

Letter to Bacon (19 February 1607)

Sir Thomas Bodley

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 22591, ff. 271v–273r

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Sir Thomas Bodleys letter to Sir Francis Bacon about his *cogitate et uisa* wherein he declareth his opynion freelye touching the same

Sir assoone as the Tearme was ended supposing yo[u]r leasure, to be more then before, I was coming to thanke you 2: or 3: tymes rather choosing to doe it by words then by letter: but I was still disapointed or my purpose as I am at this p[re]sent vppo[n] an vrgent occasion, w[hi]ch doth lye mee fast to Fulham, and hath made mee now det[er]mine to imparte my mynde in writting, I thinke you know that I haue read yo[u]r *cogitata et uisa*, w[hi]ch I p[ro]test I haue done w[i]th great desire reputing it A Token of yo[u]r Singuler Love that you ioyned mee w[i]th thos yo[u]r cheifest Freindes to whom you would Comend yo[u]r first p[er]suall of yo[u]r draught: For w[hi]ch I praye you give mee leave to saye but this vnto you: First that if the depth of my affection to yo[u]r p[er]son and spiritt, to yo[u]r Workes and wordes, & to all yo[u]r abillities were as highly to be valued as yo[u]r Affections is to mee, it might walke w[i]th yo[u]rs Arme in Arme, and claime yo[u]r Love by lust deserte, but there can be noe comparison, where our States are soe vneven, and our meanes to demonsrate o[u]r Affectio[n]s soe different, in soe much as for my owne, I must leave it to be prised in the Nature that it is, and you shall evermore finde it most adicted to yo[u]r worthe:/ As touching the Subject of yo[u]r Booke, you haue sett A Foote soe manye rare and noble Speculat[i]ons, as I cannot choose But wonder (and I shall wonder at it ever) that yo[u]r expence of tyme co[n]sidered in the publique p[ro]fession, w[hi]ch hath in a manner noe acquainta[n]ce w[i]th anye Schollershippe or learning, you should haue culled out the quitessence, and sucked vpp the Sap of the cheifest kinde of learning For howsoever in some pointes, you doe varie alltogether fro[m][tha]t, w[hi]ch_ is, and hath bene ever the received doctrine of o[u]r Schooles, and was allways by the wisest as still hath beene deemed of all Nations and Ages adiudged the truest, yet it is apparant that in thus verye pointes, and in all yo[u]r proposells and plotts in that booke, you shewe yo[u]rselfe A Mast[er] Workeman, For my selfe I must confesse, and I speake it ingenue, that for the matter of learning I am not worthyie to be reckoned in the nu[m]ber of Smatterers: and yet because it maye seeme, that being willing to Comunicate yo[u]r Treates w[i]th yo[u]r Freinds you are likewise willing to listen to whatsoever I or others ca[n] except against it, I must deliver vnto you for my p[ri]vate opynion, that I am one of that Crew [tha]t saye there is and will possesse a farr greater hold fast of Certaintie in yo[u]r Sciences, then you by yo[u]r discouse will seeme to acknowledgye/ For, where as First you doe abiect the ill successe and erro[u]rs in Practitioners in Phisicke, you know aswell the doe p[ro]ceed of the Patience vnrulynes, For not one of A hundred doth obey his Phisic[i]on in observing his Cau[n]cells, or by misinformat[i]on of their owne indisposic[i]on (for few are able in that kinde to explicate them Selves) or by reason their diseases are by nature vncureable, w[hi]ch is incident you knowe to manye Sorts of Maladyes, or for some other hidd Cause w[hi]ch cannot be discovered by Course of Coniecture, how be it I am full of this beleefe, that as Phisicke

is ministred now a dayes by Physitians, it is much to be ascribed to their negligence or ignora[n]ce { }

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or other touche of imp[er]fection, that they speed noe better in their practise, For few are found of that p[ro]fession soe well instructed in their Art, as they might be the p[re]cepts w[hi]ch y[ou]r Art doth affoord, w[hi]ch thoughe it be defective in regard of such p[er]feccion, yet for certaine it doth flourish w[i]th admirable remedies, such as tract of Tyme hath {-} taught by experientall events, and are the open highe waye to that principall knowledge [tha]t you reco[m]mend: As for Alchimy & Magicke some conclutions they haue, that are worthye the p[re]serving, but all their Skill is soe accompanied w[i]th Subtilties and guiles as both the Crafts and Crafte Masters are not onely dispised, but named with derision, wherevpon to make good yo[u]r principall asserc[i]on, me thinks you should haue drawne yo[u]r example, from that w[hi]ch is taught the Liberall Sciences, not by picking out Cases that happen very seldo[m]e and maye by all Confession, be subject to reproofe, but by Co[n]trolling the Generalls and Grounds and eminent positions & aphorismes w[hi]ch the greatest Artists and Philosophers haue from tyme to Tyme defended; for it goeth for currant amongst all men of learning, that those kindes of Arts, w[hi]ch Clarkes in tymes past did terme *quadravials*, Confirme their p[re]positions, by infallible demonstrat[i]ons; And likewise in the tryvials, such lessons, and direcc[i]ons are delivered vnto vs, as will effect verye neere, as asmuch all together, as every falculty doth p[ro]mise, Nowe in case we should concure as you advise, w[hi]ch is to renounce o[u]r Co[m]mo Notions, and Cancell all our Theomes axioms, rules and Tenents, and soe to come babes *Ad regnu[m] naturae*, as we are wild by Scriptures to come *Ad regnu[m] caeloru[m]*, there is nothing more certaine in my vnderstanding, then that it would instantlye bringe vs to barbarisme, and after manye thousand yearees, leave vs more vnprovided of Theoricall furniture then wee are at this p[re]sent; For that were indeed to become verye Babes, or Tabula rasa when wee shall leave noe impression of anye former principles, but be driven to begin the world againe, and to travell by tryalls of Action and service sence (w[hi]ch are yo[u]r p[ro]ffes by p[ar]ticulers) what to place in *intellectum*, for our gen[er]all Conceptions it being a maxime of all mens app[ro]ving in *intellectui nihil else quod non prius fuit in seunsu*, And soe in appearance it would befall vs, that till Platoes yeere become about our insight in learning, would be of lesse reckoning, then nowe it is accounted, as for [tha]t w[hi]ch you inculcate of A knowledg more excellent, then nowe is among vs, w[hi]ch experience might produce, [i]f wee would {-} but assaye to extract it out of Nature by particuler app[ro]bac[i]ons, it is noe more vpo[n] the matter, but to incite vs vnto that, w[hi]ch w[i]thout instigac[i]on, by A Naturall instinct men will practise of themselves, for it cannot in reason be otherwise thought, but that there are infinite numbers in all p[ar]ts of the world, for wee maye not in this Case confine o[u]r Cogitac[i]ons w[i]thin [th]e bounds of Europe, w[hi]ch imbrace the Course w[hi]ch you purpose, w[i]th all the deli gence and Care that anye Abillitye can p[er]forme: for every man is borne w[i]th an Appetite of knowledge, wherew[i]th they cannot be so: glutted, but still, as in dropsyes, they thirst after more: but yet when they should harken to anye such p[er]swasion, as wholly to abolish those setled opynions and generall Theories, to w[hi]ch they attained by their owne and their Au[n]cestors former experience, I sed nothinge yett alleaged to induce mee to thinke it: Moreover I maye speake it, as I should Suppose w[i]th

good p[ro]babillitie, that If I should make A mentall Survey what is like to be effected all the world ou[er] thise five or six inventions w[hi]ch you haue selected and ymagine to be but of moderne Standing would make but A slender shewe amongst soe

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manye hundreds of all kindes of Natures w[hi]ch are daiely brought to light, by the enforcem[en]t of witt, or Casuall event: & maye be co[m]pared or p[ar]tlye p[re]ferred, aboue thos w[hi]ch you haue named: but were it soe here, [tha]t all were admitted, [tha]t you can require for [th]e augmentac[i]on of our knowledge, & that all o[u]r theorem & gen[r]all positions were vtterlie extinguished, w[i]th a new substituc[i]on of oth[e]rs in their places, w[ha]t hope maye we haue of any benefit of learning by this alterac[i]on, assuredlye assoone as the new are brought *ad ax{---* by the Inventors, & th[ei]r followers, by an intercha[n]gable cou[r]se of natuall thinges, they will fall by degrees to be buried in oblivion, & soe in continuance to p[er]ish outright & [tha]t p[er]chau[n]ce vpo[n][th]e like to yo[u]r p[re]sent p[re]tences, by p[ro]posall of some means to advance all o[u]r knowledge found to an higher pitch of p[er]fectnes Forr still the same defects [tha]t antiquitye found will reside in Mankinde: And therefore oth[e]r issues of [the]ir Actions, devices, and Studies, are not to be expected, then is app[ar]ant by records were in former tymes observed, I reme[m]ber heere a note w[i]th w[hi]ch Paterculus made of the incomp[ar]able witts of [th]e Gretians and Romans in their flourishing Estate, [tha]t there might be this reason of their notable downefall in [the]ir Issue that came after, because by Nature *quod su[m]mo studio petatum est ascendit in Summum {difficisq[ue]} in perfecto mora est*, in so much that men p[er]ceaving that they could not goe further, being come to the toppe, they turned backe againe of their owne accord, forsakinge those Studdyes, that are most in request, & betaking themselves to newe endeavours as if the thing that they sought had bene by p[re]ve[n]tio[n] foresprised by oth[e]rs: so it faced in p[ar]ticuler w[i]th the eloquence of that age, that when their Successours founde, that hardlye the could equall, by noe meanes excell their p[re]decessors, they bega[n] to neglect the Study thereof, & both to write & speake, for many too: yeares in a rusticall man[er], till this latter revoluc[i]on brought [th]e wheele about againe by inflaming galla[n]t spirits, to giue the onsett afresh w[i]th streying and str[i]ving to clime vnto [tha]t top & hight of p[er]fection not in that guifte alone, but in everye other skill, in anye p[ar]te of learning, For I do not hold it an erroinous concept, to thinke of every Science, that as now they are p[ro]fessed, For they haue beene, in all p[re]cedent, Ages before, thoughe not alike in all places, nor at all tymes alike, in one and the same: but according to the Changeings & turnings of tymes, w[i]th A more exact and plaine, w[i]th a more rude and obscure kinde of teaching: and of the questio[n] should be asked, what p[ar]te I haue of it, I haue the doctringe of Aristotle, and of the deepest learned Clarkes, of whom will haue anye meanes to take anye notice, [tha]t as there is of other thinges, Soe there is of Sciences, *ortus et interitus*, w[hi]ch is allsoe the meaning, if I should expound it, of *nihil novuum subsole*, and is as well to be applyed, *ad facta as ad dicta, ut nihil neque dictum neque factum, quod non et dictum et factum prius*, I haue further for my warrent [tha]t famous co[m]plaint of Salomon to his sonne against [th]e Infinite making of Bookes in his tyme, of w[hi]ch, in all congruitie it must neede be vnderstood, [tha]t a greate p[ar]te were observac[i]ons and Instructions in all kind of literature, and of thos, there is not nowe soe much as one pettye pamphlett (onlye some p[ar]cells of the Bible excepted remayning to posteritie) As then there was not in like

manner anye footing to be found, of Millions of Authors [tha]t were long before Solomon: And yet wee must give creditt to that w[hi]ch he affirmed, [tha]t w[ha]t soever was then or had bene before, it could never be trulye p[ro]nou[n]ced of it, Behold this is new: where vpon I must for finall Conclusion inferre, Seeing all the endeaver as, Studdye and knowledge of Mandkinde in w[hi]ch soever Art, or Science, haue ever bine the same, as they are at this p[re]sent, though full of mucabillities accordinge to the changes and accidentall occasions of ages, and Cou[n]tryes, & Clarkes dispositio[n] both in their devices, and in their practised of their knowledge, if now we should accord in opinion w[i]th you, First to co[n]demne o[u]r p[re]sent knowledge of doubts and incertitude (w[hi]ch you, co[n]ferme but by averm[en]t, w[i]thout other force of Argum[en]t And then to disclaime all our Axiomes, and Maximes, and gen[er]all acsertio[n]s, that are left by tradicio[n], forom o[u]r Elders to vs, w[hi]ch (for soe it is to be inte[n]ded) haue passed all p[ro]bations, of the sharpest witts that ever were, and lastlye to devise (being become nowe againe as it, were Abecedary by [th]e frequent spel ling of p[ar]ticulers, to come to the notice of the true generalls, & soe afresh to create new priciples of Sciences, the End of all would be, that when wee shall bee ^{dis}possessed of the learning w[hi]ch wee haue all our Consequent travell, will but helpe as in A circle to Conduct vs to the place fro[m] whence

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wee sett forward and bringe vs to [th]e happines to be restored in Integru[m] w[hi]ch will require as many ages haue marched before vs to be p[er]fectly atcheived. And this I writt w[i]th noe dislike of increasing o[u]r knowledge w[i]th new found devices, (w[hi]ch is vndoubtedly A practise of highe Comendac[i]on, in regard of [th]e benefitt they will yeeld for the p[re]sent, [tha]t [th]e world hath eu[er] bene and will assuredly continue very full of such devises whose industery [tha]t way hath bine verye obstinate, and{-}eminent, & hath p[ro]duced strang effects, aboue the reach & the hope of mens como[n] Capacities: And yet our Notions and Theormes hath allways kepte in grace both with them, & w[i]th the rarest that ever were named among the learned, by this you see to w[ha]t boldnes I am brought, by yo[u]rkindnes, [tha]t (if I seeme to be too sawcye in this Co[n]tradiction, it is the opynion [tha]t I hold of yo[u]r Noble disposic[i]on, & of [th]e freedome in these cases, that you will afford yo[u]r speciall Freind, [tha]t hath enduced me to doe it, And allthoughe I my selfe, like A Cario[u]rs horse, cannot bauke the beaten way in w[hi]ch I haue bene trayned, yet such is my Censure of yo[u]r Cogitata, [tha]t I must tell you, to be plaine, you haue verye much wronged yo[u]r selfe, and [th]e world to smother such A Treatise soe long in yo[u]r Coffe, for though, I stand well assured (for the teno[u]r and subiect of yo[u]r maine discourse) you are not able to empanell A Substantiall Iurye, in anye vniu[er]sitie, that will giue you A Verdict to acquite you of erro[u]r, yet it cannot be gainesaid, that all your treatise ever doth abound w[i]th chase Conceipts of the p[re]sent State of learning, and w[i]th soe worthy Contemplations of the meanes to p[ro]cure it, as may perswade w[i]th anye Student, to looke more narrowlye to his busines, not only by aspiring to the greatest p[er]fection of that w[hi]ch is now A dayes devulged in the Sciences, both by diving yet deeper, as it were into the Bowels and Secretts of Nature, and by enforcing of the powers of this Iudgment & witt, to leave of St Paule, *Consectari meliora dona*, w[hi]ch Course would to God (to whisper soe much in yo[u]r Eare) you had followed at [th]e first, whe[n] you fell into [th]e Studye of Such A Studye, as was not worthy such a stude[n]t

Neverthelesse, being soe as it is, [tha]t you are there in set[t]led, & yo[u]r cou[n]try Soundlye Served, I cannot but wish w[i]th all my harte, as I doe verye often, that you maye gaine A fitt reward to the full of yo[u]r deserts, w[hi]ch I hope will come w[i]th leapes of happines and hono[u]r, Fro[m] Fulham 19: Feb:

yo[u]rs to be vsed & comaunded T: B:

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[*Right margin:postcripe*] Sir one kinde of Boldnes doth drawe on another, in soe much, as me thinkes I should offend, not to signifie that before the transcripte of yo[u]r booke be fitted for [th]e presse, it will be requisite for you to cast A Censo[u]rs Eye vpo[n] yo[u]r Stile, & eloquution w[hi]ch in the Framinge of some periods, and in divers wordes and phrases will hardlye goe for currant, if the Coppye brought to mee be iust the same, [tha]t you would publish Sir Cloudes of Miseryes darkens soe much such as are not in [th]e Shurchinge of p[ro]speritie, as they p[re]vayle w[i]th many good Natures, furnished w[i]th Comendable Iudgm[en]t, to give wrong Censures of them: I am one of thos, that cannot iustifie myselve soe farre, as not to be lyable to reproofe yet I am of that ranke [tha]t cannot stoope to the stroake of every malicious tongue. But in you I haue found such abundance of Favo[u]r, whoe never knewe mee but in my tyde of ebb, [tha]t I must needs leave this w[i]th you, as A Record, to wittnes my Shame and reproach, if I be in grat[e]full for it, Soe farr as either abillitie of Body or goods of Fortune maye extend to performe, And herevto hee settis his land, [tha]t resolves to live and dye/

yo[u]r faithfull freinde to serue you

Thomas Bodley

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Additional MS 4108, ff. 55r–58r
- British Library, Additional MS 44848, ff. 101r–104v
- British Library, Additional MS 78186, ff. 35r–36v
- British Library, Harley MS 852, ff. 24r–28r
- British Library, Additional MS 18648, ff. 9r–12v
- British Library, Hargrave MS 225, ff. 43v–55r
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 82, ff. 147r–152v
- Bodleian Library, MS Wood F.23, ff. 173r–174v
- Huntington Library, HM 36836, ff. 43–59
- Somerset Archives, DD\AH/51/1, item 4

Seventeenth-century print exemplars

- *Scrinia Sacra* (1654) [Wing S2110]