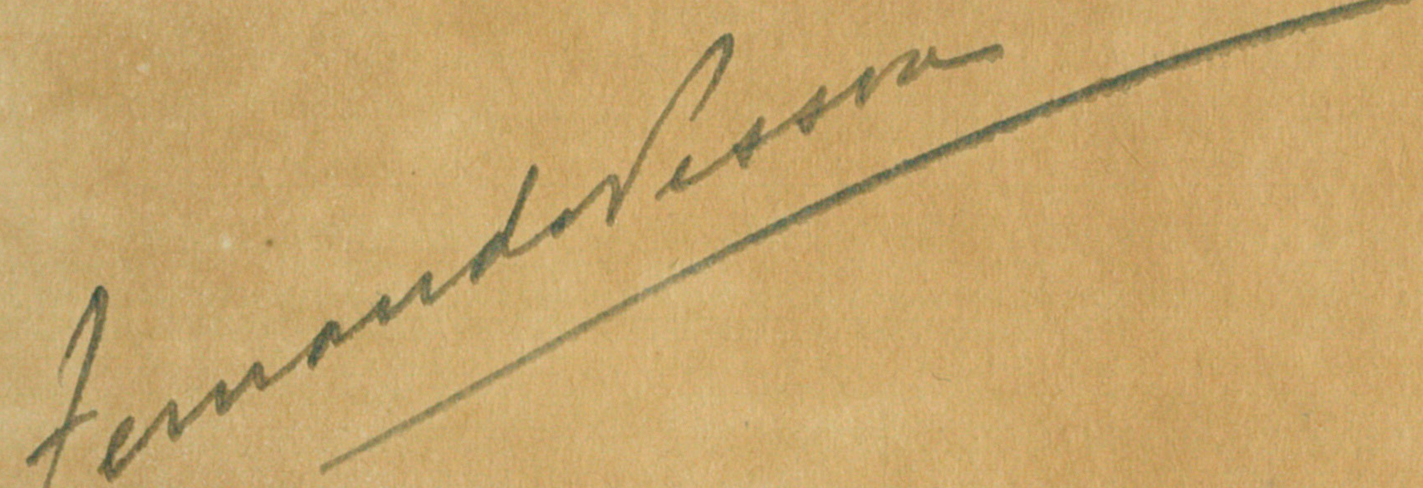

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PIONEER HUMANISTS

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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CONTENTS

ERRATUM

P. 285, line 19, *for* Boehat, *read* Bochat

NOTE

Of the following essays, those on Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza, Gibbon, and Mary Wollstonecraft were contributed originally to *The Reformer*, and I have to thank Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner for permission to reprint them. That on Shaftesbury was first printed as an introduction to the edition of the *Characteristics* published in 1900 by Mr. Grant Richards. That on Mandeville appeared first in *Our Corner*, and later in a volume of *Essays towards a Critical Method*, published in 1889 and now out of print. All alike have been revised and expanded.

MACHIAVELLI

I.

Some reputations are branded, for whole ages, by an ancestral pre-judgment, a traditionary malediction. As certain historic names stand signally for virtue or patriotism or human kindness, others carry a connotation of wickedness, which for the multitude is their net significance. Of such names Italy has perhaps more than her share. It is she who has given men their angel of humanity, Saint Francis; and to her belongs the counter figure, the outstanding human synonym for Mephistopheles. To that bad eminence Niccolò Machiavelli was raised by the men of other lands, not solely for his doctrine, of which they knew little when they maligned him, but largely because of his surroundings. He was, as it were, the pen or mouthpiece of the age of the Borgias, a name which carries still I know not what sinister aroma of crime and splendour, power and sin, dominating in the thought of many the whole multiform tradition of the Renaissance.

To those who strive towards a science of human nature it is known that such estimates are nearly always astray. On a close study, the saints are apt to dislimn. The moral halo proves to be nearly as much a donation of posterity as the pictorial; and the supernal figure of tradition is found to blend quite human virtues with very human shortcomings. So it is apt to be with the ideally bad of the

same order of traditional creation. They have their lights, as the others their shadows. And whether or not it be a work of doubtful profit to dislimn the saints; whether or not their virtues come the nearer to us when seen as simple qualities of faulty human beings, there is surely nothing but comfort for humanity in the dissolution of a paragon of evil into a simple sinner and sufferer of our own kind; above all when he can be shown to possess and communicate some positive light and virtue. Such is the case before us.

II.

In the history of political thought in the modern world, the first great name, or at least the first whose practical significance cannot be challenged, is Machiavelli's. With him begins the critical philosophy of politics, in terms of modern experience and modern conditions, for the world of politicians as distinct from that of scholars. Much keen political speculation doubtless went on in the schools, even in the Dark Ages. Arnold of Brescia, who fought politically against the Papacy in the twelfth century at Rome, and was burned for it, had probably given effect to some of the ideas of his master, Abailard; Dante, whose politics counted for so much in his philosophy of life, was not expounding novel ideas when he framed his scheme of government for Christendom; and the anti-papal *Defensor Pacis* of Marsiglio of Padua (otherwise Marsilius de Inghen) and John of Jandun, written in 1327, has been pronounced by a high authority "the greatest and most original political treatise of the Middle Ages"—and again "a book which announces a clear constitutional system such as in the present day either exists not at

all, or exists only in name in the greater part of Europe."[1] But Arnold left no writings; Dante's politics is an abstract ideal; and the *Defensor Pacis* is so little known that Hallam, in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, does not even mention it.[2] In comparison with such a systematic treatise, to be sure, those of Machiavelli are merely essays and commentaries. But his work, in virtue of its actuality, passed into the general intellectual life of Europe, setting up a discussion which has lasted down to our own day. For generations, it is true, he was little read outside of Italy. There his posthumous success was speedy and great. When he died in 1527, after the sack of Rome, all Italy was in convulsion; and till 1530 Florence, putting in effect his military if not his political precepts, was making her last stand for freedom. But in 1531 Clement VII decreed the publication of his works, already well known in manuscript; two editions of *The Prince* appeared in 1532; and twenty-three editions of the works were issued in Italy in the next eighteen years. In the then state of political life in Europe, such a fame was bound to pass the Alps;[3] but it came about that it passed by way of scandal rather than of study. When France and England were ready for the literary assimilation of such a performance as Machiavelli's, the Catholic Reaction in Italy had so

[1] R. Lane Poole, *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought*, pp. 263, 265. Compare the eulogy of Villari: "It is almost incomprehensible how the book of a Churchman, and one completed so early as 1327, could contain ideas of so daring a nature as to be only understood and carried into effect many centuries later" (*Life and Times of Machiavelli*, Eng. trans., new ed. ii, 64). Neander, too, pronounces it an "epoch-making work."

[2] What seems to be the only copy in the British Museum was acquired in 1895.

[3] In 1550 appears the Geneva edition of the complete works.

blackened his name as to leave Luther's respectable in comparison ; and for Protestant and Catholic alike he was damned in advance as a reputed Atheist, though he had never controverted any Christian dogma. Of his real doctrine the North in the sixteenth century knew as little as it did of Mohammedanism. Not till 1576 appeared even the hostile *Discours* of Gentillet, known for long as the *Contre-Machiavel,* a malevolent compilation by a French Italophobe, in which the living argument of Machiavelli was reduced to a string of crooked aphorisms, framed to repel. By such a method, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas could have been made to yield a code of unconscientiousness, and the Christian religion as a whole to supply a negation of all sane morality. No reader could gather from the *Contre-Machiavel* what manner of man Machiavelli was, or how he could have reached the views ascribed to him save by force of sheer passion for wickedness. Yet it was from Gentillet's work, translated in 1577 by Simon Patericke, an Englishman born and domiciled abroad, and presumably a Catholic, that the English generation of Shakespeare's day mostly derived its idea of Machiavelli and his work.

Herr Edward Meyer, who has made an admirably thorough research on the subject,[1] has counted in Elizabethan literature 395 references to Machiavelli, as against 500 to Aretino, his companion in reprobation. Of these the great mass proceed upon no further knowledge than was to be gathered from Patericke's version of Gentillet. The only current translations of Machiavelli's works were those of the

[1] *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama,* Weimar, 1897.

Arte della Guerra, first published in 1560 and several times reprinted, and the *Istorie Fiorentine,* issued in 1595. The *Discorsi sopra Tito Livio* were first translated by Dacre in 1636, and the *Principe* by the same hand in 1640. Yet on the small basis of hearsay thus made possible before 1600 was raised a conception as vivid as it was false. "What the Elizabethans reverted to so often as the maxims of the Florentine statesman," says Herr Meyer, "were in four cases out of five not to be found in his writings at all, but were perverted from the same in a manner infinitely unjust." Had they known anything of the life and character of Petrarch, whom they commonly honoured as a prince of poets, they might have found in him qualities of treachery and even of savagery[1] which had no part in the personality of Machiavelli; but they proceeded on myth, not on history. The "Machiavel" of current allusion[2] was, in fact, a mere monster of evil in general, as Aretino was the incarnation of sensuality in particular. But the two ideals of evil fascinated the English imagination as no type of goodness seems to have been able to do; and, while Aretino was the exemplar of private vice, Machiavelli centred in himself every conception of public or political sin. That age is indeed much more obsessed by his supposed doctrine than by any of the Puritan ideals which gave to English history, in a later generation, a cast of fanaticism not savouring of his thought, though abundantly illustrative of his theories. Marlowe makes "Machiavel" prologuise to *The Jew of Malta,* presenting him as a

[1] *E.g.,* his faithlessness to his benefactors, the Colonna family, and his exhortation to Rienzi to destroy the Roman nobility without pity, even if he should have to pursue them to hell. Cp. Villari, i, 69–70.

[2] The name seems to have been often pronounced "Matchavel."

kind of patron saint of skilful villains, yet inserting the ambiguous line :—

Admired I am of them that hate me most.

The dramatist seems to have borrowed the idea of the prologue from Gabriel Harvey's *Epigramma in effigiem Machiavelli* (1578), in which *Machiavellus ipse loquitur*. Though there is record of Harvey's borrowing Machiavelli's works from a friend, he seems, like most of his contemporaries, to have assimilated only the translation of Gentillet ; and inasmuch as Marlowe tacitly makes his devilish Barabas the representative of Machiavellianism, it is not to be supposed that he had any nearer knowledge.

It is true that Greene, who had lived in Italy, oftener names Machiavelli than do any of his co-rivals ;[1] and gives a lurid account of the Italian's teaching in his death-bed tract, *A Groatsworth of Wit*, in which he appeals to Marlowe to renounce the "diabolical Atheism" he had taken from that source. But as little as Greene learned his own vice and rascality from Machiavelli did Marlowe need Italian stimulus to make him frame the conception of his "Atheist Tamburlaine"; and when Greene in turn followed up that "high astounding" creation with his own Selimus, he was as far from reproducing Machiavelli's picture of the successful "Prince" as he was from portraying Machiavelli in the weakly villainous Ateukin who figures in *James IV*. An Italian, when all is said, might inquire whether it had needed Italian example to elicit such English types as Richard III, Henry VIII, and Thomas Cromwell ; whether it was the writings of Aretino

[1] There are strong grounds for ascribing to Greene the allusion to "Machiavel" in *1 Henry VI*, V, iv, 74, and to him or to Marlowe that in *3 Henry VI*, III, ii, 193.

that debauched Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard; and whether Oliver Cromwell would not have seemed to Machiavelli a prince very much after his ideal. It was, in reality, the relevance of Machiavelli's writing to actual English experience that moved the more serious and studious Elizabethans to pass beyond the scarecrow of the stage to the real writer. Bacon exhibits the general interest. In the *Advancement of Learning* and the *Essays*, and again in the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, he quotes him more than a dozen times, sometimes with a decorous repudiation of his ideas, but again and again with an undisguised sense of his sagacity. "We are much beholden," runs one passage, "to Machiavelli and others that write what men do and not what they ought to do."[1] Perhaps, indeed, the most Machiavellian sovereign in northern Europe in the sixteenth century was Queen Elizabeth, who had a court to match; and perhaps not the least truly Machiavellian of her councillors was the great author of the *Essays*.

III.

However that may be, it is round the name of Machiavelli that modern political science first begins to nucleate; and from him may be said to begin the line of the great modern writers on political theory—Bodin, Hobbes, Vico, Montesquieu—and even that of the political economists, whose science also may be said to have begun in Italy. Whatever, then, we may decide as to the substantive value of his contribution to political thought, Machiavelli must rank as a typical and epoch-marking political thinker.

The outline of his life, and his relation to the Italian

[1] *Advancement*, B. II (Routledge's ed. p. 140). Cp. the *De Augmentis*, B. VII, ch. iii. Ed. cited, p. 570.

politics of his day, are matters of common knowledge. His active career belongs to the closing part of the "free" period of Florentine history. For centuries the city had passed under the rule of faction after faction, who severally set up a long series of expedients to secure a balance of power among the "upper" classes and the so-called *popolo* or middle class. All expedients alike failed to avert a spell of military tyranny and an interlude of the dominion of the populace beneath the *popolo*. At length, after undergoing every political vicissitude possible to an unconquered State, the city had oscillated to a basis determined by the aristocracy of wealth, on which there had arisen and flourished for three generations the dominion of a family of capitalists, the "bosses" best adapted to the Florentine situation. The personal incapacity of young Piero de' Medici, faced by the crisis of the French invasion of 1494, had permitted a collapse in the system built up and sustained by his great-grandfather, his grandfather, and his father; and for eighteen years there endured a revival of the old oligarchic republicanism in its middle form, the last struggle of the ancient spirit before the Spanish restoration of the Medici, the prelude to the Spanish dominion. It is within that eighteen years of revived Florentine "freedom" that there emerge the two notable personalities of Machiavelli and Savonarola; and it was shortly after the Medicean restoration of 1512 that Machiavelli, living in forced retirement after his many years of service as secretary of "The Ten," wrote the work on which chiefly rests his fame. On the fall of the oligarchy, he had been imprisoned and tortured by the Mediceans; but *The Prince*, written in 1513, had been hesitatingly intended for presentation to the young Giuliano de' Medici, who

died in 1516; and it was actually inscribed to the young Lorenzo, his nephew, who succeeded him, living till 1519. The *Discourses on Livy* were begun in the same year, and really constitute a companion treatise, embodying as they do many of the same doctrines, though directed chiefly to a study of the conditions of success for States, in terms of Roman experience; whereas *The Prince* is a study of the way of success for one-man rule. Thus, though Machiavelli's personal political experience had been gained during the fourteen or fifteen years of his employment as Secretary and Ambassador by the middle-class oligarchy, he gave his political philosophy its historic shape at a time when the oligarchy had finally proved unable to uphold itself against the dynastic forces around. In the *Discourses* he had considered how republics might maintain themselves, always, indeed, laying stress on the supreme importance of the legislator as determining their course, but never disguising his love of the republican life.[1] "It is not private but public good," he declares, "that makes a State great; and without doubt the public good is considered only in a republic."[2] In *The Prince,* however, he has either practically or by way of theoretic assumption submitted to fate, chosen his side, and schemed for his country by way of a new monarchy. Henceforth Florence, the greatest of the Italian communities, must perforce submit to some form of monarchic government, as every other Italian city had done save Venice. To escape the alien rule of France or Spain, all Italy must have a

[1] "He always preserved his republican sentiments.....His first and supreme ideal was republican Rome, than which his imagination could conceive nothing grander nor more glorious" (Villari, ii, 93).

[2] *Discorsi,* ii, 2.

native prince of some kind; and, as there was no getting rid of the forever disturbing presence of the Papacy, it was just as well to attempt a combination in which a Medicean Prince might have a Medicean Pope (Leo X) to back him. Such, broadly speaking, were the circumstances under which Machiavelli drew up the great little book which above all his writings characterises him for posterity.

On the face of the case, it is plain that a book so produced cannot be a permanent foundation for political thought. It is a prescription for an Italian community at a particular period; and it does not even attempt to show that the cycle of Italian politics is the necessary cycle for all civilisations. Above all, it does not attempt, beyond the scope of a few broad assumptions, to set forth how politics *ought* to go in terms of any theory of progressive perfection; and some such undertaking practically forces itself on the political thought of our own day. What he sought was to understand political history as a causal sequence, to find what methods had answered, to explain to Italians why things had gone with them as they did. Yet there is so much that has perpetual significance in the evolution of the Italian republics; there is such a visible possibility that later politics may exhibit the same laws; and there is such a rare objectivity in Machiavelli's handling of the forces of political human nature, that the interest of his teaching is perhaps more general and more serious now than ever. As a matter of fact, the last generation of the last century has given a larger measure of close study to his work and his problem than had ever before been given in the same space of time.

That the progression from malediction to reflection as regards Machiavelli's work is wholly in the way of

reason can be best seen, perhaps, by a glance at the estimate passed upon it by Spinoza in his last writing. While the name of the author of *The Prince* was still a by-word for calculating villainy, so used by most men without the slightest first-hand knowledge of his teaching, yet also by most men who had read his books, the great Jew delivers judgment with all the penetrating wisdom which marks his handling of deeper problems :—

> What methods a prince who is moved solely by the lust of dominion should use to establish and preserve his rule, the most acute Machiavelli has fully set forth ; to what end, indeed, is not very clear. If, however, he had a good aim, as is to be believed of a sagacious man, it would seem to have been that he might show how thoughtlessly [*imprudenter*] many strive to get rid of a tyrant, when thereby the causes why the prince is a tyrant cannot be stopped, but are on the contrary strengthened, in that the prince is given more cause to fear ; which happens when the multitude makes an example of its prince, and vaunts the parricide as a thing well done. Further, he perhaps wished to show how much a free multitude should beware of trusting its welfare absolutely to one man, who, unless he is vain enough to think he can please everybody, must be in daily fear of plots, and is thus forced rather to care for himself, and to plot against the multitude, than to seek its good. And I am the more led to thinking thus of that most astute [*prudentissimo*] man, because he is known to have been on the side of liberty, for the safeguarding of which he has also given the most salutary counsels.[1]

Deep answereth unto deep. And Spinoza, in his *Tractatus Politicus,* lays down for himself at the outset precisely the method of Machiavelli—"not to deride or deplore, neither to detest, but to understand human actions," and to study "human passions, such as love, hate, wrath, envy, arrogance, compassion, and

[1] *Tractatus Politicus,* v, § 7.

the other commotions of the mind, not as vices, but as properties of human nature, which belong to it as do heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the rest, to the nature of the atmosphere." Thus spoke the best man who had written of politics down to his time.

IV.

To-day, happily, we need not occupy ourselves much with the old conception according to which Machiavelli was a kind of incarnation of evil—the "Old Nick" of political life, inciting princes and men to treasons, stratagems, and spoils. That illusion disappears for all considerate readers as soon as they have studied the problem for themselves. With a very few exceptions, all the instructed men who have sat in judgment on Machiavelli during the past hundred years have brushed the chimæra aside. Macaulay and Hallam among ourselves did it in the first quarter of the century; Mr. Morley has done as much in the last; and in Lord Acton's all-learned preface to Mr. Burd's Clarendon Press edition of the *Principe* anyone may read a score of Continental verdicts to similar effect. There is even a tendency, as in Lord Acton's own case, to pitch the note of the vindication a trifle too high. But as the proper form of the vindication is the question before us, our pronouncement had better come after and not before a survey of the main issues.

Machiavelli, all students will now agree, was no wilful worsener of political life. He loved neither treachery nor tyranny; he is himself so preternaturally candid that, though we may be at times dazzled by his inhuman lucidity, and though he sometimes vacillates, we can never accuse him of sophistry, or even of gratuitous cynicism. "Never,"

his chief biographer makes bold to say, "never was there a less Machiavellian man than Machiavelli"; and the paradox will stand, at least in the sense of the further contention that "we might, with greater justice, accuse him of cynicism than of filling his writings with premeditated reticences or hidden intentions."[1] But we may go farther. As the same student has put it, there was "Machiavellianism before Machiavelli"; and the written theory is something higher than the usage out of which it grew. In the words of Macaulay, the fault of the author of *The Prince* was "that, having adopted some of the maxims generally received, he arranged them more luminously, and expressed them more forcibly, than any other writer." We might add that the maxims in question were relatively among the decencies of contemporary statesmanship. There is no need to go to Cesare Borgia for a model of unscrupulousness in that day: the difficulty is to find a notable ruler who could not equally sit for the portrait. Caterina Sforza holds her own with the men, alike in capacity and in criminality. The maxims of statecraft with which Machiavelli has been most reproached are almost respectable beside the normal practice of his world, nay, beside the frequent practice of statecraft in our own day; and the leading types of hostility to his memory are the very types of the immorality which he dispassionately accepted as a political force —the masterful Teutonic hypocrite, represented by Frederick the Great; and the official or ecclesiastical Latin hypocrite, represented by the Papacy.

A writer who saw and showed with such deadly precision the fatal function of the Papal power in

[1] Villari, *Life and Times of Machiavelli,* Eng. trans., new ed. ii, 139.

Italy was bound, when the Reformation in the North had evoked the counter Reformation in the South, to become *anathema* at Rome; and so it came about, as Lord Acton notes, that "when the Index was instituted in 1557, Machiavelli was one of the first writers condemned, and he was more rigorously and implacably condemned than anybody else.....The exclusion of Machiavelli was permanent."[1] He was, of course, clerically accused of defying all the laws of God and man, of prescribing crime, and of abolishing virtue; when as a matter of fact the Papacy had repeatedly given concrete sanction to political crimes of which he never dreamt, and its daily diplomacy was a school in which, as Mandeville later put it, men "deceived one another by counterfeiting hypocrisy";[2] the supreme stroke of deception being to speak the truth, in the knowledge that it would not be believed. On the points of political doctrine, again, on which Machiavelli is rightly to be pronounced at once short-sighted and iniquitous, he was at one with his age, even as it was represented by men who pass for scrupulous types. To understand him we must treat him with perfect equanimity, as a master-spirit counselling an age far gone in political experience, and well qualified to confute any who should have gone about to browbeat or sermonise him.

The moment Machiavelli's immediate problem is realised, then, he is seen to be first and foremost a practical politician, who, however, brought to his practice at once the spirit of science and a patriotic ideal. We shall misconceive him if we do not keep in view the latter inspiration, which always primes Machiavelli's reasoning, and, indeed, tends to deflect

[1] Preface to Burd's edition of *Il Principe*, 1891, p. 22.
[2] Dialogue I, in vol. ii of *The Fable of the Bees* (ed. 1772, p. 44).

it, making him see all history from the point of view of the Italian yearning for a united Italy. His thought is thus the more readily intelligible to-day because it is guided by just such conceptions as rule modern international politics; since he was one of the first writers to bring into Italian life the ideal of nationality, which the pseudo-cosmopolitan character of the Papacy had thus far shut out, despite the enthusiasm for it professed by such a Pope as Julius II. Like nearly all Italians of the time, he desired the supremacy or paramountcy of his own State; but he is so far national that he desires it above all as against the domineering foreigner, and would welcome any Italian prince who could avail to drive that foreigner out. What prevented a general gravitation to that attitude was just the intense and prolonged evolution of intestine strife in Italy down till his day. Nine Italians out of ten had been so embroiled in mutual hates, had accumulated such rancours against fellow-citizens or neighbouring communities, that the foreigner was for them an almost impersonal exterior force, to be used by each if possible against the others. Hence the welcome given to the French invaders in 1494, a welcome astonishing to themselves. They could not at first realise that Italy was as it were a separate Europe of warring powers, rather than one country peopled by one race. And hence, in turn, their own swift failure. Themselves children of passion, they almost at once roused Italy against them by proving to be a worse evil than the native foe. When, in 1499, they defeated "the Moor" and took Milan, to the joy of the people, they so ruled that in six months' time the Milanese eagerly welcomed back the expelled duke.

Machiavelli in his own case perhaps anticipated the

natural reaction against the foreigner, inasmuch as he was earlier in a position to think of him critically, and to relate to him with a "consciousness of kind." Making one diplomatic journey after another, and carrying with him from his birth a clear head, incapable of harbouring any blinding hatred of any faction or Italian State, he early fell back on the primary instinct of race, which in his case had been grafted with a keen intellectual interest in the power and polity of ancient Rome. Such a development will surprise only those who, themselves ruled by the instinct of race, can see only its inapplicability in the case of other people. In Machiavelli, with all his science, the instinct was permanent; so little does all his ratiocination deflect him from the high road of political life. The revived spirit of nationality survived in his case his personal torture at the hands of the Mediceans; and after scheming in the *Discourses* for a growth of Florentine power as against other Italian States, he sketches in *The Prince* the methods by which an astute Medicean ruler may build up an Italian power that shall expel the alien. Formerly, he had hated the Papacy as much as he could hate anything, since it was for him the prime cause of Italian strife and alien invasion, and even the great corrupter of Italian morals. But now he will co-operate with the Papacy against the "barbarian dominion" which, he declares, all men hate.

It would seem, then, that the fair course towards Machiavelli is to judge him in terms of his political ideal and his relation to political evolution in general, rather than to discuss the fitness or decency of certain items of his advice to princes. We may indeed debate whether the advice he gives was such as could really have conducted a prince of

his day to wide dominion; but we should soon be forced, I think, to agree in an affirmative. No belief in the normal expediency of generous courses and scrupulous delicacy can obscure for a student the fact that the successful princes of that age succeeded largely in virtue of such methods as Machiavelli recommends. His treatise is, in fact, a digest of their more politic practice, eliminating their senseless cruelties, their personal follies, and their supererogatory frauds. When one contemplates the downfall of such a rarely capable prince as Cesare Borgia on the apparent verge of a universal triumph, one cannot but ask whether a policy of co-operation and concession might not have succeeded better than one of utter egoism. The answer, however, must be that a scrupulous and generous man could never have made the first steps in Cesare's elevation; and, had he been born to the princely status, could hardly have maintained it against the types around him. Cesare, in Machiavelli's opinion, simply made one fatal oversight, which ruined all: the lesson is, avoid such an oversight. And in so far as Cesare's private egoism and useless savageries had raised up obstacles to his political ambition, Machiavelli's counsels always imply that such stress of egoism is impolitic and thriftless.

V.

Of deeper and wider if of less stimulating interest is the less famous work in which Machiavelli sets forth his reflections on Roman history. This is essentially the more scientific book of the two. Both, indeed, are inductive, but this is inductive on a wider field, and yields a greater range of observation and inference; thus serving Montesquieu as a basis for

the lesser in size but the stronger in substance of his two leading treatises. Treating Machiavelli on general principles, one is apt to overlook the incomparable sagacity of many of his detached comments on Roman affairs. No book produced in the Christian era up to his time had contained so much rational and acute reflection on questions of public action; and, though it has never been so much debated or so notorious as *The Prince*, it must always have served to give bottom and weight to his reputation among thinking men. To meet with such clarity and sanity of judgment on the process of human affairs in such a world as that of the end of the Italian Renaissance, must have been something like what it would be now to meet with sound political philosophy in the leading columns of the *Times*. When he notes the value in ancient Rome of free public accusation and of open and strenuous debate between the populace and the senate; when he dwells on the ill results for the people of their creation of decemvirs, on the effects of free institutions on population, on the reasons why republics are hard masters, on the causes of Roman growth; he is bringing to bear on practical politics a light which before his time did not exist, unless under a bushel.

To the general problem, however, we must return. Machiavelli's two chief treatises being respectively counsels to an ambitious republic and to an ambitious prince, they remain rather handbooks for competing individualisms than gifts to mankind; and they gratify rather the instincts of emulation and self-assertion than those of philanthropy. To say this is to acknowledge a serious limitation. In a sense Machiavelli has set himself a smaller problem and a narrower ideal, however much more profoundly he

might handle them, than those represented by Augustine and Dante, to say nothing of later thinkers. And while it is to be said of the earlier idealists that they had no practical gift whatever, and that their prescriptions for contemporary mankind were valueless, it must at least be said against Machiavelli that he failed to press the best prescription for the Italy of his day—the prescription of federal union for the States who so constantly weakened each other by their jealous enmities. He was far too observant not to have considered it: in the fourth chapter of the second book of the *Discourses* he compares the three methods of republican expansion or growth—that by confederations, that by paramountcy among self-governing allies, and that by subjection of conquered peoples. Of these he notes, curtly and emphatically, that the last is perfectly futile and cannot endure; and he admits the advantages of the federal system—in particular, freedom from war, check to aggression, and the easy conservation of what has been acquired. It was indeed impossible that these advantages should not have been perceived in the Renaissance; and we know that in the year 1447, on the fall of the Visconti at Milan, there was afoot a scheme for a confederation of Italian cities, which was frustrated partly by the resistance of the Milanese, partly by the combination of Cosmo de' Medici and Venice to prevent the restoration of Milanese independence. But Machiavelli in effect puts the idea of federation aside, giving the palm without qualification to the methods which aggrandised ancient Rome.

Here, it would seem, he let his verdict be determined by the circumstance that federation had apparently no chance, though in point of fact he does not give that as his reason. What he does argue is

that federal States tend to take the pay and fight the battles of other States, as did the Swiss in his own day; or else to aim at getting tribute from smaller States; or in general to be avaricious and perfidious, like the ancient Ætolians—a most perfunctory and inconclusive argument, very unlike his usual strong simplicity. Had he been bent on advocating federation, he would have shown, as he did in regard to the drawbacks of the Roman system, that it involved certain risks, and that these risks must be guarded against. The drawbacks he mentions are clearly not inseparable from federalism. Whether or not, then, his bent had been fixed by the proved unpreparedness of the Italians for federation, and by the special difficulty of it in their circumstances, we must say that he does show a bias, and that it is in terms of an instinctive or acquired preference for the ideal of dominion. To the ideal of ancient Rome he always turns with alacrity; his dream is a rebuilding of Italian greatness by the ancient methods; he would tread again the paths the Romans trod, imitating as far as might be every institution which appeared to have nourished their power. As Macaulay has remarked, some such dream of restoration at that time "fascinated all the master-spirits of Italy," and some that were not master-spirits—men such as Julius and Leo and Clement VII, Morone, Pescara, and the last Sforza. And in a ringing period Macaulay tells how the ancient ideal wrought on Machiavelli: "He speaks like one sick of the calamitous times and abject people among whom his lot is cast. He pines for the strength and glory of ancient Rome, for the fasces of Brutus and the sword of Scipio, the gravity of the curule chair and the bloody pomp of the triumphal sacrifice."

This again is a judgment. To plan for Italy by the light of such an ideal was not to profit by the full measure of historical experience; it was only to set one vicious ideal against another, to crave an old experience instead of that of the hour. Like every other writer of the Italian Renaissance, Machiavelli evades the final lesson of Roman history; he will not confess, he will not see, that all that march of pride and power was a progress to perdition; that the greatness of Rome meant the gradual belittling of the Romans; that even the astute methods which he applauded led unalterably to the autocracy, to the debasement of the individual, to social disease, to intellectual paralysis, to subjection, ruin, and the downfall of civilisation itself. Had his ideal for Italy been realised by Florence as a community, it could have led only to ruin and degradation with a difference. From the point of view of humanity at large, what did actually happen was no worse. An Italy ruled by one prince might have been a substantial success; but only if it subordinated the Church—an inexpressibly difficult thing to do. Better even the rule of the alien, leaving the possibility of a Bruno and a Galileo and a Vico and a Beccaria, than a Borgian empire which, being entwined with the Papacy, might have prevented the rise of such minds as these, and left Italy in the seventeenth century as mindless as the Rome of the seventh.

There is a notable passage in Guicciardini's *Considerations* on Machiavelli's *Discourses* in which that astute politician, who is usually content to cavil over details and to rebut the exaggerations of his great contemporary, is moved to a novel reach of speculation. "Of the court of Rome," he writes, here agreeing with Machiavelli,

it is impossible to speak with sufficient severity, for it is a standing infamy, an example of all that is most vile and shameful in the world. And it is also true that the Church has prevented the union of Italy in a single State; but I do not know whether this be a good or an evil. A single republic might certainly have made the name of Italy glorious, and been of the utmost profit to the capital city; but it would have proved the ruin of every other city. It is true that our division has brought many calamities upon us, although it should be remembered that the invasions of the barbarians began in the time of the Romans exactly when Italy was united. And divided Italy has succeeded in having so many free cities that I believe that a single republic would have caused her more misery than happiness. It is true that this might not have been the case under a monarchy, which is more impartial in the treatment of its subjects; and thus we behold France and other countries living happily under a king. Yet, whether by fate or by the nature of men, this land has always desired liberty, and therefore has never been able to unite under one rule. The Romans succeeded in it only by their great valour and strength; but no sooner was the Republic extinguished, no sooner did the emperors' valour fail, than they easily lost their dominion. Hence I believe that, if the Church has prevented the union of Italy, it has not been for her unhappiness, inasmuch as she has thus been able to live according to her own nature.[1]

The reasoning has the uncertainty of the man wont to argue merely from his single experience; but he has laid his finger on a central truth. If only the "nature" of the men of that age could have been purged of the lust of dominion, there had been a new departure in civilisation. But in the blind determination of the Florentines to dominate Pisa there was involved the whole fatality of Italian history, and of their own downfall. Machiavelli could see the danger to all Italian liberty from the sleepless

[1] *Considerazioni sui Discorsi del Machiavelli,* on ch. xii of bk. 1. *Op. Ined. di Guicciardini,* 1857–66, i. (Cited by Villari, ii, 151.) Cp. the same work, i, 28.

ambition of Venice; and he probably agreed with Guicciardini that when Cosmo de' Medici aided Sforza to make himself master of Milan he saved all Italy from Venetian rule.[1] But only the failure of Florence could open his eyes to the evil involved in the ambition of his own city, which was but a variant of the egoisms of each one of its classes and factions.

Macaulay has hastily summed up that "Machiavelli deeply regretted the misfortunes of his country, and clearly discerned the cause and the remedy. It was the military system of the Italian people which had extinguished their valour and discipline.....The Secretary projected a scheme, alike honourable to his heart and to his intellect, for abolishing the use of mercenary troops and for organising a national militia." To put these matters as "cause" and "remedy" is to miss the real causation, which, to modern eyes looking back, should be obvious, though Machiavelli did not reach it. We want to know *why* the Italians had gravitated to their system of mercenaries. As Macaulay noted, the phenomenon was not new. "Within eighty years after the battle of Platæa, mercenary troops were everywhere plying for battles and sieges. In the time of Demosthenes it was scarcely possible to persuade or compel the Athenians to enlist for foreign service." Again, why? Because men had outgrown the psychic stage at which they annually sallied forth to fight with a neighbour city, and after a brush returned to their avocations—had outgrown, that is, the primary and not ungenerous inclination to combat, while inordinately developing the malicious appetite for plunder and dominion and for other men's overthrow. While peoples are ready

[1] Guicciardini, *Opere Inedite,* iii, *Storia di Firenze,* pp. 8, 9 (cited by Villari, i, 5).

to fight in their own quarrel, the "military virtues," such as they are, will subsist. When men still lust for conquest, without caring to fight, the military and the civic virtues are gone alike. Nothing could restore either form of virtue to the Florentines save a new ethic or an honest war of self-defence; and Machiavelli's prescription, though they finally took it, came too late. They had wasted their strength and unhinged their polity in wars of oppression.

Looking back, we can see how, just as conquest was the deadliest solvent of civic unity in ancient Rome, the disintegration of Florence at the beginning of the sixteenth century arose directly out of the insensate pursuit of the conquest of Pisa. It was that policy which loaded the city with debt till, every form of constitution failing to secure the military end, "at last necessary grants of money ceased to be voted, the soldiery received no pay, and influential citizens refused to accept embassies or other high offices, which were consequently bestowed on obscure and insignificant men, who, as Guicciardini phrased it, 'had more tongue than presence,' and were merely chosen because they pushed themselves forward."[1] Even the aggressive play of patriotism broke down, because animosity to Pisa had become the sole ground of action. Men who were united only to oppress others could no longer cohere when their efforts at oppression failed.

Had Machiavelli realised this, perhaps he would not have written at all, inasmuch as the discovery would have meant a cessation of belief in any solution then possible. As it was, though he did turn away from the solution for which it had been his business

[1] Villari, i, 278, citing Guicciardini, *Storia Fiorentina,* ch. xxiv, pp. 257–8, and ch. xxv, p. 274. Cp. Villari, pp. 233–4, 270.

to strive while he served the Florentine Government, he continued to account for the lack of sound political material on any ground rather than the lack of the spirit of reciprocity in his contemporaries. Missing as he does here the fundamental moral fact, his reasoning becomes arbitrary and incoherent. Had he known the history of Greece as he knew the history of Rome, he could hardly have missed the lesson that city States which will not respect the rights of others end by losing their own. Instead of a sound induction from relevant experience, he frames a false one from a disparate case. In two curious chapters he elaborates the two theses that on the one hand it is a calamity to a State to lack that sense of religion and fear of deity which, as he holds, visibly strengthened ancient Rome ; and, on the other hand, that Christianity has made men effeminate and other-worldly. Both theses were by way of explaining the evil plight of Italy ; and both are plainly beside the case, being indeed mutually annihilative. France and Spain had the same religion as the Italians ; and their success as against Italy was the very trouble in hand. Effeminacy, again, had been as common a phenomenon under Paganism as under Christianity. It was neither a too Christian unworldliness nor a lack of superstition that wrought Italian misfortune : it was the special political circumstances, the unthinking egoism of groups, and that crowning fatality of the Papacy which Machiavelli himself again and again recognised, though he always of necessity evaded it when he came to planning reconstructions.

VI.

When, however, we have said this much, we have completed the case against Machiavelli's credit as a

political thinker ; and our criticism amounts to saying that he did not transcend his age, though he finally saw its life steadily and whole, and saw it with a new insight by the light of history, where other men lived and reasoned from hand to mouth. Nay, though he does not wholly rise above its preoccupations, he saw at times, as it were in spite of himself, that there were better courses than those he schemed, though his contemporaries could not usefully be asked to take them. Like Savonarola, like every other Florentine, he had planned constantly for the subjection of Pisa. Yet more than once he avows that such a policy is fraught with danger, even from the Florentine point of view. "Conquests," he says in one place, "are the ruin of weak republics";[1] and again he observes that the Venetians and the Florentines were respectively much weaker, the former after seizing Lombardy, and the latter after seizing Tuscany, than they had been when the sea and six miles of territory sufficed for their ambition.[2] The happiness of the imperial free cities in Germany, too, had impressed him deeply. He falls back on the reflection that, as regards the imperial cities, their luck lies in the restraining and conciliating function of the emperor, and that the case of Italy is unchangeably different, while as regards the ideal of a happy equilibrium it is practically negated by the mutability of all human affairs.[3] Thus his preaching of expansion and empire is not pure perversity : it is the decision of the practical man who recognises the inevitable tyranny of the actual, the insuperable force of the stream of tendency. In

[1] *Discorsi,* i, 6.

[2] *Id.* ii, 19. (Cp. the *Asino d' Oro,* cap. v.) He might have added that Milan, by its tyrannies over other cities, prepared its own bondage.

[3] *Id.* i, 7.

turning to the solution of the rule of one powerful prince, who should treat all subjects impartially, he was seeking the best he could conceive for all Italy.

When we say that the true ideal for Italy had been confederation, we must add acknowledgment of the fact that in 1548 the preaching of it brought Francisco Burlamacchi of Lucca to the scaffold.[1] Machiavelli knew too well what could *not* be accomplished by the men around him: he was content to prescribe what was conceivably within their powers. And it holds good through all criticism of his philosophic shortcomings that his discussion of actualities was a real beginning of men's education for a higher political life. He is practically the first modern writer to treat of political history as a process intelligible in terms of sequent and natural causation,[2] as apart from either theosophic or fatalistic conceptions. It was this attitude, of course, that brought on him the charges of atheism and paganism. A century and a half after the production of his *Florentine History*, Cromwell, the practical Englishman, imposes theosophy on every step of his action and his experience: Machiavelli at the end of the fifteenth century is already a Naturalist. Not that he was consistent. It is unlikely that he was an atheist, as said the chorus of his earlier critics. He was probably a "Lucretian" theist, believing in some distant divinity which certainly did not answer prayer or reward righteousness; and he so far conformed to his age as to retain some belief in prophetic prodigies.[3] But such limitations belong to the nature of all evolution; and Machiavelli is significant for his originalities. He prepares the way for Vico, for Montesquieu, for Voltaire, for Bentham, for Comte, for

[1] Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, Eng. trans., ed. 1892, p. 82.
[2] So Burckhardt, p. 82.
[3] *Discorsi*, i, 56.

Buckle, for Spencer, for the sociology which shall include and supersede these. In this aspect, despite his restriction of his problem, and despite the constant pressure of his ideal, Machiavelli is essentially a scientific thinker: it was a law of his nature that he should seek the reasons of every historical development, and make historiography an intelligent exposition. In the *Florentine History*, although it was a prescribed and not a spontaneous work, he recognises clearly enough the great problem of the forces of class repulsion within every community; and if he had had time and encouragement to frame a complete theory of politics instead of practical handbooks for men of action, he was better qualified to have thought out all sides of the matter than any other man of his day.

For the rest, I cannot but count it partly an error to reproach him, as does Mr. Morley in his brilliant lecture, with being a mouthpiece of the spirit of violence. It is one thing to say how men must proceed in order to succeed or survive politically in a violent age: it is another thing to love violence for its own sake. Machiavelli studied deeply the art of war, and prescribed a military policy, because there was no other practicable line of energetic progress in his day; but even when he pleads the changefulness of human things as a reason for choosing to be the hammer rather than the anvil, he shows that if life had gone peacefully and scrupulously in his day, he never would have been the man to innovate towards strife and aggression. To turn to violence and aggression to-day as a result of his teaching would be like reverting to slavery on the plea of the authority of Aristotle. Lord Acton seems to approximate for a moment to Mr. Morley's censure when he writes that Machiavelli "obtains a new lease of *authority* from

causes that are still prevailing, and from doctrines that are apparent in politics, philosophy, and science ..... he is not a vanishing *type*, but a constant and contemporary influence." As who should say that Machiavelli is the typical jingo, or Bismarck, or aggressive modern Imperialist! This surely mishandles the case, as against a passage a few pages earlier in the same essay :—" He was simply a faithful observer of facts, who describes the fell necessity that governs narrow territories and unstable fortunes; he discovered the true line of progress and the law of future society; he was a patriot, a republican, a Liberal, but, above all this, a man sagacious enough to know that politics is an inductive science. A sublime purpose justifies him, and he has been wronged by dupes and fanatics, by irresponsible dreamers and interested hypocrites." Here, indeed, the balance is swung the other way; and one must almost demur to some of the claims. But the same accomplished critic says no more than the truth when he concludes with the decision that Machiavelli is "*more rationally intelligible* when illustrated by lights falling not only from the century he wrote in, but from our own, which has seen the course of its history twenty-five times deviated by actual or attempted crime."

There remains to be considered the further and more memorable criticism of Mr. Morley, that Machiavelli's saying, "the unarmed prophet always falls," proves him devoid of or blind to a moral faculty for reform such as was possessed by Calvin; and that if he had been in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate he would have recognised no forces worth considering save those of the political authorities. It is Mr. Morley's high merit to keep steadfastly before his age the message of moral reason; and it is with grateful

recognition of his great service as well as entire concurrence in his ideal that I repeat here, on behalf of Machiavelli, a demurrer to the verdict under notice. The sufficient answer seems to me to be that, as regards the unarmed prophet, Machiavelli spoke for his day the simple truth. In his first diplomatic experiences he had realised how the "well-armed head of religion"[1] at Rome had a casting vote in all the politics of Europe. Nor did he at all ignore or overlook the degree in which moral forces might sway politics, for he expressly points to the case of Savonarola, whom he calls a great man,[2] as showing what might even then be done to sway a people by religious means, which Machiavelli was quite ready to see employed for his own political ideals. As for Calvin, he ruled, as Mr. Morley almost admits, no less by violence than by suasion; and his polity is not so pleasing, on any close scrutiny, as to make us regret that Savonarola did not permanently set up such another in Italy.

No doubt there is in some of Machiavelli's non-political writing a strain of moral perversity which serves to point every censure of his teaching. After reading his *Prince* and his *Discourses on Livy* one can hardly think of the *Mandragola* (over which Macaulay is so oddly enthusiastic) without being moved to ask whether the society there depicted was worth shedding blood for; whether the men there portrayed were conceivably capable of playing over again the drama of ancient Rome; and whether the cry of "*Virtù contr'al furore*" is not ridiculous as coming from the writer who painted them. It is with difficulty that we can give a hearing to the plea that,

[1] Letter of October 11th, 1500, cited by Villari, i, 259.
[2] *Discorsi,* i, 12.

as the prologue tells, he turned to levity because the problem of the public life set up despair. But here again the only just judgment is one which takes into view the moral tone of other societies of the same age. Spain and France were not morally higher or deeper than Italy; and a century later the English Elizabethan drama, not to speak of that of the Caroline Restoration, includes plays to the full as crudely licentious as the comedy of Machiavelli. The Italians, in fine, were morally as well as politically a product of their circumstances; and, even as no other race of their time could have managed any better than they the political problem of papal Italy, so neither could any other, so placed, have escaped their demoralisation. The greatness of Machiavelli consists in his having possessed an intellect unenfeebled by his environment, superior in total grasp and balance to any of his time, of any country; and in his having drawn light for men's paths from the very darkness of his world.

VII.

To know a man's published discourse is one thing; to know the man is another. No writer down to his day, perhaps, revealed his thought on public affairs more hardily than did Machiavelli; but such revelation does not necessarily carry with it a full disclosure of character. And as we have little or nothing of biographical description of Machiavelli from his contemporaries, we are set upon a process of inference to construct our complete notion of him. The natural first thought is to figure him in terms of his doctrine, as infinitely cool, wary, cynical in the ordinary sense of the term, and unswayed by passion save of the patriotic sort that surges up in the closing sentences of the *Prince*. It is, therefore, likely to be

with some shock of surprise that one meets for the first time with the conception of him presented in Merejkowski's novel, *The Forerunner,* in which he is somewhat prominent. There he is restless, excitable, mercurial, more like what we know Voltaire to have been than what we spontaneously imagine the author of the *Prince* and the *Discourses* to have appeared. But after some reflection one is led to acquiesce in the novelist's divination, of the sureness of which in other cases we have many instances.

Broadly speaking, great authors are never what their mere books would suggest to us; and this for the reason that we do not allow in advance for the physiological co-efficients of genius. A man's genius is his highest faculty functioning at its best; and a great faculty of literary statement, a high art of verbal presentment, physiologically implies a degree of physical and psychical sensibility which, contrasted with the ideal of mastery evoked by a great intellectual performance, either makes an impression of weakness or lack of balance, or discloses emotional qualities which were not easily to be divined from the product. All the authors who by biographies have been posthumously made well known to readers that formerly knew only their books, have set up disillusionment of some sort. Either the author is found likable by some who had disliked him for his doctrine, or he disappoints admirers by forms of frailty which they had never associated with his teaching. Doctor Johnson, Kant, Voltaire, Rousseau, Scott, Dr. Arnold, Lamb, Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, Goethe, Carlyle, Balzac, George Eliot, Dickens, Victor Hugo, Tourguenief, Tennyson—all as revealed in their biographies made many admirers raise their eyebrows. The teacher, the preacher, the humanist, the poet,

the novelist—each is found to combine with his gift, his ideal, his inspiration, qualities and tendencies unworthy of it. The golden-tongued poet is found to be often brusque and repellent in his own person; the preacher of serenity is chronically morose or splenetic; the dignified moralist frequently explosive and tempestuous; the idealist too often prosaic or grasping; the poised artist, who can detect and limn all forms of human weakness, surprisingly weak on his own account. The Johnson of Boswell astonished many who knew the Johnson of *Rasselas* and *The Rambler;* the Carlyle of Froude shocked multitudes who had worshipped the Carlyle of *Sartor* and the *Miscellanies*.

In compensation, some men who had made enemies by their writings have turned them into friends by the magnetism of their living personalities, or by the fuller revelation of a good biography. Diderot, Malthus, Southey, Macaulay, Buckle, Darwin, had one or the other fortune. And so we may conceive, with Merejkowski, that the Machiavelli who in his own writings seems to exhibit an abnormal coolness or callousness, was keen rather in Voltaire's way than in Frederick's or John of Lancaster's; was very human, very responsive, very sanguine at times, and very capable of being cast down. He is, in fact, revealed to us by his friends early in his diplomatic career as physically restless and changeable in a high degree;[1] a type not likely to harden into impassiveness, or to undergo torture without consequences.[2] Carlyle at his desk in an upper chamber rhapsodised

[1] Villari, i, 293, and notes.

[2] There is much sensitiveness in the face of the bust reproduced in Villari's *Life,* which appears to be made from a death-mask. The portrait in the Geneva edition of 1550 is a poor block, but seems to be compatible with the bust.

of greatness, heroism, fortitude, duty, and patience, and came downstairs to exhibit other qualities. Machiavelli, theoretically considered, may very well have mused in his study on a course of action for Cesare Borgia, and come out of it to act like a cheerful Florentine, guiltless of bad blood.

In his study, indeed, he becomes not a little of an artist, and this in more senses than one. A great writer he undoubtedly was. Of the sin of verbosity, the bane of modern Italian writing, and of the historical style of his contemporary Guicciardini,[1] he is entirely innocent; he is as terse as Dante, and has been not unjustly called the Dante of Italian prose. Again and again does Villari, himself so diffuse, recur enthusiastically to the theme of the energy and compactness of Machiavelli's diction. It was no unstudied triumph: in every instance in which his revision of his work can be traced, the whole effort is seen to be towards lucid simplicity,[2] the strength and concision of popular speech refined and perfected by the play of the literary sense. Thus did he win his enduring success in the very slough of poverty and frustration. Half his fame, it may be, was thus secured.

But the spirit of art in Machiavelli outgoes the province of form. No great poet in the modern sense of the word, he is something of a poet in the old sense of an inventor of action. It has been made clear that in several of his writings he plays the part rather of the poet than of the minuting secretary. Outrunning in his eager thought the slow

[1] At least in the *Storia d' Italia*. Signor Villari justly credits Guicciardini with simplicity and strength in other writings.

[2] "His corrections aimed at simplifying his style, and by force of simplicity enhancing its vigour and power" (Villari, ii, 438).

complications of the actual history, he composes, in his *Descrizzione* of Cesare Borgia's triumph over his enemies, a narrative which cannot be reconciled with his own dispatches to his Government, written from day to day while the episode was in progress.[1] It does not appear that he had anything to gain by the alterations, though they have the effect of magnifying the astuteness of Cesare. He had simply transmuted the half-fortuitous drama of the actual into something more sequent and symmetrical, in which the plotter's brain achieves more than in reality it did or could. Brooding intensely on the possibilities of politic craft, he imagines a schemer of more than Borgian sagacity, and ends by imposing that conception not only on outside readers but on himself. As Villari notes, his dispatches denounce Cesare in the mood of the natural man who recoils from cruelty and treachery. In the *Descrizzione* the artist has reconciled himself to his own creation of an ideal Borgia, too adroit to work evil save for good ends—the possible redeemer of Italy, the master of the impossible situation. And so it is that, in his so-called *Life of Castruccio Castracani,* he has framed not a historical narrative but an ideal sketch, making the kind of man he wanted to find. We are dealing with the imaginative conceptions of a man of genius far too sanguinely sympathetic to be for an hour the kind of spirit that he has been confidently held to be by uncomprehending enmity.

Either to this imaginative propensity or to a simple lack of proper painstaking is to be ascribed the number of mistakes in his account of early Florentine institutions in the *Istorie.* His originality does not

[1] Villari, i, 311–313.

take scholarly lines. For his learning as to the Roman and early Florentine periods he relies solely on his predecessors, Biondo Flavio and Giovanni Villani; and in his account of the constitutional beginnings he puts together, as parts of one planned construction, episodes far apart in time.[1] Always it is the schemer and constructor that overrides the historian; so that even the schemer's primary purpose of knowing what men actually have been is deflected by his already formed theories. It is when he comes to the fully-recorded period that his special power of comprehension and reflection comes into play; and the true Machiavelli illuminates the history of Florence as he had done that of Rome. As a mere historian he is little to be trusted. In telling the story of the famous revolt of the *ciompi* he actually invents an episode in order to exhibit Michele di Lando, the wool-carder, as an astute schemer, skilfully directing the tumult in which he came to the front.[2] Any such historical figure, offering the slightest promise of a saviour for Italy, be it King Theodoric or the Duke of Athens or the wool-carder, always moves Machiavelli on retrospect to an enthusiastic interest. In his history we are in the hands of an idealist.

It is thus intelligible that while his gift of luminous comment made his fellow-citizens value his dispatches and crave to have from him a history of their city, they never appointed him to the responsible office of ambassador. The ambassadors of Venice, we are told, surpassed him in their comprehension of diplomatic crises, and in forecasting the policy of potentates.[3] At this business the concrete-minded

[1] Villari, ii, 384–5, 397. [2] *Id.* ii, 410, 411. [3] *Id.* ii, 440.

Guicciardini outshone the man of speculative genius, who could theorise the causation of events in mass better than the character and caprice of individuals. And it is difficult to resist the verdict of Professor Theodor Mundt[1] that the description given by Machiavelli of German life in his *Ritratti delle cose della Alamagna* is so swayed by his study of the *Germania* of Tacitus as to make his testimony misleading. His faculty of comprehension had brought the ancients as near to him as the moderns; and having lived so long with Livy, he was the more readily spell-bound by Tacitus.

It consists with these tendencies that he again reveals himself as masterly and original when he handles the art of war and the laws of language.[2] Despite his premature depreciation of firearms, not unjustified by the experience of his day, his reasonings on tactics, drill, and fortification have won from modern specialists as high praise as any given to his sociology.[3] For his own day, there seems little doubt, his counsel was thoroughly sagacious. Yet it was his fortune, after having been tortured by the Mediceans on suspicion of undue devotion to the cause of liberty, to be finally discarded by the "people" in the final struggle after the expulsion of the Mediceans in 1527, on the score that he had served the Medici for Italy's sake. It thus came about that the man ranked as the supreme cynic and egotist of his era died broken-hearted because his fellow-citizens would not let him join in the last "free" polity of the city he had loved and served so

[1] *Niccolò Machiavelli und das System der modernen Politik,* 1861, pp. 218–220, quoted by Villari, ii, 439.

[2] On this see Villari, ii, 371–2. But the authorship of the *Dialogo* on the Italian language is very doubtful. See Mr. Louis Dyer's *Machiavelli and the Modern State,* 1904, pref. p. xiv, *note.*

[3] See the citations of Villari, ii, 291 sq.

well—died, too, in poverty, having never had more than a pittance for all his services.

These essential and illuminating facts of his life his alien detractors of the succeeding ages never knew; and by his fellow-citizens they were soon forgotten; to be made clear again in a happier age, to which his love for Italy was his first recommendation. Thus it comes about that the known Machiavelli of late posterity differs further from the pseudo-historic figure of Shakespeare's day than any personality ever did from the tradition of it. And there can be no question that the recovered figure is the real one. It is reconstituted from a multitude of traces, every one of which has been scrutinised. We have, it is true, no purposive contemporary account, none of those finished literary portraits which at once clarify our notions and bias our estimates. To make up for the lack of biography, however, there have been preserved, in addition to thousands of Machiavelli's official dispatches, a handful of his private letters, some of which do him little credit, and a number from his friend Buonaccorsi,[1] which also reveal him as living at times on the plane of the *Mandragola*. Were it not for the overwhelming discredit that had fallen on all clerical morality in Italy before and after his time, these glimpses of the seamy side of the life of men of his class would doubtless have been made much of against him. It was perhaps with an eye to the defensive that, in the *Mandragola*, he made his most lifelike character the genially rascally priest. Reviewing it all, we can assent to Macaulay's conclusion that the evil course of things political threw him at times into a vein of "desperate levity." Somewhat

[1] This correspondence, however, is to be read in the light of the remarks of Villari, i, 287.

so had the terror of the plague affected an earlier Florentine generation. But a man is to be known from his best hours, not from his worst ; and among Machiavelli's letters to his friend Vettori there is one which, often as it has been quoted, must here be reproduced for the clear and lasting light it casts upon the real man. It was written in December of the year in which he had suffered torture, and in which he wrote *The Prince*.

> Since my last misfortunes, I have led a quiet country life, and, all counted, have not passed twenty days in Florence. I spent September in snaring thrushes ; but at the end of the month even this rather tiresome sport failed me. I rise with the sun in the morning, and go into one of the woods for a couple of hours to inspect the previous day's work, and to pass some time with the wood-cutters, who have always some troubles to tell me, either of their own or their neighbours'. On leaving the wood I go to a spring, and thence up to my bird-walk, with a book under my arm, either Dante, Petrarch, or one of the minor poets, such as Tibullus or Ovid.....Then I betake myself to the inn by the roadside, chat with passers-by, ask news of the places whence they come, hear various things, and note the varied tastes and diverse fancies of mankind. This carries me on to the dinner-hour, when in the company of my brood I swallow whatever fare this poor little place of mine, and my slender patrimony, can afford me. Dinner over, I go back to the inn. There I generally find the host, a butcher, a miller, and a couple of brick-makers. I mix with these boors the whole day, playing at cards and dice, which games give rise to a thousand quarrels and much exchange of bad language, and we generally wrangle over farthings, and our shouting can be heard at San Casciano. Steeped in this degradation, my wits grow mouldy, and I vent my rage at the malignity of fate, content to let it crush me in this fashion, if only to see whether it will not take shame of its work.
>
> At nightfall I return home, and seek my writing-room, and, divesting myself on its threshold of my rustic

> garments stained with mud and mire, I assume courtly attire, and, thus suitably clothed, enter within the ancient courts of ancient men, by whom, being cordially welcomed, I am fed with the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born, and am not ashamed to hold discourse with them and inquire the motives of their actions; and these men in their humanity reply to me, and for the space of four hours I feel no weariness, remember no trouble, no longer feel poverty, no longer dread death, my whole being is so absorbed in them.[1]

It was in these hours of better life, in his upper chamber, that the politician who had been on the rack wrote *The Prince*. The picture will not square with the Mephistophelean spectre conjured up by the imagination of the men of the North. What he lacked was precisely the deadly egoism with which they endowed him. Doubtless those humble, chattering neighbours, whose noisy disputes with him over cards he exaggerates in his Italian fashion, enjoyed his company. His nephew, brought up in his house, loved him, and in absence is always craving letters from him, which he affectionately writes, usually ending them with "Christo ti guardi." His wife, when he is away, writes him with warm devotion, saying how dull the house is without him. There is no basis for the tradition, accepted by Macaulay, that his marriage was unhappy.[2] And though there are examples enough of personages who did harm publicly and were good family men, these testimonies to the human goodness of Machiavelli are surely worth more than the blatant inventions of aliens who never even read his books. It was not the best men who reviled him. Greene, who vilified him above all the English penmen of

[1] Trans. in Villari's *Life and Times*.
[2] Cp. Villari, i, 287.

Elizabeth's day, was a drunkard, a liar, and a companion of thieves. Frederick the Great, who began the modern movement of declamation against him, does not finally compare with him to advantage as man or as statesman. To-day, in a world grown somewhat better, and consequently somewhat less given to evil speaking, he meets with a worthier reception, even such as the mute ancients gave and had from him in his library by night. And what he said of himself, so characteristically, so humanly, with such a humorous pathos, after he had borne with fortitude the torture of the rack, may express our revised estimate: "I am really pleased with myself, and think there is more in me than I ever before believed."[1]

[1] Since these pages were put in type, I have met with the able treatise of Mr. Louis Dyer, *Machiavelli and the Modern State* (Ginn and Co., 1904), of which the judgments so frequently and so powerfully corroborate those here put, that I regret to have been unable to cite them. Mr. Dyer's book may be recommended to any reader desirous of knowing Machiavelli better.

BACON

I.

In face of the untiring perversity of the cult of Bacon-Shakespeare, one is moved at times to wonder whether Bacon is going to be made permanently ridiculous by his wilder devotees to the extent of losing what credit he had among other people. His sad prayer for "men's charitable speeches" and the esteem of "the next ages" has at last been answered with a vengeance. Once started by Miss Delia Bacon and Mr. Nathaniel Holmes, the strange fantasy which doubled the too discursive speculator and the preoccupied Chancellor with a hard-working playwriter in a mask has been kept on foot by a series of enthusiasts, impostors, and dupes, till it would seem that the exposure of the grossest frauds is but a way to call into play the faith of new fanatics. Popular spiritualism is the only parallel to that prodigy of error.

It is all very well to say that such an exorbitance of esteem testifies to a great force of intellectual magnetism. But who are they that are magnetised? The importance of Joanna Southcott is measured by that of her worshippers; and if Bacon's power of appeal to judgment were to be divined from the reasonings of those who make him out to have written all the Elizabethan drama and Montaigne's Essays and Burton's Anatomy to boot, his fame would be in a perilous case. Happily for its duration, the man who has evoked the oddest of modern crazes had

earlier won the entire devotion and service of one of the sanest minds in all literature; and never did one writer do more for the vindication of another than Bacon has had done for him at the hands of James Spedding.

So great is the service that one can now hardly think of Bacon the man without calling up the personality and the performance of his biographer and champion. Before Spedding did his work of defence, Bacon was made known to the unstudious English-speaking race mainly by the portrait drawn of him in Macaulay's essay. It is a masterpiece of zealous injustice and impassioned untruth. To the fixing of a conventional calumny Macaulay brought all the fervour a disciple could give to the vindication of a beloved master. The spectacle is one that gives colour to the worst detractions ever made from his literary honour; and if it were not clearly to be accounted for as one of his divagations, his moral credit in this connection would to-day justly stand as low as he sought to put Bacon's. The true account of Macaulay is not that he was either a "hard-mouthed sophist" or an impeccable judge, but that he was a man of vivid first impressions and much self-complacency, who, apart from his official work, rarely reached a judgment by a judicial process, and was hardly at all capable of anxiously reconsidering a prejudice. With his large share of general good sense he usually judged with fair accuracy at first sight; but where he had grown up in a conviction, or had once committed himself to a verdict, and someone challenged him to a revision of sentence, his prejudice reacted with the spontaneity and inequity of an instinct. All his well-nourished self-love at once took arms to make good the rightness of his past way

of thinking; and the more evidence and argument were adduced to confute him, the more perverse became the sophistry with which he obscured facts and evaded reasons. Where he happens to be right, no man is more broadly judicious in showing as much; where he happens to be wrong, he is wrong with the obstinacy of a strong man playing the child. His is the fatality of the confident, undisciplined intelligence that has never been sobered by remorse for error, never been abashed to profound misgiving by a large vision of human fallibility. Intellectually, he never quite grew up. Well might his favourite clincher be "Every schoolboy knows": to the end he never quite got out of the schoolboy's way of knowing.

With regard to Bacon, it is clear that, as Spedding divined, Macaulay had early taken as an article of his literary faith the egregious line of Pope:—

> The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind.

It was just the kind of judgment to suit his hit-or-miss habit of estimate; being done in his own fashion of laying on the black and the white of a character so as to produce rather the motley of a harlequin than the interfluent lights and shadows of a living nude. His was indeed not the eye to see the monstrous paralogism of the collocation "wisest, brightest, meanest"; but had he only chanced to approach Bacon in youth under a favourable prepossession, and later to look at Pope's line with a perception of the plain streak of sneak in that poet's own character, he would have been as ready as any to realise that Pope was not the judge to accord with authority any one of his three superlatives to any man. Having, however, come to his maturity in the ordinary literary opinion, Macaulay felt the defence of Bacon in Montagu's

edition to be a flout to his judgment; and he set himself to meet it in the spirit in which he later met those who challenged his iniquitous way of trying the case of William Penn.

The result is a triumph of special pleading that is a scandal to literature. All the rhetorical powers and expository gifts of a first-rate platformer are bent to bluffing the jury, perverting the facts, garbling the defence, and dexterously playing the saddened censor of a great man's faults, till by a thousand cumulative touches of falsification, missing no opportunity for distorting incident or motive, there is wrought by wayward prejudice a comprehensive slander which wilful malice could hardly outgo. For nearly a generation it dazzled all save the best readers, till the cloud on Bacon's name seemed to have become an ineffaceable stain. But against this formidable indictment there was at length set up the most masterly rebuttal by which a great slander was ever met, the work of one of the justest reasoners that ever dealt with a problem of character and conduct. Lucifer, so to say, had met Ithuriel.

It is but fair to remember that Spedding did not fight alone. The vindication begun by Montagu was ably reinforced by Thomas Martin, whose *Character of Lord Bacon: His Life and Works* (1835) is still worth reading; and when Macaulay's essay had for most readers served to overbear that defence, and to float the piously hostile *Life of Francis Lord Bacon* by the Rev. Joseph Sortain (1851), Hepworth Dixon produced in his brilliant *Story of Lord Bacon's Life*[1]

[1] It will be observed that all three works misname Bacon, as does Macaulay in his essay. The author of the *Novum Organum* was Francis Bacon, entitled Lord (or Baron) Verulam, and Viscount St. Alban.

(1862), a vindication at least as effective as the attacks. But Dixon's book, though visibly embodying much research, is in its turn too forensic, too partisan, too unjudicial, to constitute a lasting record. Where others make everything tell against Bacon he makes everything tell for him without qualification, glosing or suppressing the record of Essex's early championship of his friend, as if the final case for Bacon were not strong enough to bear all that pressure; and so presenting the story of Bacon's fall as to make it out a mere martyrdom. It is in making good his vindication without any such straining at any point that Spedding achieves his unique success—a success unshaken by the subsequent reiteration of the hostile view in the two volumes of Dr. Edwin Abbott.

In this connection it is much to be deplored that Mr. Sidney Lee, in the study of Bacon included in his volume, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, should have pronounced Dr. Abbott's book "the best summary" of Bacon's life and work,[1] without even making a reference to the performance of Spedding. Such a case is not fitly to be so disposed of, any more than by the deliverance of Dean Church[2] that Spedding sought to make us revere as well as admire Bacon, and that "it is vain. It is vain to fight against the facts of his life; his words, his letters." To such cathedral proclamation the answer is that the issue is not one between revering and contemning: it is between accepting and rejecting such a sentence of denigration as Dr. Church places in the forefront of his book, before his readers have had from him a word of evidence. Dr. Church's pronouncement is too much in the manner and spirit

[1] *Great Englishmen*, p. 213.
[2] *Bacon*, in the "Men of Letters" series, p. 3.

of the pulpit to avail with thinking men. Mr. Lee's is a surprising oversight on the part of a student wont to look round his problems before coming to his conclusions. In the name of literary justice good readers will refuse to let such a claim as Spedding's be thus put aside.

II.

To read the *Evenings with a Reviewer* is to experience a long-drawn satisfaction of a kind that perhaps no other book can give, and to appreciate once for all the truth of the high praise passed upon Spedding by those who knew him. "He was the Pope among us young men—the wisest man I know," was the notable if not decisive verdict of his friend Tennyson ;[1] and I have sometimes wondered whether Spedding might not be the "clear-headed friend" of Tennyson's early poem "To ——," whose "kingly intellect" was to feed wasted truth "until she be an athlete bold." "An athlete bold" is, indeed, hardly the description of the truth as nourished by Spedding ; rather he makes us think of the unassuming swordsman who attempts few exploits, but, when forced into a combat, holds his own with unwearying arm till the challenging bully is driven from the lists. There is in his conduct of Bacon's defence a vigilance of scrutiny, a security of handling, that realises every ideal Macaulay misses, and that lets us see how fitly the brilliant Lady Ashburton put the impression he made on his companions :—

> I always feel a kind of average between myself and any other person I am talking with—between us two, I mean ;

[1] *Memoir,* by his son, 1-vol. ed. p. 32.

> so that when I am talking to Spedding I am unutterably foolish—beyond permission.[1]

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Spedding's work of vindication is the simple fact that a man of such rare capacity as his was content to give virtually his whole life to the restoration of one other man's fair fame. If we compare him with any of his contemporaries, he holds his own as to the general suggestion he makes of power and knowledge. In his early career as a Government official all men with whom he came in contact testified warmly to his value; and it was evidently the unanimous consent of his friends as to his fitness for the greatest undertakings that made them almost cold to what he actually achieved. His own account of that matter is humorously pathetic:—

> I have long been aware that to ninety-nine hundredths of the reading public, including about nine-tenths of my own particular friends, the most satisfactory intelligence with regard to my immortal work would be that there is no more to come, and that I might have made that announcement at the close of any volume without danger of detection.[2]

That is, indeed, how serious literature is apt to fare in England; though, happily, there are now some thousands who can appreciate Spedding's Life of Bacon. And the presumption is that that attitude among his friends was largely due to their insuppressible conviction that he was made for greater things than writing any man's biography. They resented the devotion of such a life to such a task. The *Evenings with a Reviewer* was written about 1846, and printed only for private circulation, Spedding having resolved that the world should have the

[1] Lord Houghton, *Monographs*, cited by G. S. Venables in pref. to Spedding's *Evenings with a Reviewer*, 1881, i, p. vii.
[2] Letter cited by Mr. Venables, p. xvi.

complete Life of Bacon, with all the documents, before it read this crushing answer to Macaulay. In the end, the book was published only in 1881, thirty-five years after its composition, and a few months after his accidental death. Of those thirty-five years nearly thirty were mainly occupied by his edition of Bacon's Works (with the co-operation of Ellis and Heath) in seven volumes, and the stupendous *Letters and Life* in seven volumes more. No wonder that his most admiring friends, who had been eager to have him accept a good Government office when it was tardily offered him, resented such a use of powers that they considered equal to anything.

And we are left asking, Was it worth while—worth all that while? Was it finally fitting that one of the wisest and most intellectual men of his day, living to seventy-four years, should leave as almost his sole product a perfect edition of Bacon's works, and the most thorough research that patience and devotion could accomplish in regard to his life? Was the wisdom shown in the work shown also in the choice and prolongation of it? One is at a loss to answer. Of Spedding it is told[1] that, while he knew thoroughly the English history of the reigns of Elizabeth and James, he knew in detail no other history, and was tranquilly content, despite his academic culture, to be ignorant of many things that ordinary people were supposed to know. "He was in the habit of saying that he got undeserved credit for knowledge, because no one could believe that such a man could be so profoundly ignorant.....It was true that he deliberately abstained from the study of subjects in which he felt no concern."

[1] By Mr. Venables, p. xviii.

It would seem, then, that his wisdom was of that balanced kind described in Stevenson's *Will of the Mill*, too sufficient for itself to permit of any intellectual adventure. Had it not been for his unique interest in Bacon, the *grande passion* of his intellectual life, Spedding might conceivably have gone through his days as a capable but unconspicuous Government official, without accomplishing anything in literature beyond a few more miscellaneous "Reviews and Discussions," and a little more of intelligent, but not epoch-marking, study of Shakespeare. The price of his poise of character and judgment was a general freedom from enthusiasms—or, let us say, that general detachment that could let him concentrate his powers on one serene and studious enthusiasm through a whole generation. His friend Fitzgerald, indeed, regarded the enthusiasm as special to the first years of the task.

> I am very glad [he writes] to hear old Spedding is really getting *his* share of Bacon into print. I doubt if it will be half as good as the *Evenings*, where Spedding was in the *Passion* which is wanted to fill his Sail for any longer Voyage.[1]

But if *Passion* ebbed, and zest sometimes flagged, Spedding's loyalty to his work never gave way. We can but say that there must have been something remarkable about the man whose work and personality, after two hundred years, could so possess such a follower; and that, had Bacon been able to foresee the coming of such a biographer and champion for him after such a lapse of time, he might have felt an elation that would have made light all his latter-day load of care and humiliation. And, saying that, we

[1] Fitzgerald's *Letters and Literary Remains*, 1889, i, 280.

turn with the more interest to consider what manner of man it was who could work such an admiration in such a mind.

III.

After Spedding's exhaustive analysis and confutation of the Macaulay libel, the problem of Bacon's character is happily simplified. We know now that he verily was not the heartless, servile, self-seeking hypocrite of the reviewer's effigy, but a man who managed his life, in difficult days, up to the moment of his one serious miscarriage, with honour and dignity. He was not, as Macaulay so unscrupulously made out, mean-spirited and sycophantic ; he did not timorously truckle to the Queen after boldly opposing in Parliament the policy of her ministers ; he was not selfishly disloyal to his friend and benefactor ; he was not a wanton renewer of judicial cruelty, or a wilful perverter of justice in the King's behalf; he was not even an ardent advocate of the bad financial device of trade monopolies.[1] On the principal of these points Macaulay has merely suppressed truths and accumulated false facts ; and it is to the general discredit of English letters that men who in youth sat at Macaulay's feet should still give forth their prejudice as critical judgment, without an attempt to rebut the massive defence which disposes of it. In this fashion Mr. S. H. Reynolds, in his introduction to the Clarendon Press edition of Bacon's Essays, doggedly repeats the old aspersions without a word of argument against the refutations. Making some charges which are just, he throws out also crass

[1] As one of those misled by various writers on this minor issue, I have to make my personal retractation.

imputations which no evidence could prove, declaring, for instance, that Bacon "shrank from no baseness which seemed likely to help him on his way";[1] and that he was "a gross and shameless flatterer, in an age of gross flatteries."[2] The self-confuting power of malice has seldom been better exemplified than in this writer's pronouncement that "For accuracy of detail Bacon *had no care whatever*, and this again may be set down as probably *part of his craft*."[3] For considerate men, such reckless incrimination is its own answer. It is time to try to set a reasoned judgment in place of rhetoric.

What does hold good of Bacon is, first, that in an age when the superstition of monarchism not only flourished as it has done since, but was a force vitally affecting the most eminent individual lives, he found his life laid in the central sphere of the influence of the throne, and that, having to bring his great intelligence into touch with the character and will of the King as any ordinary man might, he presents the anomalous spectacle of greatness subordinate to littleness. Secondly, being unduly careless about money matters all his life long, he latterly allowed the profuse expenses of his great households to grow upon him till it became a convenience to him to take gifts from suitors, albeit he never perverted justice on their behalf. It was a species of misconduct probably committed by most of his predecessors, and by not a few judges among his contemporaries; and there is no good reason to doubt the proudly sad claim, privately made by him after his disgrace: "I was the justest judge there was in England these fifty

[1] Clarendon Press edition of *Essays*, 1890, Introd. p. xxxiv.
[2] *Id. ib.* [3] *Id.* p. xxvii.

years," to which he appended the stoical confession, "It was the justest censure in Parliament that was these two hundred years."[1] Coke never took untimely gifts, so far as we know; but Coke was certainly not even potentially a just judge,[2] though a great lawyer.

Indeed, we cannot measure Bacon aright until we realise what an order of men they were among whom he lived, and how few there were in it who could decently cast a stone at him. If we look broadly and justly at his and their characters in mass, comparing them in point of equity, public spirit, humanity, and conscientiousness, so far from placing him low we shall be tempted to call him the best no less than the ablest of the public men of his day. Hardly one of them will bear an inquest: the leading spirits of the days of Elizabeth and James will as little satisfy modern standards as do the men of the Restoration. The crazy Essex, the unworthy Leicester, the unstable and untrustable Raleigh, the crafty Howard and Cecil, takers of Spanish bribes; the flashy favourites of James, one of whom, Buckingham, many times sought to sway the Chancellor's decrees; Bacon's official enemies, Cranfield and Williams, men essentially corrupt where he was but technically so, and finally disgraced as he never was—the whole generation were morally unworthy even to be his associates; and Coke was his inferior as judge[3] and as man no less than as mind. No decision of Bacon's was ever

[1] First transcribed by Spedding, *Evenings*, ii, 345–6.

[2] Compare the accounts of him by Gardiner, *History*, ii, 333, 338–341, and by Spedding, *Evenings*, i, 129; ii, 2, 209; and the admissions of his panegyrist Roscoe, *Lives of Eminent British Lawyers*, 1830, pp. 2–6, 24–25.

[3] Bacon in his first four terms as Chancellor made 8,798 decrees, in his second year 9,181, and gave more general satisfaction than any judge of his time. Dixon, pp. 336–8 and refs.; Martin, p. 280 and refs.

reversed on the score of bribe-taking;[1] and his "corruptness" consisted in taking fees and gifts while cases were pending, whereas the more careful judges took theirs by rule at the recognised times.[2]

Despite the many attempts of Buckingham to dictate his judicial decisions—attempts the failure of which surely goes far to vindicate his judicial rectitude—the utmost that systematic hostility can now charge against him is that in one case he modified a decree under pressure; and in that case the assertion that he "deliberately perverted justice" is not at all made out.[3] When we realise his position, at the mercy of a king ignobly ruled by unscrupulous favourites, surrounded by conscienceless suitors and merciless enemies, we are weighed upon by a sense of the hardness of the fate that led the lover of knowledge and wisdom to seek in such paths and places to forward his plans for human enlightenment and his hopes for the better government of his country. At his worst he was a high spirit among the low, cast in a world where nobleness was almost the surest bar to public usefulness, and where any man who would

[1] Dixon, p. 474; Martin, p. 279, citing Rushworth; Spedding, *Evenings,* ii, 341–5.

[2] See Martin, pp. 274–7; Dixon, pp. 366–70.

[3] Abbott, *Francis Bacon,* Introd. pp. xx–xxix, and pp. 268–9, 296. Cp. Spedding's *Letters and Life,* vi, 443–5, vii, 5–6, and Mr. Heath's letter in App. to vol. vii. Despite Mr. Heath's investigation, the case remains very obscure, and a careful lay reader will be slow to acquiesce in Mr. Heath's professional view of it. A lawyer is apt to be the last to realise how often it would be fitting to reverse judges' decisions, however informally. In the one case in which such reversal ought most obviously to take place—that of an innocent man found to have been condemned in error—officialdom never retracts, but absurdly "pardons." It should be added that Spedding did *not*, as Dr. Abbott asserts, admit that he had been wrong in his view of the case in question, but simply deferred to the opinion of Mr. Heath, his legal co-editor. What Mr. Heath *proves* is not injustice, but suspicious informality.

influence for good the courses of power must learn some measure of dissimulation and craft.

Nothing, however, can clear Bacon of grave censure for the folly which at once stained his ermine, delivered him over to his enemies, and abated his credit as a teacher. It is on that score alone, finally, that his character is seriously affected; for the old condemnation of his conduct towards Essex, endorsed and magnified by Macaulay, will not bear revisal. If we compare the measure meted out to Bacon in this matter by so many critics with the common absolution of Becket from the charge of ingratitude to his master, and of Pym from the charge of ferocity towards his old friend Strafford, we cannot but be conscious of an invidious and inordinate severity. To say, as Macaulay virtually does, that Essex's gift of an estate to Bacon ought to have bought Bacon's withdrawal from the prosecution,[1] is really to quash the other charge against him for taking gifts as a judge from suitors. Essex had himself received from Elizabeth gifts ultimately estimated at £300,000—a reward monstrously in excess of his very problematic services; and for services not at all problematic he gave Bacon an estate worth £1,800. When Mr. Sidney Lee writes that the Earl "quixotically judged himself in honour bound to compensate Bacon"[2] for the lack of the office he could not get for his protégé, he ignores at once Bacon's actual service to Essex and the latter's own financial history. If Bacon, a devoted servant of Elizabeth, in days when devotion to the Crown often went step for step with devotion to country, was

[1] In the stress of his sophistry Macaulay becomes blind enough to argue that Bacon should not have served the Queen as he did, because she had never been liberal to him, whereas Essex had been.

[2] *Great Englishmen*, p. 221.

guilty of private treason to Essex in officially conducting a just prosecution against him for an act of the grossest public lawlessness, involving the gravest danger of civil disorder, it would be interesting to know what is the measure of Essex's offence in turn against his benefactress. To palliate Essex's wanton and senseless sedition, and vilify Bacon's grave conduct of his public duty, is to commit an injustice such as Bacon never had part in.

To-day we can perhaps best account for Essex's whole career by saying that, never wise though often magnanimous, he was finally cracked.[1] This is the solution suggested by the spectacle of the lives of his mother and sisters, notoriously the most neurotic women of their time;[2] and, indeed, to a modern mind the story of all four tends to set up a sense of troubled compassion which has not yet appeared among the historians, though Bacon seems to have felt it.[3] But as men go, Essex was impossible. With such a man Bacon could not finally do aught save what he did; and Macaulay, in declaiming to the contrary, is virtually contending that an intellectually great man like Bacon was fitly to be bound for life to the fortunes of a chivalrous court favourite because the latter had for a time duly appreciated him and had partly rewarded his great services. Bacon, in accepting the reward, had expressly stipulated that it should not bind him to the giver. Macaulay in effect claims for the favourite, whose own vast rewards were so lightly come by, exactly the devotion at which he sneers when it is given by Bacon to the Queen. Yet, as Spedding shows, Essex had ceased

[1] Cp. Abbott, *Francis Bacon,* 1885, pp. 71, *note*, 73, 81.
[2] Cp. Dixon, pp. 120–1.
[3] Dixon, pp. 177–186, 191–3; Spedding, *Evenings,* i, 181–2.

to take counsel from Bacon long before his insane revolt. At the trial, nevertheless, Bacon strove to save him from himself; and only the insane plea of not guilty forced the friendly accuser to press the crushing proofs of guilt.

IV.

The utmost that can now be urged against Bacon in regard to Essex has been put by Dr. Edwin Abbott in his works on Bacon, of which the larger was published four years after Spedding's *Evenings*. In that work Dr. Abbott repeats, among other charges, a very grave one originally laid by Jardine, as to Bacon's having malevolently struck out of the report of the trial the passages of testimony which went to show that the conspirators had not intended to raise the City. That charge of bad faith had been fully and convincingly rebutted by Spedding, who shows[1] that the very testimony in question was fully reproduced in the official *Declaration*, and that the omissions from the evidence were clearly made by way of saving certain third parties who would thereby have been implicated. To this rebuttal Dr. Abbott makes no reference whatever; and the circumstance throws grave doubt on the whole of his argumentation against Bacon. It is the bane of our literary criticism that it more often than not takes no account of contrary opinion, adding only so many yeas and nays to a prior heap, instead of scrutinising all in the spirit of universal science. Spedding wrought for science inasmuch as he thoroughly sifted the criticism before him; and those who after him claim to rejudge the case without doing as much are destined to be overruled.

[1] *Evenings*, i, 193–202.

When we test Dr. Abbott on the gravest issues, he breaks down so thoroughly that trust in his judgment ceases. He undertakes in both of his books to show that Bacon's vindicatory account in the *Apology* of his relations with Essex is discredited on a comparison of its narrative with one of his actual letters. The *Apology* states that Bacon had many times dissuaded Essex from accepting the command of the Irish expedition: the letter of March, 1599, acquiesces in his acceptance of it. But anyone who, satisfied as the present writer was with this *prima facie* case, proceeds to examine the whole matter, will find that the discrepancy is apparent only. A perusal of the whole of Bacon's letter[1] will show that instead of being, as Dr. Abbott alleges or implies,[2] a counsel to Essex to accept the command, it is only an acquiescence in the decision finally taken, accompanied by a few encouragements and more warnings. In so far as it touches on the topics which Bacon later says he had used as dissuasions, the turning of these same illustrations to purposes of encouragement is perfectly compatible with a different use of them at an earlier stage, especially on the part of one who, like Bacon, had a positive bent to "antitheta." The letter is in fact obviously that of a friend who had *not* counselled the course taken, but was now seeking to make the best of it, as a good friend would. And Dr. Abbott, after arguing that on the face of the letter Bacon had not recently sought to dissuade Essex, and that as late as March 12th it was still possible for him to withdraw, obliviously admits that Bacon *had* "desired

[1] Spedding's *Letters and Life,* ii, 129–133.

[2] *Bacon and Essex,* 1877, pp. 97, 105–115; *Francis Bacon,* 1885, p. 58. The latter book puts the imputation less explicitly than the former.

to divert" Essex from ruin, but that the Earl *could not* draw back, and that "he probably seemed to Bacon, *even early in 1599*, inextricably intertangled." *Solvuntur tabulæ.* Dr. Church, equally swift to condemn, goes no deeper into the analysis of the documents. Yet, while asserting that "when Essex went to Ireland Bacon wrote only in the language of sanguine hope," he admits that, "anxious as he may have been, he could not have foreseen Essex's unaccountable, and to this day unintelligible, failure."[1]

That Bacon in his later *Apology* may have fallen into errors of memory in describing his relations with Essex is primarily credible: few men in such a case could be trusted so to recall the past that everything which might tell against them should be made prominent, or even clear. But Dr. Abbott, reiterating as he does the old pleas that Bacon need not have taken part in the trial, and that he showed a gratuitous malice, misses the true inwardness of the matter, revealed by Spedding. He cannot see that Bacon had on public grounds the strongest motives for throwing himself on the side of order, and that he was justly resentful of Essex's vain and unexpected plan of pleading innocence where the proper course was to plead guilty. The student has but to read Spedding's analysis of the case after Abbott's in order to see that, whatever may have been Bacon's later slips of memory or minor inconsistencies, his main course was as justifiable as Essex's was the reverse. Dr. Abbott on his part keeps out of sight all the damning record of Essex's plotted treasons of that very period,[2] concerning which the Earl had

[1] *Bacon*, p. 41.

[2] Cp. Spedding, *Letters and Life*, ii, 167 sq., 206 sq.; *Evenings*, i, 110; Dixon, pp. 150–151 and refs.; Church, *Bacon*, p. 41.