

Speech to Sir John Denham when he was called to be one of the Barons of the Exchequer (1617)

Francis Bacon

Transcript

British Library, Sloane MS 3522, ff. 25r–27r

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S[i]r Fraunces Bacon Lord keep[er] of the great Seale of England his Speach to S[i]r Iohn Denham knight when he receaued his pattent for his Succession in Mr Baron Althams place 1617./.

S[i]r Iohn Denham the kinge of his grace and fauor hath made choice of you to be one of the Barons of the Exchequor to succede to one of the grauest, and most reuerend Iudges of this kingdome (For soe I hold Baron Altham was) The Kinge takes you not upon credit but upon proof of yo[u]r former seruice, and that in both theis kindes wherein you are now to serue, for as you haue shewed yo[u]rselfe a good Iudge betweene partie, and partie, soe you haue shewed yo[u]r self a good Administer of the kinges Reuenue both when you were cheef Baron, and sithence as Councillor of Estate there in Ireland, where the Councill (as you knowe) doth in great parte Mannage the kings Reuenue./.

And to both partes I will applie some Admonition not vulgar, or discussiue but apt for the times, and in few wordes for they are the best remembred./.

.1. First therefore

First therefore aboue all you are to [*Left margin:=*] mainteine the kinges Prerogatiue, and to sett downe with yo[u]r self that the kinges prerogatiue, and the lawe are not two things but the kinges prerogatiue is lawe, and the principall parte of the lawe, the first [*Left margin:x*] borne, or pars Euita of the lawe, and therefore in Conseruinge, and mainteininge that you conserue, and mainteine the Lawe, There is not in the bodie of man one Lawe of the head, and another of the bodie, but all is one entire lawe./.

[*Left margin:.2.*] The next point that I would Aduise you is that you acquaint yo[u]r selfe diligentlie with the Reuenue, and antient Reccords, and Presidentes of this Courte, when the famous Case of the Copper mynes was argued in this Courte, and Iudged for the kinge, it was not upon the fyne reasons of witt, that the kings Prerogatiue drewe it to ^{it} the cheef (in quaque specie) The Lyons the cheef of Beasts; the Eagles, the cheef of Birds, the whale the chief of Fishes, and soe the cheef of Myneralls,

For theis

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For theis are but Dalliances of lawe, and Ornamentes, but it was the graue reccordes, and [*Right margin:=*] Presidentes that grounded the Iudgement of the Cause, And therefore I would haue you both guide, and Arme yo[u]rself with them against theis vapors, and Fumes of lawe which are Extracted out of mens Inuentions, and Conceiptes./.

The third Aduise I will giue you hath a large extent It is that you doe yo[u]r endeauo[u]r in yo[u]r place soe to mannage the kinges Iustice, and Reuenue as the kinge may haue most

proffitt, and the subiect least vexac[i]on, for when there is much vexac[i]on to the subiect, and little benefitt to the kinge then the Exchequo[u]r is sick, and when there is much benefitt to the kinge with lesse trouble, and vexac[i]on to the subiect then the Exchequo[u]r is sounde./.

As for Example if there shalbe much rakinge for the kinges ould debtes, and the more fresh, and late debtes, shalbe either more negligentlie called upon, or ouer easilie discharged, or ouer Indulgentlie Installed, or If the number of Informac[i]ons be

manie

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manie, And the kinges parte for Fynes for Composic[i]ons, a Tryfle; or If there much a doe to gett the kinge more landes upon Concealementes, and that w[hi]ch he hath allreadie bee not well knowne, and suruayed, nor the woodes preserued (I could putt you many other Cases.) This falles within that which I sayed, was the disease of the Exchequo[u]r./. And this is that w[hi]ch makes euery man readie with their vndertakings, and their Proiectes to disturbe the antient Frame of the Exchequo[u]r (then the w[hi]ch I am perswaded there is not a better) Sure I am that besides your owne Associates the Barons, you serue with two superio[u]r great officers then the w[hi]ch neuer any were, that haue had more hono[ur]able and true endes, and desires to serue the kinge and right the subiect./.

There resteth that I deliuer you yo[u]r Pattent./.

This beinge the burthen of the songe that much goeth out of the subiectes Pursse, and little cometh to the kinges, therefore giue

them not

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them not that Aduantage soe to saye./.

Other manuscript witnesses

- Alnwick Castle, MS 526, ff. 1r–2v
- British Library, Additional MS 22591, ff. 258v–259r
- British Library, Harley MS 39, ff. 279r–280r
- Beinecke Library, Osborn Shelves Gordounstoun Box 5, ff. 58r–60r
- Beinecke Library, Osborn fb59
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.206, ff. 19r–20v
- Northamptonshire Record Office, FH83, ff. 4r–5v
- Senate House, University of London, MS 20, ff. 189v–191v
- Senate House, University of London, MS 300, ff. 65x–79x
- The National Archives, SP 14/92, /6 [ff.62r–v]
- Woburn Abbey, MS 192, pp137–140