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# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

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BY

R. W. CHURCH,

DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S,  
HONORARY FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE

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## P R E F A C E.

IN preparing this sketch it is needless to say how deeply I am indebted to Mr. Spedding and Mr. Ellis, the last editors of Bacon's writings, the very able and painstaking commentators, the one on Bacon's life, the other on his philosophy. It is impossible to overstate the affectionate care and high intelligence and honesty with which Mr. Spedding has brought together and arranged the materials for an estimate of Bacon's character. In the result, in spite of the force and ingenuity of much of his pleading, I find myself most reluctantly obliged to differ from him; it seems to me to be a case where the French saying, cited by Bacon, in one of his commonplace books, holds good—"*Par trop se débattre, la vérité se perd.*"<sup>1</sup> But this does not diminish the debt of gratitude which all who are interested about Bacon must owe to Mr. Spedding. I wish also to acknowledge the assistance which I have received from Mr. Gardiner's *History of England* and Mr. Fowler's edition of the *Novum Organum*: and not least from M. de Rémusat's work on Bacon, which seems to me the most complete and the most just estimate

<sup>1</sup> *Promus*: edited by Mrs. H. Pott, p. 475.

both of Bacon's character and work, which has yet appeared ; though even in this clear and dispassionate survey we are reminded by some misconceptions, strange in M. de Rémusat, how what one nation takes for granted is incomprehensible to its neighbour, and what a gap there is still, even in matters of philosophy and literature, between the whole Continent and ourselves :—

“ Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.”