This is a very short Essay of only 282 words, although one of the most deeply felt of the 1612 edition. I have

quoted from it at some length because in the final edition, it just disappeared. In 1625 the Essay of Friendship had been rewritten, and made into a long — 2581 words — discourse on Friendship, full of intellectual ideas, of examples, Latin quotations, and of very logical divisions, but lacking in the freshness of feeling of the 1612 Essay, although it sounds quite true when dealing with the most negative aspects of Friendship. *Magna civitas, magna solitudo*, he complains about the large cities. He would like to see the favorites or privados, less as «Matter of grace or conversation» and more as «participes curarum,» partakers of the cares of the State. He quotes Pompey: «For that more men adore the sun rising than the sun setting.»

The final lines of the Essay are beautiful and fluid, and in them we find again the conceit of «life as a stage» that was also present in the edition of 1612:

«A man cannot speak to his son but as a father; to his wife but as a husband; to his enemy but upon terms: whereas a friend may speak as the case requires, and not as it sorteth with the person. But to enumerate these things were endless: I have given the rule, where a man cannot fitly play his own part: if he have not a friend, he may quit the stage.»

It is difficult when one speaks of Bacon's Essays not to mention at least the Essays of Michel Eyquem, Lord of Montaigne, that were first published in Bordeaux, in 1580, soon enjoyed a wide popularity, and were translated into English by John Florio in 1603. It is most likely that Bacon must have known Montaigne's Essays before the first publication of his own work, but at any rate there is very little evidence of influence from the French upon the English author, besides the similarity in the title, meaning very adequately «trials» or «rehearsals» a meaning that fits very well the mental attitude of both writers at the time of writing their works. I think that the differences between the two authors were very well pointed at by O.

Smeaton when he stated in his introduction to Bacon's Essays:

«Montaigne's Essays appeal to broader social sympathies and cover a larger area of human action, as the sphere of their observation and criticism. But we miss the firm intellectual grip, the bone and sinew of compact thought, the comprehensive survey over the entire domain of knowledge, the almost preternatural acumen displayed in detecting far-reaching analogies, and the polymathic acquaintance with the entire range of the learning of his age, evinced by Bacon. He lacked Montaigne's lightness of touch and piquant picturesqueness in stating obvious truths so as to make them look like new; while Montaigne in turn was entirely destitute of the great English Essayist's marvellous penetration into the very soul of things, and of his superb ratiocinative faculty. If Montaigne were the greater literary artist Bacon was the profounder moral and intellectual force.»²⁸

One simple example perhaps will help the reader to judge the difference in style between the two writers. Bacon's Essay on Deformity, number XLIV of the edition of 1625, covers about one page, which is enough for him to point at the nature of deformed persons, their inclinations, their boldness as a reaction against their handicap, their industry and powers of observation, the advantages they may get from their deformity, and how sometimes they prove to be excellent persons. On the other hand, Montaigne's Essay on «Des boyteux», the XIth of the third book, has over twelve pages of close print. Here, you learn about a wide variety of things, like the measurement of time, the liberty of human reason, truths and lies, miracles, about Montaigne's opinion of himself, «Moy-meme, qui faicts singulière conscience de mentir et qui ne me souci guiere de donner creance et autorité a ce que je dis...», about court suits, witches and many other subjects, and when we wonder if we are going to be told

28. «Essays of Francis Bacon» with an introduction by O. Smeaton, Everyman's Library; London, 1906.

anything about lame people, in the eleventh page of the Essay we are informed, on a very Gallic fashion, that «celuy-la ne cognoit pas Venus en sa parfaite douceur qui n'a couché avec la boyteuse», «He does not know Venus in all her perfect sweetness, who has not been in bed with a lame woman,» and that the Amazons, who should know, were of the opinion that ἄριστα ἰολός οἴφει «the lame man makes it better.»²⁹

Bacon's Essays bear witness that, with all his interest for philosophical reform and scientific advancement, he remained a man who had a deep respect for moral principles, as is again and again demonstrated in his Essays: «In the discharge of thy place set before thee the best examples; for imitation is a globe of precepts,»³⁰ «Be so true to thyself, as thou be not false to others.»³¹ «The virtue of prosperity is temperance; the virtue of adversity is fortitude; which in morals is the more heroic virtue.»³² «A man that hath no virtue in himself ever envieth virtue in others.»³³ «The desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall; but in charity there is no excess, neither can angel or man come in danger by it.»³⁴

There are also in the Essays constant references to respect for justice, care for our fellow man, and, above all, for an untiring search for truth: «Truth which only doth judge itself, seacheth that the enquiry of truth which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.»³⁵

29. «Essais de Montaigne», Editions Garnier, Paris, 1962. Vol. II, pp. 472-484.

30. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 399.

31. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 432.

32. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 386.

33. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 393.

34. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 403.

35. Sped. Vol. VI, p. 378.

And perhaps, with this praise of truth, to whose discovery and fostering were directed all the main efforts of Bacon's life, we may put a final stop to our consideration of his Essays.