

Rawley's Life of Francis Bacon



The autobiography of Sir Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, by William Rawley, Bacon's private chaplain and literary executor.

The Life of The Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, by William Rawley, D.D. His Lordship's First and Last Chaplain and of Late His Majesties Chaplain in Ordinary.

First printed in:-

Resuscitatio, Or, Bringing into Publick Light Severall Pieces of the Works, Civil, Historical, Philosophical, & Theological, hitherto sleeping, Of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban. According to the best Corrected Copies. Together with his Lordship's Life. By William Rawley, Doctor in Divinity, His Lordship's First, and Last, Chapleine. Afterwards, Chapleine to His late Majesty. London, Printed by Sarah Griffin, for William Lee, and are to be sold at his Shop in Fleetstreet, at the sign of the Turks-head, near the Mitre Tavern, 1657.



The Life of the Honourable Author

FRANCIS BACON, the glory of his age and nation, the adorning and ornament of learning, was born in York House, or York Place, in the Strand, on the 22th day of January, in the year of our Lord 1560. His father was that famous counsellor to Queen Elizabeth, the second prop of the kingdom in his time, Sir Nicholas Bacon, Knight, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England; a lord of known prudence, sufficiency, moderation, and integrity. His mother was Ann Cook, one of the daughters of Sir Anthony Cook; unto whom the erudition of King Edward the Sixth had been committed; a choice lady, and eminent, for piety, virtue and learning; being exquisitely skilled, for a woman, in the Greek and Latin tongues. These being the parents, you may easily imagine what the issue was like to be, having had whatsoever nature or breeding could put into him.

His first and childish years were not without some mark of eminency; at which time he was endued with that pregnancy and towardness of wit, as they were presages of that deep and universal apprehension which was manifest in him afterward, and caused him to be taken notice of by several persons of worth and place, and especially by the Queen; who (as I have been informed) delighted much then to confer with him, and to prove him with questions; unto whom he delivered himself with that gravity and maturity above his years that Her Majesty would often term him, *The young Lord Keeper*. Being asked by the Queen how old he was, he answered with much discretion, being then but a boy, *That he was two years younger than Her Majesty's happy reign*; with which answer the queen was much taken.¹

At the ordinary years of ripeness for the university, or rather something earlier, he was sent by his father to Trinity College, in Cambridge, to be educated and bred under the tuition of Doctor John White-gift, then master of the college, afterwards the renowned Archbishop of Canterbury, a prelate of the first magnitude for sanctity, learning, patience, and humility; under whom he was observed to have been more than an ordinary proficient in the several arts and sciences. Whilst he was commorant in the university, about 16 years of age, (as his lordship hath been pleased to impart unto myself), he first fell into the dislike of the philosophy of Aristotle; not for the worthlessness of the author, to whom he would ever ascribe all high attributes, but for the unfruitfulness of the way; being a philosophy (as his lordship used to say) only strong for disputations and contentions, but barren of the production of works for the benefit of the life of man; in which mind he continued to his dying day.

After he had passed the circle of the liberal arts, his father thought fit to frame and mould him for the arts of state; and for that end sent him over into France with Sir Amyas Paulet, then employed Ambassador Lieger into France; by whom he was, after a while, held fit to be entrusted with some message or advertisement to the Queen; which, having performed with great approbation, he returned back into France again, with intention to continue for some years there. In his absence in France his father the Lord Keeper died, having collected (as I have heard of knowing persons) a considerable sum of money, which he had separated with intention to have made a competent purchase of land for the livelihood of this his youngest son (who was only unprovided for; and, though he was the youngest in years, yet he was not the lowest in his father's affection); but the said purchase being unaccomplished at his father's death, there came no greater share to him than his single part and portion of the money dividable amongst five brethren; by which means he lived in some straits and necessities in his younger years. For as for that pleasant site and manor of Gorhambury, he came not to it till many years after, by the death of his dearest brother, Mr. Anthony Bacon, a gentleman equal to him in height of wit, though inferior to him in the endowments of learning and knowledge; unto whom he was most nearly conjoined in affection, they two being the sole male issue of a second venter.

Being returned from travel, he applied himself to the study of the Common Law, which he took upon him to be his profession; in which he obtained to great excellency; though he made that (as himself said) but as an accessory, and not as his principal study. He wrote several tractates upon that subject: wherein, though some great masters of the law did out-go him in bulk and particularities of cases, yet, in the science of the grounds and mysteries of the law, he was exceeded by none. In this way he was, after a while, sworn of the Queen's Counsel Learned, Extraordinary; a grace (if I err not) scarce known before. He seated himself, for the commodity of his studies and practice, amongst the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, of which house he was a member; where he erected that elegant pile or structure commonly known by the name of *The Lord Bacon's Lodgings*, which he inhabited, by turns, the most part of his life (some few years only excepted), unto his dying day. In which house he carried himself with such sweetness, comity, and generosity, that he was much revered and loved by the Readers and gentlemen of the House.

Notwithstanding that he professed the law for his livelihood and subsistence, yet his heart and affection was more carried after the affairs and places of estate; for which, if the Majesty Royal then had been pleased, he was most fit. In his younger years he studied the

service and fortunes (as they call them) of that noble but unfortunate earl, the Earl of Essex; unto whom he was, in a sort, a private and free counsellor, and gave him safe and honourable advice; till, in the end, the Earl inclined too much to the violent and precipitate counsel of others, his adherents and followers, which was his fate and ruin.

His birth and other capacities qualified him, above others of his profession, to have ordinary accesses at court, and to come frequently into the Queen's eye, who would often grace him with private and free communication, not only about matters of his profession or business in law, but also about the arduous affairs of estate; from whom she received, from time to time, great satisfaction. Nevertheless, though she cheered him much with the bounty of her countenance, yet she never cheered him with the bounty of her hand; having never conferred upon him any ordinary place or means of honour or profit, save only one dry reversion of the Register's Office in the Star Chamber, worth about 1600*l. per annum*, for which he waited in expectation either fully or near 20 years; of which his lordship would say in Queen Elizabeth's time, *That it was like another man's ground buttalling upon his house, which might mend his prospect, but it did not fill his barn.* (Nevertheless, in the time of King James it fell unto him.) Which might be imputed, not so much to Her Majesty's averseness and disaffection towards him, as to the arts and policy of a great statesman then, who laboured by all industrious and secret means to suppress and keep him down; lest, if he had risen, he might have obscured his glory.

But though he stood long at a stay in the days of his mistress, Queen Elizabeth, yet, after the change and coming in of his new master, King James, he made a great progress; by whom he was much comforted in places of trust, honour, and revenue. I have seen a letter of his lordship's to King James, wherein he makes acknowledgment: *That he was that master to him, that had raised and advanced him nine times; thrice in dignity, and six times in office.* His offices (as I conceive) were: Counsel Learned Extraordinary to His Majesty, as he had been to Queen Elizabeth; King's Solicitor-General; His Majesty's Attorney-General; Counsellor of Estate, being yet but Attorney; Lord-Keeper of the Great Seal of England; lastly, Lord Chancellor; which two last places, though they be the same in authority and power, yet they differ in patent, height, and favour of the prince; since whose time none of his successors until this present honourable lord² did ever bear the title of Lord Chancellor. His dignities were first Knight, then Baron of Verulam; lastly, Viscount Saint Alban; besides other good gifts and bounties of the hand which His Majesty gave him, both out of the Broad Seal and out of the Alienation Office to the value in both of eighteen hundred pounds per annum; which, with his manor of Gorhambury, and other lands and possessions near thereunto adjoining, amounting to a third part more, he retained to his dying day.³

Towards his rising years, not before, he entered into a married estate, and took to wife Alice, one of the daughters and co-heirs of Benedict Barnham, Esquire, and Alderman of London; with whom he received a sufficiently ample and liberal portion in marriage. Children he had none; which, though they be the means to perpetuate our names after our deaths, yet he had other issues to perpetuate his name: the issues of his brain, in which he was ever happy and admired, as Jupiter was in the production of Pallas. Neither did the want of children detract from his good usage of his consort during the intermarriage, whom he prosecuted with much conjugal love and respect, with many rich gifts and endowments, besides a robe of honour which he invested her withal, which she wore unto her dying day, being twenty years and more after his death.

The last five years of his life, being withdrawn from civil affairs and from an active life, he employed wholly in contemplation and studies—a thing whereof his lordship would often speak during his active life, as if he affected to die in the shadow and not in the light; which also may be found in several passages of his works. In which time he composed the greatest part of his books and writings, both in English and Latin, which I will enumerate (as near as I can) in the just order wherein they were written: – *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh*; *Abcedarium Naturae*, or a *Metaphysical piece* which is lost; *Historia Ventorum*; *Historia Vitae & Mortis*; *Historia Densi & Rari*, not yet printed; *Historia Gravis & Levis*, which is also lost; *a Discourse of a War with Spain*; *a Dialogue touching an Holy War*; *the Fable of the New Atlantis*; *a Preface to a Digest of the Laws of England*; *the beginning of the History of the Reign of King Henry the Eighth*; *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, or the *Advancement of Learning*, put into Latin, with several enrichments and enlargements; *Counsels Civil and Moral*, or his book of *Essays*, likewise enriched and enlarged; *the Conversion of certain Psalms into English Verse*; the translation into Latin of the *History of King Henry the Seventh*, of the *Counsels Civil and Moral*, of the *Dialogue of the Holy War*, of the *Fable of the New Atlantis*, for the benefit of other nations; his revising of his book *De Sapientia Veterum*; *Inquisitio de Magnete*; *Topica Inquisitionis de Luce & Lumine*; both these not yet printed; lastly, *Sylva Sylvarum*, or *The Natural History*. These were the fruits and productions of his last five years. His lordship also designed, upon the motion and invitation of his late majesty, to have written the *Reign of King Henry the Eighth*; but that work perished in the designation merely, God not lending him life to proceed farther upon it than only in one morning's work, whereof there is extant an *ex ungue leonem*, already printed, in his lordship's *Miscellany Works*.

There is a commemoration due as well to his abilities and virtues as to the course of his life. Those abilities, which commonly go single in other men, though of prime and observable parts, were all conjoined and met in him. Those are, *sharpness of wit*, *memory*, *judgement*, and *elocution*. For the former three, his books do abundantly speak them; which, with what sufficiency he wrote, let the world judge; but with what celerity he wrote them, I can best testify. But for the fourth, his *elocution*, I will only set down what I heard Sir Walter Raleigh once speak of him by way of comparison (whose judgment may well be trusted): *That the Earl of Salisbury was an excellent speaker, but no good penman; that the Earl of Northampton (the Lord Henry Howard) was an excellent penman, but no good speaker; but that Sir Francis Bacon was eminent in both.*

I have been induced to think, that if there were a beam of knowledge derived from God upon any man in these modern times, it was upon him. For though he was a great reader of books, yet he had not his knowledge from books, but from some grounds and notions from within himself; which, notwithstanding, he vented with great caution and circumspection. His book of *Instauratio Magna* (which in his own account was the chiefest of his works) was no slight imagination of fancy of his brain, but a settled and concocted notion, the production of many years' labour and travel. I myself have seen at the least twelve copies of the *Instauration*, revised year by year one after another, and every year altered and amended in the frame thereof, till at last it came to that model in which it was committed to the press; as many living creatures do lick their young ones, till they bring them to their strength of limbs.

In the composing of his books he did rather drive at a masculine and clear expression than at any fineness or affectation of phrases, and would often ask if the meaning were expressed plainly enough, as being one that accounted words to be but subservient or ministerial to matter, and not the principal. And if his style were polite, it was because he could do no otherwise. Neither was he given to any light conceits, or descanting upon words, but did ever purposely and industriously avoid them; for he held such things to be but digressions or diversions from the scope intended, and to derogate from the weight and dignity of the style.

He was no plodder upon books, though he read much, and that with great judgment and rejection of impertinences incident to many authors; for he would ever interlace a moderate relaxation of his mind with his studies, as walking, or taking the air abroad in his coach, or some other befitting recreation; and yet he would lose no time, inasmuch as upon his first and immediate return he would fall to reading again, and so suffer no moment of time to slip from him without some present improvement.

His meals were refectations of the ear as well as of the stomach, like the *Noctes Atticae*, or *Convivia Deipno-Sophistarum*, wherein a man might be refreshed in his mind and understanding no less than in his body. And I have known some, of no mean parts, that have professed to make use of their note-books when they have risen from his table. In which conversations, and otherwise, he was no dashing man, as some men are, but ever a countenancer and fosterer of another man's parts. Neither was he one that would appropriate the speech wholly to himself, or delight to out-vie others, but leave a liberty to the co-assessors to take their turns. Wherein he would draw a man on and allure him to speak upon such a subject as wherein he was peculiarly skilful and would delight to speak. And for himself, he contemned no man's observations, but would light his torch at every man's candle.

His opinions and assertions were for the most part binding, and not contradicted by any; rather like oracles than discourses; which may be imputed either to the well weighing of his sentence by the scales of truth and reason, or else to the reverence and estimation wherein he was commonly had, that no man would contest with him; so that there was no argumentation, or *pro* and *con* (as they term it), at his table: or, if there chanced to be any, it was carried with much submission and moderation.

I have often observed, and so have other men of great account, that if he had occasion to repeat another man's words after him, he had an use and faculty to dress them in better vestments and apparel than they had before; so that the author should find his own speech much amended, and yet the substance of it still retained, as if it had been natural to him to use good forms; as Ovid spake of his faculty of versifying: "Et quod tentabam scribere, versus erat."

When his office called him, as he was of the King's Counsel Learned, to charge any offenders, either in criminals or capitals, he was never of an insulting and domineering nature over them, but always tender-hearted, and carrying himself decently towards the parties (though it was his duty to charge them home); but yet as one that looked upon the *example* with the eye of severity, but upon the *person* with the eye of pity and compassion. And in civil business, as he was Counsellor of Estate, he had the best way of advising, not engaging his master in any precipitate or grievous courses, but in moderate and fair

proceedings: the king whom he served giving him this testimony, *That he ever dealt in business, sauvibus modis; which was the way that was most according to his own heart.*

Neither was he, in his time, less gracious with the subject than with his sovereign. He was ever acceptable to the House of Commons when he was a member thereof. Being the King's attorney, and chosen to a place in Parliament, he was allowed, and dispensed with, to sit in the House, which was not permitted to other attorneys.

And as he was a good servant to his master, being never, in 19 years' service (as himself averred), rebuked by the King for anything relating to His Majesty, so he was a good master to his servants, and rewarded their long attendance with good places freely when they fell into his power; which was the cause that so many young gentlemen of blood and quality sought to list themselves in his retinue. And if he were abused by any of them in their places, it was only the error of the goodness of his nature, but the badges of their indiscretions and intemperances.

This lord was religious: for though the world be apt to suspect and prejudge great wits and politics to have somewhat of the atheist, yet he was conversant with God, as appeareth by several passages throughout the whole current of his writings. Otherwise he should have crossed his own principles, which were, *That a little philosophy maketh men apt to forget God, as attributing too much to second causes; but depth of philosophy bringeth a man back to God again.* Now I am sure there is no man that will deny him, or account otherwise of him, but to have been a deep philosopher. And not only so; but he was able to render a reason of the hope which was in him, which that writing of his of the *Confession of the Faith* doth abundantly testify. He repaired frequently, when his health would permit him, to the service of the Church, to hear sermons, to the administration of the sacrament of the blessed body and blood of Christ, and died in the true Faith, established in the Church of England.

This is most true: he was free from malice, which (as he said himself) *he never bred nor fed.* He was no revenger of injuries; which if he had minded, he had both opportunity and place high enough to have done it. He was no heaver of men out of their places, as delighting in their ruin and undoing. He was no defamer of any man to his prince. One day, when a great statesman was newly dead, that had not been his friend, the King asked him, *What he thought of that lord which was gone?* he answered, *That he would never have made His Majesty's estate better, but he was sure he would have kept it from being worse;* which was the worst he would say of him: which I reckon not among his moral, but his Christian virtues.

His fame is greater and sounds louder in foreign parts abroad, than at home in his own nation; thereby verifying that divine sentence, *A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.* Concerning which I will give you a taste only, out of a letter written from Italy (the storehouse of refined wits) to the late Earl of Devonshire, then the Lord Candish: *I will expect the new Essays of my Lord Chancellor Bacon, as also his History, with a great deal of desire, and whatsoever else he shall compose: but in particular of his History I promise myself a thing perfect and singular, especially in Henry the Seventh, where he may exercise the talent of his divine understanding. This lord is more and more known, and his books here more and more delighted in; and those men, that have more than ordinary knowledge in human affairs, esteem him one of the most capable spirits of this age;*

and he is truly such. Now his fame doth not decrease with days since, but rather increase. Divers of his works have been anciently and yet lately translated into other tongues, both learned and modern, by foreign pens. Several persons of quality, during his lordship's life, crossed the seas on purpose to gain an opportunity of seeing him and discoursing with him; whereof one carried his lordship's picture, from head to foot, over with him into France, as a thing which he foresaw would be much desired there, that so they might enjoy the image of his person as well as the images of his brain, his books. Amongst the rest, Marquis Fiat, a French nobleman, who came ambassador into England, in the beginning, of Queen Mary, wife to King Charles, was taken with an extraordinary desire of seeing him; for which he made way by a friend; and when he came to him, being then through weakness confined to his bed, the Marquis saluted him with this high expression, *That his lordship had been ever to him like the angels, of whom he had often heard, and read much of them in books, but he never saw them.* After which they contracted an intimate acquaintance, and the Marquis did so much revere him that, besides his frequent visits, they wrote letters one to the other under the titles and appellations of father and son. As for his many salutations by letters from foreign worthies devoted to learning, I forbear to mention them, because that is a thing common to other men of learning or note, together with him.

But yet, in this matter of his fame, I speak in the comparative only, and not in the exclusive. For his reputation is great in his own nation also, especially amongst those that are of a more acute and sharper judgment; which I will exemplify but with two testimonies and no more. The former, when his *History of King Henry the Seventh* was to come forth, it was delivered to the old Lord Brook, to be perused by him; who, when he had dispatched it, returned it to the author with this eulogy: *Commend me to my lord, and bid him take care to get good paper and ink, for the work is incomparable.* The other shall be that of Doctor Samuel Collins, the late provost of King's College in Cambridge, a man of no vulgar wit, who affirmed unto me, *That when he had read the book of the Advancement of Learning, he found himself in a case to begin his studies anew, and that he had lost all the time of his studying before.*

It hath been desired, that something should be signified touching his diet, and the regiment of his health, of which, in regard of his universal insight into nature, he may perhaps be to some an example. For his diet, it was rather a plentiful and liberal diet, as his stomach would bear it, than a restrained; which he also commended in his book of the *History of Life and Death*. In his younger years he was much given to the finer and lighter sort of meats, as of fowls and such like; but afterward, when he grew more judicious, he preferred the stronger meats, such as the shambles afforded, as those meats which bred the more firm and substantial juices of the body, and less dissipable; upon which he would often make his meal, though he had other meats upon the table. You may be sure he would not neglect that himself, which he so much extolled in his writings, and that was the use of nitre; whereof he took in the quantity of about three grains in thin warm broth every morning, for thirty years together next before his death. And for physic, he did indeed live physically, but not miserably; for he took only a maceration of rhubarb, infused into a draught of white wine and beer mingled together for the space of half an hour, once in six or seven days, immediately before his meal (whether dinner or supper), that it might dry the body less; which (as he said) did carry away frequently the grosser humours of the body, and not diminish or carry away any of the spirits, as sweating doth. And this was no grievous thing to take. As for other physic, in an ordinary way (whatsoever hath been vulgarly spoken) he

took not. His receipt for the gout, which did constantly ease him of his pain within two hours, is already set down in the end of the *Natural History*.

It may seem the moon had some principal place in the figure of his nativity: for the moon was never in her passion, or eclipsed, but he was surprised with a sudden fit of fainting; and that, though he observed not nor took any previous knowledge of the eclipse thereof; and as soon as the eclipse ceased, he was restored to his former strength again.

He died on the 9th day of April in the year 1626, in the early morning of the day then celebrated for our Saviour's resurrection, in the 66th year of his age, at the Earl of Arundel's house in Highgate, near London, to which place he casually repaired about a week before; God so ordaining that he should die there of a gentle fever, accidentally accompanied with a great cold, whereby the defluxion of rheum fell so plentifully upon his breast that he died by suffocation; and was buried in St. Michael's Church at St. Albans, being the place designed for his burial by his last will and testament, both because the body of his mother was interred there and because it was the only church then remaining within the precincts of old Verulam: where he hath a monument erected for him of white marble (by the care and gratitude of Sir Thomas Meautys, knight, formerly his lordship's secretary, afterwards Clerk of the King's Honourable Privy Council, under two kings); representing his full portraiture in the posture of studying, with an inscription composed by that accomplished gentleman and rare wit, Sir Henry Wotton.

But howsoever his body was mortal, yet no doubt his memory and works will live, and will in all probability last as long as the world lasteth. In order to which I have endeavoured (after my poor ability) to do this honour to his lordship, by way of conducing to the same.



Endnotes

¹ This sentence was not included in the *Life* that was first printed in *Resuscitatio*, 1657.

² “until this present honourable lord” was not included in the *Life* that was first printed in *Resuscitatio*, 1657.

³ “to the value in both of eighteen hundred pounds per annum; which, with his manor of Gorhambury, and other lands and possessions near thereunto adjoining, amounting to a third part more, he retained to his dying day” was not included in the *Life* that was first printed in *Resuscitatio*, 1657.