

M. A. Prev(english) sem-2

Of Truth by Francis Bacon

In this essay, Bacon has presented the objective truth in various manifestations. Similarly, Bacon shares with us the subjective truth, operative in social life. "OF TRUTH" is Bacon's masterpiece that shows his keen observation of human beings with special regard to truth. In the beginning of the essay, Bacon rightly observes that generally people do not care for truth as Pilate, the governor of the Roman Empire, while conducting the trial of Jesus Christ, cares little for truth:

"What is truth? Said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer."

Advancing his essay, Bacon explores the reasons why the people do not like truth. First, truth is acquired through hard work and man is ever reluctant to work hard. Secondly, truth curtails man's freedom. More than that the real reason of man's disliking to truth is that man is attached to lies which Bacon says "a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself." Man loves falsehood because, Bacon says that truth is as if the bright light of the day and would show what men, in actual, are. They look attractive and colourful in the dim light of lies. He further adds,

"A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure."

It is a fact that man prefers to cherish illusions, which make his life more interesting. With a profound observation of man's psychology, Bacon states that if deprived of false pride and vanities, the human mind would contract like a deflated balloon and these human beings would become poor, sad and ill. However, poetic untruth is not gone unnoticed by Bacon's piercing intellect. He says though poetic untruth is a wine of the Devil in priest's eyes, yet it is not as harmful as the other lies are. Bacon being a literary artist illustrates this concept with an apt imagery that the poetic untruth is but the shadow of a lie. The enquiry of truth, knowledge of truth and belief of truth are compared with the enjoyment of love. Such a comparison lends the literary charm to this essay. Bacon further says in that the last act of creation was to create rational faculty, which helps in finding truth, is the finished product of God's blessing as he says:

"... The last was the light of reason...is the illumination of his spirit."

Bacon's moral idealism is obvious when he advancing his argument in favour of truth asserts that the earth can be made paradise only with the help of truth. Man

should ever stick to truth in every matter, do the act of charity and have faith in every matter, do the act of charity and have faith in God. Bacon's strong belief in truth and Divinity is stated thus:

“Certainly, it is heaven upon earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.”

From the objective truth, Bacon passes judgment, to the subjective truth, which he calls “the truth of civil business”. It is the compelling quality of truth, Bacon observes, that the persons who do not practice truth, acknowledge it. Bacon's idealistic moral attitude is obvious in these lines when he says: “..... that clear and round dealing is the honour of man's nature; and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work better, but it embaseth it.”

Bacon further asserts that the liars are like a snake that goes basely upon the belly and not upon the feet. Imagery comprising comparison is apt and convincing. Moreover, Bacon refers to Montaigne who is of the view that “a lie faces God and shrinks from man”. Bacon adds that falsehood is the height of wickedness and as such will invite the Judgment of God upon all human beings on Doom's day. Therefore, Bacon concludes his essay with didacticism with a tinge of Christian morality.

In the essay, “OF TRUTH”, there is no digression. All the arguments in the essay pertain to the single main idea, truth. Bacon's wide learning is clearly observed when he refers to Pilate (history), Lucian (Greek literature), Creation, Montaigne (a French essayist). “OF TRUTH” is enriched with striking similes and analogies, such as he equates liars as a snake moving basely on its belly, mixture of falsehood is like an alloy of gold and silver. Similarly, truth is ‘open day light’ whereas lie is ‘candle light i.e fake dim light. Truth is ‘a pearl’ i.e worthy and precious whereas ,lie is ‘a diamond’ that reflects light illusions when placed in daylight.

The essay “OF TRUTH” is not ornamental as was the practice of the Elizabethan prose writers. Bacon is simple, natural and straightforward in his essay though Elizabethan colour is also found in “OF TRUTH” because there is a moderate use of Latinism in the essay. Economy of words is found in the essay not alone, but syntactic brevity is also obvious in this essay. We find conversational ease in this essay, which is the outstanding feature of Bacon's style. There is a peculiar feature of Bacon i.e. aphorism. We find many short, crispy, memorable and witty sayings in this essay.

Therefore, Bacon's essay "OF TRUTH" is rich in matter and manner. This is really a council 'civil and moral'.