



Francis Bacon: The Temper of a Man

Catherine Drinker Bowen

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The portrait Bowen paints of this controversial man, Francis Bacon (1561-1626), balances the outward life and actions of Bacon with the seemingly contradictory aspects of his refined philosophical reflections. As Lord Chancellor of England, Bacon was impeached by Parliament for taking bribes in office, convicted, and banished from London and the law courts. In a prayer Bacon composed during the interval following his punishment, he reveals that the dichotomy of his existence was no more deeply felt than by himself, and he readily admits that his obligations to society were not as suited to his nature as the study of philosophy, science, and law. Modern scholars hold Bacon's philosophical works, *Novum Organum*, *Advancement of Learning*, and *The New Atlantis*, as his greatest achievements. Bowen's story reveals a man whose genius it was not to immerse himself in the rigor of scientific experimentation, but to realize what questions science should ask, and thereby reach beyond the status quo and appeal to the wider imagination of his generation. In his writings, Bacon challenged established social and religious orders, raised questions about the mind/body relation and the role of dreams, and foresaw the development of the modern research university. It is Bacon's legacy to have gone beyond his age and, out of pure intuition, anticipate the concerns of future generations.

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