



New  
Direction

Benjamin Disraeli

**ON  
CONSERVATIVE  
PRINCIPLES**





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# **On Conservative Principles**



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# New Direction

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Registered Office: Rue du Trône, 4, 1000 Brussels, Belgium **President:** Tomasz Poręba MEP **Executive Director:** Witold de Chevilly

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## INTRODUCTION

Tomasz Poreba MEP

Conservatism is primarily associated with opposition to sudden political changes. Such an image is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that its origins, as a separate ideological-political trend, are commonly sought in the actions against the slogans and practices of the French Revolution of 1789, especially in the criticism of the radicalization of revolutionary governments after they were taken over by the Jacobins. Indeed, it was then that with both great talent and extraordinary power of persuasion, the revolutionary theories and practices were attacked by high-class thinkers, like Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, and Louis de Bonald, who laid the foundations for a conservative reflection on reality. Since then, conservatism has been recognized – although for this reason it is assessed in different ways – as the most expressive alternative to radicalism striving to destroy the existing orders, and to the abstract political and social theories ignoring both tradition and experience advocated by radicals. Nonetheless, this is far too narrow a view of what conservatism is and what role it can and should play. Not only in times of revolutions or other disturbances and violent upheavals political community finds useful the conservative moderation, protection of traditional, evolutionarily developed customs, local colour and diversity – and the common sense associated with these values. Even in times of stability, when there are no signs of major threats to the current order, it is worthwhile to prophylactically protect what is valuable. After all, it is better to avoid acute crises than to fight them later.

But it is also a mistake to equate conservatism only with reluctance to change or defending a given *status quo*. Such an understanding would lead to the conclusion that conservatives should protect also the orders that are fully non-conservative as well as threatening to all which conservatives consider valuable in politics, culture or social life. There are situations when a conservative must even be focused on a thorough change of the *status quo*, although carried out with appropriate caution and the awareness of his own limitations, which his opponents often lack. It is not worth defending a given state of affairs at all costs, if there are elements which need improving. Neither does it make sense to idealize the past by force. Though, it is always worth drawing conclusions from it. The legacy of the conservative thought of the past centuries gives a lot of room for expression here, and can still become an excellent inspiration in dealing with the current dilemmas.

Conservatives are facing many such challenges and dilemmas in the present times. In many countries of the Western world, they are pushed to the margins of both political and intellectual life, and those who wish to place them there transform reality in a way that not only disregards the lessons of the past, but is directly dangerous to the harmony of freedom and order, without which the continued successful development of political communities would be difficult. Political correctness certainly limits the freedom of public debate. Opinions, until recently treated as ordinary voices in a discussion, are now stigmatized as inappropriate. Those who preach them not only face ruthless criticism, but often are eradicated from many media, including those introducing themselves as objective and pluralistic. There are attempts to marginalize them also in the academia. The arbitrariness of solutions enforced by the political 'mainstream' is often clearly visible also within the European Union, the evolution of which towards left-liberalism is legitimately causing concern among conservative circles. At the same time, the crisis currently affecting the Western world increases the risk of growing popularity of various radical ideas, in facing which this political 'mainstream' and its media are either helpless or even naively favourable. In such a situation, conservatives must present a clear alternative to these trends and phenomena – which they need to try to consistently promote and implement wherever possible.

Old conservative books do not contain ready-made solutions on how to deal with these modern threats. To the modern reader, who wishes to find recipes for now, this lack of simple answers may seem disappointing. A conservative, however, if he has learnt well the lessons of the classics of conservatism, is perfectly aware that as the political, cultural, and social conditions change, various political forms gain or lose their value. Therefore, both the dogmatic attachment to certain solutions or the imposition of them on countries and nations that have followed a different path is often a dangerous mistake. On the other hand, a conservative should look for inspiration in the heritage of conservative thought as well as treat it as a great lesson in political thinking. He should also popularize this heritage in order to combat the long-lingering myth that there is no alternative to left-liberal ideas that have largely dominated the political and academic 'mainstream' of the Western world.

Based on this belief, New Direction – The Foundation for European Reform of Brussels and the Centre for Political Thought of Krakow undertook the initiative to publish selections of the classics of conservative thought. It includes diverse authors who took different positions on many issues. As this is how conservatism has always been – also before the French Revolution when it was still unnamed. It always drew on different national traditions, emphasized various principles, and referred to various practical experiences. In order to better understand the nature of politics and the cultural processes taking place before our eyes, it is precisely this ambiguity and the wealth of experiences captured by the classics of conservative thought that can be especially inspiring. And it is exactly this decent, reasonable inspiration which, among other things, the Western world needs so very much right now.

## PREFACE

Piotr Musiewicz

**B**enjamin Disraeli was a man of paradoxes and breakthroughs. Belonging to the middle class, he criticized it, and shaped the ideals of the aristocracy. Acting as a member of a conservative party, he was instrumental in granting voting rights to labourers. Instead of competing with the Whigs, he chased Robert Peel from the Conservative Party. His political thought has long been the subject of keen interest, though he wrote down his reflections in a systematic form but reluctantly and infrequently. He did not like voluminous treatises: he preferred to write novels and letters, and deliver rousing speeches. Being proud of his Jewish ancestry and being baptized almost by accident, he promoted the Church of England as the guardian of socio-political order. Living in the Victorian era, he was fascinated by Byron, dressed unconventionally, and had two love affairs in his past. Just like Bolingbroke, by whom he was significantly inspired, he remained adored by some, hated by others<sup>(1)</sup>.

He was born on December 21, 1804 in London (Bloomsbery) to a Jewish family who came to England from Italy, by the decision of his grandfather, Benjamin D'Israeli. His father, Isaac D'Israeli, after a quarrel with the London synagogue Bevis Marks<sup>(2)</sup>, at the urging

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(1) C. McGuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, New York 1987, p. 15-27.

(2) Members of the Sephardic synagogue elected Isaac as a Parnassus – one of the elders of the congregation, but he refused to accept the post. In response, the synagogue authorities imposed on him a financial penalty in the amount of the worker's annual salary, which D'Israeli did not pay. When they began to demand payment, D'Israeli finally left the synagogue with his family (R. Blake, *Disraeli*, New York 1967, p. 10-11).

of a lawyer friend who made him aware of better social prospects, decided to baptize all four children in the Church of England. His father did not plan a political career for Benjamin – seeing him rather as a lawyer – and he sent only his brothers to the prestigious school at Winchester College, which was the forge of the political elite of the time. However, being baptised opened a formal possibility for Benjamin to sit in parliament, which he would successfully utilise (Catholics were allowed to the British Parliament in 1829, and the Jews as late as 1858)<sup>(5)</sup>.

After graduating from school, Disraeli worked as a clerk in a law firm, but his lively temperament did not allow him to stay in this profession for long. He travelled to Germany and Belgium and became involved in mining investments in South America (Colombian Mining Association), through which he lost several thousand pounds (which he paid back over the next 25 years). Nevertheless, in order to earn money, he still wrote pamphlets encouraging the purchase of shares that he knew were failing – his political opponents will repeatedly reprimand him on that score. In his first novel – *Vivian Gray* (1826) – he described his experiences regarding these investments, as well as an attempt to start a newspaper, *The Representative* – to compete with *The Times* – a daily which had lasted but six months (such a “psychological autobiography” became a model for all of Disraeli’s novels). When the newspaper publisher John Murray discovered that he had been portrayed as Carabas the drunk in the novel, he severed his relationship with Disraeli, ultimately burying their joint publishing ideas. It was also astonishing to discover that the author of *Vivian Gray*, an anonymously published novel – presented by the publisher as a person of high society – who described with great insight the life of the aristocracy, was himself not an aristocrat, but a 22-year-old member of the middle-class. These failures led Disraeli to a nervous breakdown, which he was cured from by staying at his father’s newly purchased mansion in Buckinghamshire, as well as by working on the novel *The Young Duke*<sup>(4)</sup>.

(5) C. Richmond, P. Smith, *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*, Cambridge and New York, p. 23.

(4) R. Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 12-24; C. McQuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, New York 1987, p. 40-45; J. Parry, *Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield*, „Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies”, online edition.

Although he wrote this novel to raise funds for a trip to the Middle East, in this very novel he criticized the idea of the “Young Duke’s” grand voyage, calling it a waste of time<sup>(5)</sup>. More importantly, however, in this first political novel of his, Disraeli cautions the aristocracy and calls for its “renewal”, so it would become a guiding and unifying force for the nation divided into rich and poor<sup>(6)</sup>. Later, he included the Tory paternalistic social ideas in *The Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835), and then developed them in his trilogy, *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil or the Two Nations* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847), which became his best-known literary work; these ideas became essential to Young England, the political group he founded.

However, before it happened, Disraeli travelled to Jerusalem in 1830, stopping along the way in Spain, Malta, Corfu, Greece, Egypt and Turkey. After returning to England, he got involved in affairs with married women, Clara Bolton (the wife of his doctor) and Henrietta Sykes, who became the heroine of his novel *Henrietta Temple* (1837). The rumours of Disraeli’s personal life, which spread among the Victorian public, did not help with his intended public career. He experienced a series of failures in the elections to the House of Commons, to which he initially ran from the milieu of radicals, advocating the extension of electoral rights more widely than the Reform Act passed by the Whigs in 1832<sup>(7)</sup>. At that time, he considered the Tory Party a relic, and to the level of the Whigs, promoting the interests of the middle class, he “did not want to descend”<sup>(8)</sup>.

In his novel *Contrarini Fleming* Disraeli vented the consuming question whether he needed to choose a literary or a political future as his life-path. Ultimately, despite the fundamental difference in the program of electoral rights, due to better prospects, he approached the Tories and stood for the elections from their list in 1835 (again

(5) R. Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 56.

(6) A. Diniejko, *Benjamin Disraeli’s The Young Duke as a Silver Fork-Novel With Social Commentary*, [online:] <[www.victorianweb.org](http://www.victorianweb.org)> (access: 24.10.2022).

(7) This reform gave the richer part of the middle class a vote, and changed the organization of constituencies, including delimiting new ones in cities where the population was rapidly increasing due to industrialization. This change was beneficial for the Whig electorate, which Disraeli did not like.

(8) R. Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 87.

unsuccessfully). During the campaign, he became famous for his dispute with the Irish Catholic leader Daniel O'Connell, but not over the issues of political equality for Catholics, to which Disraeli did not object; he called O'Connell a traitor for his alliance with the Whigs and his utilitarianism, and the latter, although considered to be a supporter of the equality of Jews, responded with statements about Disraeli's Jewish origin and questionable morality<sup>(9)</sup>. Also against O'Connell, Disraeli gave his first parliamentary speech, when finally, in 1837 – in the year of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne – he sat in the House of Commons. The speech was booed by the Whigs as well as considered a false start in Disraeli's parliamentary career, but as he concluded it, he uttered the prophetic words: "Though I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear me."<sup>(10)</sup>

From the same constituency, Maidstone, a second Tory – Lewis Wyndham – entered the House of Commons, and died shortly after. This happened almost exactly when Henrietta left Disraeli, which culminated in Disraeli's wedding to Mary Anne Evans Wyndham – thanks to whose wealth Disraeli was able to live in a mansion in Hughenden, Buckinghamshire. Disraeli's motives and approach were depicted by Mary Anne herself, who said that although Disraeli had married her for money, the second time he would have married her out of love.<sup>(11)</sup>

Disraeli's presence in the House of Commons began at a time of both constitutional and party transformations in the United Kingdom. In 1830, for the first time in 24 years, the Whigs came to power in result of electoral and social reforms, the Tories managed to regain power and form a stable government only in 1841 (until 1846), but at the cost of changing the nature of the party. The erosion of political principles followed by them so far began in the Tory camp in the late 1920s, when some of them abandoned the traditional Anglican belief that only a member of the Anglican Church could faithfully serve the state – and supported the Whig-promoted act of Catholic emancipation (1829). A new name for

the Tories – "conservatives" – then appeared in the press, used by Wilson Croker, adopted by Tory leader Robert Peel and popularized in the 1930s and 1940s<sup>(12)</sup>. The Conservative Party was supposed to be a reformed version of Toryism, adopting – due to the need for its survival – the liberal (Whig) solutions; in its manifesto delivered in a manner of the radicals directly to the people, Peel announced further reforms liberalizing grain duties, opening wide access to Anglican universities and professions, and reforming education in the spirit of greater emphasis on knowledge than on religion and morality<sup>(13)</sup>.

This rather radical change in the nature of the Tories was met with opposition both from the Church (the High Church party and the Tractarians) and from the Parliament, among some of the Tories. In the House of Lords, the Duke of Wellington became the leader of the defence of principles of Old Toryism, and in the House of Commons – a former radical, Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli accused Peel of allowing the Whigs to take over the initiative of social reforms and to pass a new poor law (1834, New Poor Law) that did not help the poor, but made richer the factory owners supported by the Whigs. He argued that Peel was blurring the differences between Whigs and Tories by making too many deals, and that he served the interests of the middle class excessively.

In the 1940s, Disraeli was most outraged by Peel's drive to abolish the Corn Laws. These Laws maintained tariffs on cereals imported to England and, in a mercantilist spirit, guaranteed high purchase prices for English farmers, also protecting the situation of traditional Tory landowners. The removal of customs duties would flood England with cheaper, mainly Irish grain, and cause the formation of new groups of traders and food processors, which would benefit the traders traditionally associated with the Whigs. Peel argued that lifting tariffs would help Irish peasants struck by great poverty, but – much to the old Tories' chagrin – he also appealed to free-market ideas by Adam Smith, David Hume and David Ricardo<sup>(14)</sup>. For Disraeli, Peel's proposal was a betrayal

(9) C. McGuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p. 36-51.

(10) *Ibidem*, p. 13.

(11) A. Kirsch, *Benjamin Disraeli*, New York, 2008, p. 106.

(12) W. Safire, *Conservative*, „Safire's Political Dictionary”, Oxford 2008, p. 144; D. Paterson, *Liberalism and Conservatism 1846-1905*, London 2001, p. 5.

(13) R. Peel, *Speeches by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, London 1835, p. 7-10.

(14) B. Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical political economy, the empire of free trade*

of English farmers and native landlords, in favour of the interests of the middle class. McGuirk states that it was not so much the emancipation of Catholics but the liberal attitude to the grain laws that defined the new Conservative Party<sup>(15)</sup>.

The main opposition to Peel, as well as to the Whigs and their principles, was Disraeli's New England (the Young England) which, nevertheless, was far from defending the principles of the old Toryism. Although Disraeli criticized Peel (also in his trilogy, especially in *Coningsby*) for depriving the Tories of major principles, he himself betrayed one of them – the distance between the working class and the peasants. He did not consider only the monarch, the Church and the aristocracy – whom he would especially urge to take on social and moral duties towards the underprivileged classes – but to the dismay of the Tories and the Whigs, he called for further social reform, for a national unity movement broader than the Whigs' interest in the middle class. This vision assumed the merger of the Tories with the radicals, and was to be embodied in a national party that the Young England would become – the New England. Although these proposals shocked the Parliament, a group of young aristocrats (George Smyth, Lord Manners, Henry Thomas Hope, Alexander Baille-Cochrane), captured by these ideas, gathered around Disraeli. The postulates of “radical Toryism”, raising the importance of workers and the peasants, outgrown by far the social reforms implemented and postulated by the Whigs, which Disraeli strongly criticized for being moderately aimed only to secure the interests of the middle class<sup>(16)</sup>.

The parliamentary speeches against the abolition of the Grain Laws, against Peel and the Whigs, made Disraeli popular, at the same time exacerbating his rivalry with Peel, who – no wonder – did not invite Disraeli to his government. It is true that Disraeli failed to maintain the Grain Laws for long – they were abolished in 1846 by John Russell's Whig Cabinet – but the lack of support for the government's actions ultimately

and imperialism, 1750-1850, Cambridge 2004, p. 22.

(15) C. McGuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p. 60.

(16) C. Brinton, *English Political Thought in XIX century*, p. 146-147.

led to the collapse of Peel's government<sup>(17)</sup> and to Disraeli's taking over the leadership of the Conservatives in the House of Commons.

*This victory turned out to be Pyrrhic at first. Peel founded his own party and left the Conservative Party, taking with him a large group of supporters and depleting the ranks of Disraeli's party (one of them was William Ewart Gladstone, later a Whig leader and prime minister, who after the collapse of Peel's government has become Disraeli's intransigent political adversary). Whigs ruled England, briefly, for the next thirty years, and Disraeli remained the leader of the opposition in the House of Commons for most of his subsequent political life. In addition, for many Tories, accepting Disraeli's leadership was difficult due to his class and ethnic origins, not to mention the radical ideals of the Young England. However, they were unable to do without him<sup>(18)</sup>.*

*Disraeli became Chancellor of the Treasury in the short-lived cabinets of Lord Derby (1852 and 1858-1859), the leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords. During this time, he passed the Jews Relief Act (1858), which released members of Parliament from the obligation of the Christian oath. He proposed to change the voting system (voting of the townspeople in their city districts), as well as to increase the right to vote in non-urban areas. This democratization was also to strengthen the extra-urban – Tory – electorate and weaken the Whig electorate, however, the Whigs blocked the reform in 1859, and the Derby Government had to give way<sup>(19)</sup>.*

*Disraeli's political triumph and the triumph of his radical terrorism came in 1867, when the Reform Act was passed, extending electoral rights to almost all city dwellers having permanent address, i.e. mainly workers. Even the leader of parliamentary radicals, John Bright, did not advocate for such an option, declaring that workers, as uneducated persons, should not have the right to vote. Disraeli, on the other hand, even though initially not planning to go that far, was convinced that the law*

(17) In Britain, in the 19th century, prime minister resigned after his party lost a vote on a major bill. In 1846, Peel lost the vote for the Irish Coercion Bill – which was supposed to give more power to calm the mood in Ireland – some of the Whigs, Disraeli's Tories and radicals voted against – see: C. Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade: interests, ideas, and institutions in historical perspective*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2006, p. 239.

(18) C. McGuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p. 61-67.

(19) S. Weintraub, *Disraeli: A Biography*, New York 1993, p. 371-373.

would bring the nation the desired unity, and that the working class people were and will remain Tory supporters, and that giving them the right to vote would politically weaken Gladstone's liberals for a long time. Some Tories supported the project because they were tired of being in opposition for 20 years and wanted to get back at the Whigs – even at the cost of revising their traditional postulates; help came also from a group of Whig dissidents, disappointed by the excessively moderate Gladstone's program, as well as from some radicals. Ultimately, the turnout – only 100 voters (in the previous month, 599 voted over the rejection of Gladstone's proposal) turned out to be crucial in the enactment of the new law. As noted by Zins, the reform of the electoral law was also passed by the Parliament in which there was not a single worker<sup>(20)</sup>; the majority of the Conservatives were also absent.

As a result of the expansion of his electoral law, Disraeli was criticised by both conservatives and liberals. Thomas Carlyle cursed Disraeli as a treacherous illusionist, a charmer who charmed lords and parties and lead England by the nose like cattle. Homersham Cox, one of the liberals, claimed that the giant leap policy was invented by a government that calls itself conservative. Another liberal, Lord Chandon, proclaimed the end of the world when a demoralized nation admired the insolence and tricks of the impudent Jew. Even Lord Derby admitted that there had been a great leap into darkness<sup>(21)</sup>.

For Disraeli, however, the proper goal of conservatism was achieved – the fraternity of the aristocracy with the working class. He saw the “Tory democracy” as the natural result of his work, that is the Young England, and as the natural idea of the Tories. This bold step eventually made him a hero to his party and the leader of the entire conservative camp (not only in the House of Commons). In February 1868, he assumed the post of prime minister after Lord Derby's retiring due to health reasons.

To his disadvantage, the conservatives lost the elections in November that year (the extension of the electoral law has not yet entered into force) and Gladstone became prime minister. Disraeli did not return to

power until six years later, in 1874, at the age of seventy, divested of some of the energy of his youth, and of his wife, who had died two years earlier. He kept his mind alive, however, as can be seen from his speeches in the House of Commons, and from reports to Queen Victoria in which he used language so colourful as if he were writing new novels. The Queen was pleased and inclined to favour him, which was reflected in her ignoring the protocol and asking Disraeli to sit down during the audiences, as well as in her visiting Disraeli's residence for lunch.

The friendly relations of the Queen and the Prime Minister favoured the advancement of imperial policy of Great Britain. Disraeli contributed to the enactment in 1876 of the Act granting Victoria the title of Empress of India. This was a novelty, for the development of the empire in the nineteenth century had so far been carried out almost exclusively by the Whigs, and the imperial policy was recommended neither by Burke nor Bolingbroke, whose ideas were employed by Disraeli. He found the British Empire soon after the suppression of the Sipoy Rebellion in India (1857-1858), which caused the Whigs to ease the tough imperial policies, by dissolving the East India Company, renouncing the annexation and confiscation of lands, and to empower the Indian princes. The title of empress in this context was to be a confirmation of the reign of Great Britain in India, the restoration of the Empire of India, which the Whigs “lost”<sup>(22)</sup>.

Developing the imperial policy, to the Queen's delight, Disraeli on his own initiative acquired 44% of the shares of the Suez Canal company from the Khedive of Egypt, which broke French domination in this region and gave the English greater opportunities to use the shortened sea route to India. In the long run, this helped the subjugation of Egypt by Great Britain (1882). In recognition of his services, in 1876 Disraeli received the peerage from the Queen – the title of the Earl of Beaconsfield<sup>(23)</sup>.

Disraeli opposed Russia's expansion in the Balkans and supported Turkey to that end. He did not believe the press reports that 12,000 Christian peasants had been murdered in Bulgaria by Turkish troops,

(20) H. Zins, *Historia Anglii* [History of England], Wrocław etc., 1971, p. 367. For more, see: M. Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill*, Cambridge 2005.

(21) C. McGuirk, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p. 86.

(22) S. Weintraub, *Disraeli: A Biography*, p. 551; R. Aldous, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone and Disraeli*, New York 2007, p. 265.

(23) R. Aldous, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone and Disraeli*, p. 262–263.

prompting Gladstone to publicly criticize his naivety and causing a fierce debate between the two of them. As a result of Russia's victory against Turkey, and under the San Stefano Peace (1878), Russia was granted such vast territories in the Balkans that Disraeli protested and demanded a new conference. He attended the Congress of Berlin in 1878 in person (this was the first time a British Prime Minister went to negotiate abroad in person). He managed to limit Russia's gains, and Great Britain obtained Cyprus from Turkey. Disraeli's popularity in the UK was at its peak.

In 1880 he completed the novel *Endymion*, describing the fate of a hero who became the Whig prime minister. For this novel he received a fee of 10,000 pounds at that time, which was a record-breaking sum. It was Disraeli's last literary success. Another novel, *Falconet*, which was a satire aimed at Gladstone, was not completed; in 1881, returning from an evening dinner, he fell ill with bronchitis and, a month later – on April 19 – he died at the age of 76.

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Not without connection with Disraeli's activities and ideas is the fact that after his death, over the next 25 years, the Conservatives – despite the strong position of the Whigs under Gladstone's leadership – managed to create a series of stable governments – mainly of Lord Salisbury – and that over that period they were in power more often than the Whigs. Seeing it from a broader perspective, Disraeli saved the Tory party from being politically marginalized on the British scene, though without liberalizing it. For in the 1830s, the future ideological direction of the Tories – who turned to liberalism due to Peel, but who turned away from this path thanks to Disraeli – was being determined for several decades. In the era of accelerating liberalism, Disraeli managed to show that Toryism, only slightly reformed, remains a valid and valuable set of ideas that can successfully serve society, and therefore there is no need to abandon British constitutional traditions and principles. Moreover, what seemed unlikely, became a lasting effect of Disraeli's activities – the conservative sentiment was instilled among small town dwellers and workers, with the result that Britain remained largely “Tory” in the

second half of the nineteenth century, and it remains so to some extent also today. In this context, Russell Kirk notes that no other country in the world in its history has managed to create a conservative party as stable and coherent when it comes to its goals<sup>(24)</sup>.

To this end, Disraeli carried out the “baptism of the Tory democracy,” introducing into the canon of Tories and conservative thought the ideas they had so far refused to face. More importantly, their source was not to be liberalism (individualism), but conservatism itself, intended to build the unity of the nation by rebuilding the unity of classes. By avoiding the liberal justification for the emancipation of the working class, Disraeli “succeeded in diverting the torrent of progress into the channel of tradition.”<sup>(25)</sup> In this way, the Conservative Party under his leadership has become more progressive than the liberal Whigs (in terms of emancipation), while remaining more conservative than the Whigs (in terms of preserving the importance of traditional political institutions and classes). Disraeli proved that conservatism is not a tyranny and that it can be more popular than liberalism.

Disraeli, however, was not a democrat in the modern sense, or in the sense of the nineteenth-century radicals who advocated voting rights for all citizens. After all, he was not the initiator of the Reform Bill of 1867, and after its enactment, he was convinced that the democratic reforms had ended; he did not envisage that five years after his death – this time under the rule of the Whig Cabinet of Gladstone – farmers and miners would be granted voting rights. He feared unlimited democracy mainly because it carried the idea of equality, which he considered to be “a pernicious doctrine of modern times”<sup>(26)</sup>, violating the natural inequalities between people, for which reason society should remain in the form of classes.

From the time of the Plantagenets, he preached, classes remained a natural part of the constitution of England, possessing different rights and privileges, which did not lead to national disunity, but harmonized

(24) R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, New York 1960, p. 257-258.

(25) *Ibidem*, p. 265.

(26) *Ibidem*, p. 254.

the nation by giving each class a voice in the affairs of the Kingdom. Their harmony was broken first by the reformation and the weakening of the role of both the Church and the poor by the Tudors, and then by the growth of aspirations and power of the groups made wealthy by the Tudors – thus the Whig Party came into being. The attempt to limit the power of the Whigs by the king and the Tories led to civil wars and to the victory of the Whigs, who placed their ruler, William of Orange, on the throne. However, they wanted to make him a Venetian doge, controlled by the new aristocracy (themselves), then showing the same aspirations in relation to the Hanoverian dynasty. Their boundless ambitions to obtain a monopoly of power, no matter what the cost, have led to the marginalization of the role of the crown, the Church, and the underprivileged classes, and the absolutisation of the powers of the House of Commons dominated by them, and thus to the erosion of traditional political institutions. In 1832, the Whigs, argued Disraeli, further destroyed political traditions by removing constituencies for the lower classes and attempting to entrust full power to only one class, rather than recognizing the role of all classes for the unity of the nation, as the Tories did and were to do<sup>(27)</sup>.

The Tories were to be the ones who transform the nation divided into the rich and the poor into a unity, by restoring – among other things – a representation of all classes and strengthening the role of traditional political institutions: the aristocracy, the monarch, the Church. The aristocracy, who required a moral renewal in the sense of their obligations towards the poorer members of society, were to play a primary role in this process, was to be the initiator of the rebuilding of national unity and the national party. The responsible approach of the aristocracy towards the poorer classes was to be met with a favourable reaction of the latter, as well as with the abandonment of radical democratic or communist aspirations. Disraeli therefore wanted to heal the unity of the nation while leaving the class society behind. “Popular privileges,” he wrote, “are consistent with a state of society in which there is great inequality of conditions. Democratic rights, on the contrary, demand that there

(27) B. Disraeli, *A Vindication of the English Constitution*, London 1835, p. 104-190.

should be equality of conditions as the fundamental basis of the society, which they regulate”<sup>(28)</sup> – he was therefore far from postulating the latter.

When it comes to Disraeli’s ideological inspirations, Henry St. John Bolingbroke, Edmund Burke and the English Romantics, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge, should be named. Disraeli shared Burke’s fears of absolutism and a radical reconstruction of the socio-political system – like Bolingbroke, he saw the troublemakers among the Whigs and their projects of strengthening the middle class and putting their own interests above the common good. Like Burke, he also appealed to tradition as the justification of the English socio-political order (including class division), and ultimately, also like Burke, he treated moral principles as a source of political decisions. Comparably to Burke and Coleridge, he distanced himself from rationalism and raised the role of imagination in thinking about politics, also taking bold political steps based on it. He appealed to Revelation – which Burke did not – as a source of sound social principles that could save Western society from the spread of Bentham’s ideas, highlighting the role of Jews as natural heirs and promoters of conservative thinking<sup>(29)</sup>.

Contrary to Burke, he did not argue though that there were long-established freedoms for the Hindus, and departed explicitly from his anti-imperialist approach in general. It is true that imperialism itself did not become a direct object of Disraeli’s reflection, but it is connected with Disraeli’s thought by the fact that Disraeli apparently treated it as a natural and unjustified element of the United Kingdom’s politics<sup>(30)</sup>, and by the fact that he sanctioned it with his own political moves.

Although Disraeli shares Burke’s distance to reason and will as justifications for political action, he is not close to Burke’s category of the natural feelings of individuals – the justification and goal for him is rather the Bolingbroke’s or Coleridge’s pursuit toward the national unity, in obtaining which he counted not so much on the king, as on the Tory

(28) B. Disraeli, *Selected Speeches of the Earl of Beaconsfield*, ed. T. Kebbel, vol. I, London 1882, p. 546.

(29) R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, p. 254.

(30) In one his parliamentary speeches, Disraeli states the following: “As our Empire expanded (...), the existence of a large body of disciplined troops became a necessity”; in another he mentions: “No one honours more than myself the Colonial Empire of England” (B. Disraeli, *Selected Speeches of the Earl of Beaconsfield*, ed. T. Kebbel, vol. II, London 1882 p. 514 and 238).

aristocracy. Just like Bolingbroke, on the other hand, he attributed to the Whigs the responsibility for destroying the English constitution and introducing divisions into English society (although Bolingbroke saw a partial responsibility for not stopping the Whigs also in the mistakes of the Tories).

Disraeli seems to have followed more the Coleridge's than Burke's way of thinking. The concept of national unity and solidarity of social classes, proclaimed by the Romantics, with the strong role of the aristocracy, the king, and the Church, became his guiding idea, as well as a distance to the liberal idea of the free market. Like the Romantics, he rejected the social atomization proclaimed by Bentham, arguing that society is above all a nation whose guardians are the crown, aristocracy, and the Church; he regretted that this idea was not understood by the Whigs and utilitarians. A novelty on the part of Disraeli in conservative thought in this context was the pursuit of giving more rights to the working class, and the conviction that it was favourable to the aristocracy and the Tories, as well as – and perhaps above all – the implementation of the above concepts in political practice.

It is noteworthy that Disraeli's conservative successors did not maintain the emphasis on moral and social obligations in terms of making political decisions, as well as the importance of the responsibilities of the aristocracy. Lord Salisbury underlined the rights rather than the duties of the landowners, gradually turning conservatism into the defender of all property – not only owned by the aristocracy – bringing conservative thought closer to liberal in this respect. Salisbury also abandoned the belief that tensions between the aristocracy and the working class could be resolved, and he weakened the role of tradition. In James Fitzjames Stephen's reflection, this will result in a departure from the idea of national unity and in criticizing utilitarian individualism in the name of defending individual rights and freedoms, thus further bringing conservatism closer to liberalism.

What of Disraeli's thoughts has survived, what has not, and what could be valuable today?

It is worth noting that although he saved 19th-century conservatism from marginalization, his successors gradually adopted liberal thought into it – so conservatism survived, but on principles that Disraeli himself

did not consent to in his time. On the other hand, Disraeli undoubtedly contributed to conservatism, which through gradually liberalizing itself, became in Britain a regular, acceptable idea, with strong public support, while its supporters formed and still form one of Britain's two strongest parties. Disraeli did not succeed in introducing partial democratization – the process turned out to be unstoppable (it was also quickly undertaken by the Whigs) and finally, in 1928, all citizens were granted the right to vote. Contrary to his intentions, in the long run the principle of equality, regarded by him as dangerous, succeeded – he took part in the process of shaping it, although it was not his intention, and he was not aware of it. His mercantilist thought, which he failed to embody, did not survive politically, and class society, of course, did not survive in the long run, as well as the leading role of the traditional aristocracy and the Church, even though, unlike continental Europe, Great Britain did not have a revolution that would destroy the aristocracy – their political role has decreased, but in the way of evolutionary reforms, still remaining stronger than on the continent.

So it turns out, that in addition to inscribing the social factor in British conservatism and gaining support for the conservative party as well as a permanent place on the political scene – which was a deliberate act – two of the most enduring components of Disraeli's legacy – democratization and imperialism – he introduced “inadvertently”. He did not plan the former, and the latter was so obvious to him that he implemented it without looking for its philosophical justifications. However, he undoubtedly included imperialism in British conservative thought (in this he made the conservatives resemble the liberals of the time) and paved the way for the imperial policies of Chamberlain and Churchill<sup>(31)</sup>. The departure of British conservatives from imperialism takes place only after the Second World War.

Today, Disraeli's thought may become an inspiration to search for non-standard, bold solutions in politics, to activate the political imagination instead of only calculating interests, to seek – also in

(31) The exceptions include the conservative thought of G. K. Chesterton openly criticizing imperialism, including the English one – see P. Musiewicz, *Imperializm pruski i angielski w idealistycznej optyce Gilberta K. Chestertona* [Prussian and English imperialism in the idealistic view of Gilbert K. Chesterton], “Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ Nauki Społeczne”, No. 5 (2/2012), p. 29-42.

tradition – the solutions that are socially acceptable, and to be patient in implementing socio-political visions (since Disraeli managed to realise his own only in the final years of his life). Even more interesting and valuable – not only for contemporary thinkers and politicians of conservative provenance – should be Disraeli's idea of an alternative to liberalism and its implementation, which may mean nowadays that political dogmatism structured on a liberal basis does not have to be the only way for governing and thinking about politics. Although this path is certainly not easier today than in Disraeli's times, an interesting alternative may be conservatism spiced up by a revolutionary idea, which in some important social area would become more radical, bolder and more attractive than liberalism.

*Translated by Renata Czekalska*



**Benjamin Disraeli**

# **On Conservative Principles**



**New Direction | OMP**  
MMXXII

# Vindication of the English Constitution

## CHAPTER I

### Of Writers on the English Constitution.

**Y**our Lordship has honoured me by a wish that some observations which I have made in conversation on the character of our Constitution might be expressed in a more formal and more public manner. When I transmit you this long letter I fear you may repent your friendly suggestion; but the subject has given rise to so many reflections that I did not anticipate that what I originally intended for a pamphlet has, I fear, expanded almost into a volume.

The polity of England, which has established the most flourishing society of modern ages, and regulated the destinies of a nation which for many centuries has made a progressive advance in the acquisition of freedom, wealth, and glory, undoubtedly presents one of the most interesting subjects of speculation in political philosophy. Nor is it one that has been neglected; and illustrious foreigners have emulated our native authors in their treatises of the English Constitution. Our own constitutional writers may, in general, be divided into two classes: firstly, the mere antiquaries, whose labours, however, are inestimable; and, secondly, that order of political writers who have endeavoured, in an examination of what they style the theory of the Constitution, to promulgate the opinions and maintain the interests of the party in the State in whose ranks they have been enrolled: the dissertations upon our Constitution have therefore been either archaeological treatises or party manifestoes.

Yet for many years the general result of these writings, whichever might be the quarter whence they emanated, was, as far as their subject was concerned, one of unqualified panegyric. However the excesses of

factions might be deplored, or the misrepresentations of factious writers exposed and stigmatised, the English Constitution was universally recognised as an august and admirable fabric, and counted among the choicest inventions of public intellect on record. That a very different tone has of late years been assumed by our public writers is a notorious circumstance. A political sect has sprung up avowedly adverse to the Estates of the Realm, and seeking by means which, of course, it holds legal, the abrogation of a majority of them. These anti-constitutional writers, like all new votaries, are remarkable for their zeal and activity. They omit no means of disseminating their creed: they are very active missionaries: there is no medium of the public press of which they do not avail themselves: they have their newspapers, daily and weekly, their magazines, and their reviews. The unstamped press takes the cue from them, and the members of the party who are in Parliament lose no opportunity of dilating on the congenial theme at the public meetings of their constituents.

## CHAPTER II

### Of the Utilitarian System – Its Fallacies.

**T**he avowed object of this new sect of statesmen is to submit the institutions of the country to the test of UTILITY, and to form a new Constitution on the abstract principles of theoretic science. I think it is Voltaire who tells us that there is nothing more common than to read and to converse to no purpose, and that in history, in morals, and in divinity, we should beware of EQUIVOCAL TERMS. I do not think that politics should form an exception to this salutary rule; and, for my own part, it appears to me that this term, UTILITY, is about as equivocal as any one which, from the time of the Nominalists and Realists to our present equally controversial and equally indefinite days, hath been let loose to breed sects and set men a-brawling. The fitness of a material object for a material purpose is a test of its utility which our senses and necessities can decide; but what other test there is of moral and political utility than the various and varying opinions of mankind I am at a loss to discover; and that this is utterly unsatisfactory and insufficient, all, I apprehend, must agree.

Indeed, I have hitherto searched in vain in the writings of the Utilitarian sect for any definition of their fundamental phrase with which it is possible to grapple. That they pretend to afford us a definition it would be disingenuous to conceal, and we are informed that Utility is “the principle which produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number”. Does this advance us in comprehension? Who is to decide upon the greatest happiness of the greatest number? According to Prince Metternich, the government of Austria secures the greatest happiness of the greatest number: it is highly probable that the effect of the Austrian

education and institutions may occasion the majority of the Austrian population to be of the same opinion. Yet the government of Austria is no favourite with the anti-constitutional writers of our own country. Gross superstition may secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as it has done in Spain and Portugal: a military empire may secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as it has done in Rome and France: a coarse and unmitigated despotism may secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as it does to this day in many regions of Asia and Africa. Every government that ever existed, that has enjoyed any quality of duration, must have been founded on this "greatest happiness principle", for, had not the majority thought or felt that such were its result, the government could never have endured. There have been times, and those too not far gone, when the greatest happiness of Christian nations has been secured by burning men alive for their religious faith; and unless we are prepared to proclaim that all religious creeds which differ from our own are in fact not credited by their pretended votaries, we must admit that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of mankind is even now secured by believing that which we know to be false. If the greatest happiness of the greatest number, therefore, be the only test of the excellence of political institutions, that may be the plea for institutions which, according to the Utilitarians especially, are monstrous or absurd: and if to avoid this conclusion we maintain that the greatest number are not the proper judges of the greatest happiness, we are only referred to the isolated opinions of solitary philosophers, or at the best to the conceited conviction of some sectarian minority. UTILITY, in short, is a mere phrase, to which any man may ascribe any meaning that his interests prompt or his passions dictate. With this plea, a nation may consider it in the highest degree useful that all the statues scattered throughout the museums of Christendom should be collected in the same capital, and conquer Christendom in consequence to obtain their object; and by virtue of the same plea, some Iconoclastic enemy may declare war upon this nation of Dilettanti tomorrow, and dash into fragments their cosmopolite collection.

Viewed merely in relation to the science of government, the effect of the test of utility, as we have considered it, would in all probability be harmless, and its practical tendency, if any, would rather lead to a spirit

of conservation and optimism than to one of discontent and change. But optimism is assuredly not the system of the Utilitarians: far from thinking everything is for the best, they decidedly are of opinion that everything is for the worst. In order, therefore, that their test of utility should lead to the political results which they desire, they have dovetailed their peculiar system of government into a peculiar system of morals, in connection with which we must alone subject it to our consideration. The same inventive sages, who have founded all political science on UTILITY, have founded all moral science on SELF-INTEREST, and have then declared that a system of government should be deduced alone from the principles of human nature. If mankind could agree on a definition of Self-interest, I willingly admit that they would not be long in deciding upon a definition of Utility. But what do the Utilitarians mean by the term Self-interest? I at once agree that man acts from no other principle than self-interest, but I include in self-interest, and I should think every accurate reasoner must do the same, every motive that can possibly influence man. If every motive that can possibly influence man be included in self-interest, then it is impossible to form a science on a principle which includes the most contrary motives. If the Utilitarians will not admit all the motives, but only some of the motives, then their science of government is not founded on human nature, but only on a part of human nature, and must be consequently and proportionately imperfect. But the Utilitarian only admits one or two of the motives that influence man; a desire of power and a desire of property; and therefore infers that it is the interest of man to tyrannise and to rob.

The blended Utilitarian system of morals and politics, then, runs thus: Man is only influenced by self-interest: it is the interest of man to be a tyrant and a robber: a man does not change his nature because he is a king; therefore a king is a tyrant and a robber. If it be the interest of one man to be a tyrant and a robber, it is the interest of fifty or five thousand to be tyrants and robbers; therefore we cannot trust an aristocracy more than a monarch. But the eternal principle of human nature must always hold good. A privileged class is always an aristocracy, whether it consists of five thousand or fifty thousand, a band of nobles or a favoured sect; therefore the power of government should be entrusted to all; therefore the only true and useful government is a representative polity, founded

on universal suffrage. This is the Utilitarian system of morals and government, drawn from their “great works” by one who has no wish to misrepresent them. Granting for a moment their premises, I do not see that their deduction, even then, is logically correct. It is possible to conceive a state of society where the government may be in the hands of a favoured majority; a community of five millions, of which three might form a privileged class. Would not the greatest happiness of the greatest number be secured by such an arrangement? and, if so secured, would or would not the Utilitarian, according to his theory, feel justified in disturbing it? If he opposes such a combination, he overthrows his theory; if he consents to such a combination, his theory may uphold tyranny and spoliation.

But I will not press this point: it is enough for me to show that, to render their politics practical, they are obliged to make their metaphysics impossible. Let the Utilitarian prove that the self-interest of man always leads him to be a tyrant and a robber, and I will grant that universal suffrage is a necessary and useful institution. A nation that conquers the world acts from self-interest; a nation that submits to a conqueror acts from self-interest. A spendthrift and a miser alike act from self-interest: the same principle animated Messalina and Lucretia, Bayard and Byng. To say that when a man acts he acts from self-interest is only to announce that when a man does act he acts. An important truth, a great discovery, calling assuredly for the appearance of prophets, or, if necessary, even ghosts. But to announce that when a man acts he acts from self-interest, and that the self-interest of every man prompts him to be a tyrant and a robber, is to declare that which the experience of all human nature contradicts; because we all daily and hourly feel and see that there are a thousand other motives which influence human conduct besides the idea of exercising power and obtaining property; every one of which motives must rank under the term Self-interest, because every man who acts under their influence must necessarily believe that in so acting he acts for his happiness, and therefore for his self-interest. Utility, Pain, Power, Pleasure, Happiness, Self-interest, are all phrases to which any man may annex any meaning he pleases, and from which any acute and practised reasoner may most syllogistically deduce any theory he chooses. “Such words”, says Locke, “no more improve our understanding than the move

of a jack will fill our bellies”. This waste of ingenuity on nonsense is like the condescending union that occasionally occurs between some high-bred steed and some long-eared beauty of the Pampas: the base and fantastical embrace only produces a barren and mulish progeny.

## CHAPTER III

### Of Abstract Principles in Politics, and the Degree of Theory that enters into Politics.

We have before this had an *a priori* system of celestial mechanics, and its votaries most syllogistically sent Galileo to a dungeon, after having triumphantly refuted him. We have before this had an *a priori* system of metaphysics, but where now are the golden volumes of Erigena<sup>(32)</sup>, and Occam, and Scotus, and Raymond Lully<sup>(33)</sup>? And now we have an *a priori* system of politics. The schoolmen are revived in the nineteenth century, and are going to settle the State with their withering definitions, their fruitless logomachies, and barren dialectics.

I should suppose that there is no one of the Utilitarian sages who would not feel offended if I were to style him the Angelical Doctor, like Thomas Aquinas; and I regret, from bitter experience, that they have not yet condescended sufficiently to cultivate the art of composition to entitle them to the style of the Pespicious Doctor, like Walter Burley.

These reflections naturally lead me to a consideration of the great object of our new school of statesmen in general, which is to form political institutions on abstract principles of theoretic science, instead of permitting them to spring from the course of events, and to be naturally created by the necessities of nations. It would appear that this scheme originated in the fallacy of supposing that theories produce

circumstances, whereas the very converse of the proposition is correct, and circumstances indeed produce theories. If we survey the career of an individual, we shall on the whole observe a remarkable consistency in his conduct; yet it is more than possible that this individual has never acted from that organised philosophy which we style *system*. What, then, has produced this consistency? What, then, has occasioned this harmony of purpose? His individual character. Nations have characters as well as individuals, and national character is precisely the quality which the new sect of statesmen in their schemes and speculations either deny or overlook. The ruling passion, which is the result of organisation, regulates the career of an individual, subject to those superior accidents of fortune whose secondary influence is scarcely inferior to the impulse of his nature. The blended influences of nature and fortune form his character; 'tis the same with nations. There are important events in the career of an individual which force the man to ponder over the past, and, in these studies of experience and struggles for self-knowledge, to ascertain certain principles of conduct which he recognises as the cause of past success, and anticipates as the guarantee of future prosperity: and there are great crises in the fortunes of an ancient people which impel them to examine the nature of the institutions which have gradually sprung up among them. In this great national review, duly and wisely separating the essential character of their history from that which is purely adventitious, they discover certain principles of ancestral conduct, which they acknowledge as the causes that these institutions have flourished and descended to them; and in their future career, and all changes, reforms, and alterations, that they may deem expedient, they resolve that these principles shall be their guides and their instructors. By these examinations they become more deeply intimate with their national character; and on this increased knowledge, and on this alone, they hold it wise to act. This, my Lord, I apprehend to be the greatest amount of theory that ever enters into those political institutions, which, from their permanency, are alone entitled to the consideration of a philosophical statesman; and this moderate, prudent, sagacious, and eminently practical application of principles to conduct has ever been, in the old time, the illustrious characteristic of our English politicians.

(32) Joannes Scotus Erigena, mediaeval philosopher; wrote "De Divisione Naturae".

(33) William of Occam ("Doctor Invincibilis"), John Duns Scotus ("Doctor Subtilis"), and Raimon Lull ("Doctor Illuminatus"), schoolmen of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

## CHAPTER IV

### Of Magna Charta – Petition of Right.

**F**rom the days of Magna Charta to those of the Declaration of Right, the same wary boldness is perceptible in the conduct of our leaders. It is the fashion nowadays to depreciate the value of the Great Charter – an ominous sign of the times, in my belief. For he runs a slight chance of being ultimately counted among the false prophets of the realm who predicts that, when the mention of that blessed deed does not command the reverential gratitude of every Briton, evil fortunes are impending for this society. Despots may depreciate it, whether they assume the forms of crowned monarchs or popular tribunes, for it stands alike in their way; but he who really loves freedom and his fatherland will never forget that the signet of the tyrant sealed alike our civil liberty and our national independence. They were great men, my Lord, that Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>(34)</sup> and that Earl of Pembroke, who, in the darkness of feudal ages, laid this bold and broad foundation of our national liberties; they were great men, and they were great statesmen. They did not act upon abstract principles, luckily for us, principles which the next age might have rejected, and the first schoolman, hired by the King, might have refuted; they acted upon positive conventional right. They set up no new title: they claimed their inheritance. They established the liberties of Englishmen as a life estate which their descendants might enjoy, but could not abuse by committing waste, or forfeit by any false, and fraudulent conveyance. They entailed our freedom.

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(34) Stephen Langton.

The Magna Charta, at which our new sect of statesmen, the admirers of abstractions, sneer (it would be well if they read it oftener or at all), established an equality of civil rights to all classes of English freemen. It terminated arbitrary imprisonment and arbitrary spoliation. It enacted that justice should neither be sold, nor denied, nor delayed. It virtually established Habeas Corpus. It eminently advanced civilisation by curtailing at the same time the most crying grievances of the feudal tenure, and rendering inviolate the franchises of all mural communities. It checked the forest laws, established the freedom of foreign commerce, and finally secured the speedy execution of justice by virtually rendering the Court of Common Pleas permanent at Westminster, and independent of the Sovereign.

But, my Lord, these great and manifold blessings were not wrested from the Norman oppressor by the Barons of England under the plea of Utility, or with some windy and senseless cry of securing the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Stephen Langton knew the value of words as well as any clerk in Christendom; and he knew also that the right that is founded on words may be subverted by the same machinery; that what is incontestable in the twelfth century may be a subject of great discussion in the thirteenth; that a first principle in one age may become a second principle in a succeeding century, or a twenty-second principle. Whether there were any Utilitarians under the Plantagenets I pretend not to decide. There is generally no lack of political sciolists, and, for aught I know, some predecessor of Condorcet<sup>(35)</sup> or Bentham may have been innocently dreaming in a cloister; but if these abstract-principle gentlemen had been as active in the reign of John as in that of our own gracious Sovereign, I doubt our great Lord Primate would have placed the State in jeopardy to make it prove and square with their cockbrained fancies. The Barons wished that the liberties they secured for themselves should likewise descend to their posterity; and as therefore they were to become a matter of inheritance, as a matter of inheritance they claimed them. They claimed them as an inheritance which had been too long in abeyance; and, not content with establishing their confirmation by Henry

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(35) Marie Jean Antoine Nicholas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), French philosopher.

Beauclerk, they traced their glorious pedigree even to the Confessor.

I do not find, my Lord, that at a much later but as momentous a period of our history, Selden and Sir Edward Coke, though they lived in an age which, in the Protestant Reformation and the Revolt of the Netherlands, had witnessed revolutions as awful as any of those which we or our fathers can remember; and had, consequently, the advantage of a far vaster range of political experience than the Stephen Langtons and the great patriots of the reign of John; I do not find, my Lord, that these wise, and spirited, and learned personages saw fit to question the propriety of their great ancestors conduct. On the contrary, knowing that society is neither more nor less than a compact, and that no right can be long relied on that cannot boast a conventional origin, they were most jealous of our title to our liberties. They lavished all their learning in proving its perfection and completeness. They never condescended to argue; they offered evidence. They were ever ready with their abstract of title, and, with very slight alterations, the language of the famous Petition of Right itself might be transformed into a humble request to a Sovereign for the restoration of some real estate – some patrimony long withheld from a defrauded posterity. In short, all our struggles for freedom smack of law. There is throughout the whole current of our history a most salutary legal flavour. And arbitrary monarchs and rebellious Parliaments alike cloak their encroachments under the sacred veil of right, alike quote precedent and cling to prescription.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Of Precedent, Prescription, and Antiquity – Of the Formation of a Free Constitution.**

**T**his respect for Precedent, this clinging to Prescription, this reverence for Antiquity, which are so often ridiculed by conceited and superficial minds, and move the especial contempt of the gentlemen who admire abstract principles, appear to me to have their origin in a profound knowledge of human nature, and in a fine observation of public affairs, and satisfactorily to account for the permanent character of our liberties. Those great men, who have periodically risen to guide the helm of our government in times of tumultuous and stormy exigency, knew that a State is a complicated creation of refined art, and they handled it with all the delicacy a piece of exquisite machinery requires. They knew that, if once they admitted the abstract rights of subjects, they must inevitably advance to the abstract rights of men, and then that the very foundations of their civil polity would sink beneath them. They held this to be too dear a price for the barren fruition of a first principle. They knew that the foundation of civil polity is Convention, and that everything and every person that springs from that foundation must partake of that primary character. They held themselves bound by the contracts of their forefathers, because they wished their posterity to observe their own agreements. They did not comprehend how the perpetuity of a State could be otherwise preserved. They looked upon the nation as a family, and upon the country as a landed inheritance. Generation after generation were to succeed to it, with all its convenient buildings, and all its choice cultivation, its parks and gardens, as well as its fields and meads, its libraries and its collections of art, all its wealth, but all its encumbrances.

Holding society to be as much an artificial creation as the fields and cities amid which they dwelt, they were of opinion that every subject was bound to respect the established Constitution of his country, because, independent of all other advantages, to that Constitution he was indebted even for his life. Had not the State been created the subject would not have existed. Man with them, therefore, was the child of the State, and born with filial duties. To disobey the State, therefore, was a crime; to rebel against it, treason; to overturn it, parricide. Our ancestors could not comprehend how this high spirit of loyalty could be more efficiently fostered and maintained than by providing that the rights, privileges, and possessions of all should rest on no better foundation than the State itself. They would permit no antagonist principle in their body politic. They would not tolerate nature struggling with art, or theory with habit. Hence their reverence for prescription, which they placed above law, and held superior to reason. It is to this deference to what Lord Coke finely styles “reverend antiquity” that I ascribe the duration of our commonwealth, and it is this spirit which has prevented even our revolutions from being destructive.

I do not see, my Lord, that this reverence for antiquity has checked the progress of knowledge, or stunted the growth of liberty, in this island. We are universally held to be the freest people in Europe, and to have enjoyed our degree of freedom for a longer period than any existing State. I am not aware that any nation can fairly assert its claims to superior learning or superior wisdom; to a more renowned skill in arts or arms; to a profounder scientific spirit; to a more refined or comprehensive civilisation. I know that a year or two back the newspapers that are in the interest of the new sect of statesmen were wont to twit and taunt us with the superior freedom of our neighbours. “The fact can no longer be concealed”, announced the prime organ of the party”, the people of France are freer than the people of England. The consciousness of this fact will be the last blow to the oligarchy”. Profound publicist! The formation of a free government on an extensive scale, while it is assuredly one of the most interesting problems of humanity, is certainly the greatest achievement of human wit. Perhaps I should rather term it a superhuman achievement; for it requires such refined prudence, such comprehensive knowledge, and such perspicacious sagacity, united with

such almost illimitable powers of combination, that it is nearly in vain to hope for qualities so rare to be congregated in a solitary mind. Assuredly this *summum bonum* is not to be found ensconced behind a revolutionary barricade, or floating in the bloody gutters of an incendiary metropolis. It cannot be scribbled down – this great invention – in a morning on the envelope of a letter by some charter-concocting monarch, or sketched with ludicrous facility in the conceited commonplace book of a Utilitarian sage. With us it has been the growth of ages, and brooding centuries have watched over and tended its perilous birth and feeble infancy. The noble offspring of liberty and law now flourishes in the full and lusty vigour of its proud and perfect manhood. Long may it flourish! Long be its life, venerable its age, and distant its beatified euthanasia! I offer this prayer for the sake of human nature as much as for my country; not more for Britain than for the world of which it is the ornament and honour.

## CHAPTER VI

### Of the Attempts of the French to form a Free Constitution – Reasons of their Failure – Fallacy of adopting the English Constitution in France.

When the people of France, at the latter part of the last century, made their memorable effort for the formation of a free government, they acted on very different principles to those that guided Stephen Langton and Selden. Their principles, indeed, were as abstract as any Utilitarian could desire. They built their fabric, not merely upon the abstract rights of subjects, but the abstract rights of men, and at once boldly seized equality for their basis. We know the result. Equality, anarchy, tyranny, were the necessary gradations of their philosophical system of political regeneration. Wearied with fruitless efforts, and exhausted by long suffering, they at length took refuge in the forced shade of exotic institutions. We witnessed the miserable but inevitable fate of the constitutional studies of the groves of Hartwell<sup>(36)</sup>; a fate which must ever attend institutions that have not been created by the genius of a country, and with which the national character can never sympathise.

In France, previous to the great revolution, there existed all the elements of a free Constitution, although not of the English Constitution. In its old local divisions, indicated by nature, consecrated by custom, in its ancient States, its Parliaments, its corporations, its various classes of inhabitants, its landed tenure, its ecclesiastical and chivalric orders, there might have

been found all that variety of interests whose balanced influences would have sustained a free and durable constitution. The French leaders neglected these admirable materials. To secure; equality they decided on indiscriminate destruction: they not only destroyed law and custom, but they destroyed their country. They destroyed Normandy, they destroyed Provence, they destroyed Burgundy, they destroyed Gascony; not in name alone, but in very deed and fact. They measured their land, and divided it into equal geometrical departments, without the slightest regard to difference of soil or population, variety of manners, or diversity of temperament; and in this Laputan state that great country still remains. Why the name of France was preserved it is difficult to comprehend. If for its associations, could not these Utilitarian legislators understand that, in destroying the associations that clung to the name of Brittany and Burgundy, they were destroying so many wholesome elements of vigorous and enduring government? Their sentiment required that they should still dwell in Paris, beautiful and famous Paris. Were they so blind as not to see that the outraged sympathy, which would have recoiled from styling the capital “the city of the Seine”, was equally offended when the old dweller in Touraine found that he was suddenly transformed into an inhabitant of the department of the Loire?

When Napoleon obtained supreme power France was not a country – it was a camp – a lawless and disorderly camp. Napoleon disciplined it. He found the land geometrically parcelled out, and the French nation billeted on the soil. With such elements of government, even Napoleon could not do more; even with his unlimited authority and indomitable will, all that he could aspire to was to organise anarchy. The Emperor of the French was not one of your abstract-principle gentlemen. His was eminently a practical mind. He looked about for the elements of government, and he could discover no better than those which had been created by the national character, and hallowed by the national habits. Even his sagacious mind deferred to the experience of ages, and even his unconquerable will declined a rivalry with the prescriptive conviction of an ancient people. He re-established the tribunals; he revived chivalry; he conjured up the vision of a nobility; he created the shadow of a Church. He felt that his empire, like all others, must be supported by institutions.

(36) Hartwell, a Buckinghamshire village, to which Louis the Eighteenth retired in 1809.

The rapid vicissitudes of his reign prevented these establishments from maturing into influence and power, and, when Louis the Eighteenth returned to the throne of his fathers, he was called upon to establish a Constitution without being furnished with the elements to form one. The puzzled monarch in despair, with some degree, one would think, of that Rabelaisian humour with which he was not altogether untinged, presented his subjects with the Constitution of another country. Could anything be conceived more supremely ludicrous? Was it in the power of the most ill-regulated mind to break into folly more flagrant? The lunatic with a crown of straw is as much a sovereign as a country is a free country with a paper Constitution. France, without an aristocracy of any kind, was ornamented with an Upper Chamber of hereditary peers, and a Second Chamber invested with all the powers with which, after more than five centuries of graduated practice, we ventured to entrust our House of Commons, was filled with some hundreds of individuals who were less capable of governing a country than a debating society of ingenious youth at one of our Universities. The good Louis presented his countrymen with a free Constitution – drawn up in a morning. He did that which the great Napoleon never ventured to do. Louis the Eighteenth achieved that in one morning which in less favoured England has required nearly a thousand years for its accomplishment. This innocent monarch seems to have supposed that the English Constitution consists merely of two rooms full of gentlemen, who discuss public questions and make laws in the Metropolis at a stated season of the year. The King of France had no idea that political institutions, to be effective, must be founded on the habits and opinions of the people whom they pretend to govern; that the members of a representative body must be composed of a class to which the people have long looked up with respect and confidence; and that these representatives must carry on their affairs in a mode and spirit congenial and homogeneous with the prescriptive practice of the community. The King of France, good, easy man, had forgotten – M. de Lolme<sup>(37)</sup> had not taught him – that the Parliament of England was only the last, though loftiest, gradation in a long flight and series of ascending

establishments; that not a man was entrusted with the exercise of a political suffrage in England who was not already invested with the most precious office in the realm, the duty of deciding upon the fortunes and the lives of his fellow-citizens, and was thus long, early, and accurately practised in the habits of judgment and examination; that nearly every member of the Houses of Parliament was an active magistrate of the realm, and, in taking his legislative seat, bore his quota of local respect to the great aggregate of national reverence; that the vast institution of the Poor Laws alone connected the thoughts and feelings of the unrepresented peasants and populace of England with the Parliament in which the local executors of those statutes as magistrates took their seats as members.

Louis the Eighteenth forgot that in almost every town in England there were corporations which were the express image of the political Constitution of the realm, and vestries in which the local interests were debated by a representative body with an affectation of all the forms and ceremonies of Westminster.

Louis the Eighteenth had no idea that his two rooms full of gentlemen, to be obeyed, must actually or virtually, directly or indirectly, represent every important interest in the kingdom. He had no suspicion that it is not in the power of any legislator that ever lived, or that ever will live, to frame a political assembly a priori that shall represent all, or even a majority of, the interests of a complicated society. The French Chambers represented none – they were only fitted to be the tools of a faction, and the tools of a faction they became. The two Chambers constituted by the Charter were nothing more than two debating societies. I am only surprised that the ludicrous imposture lasted so long; but we must take into consideration the exhaustion of France when the exotic was introduced and planted in its soil, and the unceasing vigilance and sleepless care with which the delicate graft was tended by the foreign Powers, whose complaisant approval had sanctioned its adoption.

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(37) Jean Louis de Lolme (1740-1806), who wrote “The Constitution of England, or an Account of the English Government”.

## CHAPTER VII

### Of the Attempts to establish the English Constitution in the Sicilies and the Peninsula.

If the barren adoption of a form of government by France, styled by courtesy the English Constitution, must be classed among the prime follies of human conduct, what language are we to use when the Anglo-Gallic scheme is gravely introduced to the consideration of the Lazzaroni of Naples and the Hidalgos of Spain; we seem to have arrived at the climax of human absurdity. The classical romance of “Rienzi” was not more ridiculous than the first instance; there is no adventure in “Don Quixote” which can rival the frenzy of the second. In France, thanks to Equality and its crabbed fruits, there were no prejudices to shock; but when we read of the sudden transplantation of institutions gradually established in the course of centuries by the phlegmatic experience of a Saxon people into the most southern soils of Europe, the glittering and barbaric Sicilies, and a country which is the link between Europe and Africa, and which in the fertility of its soil, the temperature of its climate, and the character of its inhabitants, resembles Morocco more than England, we seem to be perusing the mad pages of a political novel poured forth by the wild and mystic genius of some inmate of a German University. Undine or Sintram<sup>(38)</sup> are more real: the pages of Hoffmann<sup>(39)</sup> less shadowy and more probable.

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(38) “Sintram and his Companions” and “Undine”, by Baron Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843).

(39) Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann, 1776-1822. Of his fairy tales, “Der Goldene Topf” was translated by Carlyle in 1827.

I have travelled over Andalusia and Sicily – I travelled on horseback, for there were no roads – I found a feudal nobility and a peasantry untaught, even in the slightest degree, by letters, and steeped in the grossest superstition: I found agriculture generally neglected, or unchanged in its pursuit since the days of Theocritus; a teeming soil, no human energy; no manufactures, no police; mountainous districts swarming with bandits, plains whose vast stillness prepared me for the Syrian deserts; occasionally I reposed in cities where a comparative civilisation had been obtained under the influence of a despotic priesthood. And these are the regions to which it is thought fit suddenly to apply the institutions which regulate the civil life of Yorkshire and Kent! We may celebrate the constitutional coronation of a Bavarian in the Acropolis, and surround his free throne with the bayonets of his countrymen; we may hire Poles and Irishmen as a bodyguard for the Sovereign who mimics the venerable ceremonies of Westminster as she opens the Parliaments of Madrid or Lisbon; but invincible nature will reject the unnatural novelties, and history, instead of celebrating the victory of freedom, will only record the triumph of folly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Of the Last Attempt of the French to form a Free Government.

#### – La Fayette and Lord Somers compared.

Charles the Tenth struggled with the futility of the Charter; he passed years in an impracticable attempt and fruitless effort to govern thirty-two millions of people with a silly piece of paper. With good intentions but with no talents, surrounded by creatures destitute of every quality of statesmen, the King at length attempted to rid himself, and the nation, of an imposture which only supplied a faction with a pretext. Charles failed, but even Charles the Tenth nearly succeeded. Louis Philippe at the head of a mob crying, “Vive la République!” established a despotism. Is there no moral in this rapid catastrophe? Are we to be ever deaf and ever blind? Are we never to learn that a Constitution, a real Constitution, is the creation of ages, not of a day, and that when we destroy such a Constitution we in fact destroy a nation?

Let us bestow a little more examination upon the conduct of the French nation during their last Revolution, their second great effort to establish a free government. Let us contrast La Fayette at the head of France in 1830 with Lord Somers at the head of England in 1688. The parallel will be instructive. When La Fayette had got rid of Charles the Tenth, he found himself precisely in the same situation in which that unfortunate monarch had suffered throughout his reign; he found himself in the precise predicament in which Louis the Eighteenth was placed when he returned from Hartwell; he occupied the exact site of Napoleon when he declared himself First Consul. He found himself at the head of a people without a Constitution, and not possessing any

elements to form one. The creative genius of Napoleon instantly devised some expedients, and until they could be called into action he depended upon the teeming resources of his own strong mind, and the devotion of a victorious army. Louis the Eighteenth trusted to his allies for substantial support, and offered the written description of the Constitution of another country as a pretext for the loyal allegiance of his own subjects. Charles the Tenth had neither a confiding army nor foreign allies; he had neither the creative genius of Napoleon nor the epicurean adroitness of Louis. La Fayette called out the National Guard and changed the national colours for present support, and then, that his revolution might be something better than merely a revolution of ribbons, he took refuge again in abstract principles. Equality would not serve the purpose again; that blooming prostitute had shrunk by this time into a most shrivelled and drivelling harridan. For Equality the pupil of Washington substituted the SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE. The people shouted in its honour, all was satisfactorily settled, and thirty-two millions were again to be governed by a phrase.

Let me recall to your Lordship the tone and temper with which the intelligence of these exploits was received in our own country. I was indeed then absent; but although the announcement of this millennium reached me in the shadow of the Pyramids, and two years elapsed before I returned to a country which I found so changed, I returned in time to witness the still exulting and still palpitating triumph of that party, who are now so anxious, and so active in their anxiety, to abrogate the clumsy and chance-born institutions of England, and substitute in their place their own modish inventions, formed on the irrefragable basis of Reason and Utility. There was no class of persons in England with whom the junior French Revolution<sup>(40)</sup> – I mean the riot that placed the House of Valois<sup>(41)</sup> on the throne of Paris – was so popular in this country as our own anti-constitutional writers. It was the avowed consummation of all their theoretical wishes: the practical adoption of the scheme in England

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(40) The Revolution of 1830.

(41) Disraeli, in a letter to his sister (January 9, 1836), writes: “Eliot... wants to know, by-the-by, why I called the Orleans branch the House of Valois. I am sure I don’t know. Pray find out for me, and write your answer, if you catch one, as soon as possible”.

was all that was requisite to secure the completion of their patriotic satisfaction. I believe there was no individual in this country who more ardently admired the conduct of France at that period than Mr. Bentham. I have been assured this on good authority. Within these last twelve months, even, the principal daily organ of this new sect of statesmen has more than once taunted Englishmen with the fact that the French were now freer than they, and has announced that the consciousness of this fact would be “the last blow to the oligarchy”. I impute no bad motives to these writers; I condescend to none of those “vituperative personalities” which their apostle deprecates; I avoid the “*fallacies ad odium*” which their evangelist so successfully exposes by fallacies still more fallacious (“Book of Fallacies”, pp. 127-133); I am content ever to take the motives of individuals as I find them. I give them full credit for sincerity. But judge, oh! judge by the result, of their capabilities for government; admire their political prescience, and trust, if you will, their practical ability.

The Constitution founded on the Sovereignty of the People has run even a shorter career than the Constitution founded on the Equality of Man: one of the most gifted and civilised nations that ever existed is enthralled by an iron despotism; the liberty of the press is utterly destroyed; trial by jury virtually abrogated; arbitrary imprisonment in daily practice; the country covered with Bas tiles, and the Bas tiles crowded with State victims.

I turn from France in 1830 to England in 1688; from La Fayette to Lord Somers; from the abstract-principle politicians eulogised on all occasions by our anti-constitutional writers to practical statesmen on all occasions the object of their sneers, and whom one of their number has recently published a quarto volume to decry. No sooner had the nation got rid of the Popish tyrant than Lord Somers drew up the famous Declaration of Bight. Mark that title. A Declaration of Bight. This document enumerated and claimed for Englishmen all the rights and liberties to which they were entitled by laws which James the Second had violated. So careful were the leaders of 1688 of not vitiating or injuring the valued title to our liberties that they omitted in this great remedial statute all mention of those further guarantees of our freedom which they had already devised, and which they immediately afterwards proposed and passed in Parliament. First, and before they made any

addition to their inheritance, they determined to secure themselves in the clear freehold of their rights. They were careful, while they were meditating improvements and increase, that they should not, from present neglect, be forced to bring actions of ejectment hereafter for property to which they had become entitled in the times of Charles the First or the Plantagenets, and which in their hot zeal and hurry they had now overlooked. The Declaration of Bight connected the pedigree of our rights and liberties with the Petition of Right, which again carried them upwards to the Great Charter, in like manner dependent on the charter of Henry Beauclerk and the laws of the Confessor. Whether it ascended further was now a matter of interest only to the antiquary. A pedigree of six centuries was proud enough even for our glorious British freedom. In all this Lord Somers exhibited the same practical wisdom as had animated Stephen Langton and guided Selden. Lord Somers, I doubt not, was as conversant with abstract principles of government as any writer in the *Westminster Review*; for a quarter of a century before they had been rife enough in England, but Lord Somers knew to what their adoption had eventually and speedily led. He knew that there was a stern necessity in society which would occasionally vindicate its way above all law; his recent experience would have taught him, if nothing else, that occasional revolutions in States were beyond the power of human prevention; but, like all other wise statesmen, he would not look upon these as the course of politics, any more than the earthquake or the hurricane as the course of nature. He blotted their possibility out of the statute book, however he might choose to speculate over them in a political treatise, in Sidney, or Harrington, or Locke. He wished to obliterate from the mind of the nation that awful truth, that a deed may sometimes be necessary which is not lawful. He knew very well that, if a crisis were again to occur that should require such a sacrifice, the native instinct of men would prompt them to the exploit. They would read their purpose in each other's eyes, and do the deed. Far from braying out the sovereignty of the people, or any such perilous stuff, he and his great associates exerted themselves to the utmost to endow King William with a legal and hereditary title. They had consented to the necessary evil of a revolution, but then they had carved the State

“As a dish fit for the gods<sup>(42)</sup>,  
Not hewed it as a carcass fit for hounds”.

An English revolution is at least a solemn sacrifice: a French revolution is an indecent massacre.

Lord Somers and the English nation were rewarded for their wisdom and their prudent carriage by securing for this realm nearly a century and a half of the greatest order, prosperity, and glory, that this country, or any other country, ever enjoyed. And this leads me, my Lord, to another great event in our history: the Reform of the House of Commons, to which I shall presently advert.

## CHAPTER IX

### Of the Constitutional Development of Prussia.

I wish, however, previously, to call your Lordship’s attention to the conduct of a Sovereign who was placed in the same situation as Louis the Eighteenth at the same period; but whose policy, fortunately for himself and for his subjects, materially differed from that of the brother of the unhappy Charles the Tenth. The Sovereign to whom I allude is the present King of Prussia. The King of Prussia, like the King of France, promised his subjects a Constitution; and we all remember for how many rabid years this Sovereign was the object of the virulent invective of our own disaffected writers, who, by-the-by, seem equally anxious to destroy the English Constitution in England, and to substitute it in every other country, for not redeeming his pledge and fulfilling his promise. No news arrived to the geniuses of our gazettes of the holding of any Parliament at Berlin; no advices reached them of any Dukes of Potsdam or Posen moving constitutional addresses in the Prussian House of Lords; there was not even a rumour of any frank having yet been seen in the handwriting of any honourable representative of Königsberg or Erfurt. What royal treachery! What base, despotic, holy-alliance perfidy! But nations are not to be deceived, and outraged, and trampled on, with impunity. The day of retribution was at hand; sooner or later the hour of popular vengeance would arrive, and then the perfidious tyrant, in spite of his standing army, would learn how utterly vain is the struggle with the spirit of the age, and how futile the final rivalry of force and freedom. Prussia was undoubtedly to be the first victim.

Now this is no misrepresentation, no exaggeration even, of the tone in which the disaffected writers of this country indulged for a series of years

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(42) “Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,  
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds”.  
SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*, II. i. 173.

against the King of Prussia. I think it expedient to seize an occasional opportunity of illustrating the sagacity and information which the disaffected writers in this country invariably bring to the consideration of public subjects, and especially to any speculations connected with foreign politics. Abstract principles and a daily and dexterous practice in the art of misrepresenting circumstances which, in the imperfect survey of gradual occurrence, cannot always be fully comprehended even by the wisest heads and the calmest minds, carry these writers through their domestic lucubrations with a spanking breeze and flying colours; but when we catch them fishing in strange waters, we are better enabled to test the value of their barren axioms, and to gauge the depth and spirit of their acuteness and information.

And so it happened that, when the party throughout Europe who, to use the words of Locke, “are the popular asserters of public liberty and the greatest engrosses of it too, and not unfitly called its keepers – ambitious men who pull down well-framed Constitutions, that out of the ruins they may build themselves fortunes” – when, I say, it happened that that restless and intriguing minority, who ever have the greatest happiness of the greatest number on their lips, succeeded in 1830 in overthrowing the Bourbon Government and embroiling Europe in that period of general commotion, when every European State was more or less shaken with internal convulsions, when Belgium revolted from Holland and Poland from Russia, when the tricolour flag was hoisted in Italy, when Spain summoned its Cortes, and Portugal expelled its Sovereign with foreign bayonets, when even the Swiss Confederation shook to its centre, and every minor German State, from Baden to Brunswick, was the theatre of revolutionary riots – and last of all, but, oh! indeed not least, when even Great Britain yielded to the tempest, and at least a branch of that mighty oak was severed from its vigorous though ancient trunk; Prussia, enslaved and indignant Prussia, governed by a perfidious despot, whose realm was surrounded and even divided in the midst of its territory by the very States which were most inflamed, alone sent forth neither a shout nor a murmur, and alone remained tranquil and undisturbed. How was this? How did this accord with the Utilitarian system of government? Was Prussia content because it was tranquil? Was it the general conviction that the greatest happiness of

the greatest number was secured by the influence of its polity? But that polity was absolute. It is the interest of every man to be a tyrant and a robber. Was, then, the King of Prussia neither a tyrant nor a robber? Was he mild, merciful, just, beneficent, useful? How did this accord with the Utilitarian system of morals?

It appears to me that a study of the policy of Prussia during the last quarter of a century may tend more to a solution of the great problem of government than any exercise of reason with which I am acquainted. By it we may learn how entirely the result of a principle depends upon its method of application, and that that method of application, to be beneficent, must be framed in very strict, though not absolute, deference to the existing civilisation of the country. That a reforming Minister must, above all things, be skilful in adaptation is perhaps but a barren phrase; but this I will observe, that a wise statesman will be careful that all new rights shall, as it were, spring from out old establishments. By this system alone can at the same time the old be purified and the new rendered permanent.

The French Revolution was the death-blow in civilised Europe to the long-declining feudal system. An equality of civil rights was recognised by the King of Prussia and his wise councillors as the basis of their new order of society. And how did they obtain this great end? Not by a bombastic decree from Potsdam suddenly braying the rights of man into the indefinite ears of the motley subjects of the Prussian Government, and creating, probably, endless riots in consequence; but by a series of wise edicts which, in the course of twelve years, entirely abolished serfage, and effected a complete but gradual revolution in the tenure of land, so that at length the Prussian nobility found themselves with no other privilege but the prefixion of a definite article to their name. Almost simultaneously with the abolition of serfage among the rural population, the citizens were emancipated by a great municipal charter, which introduced the system of popular election into towns, and prepared the inhabitants for the function of even higher duties. I assure you, my Lord, that the municipal constitution of Prussia might have been referred to with profit in those memorable debates, in which you achieved so much general benefit and acquired so much personal honour.

I now arrive at the most important decree of the King of Prussia, and the establishment of which I hesitate not to class among the wisest, the most benevolent, and the most comprehensive institutions on record, and fairly to entitle its illustrious originator to rank among the most eminent legislators that have flourished. Convinced that a practical assembly of national representatives can never be collected except in a country in which the inhabitants have been long versed in the partial administration of affairs, and consequently habituated to the practice of public discussion, and anticipating that the hour would arrive when such an assembly might indeed be holden at Berlin, the King in 1815 decreed the erection of Provincial States, to whose supervision the interests of their respective provinces were intrusted, with full power to take into consideration all measures, whether relating to persons, property, or taxation, and to advise with the King thereon, by the right and process of petition. Here the powers of these States ceased; their province was merely consultative; they were invested with no legislative functions. In this great institution of consultative Parliaments, the King of Prussia, by an analogous wisdom which cannot be too much admired, has adopted as the basis of the future Constitution of his country that system of Remedial, as contradistinguished from Legislative, Representation which was long the custom of England, and to the influence of which upon the character of the nation we mainly owe our efficient legislative representation in the House of Commons.

There is no spectacle in the world more delightful than that of a wisely-governed and well-ordered community, and I could willingly dwell upon the consideration of Prussian policy, were the fortunes of that realm the sole subject of my remarks, instead of being the incidental illustration of an argument. I might show how one of the bravest, best disciplined, and most numerous, armies in the world was a popular force; how the boasted career of merit of the French Empire is reduced to such practical reality in Prussia that to rise to the highest appointments in the State requires only a proportionate degree of talent, industry, honesty, and study; and, lastly, how the most philosophical system of national education with which we are acquainted is preparing the rising generation of the realm for all the duties of good citizens, loyal subjects, and devoted patriots.

Having now, I hope, satisfactorily explained why in the heady tumult of 1830 the subjects of Prussia were alone loyal to their Sovereign, I will ask your Lordship what would have been the situation of that country, then and now, had Frederick William, at the same time as Louis the Eighteenth, presented his subjects with the same Constitution and a free press, and thus avoided the diatribes of those enlightened journalists, who for so many years described and denounced this great and good man as a perfidious despot. We know very well what would have happened. A nominally representative assembly would have met in Berlin, consisting of individuals totally inexperienced in the habits of discussion, the practice of legislation, and the art of government. Invested with power which they could not exercise for any beneficial purpose, and representing the nation in form only, and not in spirit, they would have soon split into factions, having no other object but their own aggrandisement. An active click, through the agency of a violent press, would have enlisted the physical force of the people on their side by affecting an extraordinary zeal for popular interests: having obtained a majority in the Chamber by repeated elections, rendered necessary by their factious conduct, they would have overthrown a series of administrations by a series of factious resolutions. When they had rendered the royal government impracticable, they would have forced the King, in defence of the nation and his crown, to some necessary but unconstitutional decrees, and then we should have had "three glorious and beautiful days" at Berlin. Perhaps in such a vicinity the conspiracy would have been crushed, but where now would have been the prosperity and patriotism and philosophy and real freedom of Prussia? The bayonet would have been the only law, and a military dungeon the only school of national education. The King of Prussia was as careful that the rights of his subjects should flow from the royal will, their ancient government, as Stephen Langton, Selden, and Lord Somers that the liberties of their countrymen should be traced to a similar source. All were alike practical men; all avoided the barren assertion of abstract rights; and the same destiny of continued welfare in all probability awaits Prussia that has long so blessed our native land.

## CHAPTER X

### Constitution of the United States exercises the same Fatal Influence over America as that of England over Europe – Mexico, Chili, Peru, contrasted with France, Spain, and Portugal.

It appears to me, my Lord, that it is destined to the free Constitution of the United States of North America to exercise the same fatal influence over the political society of the New World as the Constitution of England has wielded over that of the old. The Constitution of the United States was applied to the Government of Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Chili, by virtue of the same peremptory and abstract principles that had selected the Constitution of England for the government of France, Sicily, Spain, and Portugal; and the same results were acquired. The European and the American States, that have been the victims of this Quixotic spirit of political Propagandism, have vied with each other in successive revolutions, until at length disorder and even disorganisation have universally prevailed, except where anarchy has been arrested by despotism.

Why is this? Why has the republican Constitution flourished in New England, and failed in New Spain? Why has the Congress of Washington commanded the respect of civilised Europe, and the Congresses of Mexico, or Lima, or Santiago, gained only its derision or disgust? The answer is obvious: The Constitution of the United States had no more root in the soil of Mexico, and Peru, and Chili, than the Constitution of England in that of France, and Spain, and Portugal: it was not founded on the habits or the opinions of those whom it affected; to guide, regulate, and control. There was no privity between the legislative institutions and the other establishments of these countries. The electors and the

elected were both suddenly invested with offices for the function of which they had received no previous education and no proper training; and which they were summoned to exercise without any simultaneous experience of similar duties. Had it been the Constitution of England, instead of that of the United States, which they were seeking to establish, these disqualifying circumstances alone would have insured failure; but, in addition to these disadvantages, picture to yourself the frenzy of attempting to establish republican institutions, invented by the Puritans and maintained by their peculiar spirit, not only among an ignorant people educated in Papal despotism, but in revolted colonies possessing a powerful Church establishment and a wealthy aristocracy. In their haste to establish freedom, these rudderless States have not secured independence; their revolutions have degenerated into riots, and, if they be not wise, may yet turn out to be only rebellions.

He is a short-sighted politician who dates the Constitution of the United States from 1780. It was established by the Pilgrim Fathers a century and a half before, and influenced a people practised from their cradles in the duties of self-government. The Pilgrim Fathers brought to their land of promise the laws of England, and a republican religion; and, blended together, these formed the old colonial Constitution of Anglo-America. The transition from such a government to the polity of Washington was certainly not greater in degree than the difference between Great Britain of 1829 and our country at this hour. The Anglo-Americans did not struggle for liberty: they struggled for independence; and the freedom and the free institutions they had long enjoyed secured for them the great object of their severe exertions. He who looks upon the citizens of the United States as a new people commits a moral, if not an historical, anachronism.

Of the Reform of our House of Commons, it is in this place only necessary to observe that the alleged increase of democratic power was not founded on abstract rights, but that the leaders and advocates of the Reform ostentatiously, although ignorantly, recommended their scheme as a restoration of the ancient spirit and a return to the ancient practice of the Constitution. Whether that Reform originated in a Continental or a national impulse; whether it were an expedient or an imprudent measure; whether it were framed in harmony or in hostility

to our existing institutions; whether it really developed the democratic elements of the country in their true and comprehensive sense, or only increased the power and influence of a sectarian minority; whether that great settlement, in short, will be conducive to the ultimate prosperity of the community, the happiness of the people, and the honour of the Empire, are great questions from the discussion of which I do not shrink, but they bear no reference to the point at present under our examination, and are fully treated in a work which for a long period has engaged my time and study<sup>(43)</sup>. My object hitherto has been to prove by reference to the experience both of the Old and the New World, and of the several States of which they respectively consist, that political institutions, founded on abstract rights and principles, are mere nullities; that the only certain and legitimate foundation of liberty is law; that if there be no privity between the old legal Constitution of a country and the new legislature, the latter must fall; and that a free government on a great scale of national representation is the very gradual work of time, and especially of preparatory institutions.

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(43) Possibly at this time Disraeli was engaged on "The Spirit of Whiggism", published in the following year, which briefly discusses the points mentioned.

## CHAPTER XI

### Of the "Wisdom of our Ancestors".

It was a conviction of the soundness of these principles that guided our forefathers in that prudent practice which we have hitherto been in the habit of dignifying by the venerable title of the Wisdom of our Ancestors<sup>(44)</sup>, a phrase once ever on the grateful lips of Englishmen, but now the object of scorn and ridicule by those who fancy themselves very profound, but who in reality are especially superficial. According to the most eminent of the Utilitarian schoolmen<sup>(45)</sup>, in his "Book of Fallacies" we have all the wisdom of our ancestors and our own into the bargain. The great detector of the deceits of political logic has here, according to his custom, involved himself in a position as deceptive as any of those from which he intended to dislodge his opponents. The fallacy of the great Utilitarian schoolman consists in confounding wisdom with knowledge. We may have all the knowledge of our ancestors, and we may have more; but it does not follow that we have all the wisdom of our ancestors, and we may have less. In using the phrase "wisdom of our ancestors", we, in fact, refer to the conduct of those of our ancestors who were wise; and when we have recourse to this phrase in reference to political conduct, we especially allude to those of our forefathers, those rare great men, who in seasons of singular emergency, difficulty, and peril, have maintained the State, and framed, fostered, developed, and established, our political institutions.

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(44) First used, according to Brougham, by Sir William Grant (1754-1832).

(45) Bentham.

Let us take a rapid survey of our wise ancestors, in a political sense, since the Reformation. We will commence by a King, that extraordinary being, Henry the Eighth, for certainly he must not be omitted; Burleigh claims a place, and Cecil, and assuredly Walsingham; then we may count Sir Edward Coke, and Selden, Strafford, and Pym, the Protector, Lord Clarendon, Sir William Temple, King William, Lord Somers, the Duke of Marlborough, the Duke of Argyll, Sir Robert Walpole, Lord Mansfield, Lord Hardwicke, Edmund Burke. The name of a twentieth great statesman since the Reformation previous to our own age does not easily occur to me, although I would include Lord Bolingbroke for reasons I may hereafter offer; and I have some doubt whether it would be possible, even with research, to fix upon another score. Now, it is possible that, having the benefit of all these men's knowledge, we may actually know more than these men; but suppose we are called upon to act tomorrow, and act, as is very probable, very unwisely, we may then find that we have not all these men's wisdom.

M. Guizot, who is so learned in British history, who writes even our annals, and edits our political memoirs<sup>(46)</sup>, doubtless, during the three glorious days and the subsequent settlement, inwardly congratulated the French people on being directed by a statesman who had all the knowledge of Lord Somers, "and something more". But where are the French people now, and what is M. Guizot? A striking evidence that a man may be very knowing without being very wise. Throughout the whole of our history we observe that the leading men who have guided the fortunes of our Commonwealth in times of great difficulty and danger have invariably agreed in one line of policy – namely, to eschew abstractions. This resolution is the distinguishing feature of English statesmanship; it is the principal cause of the duration of the English State; and herein eminently consists the "wisdom of our ancestors".

(46) "Mémoires relatifs à la Révolution d'Angleterre" (26 vols.).

## CHAPTER XII

### The "House of Commons" not the "House of the People" – The Political Institutions of England sprung from its Legal Institutions – Nature of the Representative Principle – Original Character of the English Parliament.

**B**ut, my Lord, to confess the truth, I have my suspicions that the new school of statesmen, with all their affected confidence in abstract principles, and all their valorous determination to construct our coming commonwealth on a basis of pure political science, have some misgivings that this great result is not to be entirely obtained by the virgin influence alone of their boasted philosophy; and I am confirmed in this imagination by the distrustful circumstance of their simultaneously condescending, amid all their theory, to avail themselves, for the purpose of advancing their object, of a great practical misrepresentation of the form and spirit of our Constitution. For it is curious to observe that, while they pretend to offer us an unflinching test of the excellence and expediency of all political institutions, they are at the same time indefatigable in promulgating the creed that the branch of our legislature hitherto styled the House of Commons is, in fact, the House of the People, and that the members of that assembly are consequently and absolutely representatives of the People. VOX POPULI VOX DEI is a favourite adage, and ever on these persons' tongues: so that, if the House of Commons be the House of the People, it is also the House of God; it is omniscient and omnipotent – a convenient creed! There was a time when our Kings affected to rule by Divine right. It cost our fathers dear to root out that fatal superstition. But all their heroic labours will prove worse than fruitless if the Divine right of Kings is to be succeeded by the

Divine right of the House of Commons. In such a belief, I, for one, see no security for our cherished liberties; and still less a guarantee for our boasted civilisation: in such a belief it seems to me the prolific seeds are deeply sown of tyranny and of barbarism, and if this principle is to be the foundation of our future polity, it requires, in my opinion, no great gift of inspiration to foretell that all those evils are impending for this country which are the inevitable consequences of its destinies being regulated by a vulgar and ignoble oligarchy.

My Lord, I do not believe that the House of Commons is the House of the People, or that the members of the House of Commons are the representatives of the People<sup>(47)</sup>. I do not believe that such ever were the characters, either of the House of Commons or the members of the House of Commons; I am sure that such are not now the characters of that assembly, or of those who constitute it, and I ardently hope that such will never be the characters.

The Commons of England form an Estate of the realm, and the members of the House of Commons represent that Estate. They represent nothing more. It is a very important estate of the realm; it may be the most important estate. Unquestionably it has of late years greatly advanced in power; but at this very moment, even with all the accession of influence conferred upon it by the act of Reform, it has not departed from the primary character contemplated in its original formation; it consists of a very limited section of our fellow-subjects; invested, for the general advantage of the Commonwealth, with certain high functions and noble privileges. The House of Commons is no more the House of the People than is the House of Lords; and the Commons of England, as well as the Peers of England, are neither more nor less than a privileged class, privileged in both instances for the common good, unequal doubtless in number, yet both, in comparison with the whole nation, forming in a numerical estimation only an insignificant fraction of the mass.

Throughout these observations, in speaking of the English Constitution, I speak of that scheme of legislative and executive government consisting of the King and the two Houses of Parliament;

but this is a very partial view of the English Constitution, and I use the term rather in deference to established associations than from being unconscious that the polity of our country consists of other institutions, not less precious and important than those of King, Lords, and Commons. Trial by Jury, Habeas Corpus, the Court of King's Bench, the Court of Quarter Sessions, the compulsory provision for the poor, however tampered with, the franchises of municipal corporations, of late so recklessly regarded by short-sighted statesmen, are all essential portions of the English Constitution, and have been among the principal causes of the excellent operation and the singular durability of our legislative and executive Government. The political institutions of England have sprung from its legal institutions. They have their origin in our laws and customs. These have been the profound and perennial sources of their unexampled vigour and beneficence; and unless it had been fed by these clear and wholesome fountains, our boasted Parliament, like so many of its artificial brethren, would soon have dwindled and dried up, and, like some vast canal filled merely with epidemic filth, only been looked upon as the fatal folly of a nation.

We talk much at the present day of the Representative principle; yet how little is that principle understood! An assembly may be representative without being elective. No one can deny that the Church of England is at this day not only virtually, but absolutely, faithfully, and efficiently represented in the House of Lords by the Bishops; yet these Lords of Parliament are not elected by their clergy. Previous to the Reformation the mitred Abbots took their seat in the Upper House. Who can deny that these great officers were the direct representatives of their powerful and wealthy institutions? If a representative assembly be not necessarily elective, so also it may be elective without being legislative. Representation may be purely remedial, and such for a long period was the character of English representation. This remedial representation arose out of some peculiar elements of our ancient Parliament, an assembly which, besides being a great national council, was also a high court of justice. Our ancient Parliaments, like those of other feudal countries, were formed by the simultaneous gathering of a vast number of estates, tribunals, and public officers, from all parts of the kingdom, who met to convey to the Sovereign information of the condition of his

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(47) Compare argument in *Morning Post* articles, 1835.

realm, and to assist him in the execution of justice between his subjects. Among those who mingled with the prelates of the land, and the Earls and Barons of the kingdom, were certain chosen delegates of the counties, who were, in fact, elected by a particular order or estate of the kingdom to act, not as their legislators, but as their judges. These personages were prepared to afford immediate information to the Sovereign of the state of their districts; and previous to their arrival at the great council they obtained, by the inquisitions of the juries of the hundreds, an accurate report of the condition of the county, of the necessities of the lieges, of the “oppressions” to be redressed, and of their ability to contribute to the exigencies of the State.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Of the Estate of Knights – Rise of the Towns.

These deputies were members of a class of our population which, from the important part it was subsequently destined to fill in the fortunes of our country, requires our particular attention. I allude to the estate of THE KNIGHTS. In spite of some cloudy cavils of Madox<sup>(48)</sup>, our modern inquirers agree with the learned Selden, that every immediate tenant of the Crown in England was a Baron by virtue of his tenure, and as such entitled to be personally summoned to the King’s Great Court or Council of Parliament, and therein to take his seat. But in process of time these military tenants of the Crown had, by the alienation and splitting of feofs, become in number so considerable, and in personal influence, in comparison with their high privilege, so moderate, that the Crown neglected to summon them to its councils, and, indeed, the burthen of attendance in Parliament was so grievous to men whose limited estates required their personal supervision that the royal neglect was by themselves considered anything but a grievance. In the thirteenth century these royal tenants formed the great bulk of the freeholders of the kingdom, for I need not remind your Lordship that it was not then uncommon for a tenant *in capite* to hold even a fraction of a knight’s fee. These lower nobility, or minor Barons as they were styled, in gradually ceasing to be insignificant Peers, subsided, however, into a most powerful equestrian order, in which the lesser portion of the freeholders, who were only mesne tenants, by degrees also merged. And thus was established the ESTATE of THE KNIGHTS.

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(48) Thomas Madox, English antiquary and royal historiographer (d. 1727).

The local government of the country was in the hands of this order. In their county court, under the style and title of “The Community or Commonalty of the County”, a phrase which has been so much misunderstood, but which originally implied nobility, this estate met to elect one of their number as the governor or guardian of the shire, their choice subject, however, to the royal ratification. When the King held his great council, he directed the Sheriff of the county to return two or more knights to present to him the condition of their district. These knights, being sworn, summoned before them the jurors as witnesses of the hundreds, and, having obtained from these inquisitions all necessary information, repaired to the great council of the kingdom with their quota of statistical intelligence. The transition from being merely the selected councillors of their Sovereign to being the virtual representatives of their order was natural, easy, and rapid; and thus this important and numerous estate of the kingdom was in fact represented by deputation in the great council – a representation, however, merely remedial, and not legislative: they came to impart knowledge and inferentially to proffer counsel, to present to the King the state of his realm and the “grievances” of his subjects, and to assist the monarch in deciding suits arising in their districts, and in ascertaining the just apportionment of the general taxation. As from councillors and judges they became representatives, so also in time their sanction was held necessary to the tax which originally they had met only to estimate by their information. In time, also, their consent was equally held necessary to the laws, which, however, they never originated. It is, indeed, very questionable whether the great office of legislation was then exercised even by the more potent estates of the kingdom themselves, who appeared personally in Parliament, the Clergy and the Peers. In those days legislation was the province of the clerk-like councillors of the Sovereign, and I do not myself infer any degrading inferiority in the estate of the knights from the circumstance of their Parliamentary attendance assuming merely a remedial character. Thus, gradually, a most important constituent portion of our House of Commons developed itself, and so little has any preconceived theory ever influenced the formation of our political institutions, and so entirely have they emanated from the legal economy of the land, that I have myself little doubt that this convenient method,

by which the English knights assumed their fitting place in the council of their Sovereign, was derived from ancient and analogous, though occasional, customs of our country which prevailed in England before the Conquest, and which pervaded the Teutonic jurisprudence in every land. The Court of Echevins<sup>(49)</sup> alone will occur to those who are learned in British history, and curious in constitutional inquiries.

Thus we find, in the thirteenth century, the King of England surrounded in his council by three estates of his realm – his Prelates, his Peers, and his Knights. We approach now an interesting period in the history of our political Constitution. The reign of Henry the Third is one of the most important in our annals. The great struggle between the Norman King and the feudal aristocracy was at this time conducted on both sides with unexampled energy. Undoubtedly the great body of the nation in these struggles favoured the aristocracy. In England, unlike the Continent, the King was powerful. We owe our liberties to our nobility. But I am inclined to attribute the sympathy which has ever subsisted between the English and their aristocracy to a more influential cause than the mere power and consequent tyranny of the Crown, and to this cause, which at present flourishes, and to which may be principally ascribed the singular prosperity of this country, I shall hereafter advert.

Under the Norman Kings, and especially under Henry the Second, the English towns had made rapid advances in wealth and population. Charters of incorporation became frequent. In the latter part of the twelfth century it was impossible for a sagacious politician not to perceive that new and powerful interests were springing up in the Commonwealth, or to shut his eyes to the political privileges which awaited the growing wealth and increasing numbers of the citizens and burgesses of England. But as, from the very nature and origin of these mural communities, the

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(49) Mr. J. H. Round's discovery, “among the manuscripts of the British Museum, of the oath of the ‘Commune’ proves for the first time that London in 1193 possessed a fully-developed ‘Commune’ of the Continental pattern. From this we learn that the government of the city was in the hands of a Mayor and twelve *échevins* (skivini); both these names, being French, seem for a time to have excluded the Saxon Aldermen. Twelve years later (1205-06) we learn, from another document preserved in the same volume as the oath, that *alii probi homines* were associated with the Mayor and echevins to form a body of twenty-four (that is, twelve skivini and an equal number of councillors). Round holds that the Court of Skivini and *alii probi homines*... was the germ of the Common Council”. – Article on “London”, “Encyclopaedia Britannica”, vol. xvi.; J. H. Round, “The Commune of London and Other Studies”, 1899, cited.

Sovereign had the undoubted and unquestioned prerogative of imposing tallages or taxes on cities and boroughs at pleasure, there existed no obvious or urgent inducement to summon the inhabitants to the great council of estates, which principally assembled to apportion the aids to be raised on their separate orders. Although the Earl of Leicester<sup>(50)</sup>, who headed the rebellious Barons, unquestionably possessed many of the eminent qualities becoming the leader of a great party, I am not disposed to behold any very revolutionary tendency in his conduct when, mighty as were the results in his memorable Parliament of 1264, in addition to the Prelates, the Magnates, and the Knights, he decided to issue writs of summons to “two honest, lawful, and discreet” citizens and burgesses from every city and burgh. I am more inclined to believe that this great movement was rather dictated by a politic apprehension that, however the nation might be disposed to view in complacent silence his assumption of many of the prerogatives of the King, who was his prisoner, they might perhaps have expected that an exception would be made in favour of the royal right of arbitrary taxation. I suspect that he was of opinion that the tallages would be forthcoming with more readiness if the citizens were flattered by granting those contributions as a favour which were before exacted as a right. Certain it is that De Montfort anticipated in some degree the necessities of his age; for when, under the vigorous policy of the next reign, civil peace again flourished, and the legitimate Sovereign found it convenient to avail himself of the new machinery which his rebellious subject had introduced, no privilege ever conferred by a King was ever received with more discontent than the right of returning members to his Parliament by his loyal towns. These honest burghers were loth to leave their homes and business for pursuits with which they were little acquainted, and society for which they were unfitted. Petitions to be exempted from the grievance of sending members to Parliament are not uncommon in our early records; many burgesses when appointed declined to serve, and absented themselves from the council; and to remedy these inconveniences the Sheriff was invested with a discretionary power of omitting boroughs in

his return. It would seem that, from experience, the inhabitants of towns preferred the arbitrary taxation of their Sovereign to the grants of their representatives, and that these worthy traders were generally cajoled by the great council into contributions more liberal than their calmer moments in their stores and counting-houses approved.

We must, however, guard ourselves from supposing that these citizens and burgesses who were summoned to Parliament were absolutely elected by the inhabitants of the towns as their representatives. Their presence in Parliament is another instance of representation without election. They were often nominated by the Sheriff of the county; and even when that great officer, from negligence or favour, permitted the return to be made by those more interested in the transaction, the nomination was confined to the small governing body, who returned two of their members, in general very unwilling missionaries, to the great council.

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(50) Simon de Montfort.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Creation of the Estate of the Commons – The House of Commons an Equestrian Chamber – Why the Equality of Civil Rights was established in England at so Early a Period in our History.

At first the three Estates of the realm held themselves aloof; the Knights by right and custom taking their seats among the Peers, while the citizens and burgesses remained in humble attendance, and, after settling the amount of their tallages, gave themselves no further concern with the public business, but cheerfully returned to their homes and affairs. But the two great causes which had simultaneously degraded the lower nobility into mere gentry, and raised the burghers into comparative importance, still operated; the increased division of land rendered the first class less influential and more numerous, the increase of commerce the last more powerful and more wealthy. The chasm between the magnates and the lower nobility or Knights became each year wider and more profound, the boundary that separated the Knights from the burghers each year less marked and definite. It is impossible to fix nicely the period when Parliament was divided into two Houses, but I am inclined to place it towards the end of the reign of Edward the First. It is easier to ascertain the principles on which the memorable division was established. Between the Prelates and the Magnates on the one hand, and the Knights and Burgesses on the other, there existed this memorable distinction. The first were in themselves estates of the realm; the last were only representatives of estates. To induce the Knights, however, to quit their noble companions, of whom the law still held them as the personal equals, and mix with the humble burghers, required some politic dexterity. It was at length

settled that a new estate of the realm should be created, styled the Estate of the Commons or Commonalty, a title, as I have before observed, of great dignity, implying nobility, and formerly confined to the landed proprietors. The burghers were flattered by merging into the landed gentry of the country, and thus obtaining the dignity of the lesser nobility, and the Knights were compensated for the sullen sacrifice on their part by giving their title to the new estate, and impressing their peculiar character on the new chamber in which, for a very long period of our history, they naturally took the lead. Yet even then some time elapsed before the Knights condescended to renounce their old privilege of apportioning the tax of their original order, and blending the aids of the Lower House of Parliament.

Thus have I traced, my Lord, and I assure you not without some difficulty, the history of the formation of our House of Commons. And now to what did this great revolution in the Constitution of our country amount? To nothing more nor less than the establishment of AN EQUESTRIAN CHAMBER. If such were its original character, that character has been maintained throughout the whole of our history, and that character, as I will shortly show, has not been affected by the recent Act of Reform. It never was the House of the People; it is not the House of the People. The members of the House of Commons never were the representatives of the people. They are not the representatives of the people. They always were, and they are still, the representatives of the Commons, an estate of the realm privileged as the other estates, not meeting personally for the sake of convenience, but by its representatives, and constituting, even with its late considerable accession of members, only a small section of the nation. We have a curious instance how accurately this distinction was observed in the time of Henry the Fourth, and how perfect was the order of Parliament in that reign. For when the King met his Parliament, and, having addressed the estates of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, then turned to the House of Commons, he promised that he “would do nothing *against the liberty of the estate for which they had come to Parliament*, nor against the liberties of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal”. The impudent misrepresentation of our anti-constitutional writers originates in an ignorant misconception of words. If the House had been called the House of Knights, or rather the House

of Squires, which is the literal meaning of the word Commons, we should have heard nothing of this dangerous nonsense by virtue of which it is sought that the whole power of the realm shall be concentrated in one of the estates, and that, too, one recently remodelled for factious purposes. An Estate of the People involves a contradiction in terms, for an estate is a popular class established into a political order. If, therefore, the Sovereign had established the Lower House as the estate of the people, he would have virtually declared that the clergy and the nobles, the most influential part of the nation, were not a portion of the people. Far from this, the cautious monarch refrained from even establishing the citizens into a separate estate; instead of doing this, he flattered their vanity while he checked their independence, and while he raised them to the rank of Commons, he secured, to use the epithet in its popular – not its correct – sense, an aristocratic character for each estate of his realm. As the Upper House consisted of two estates of the realm, the Clergy and the Peers, so also the Lower House might equally have consisted of the representatives of two estates of the realm, the Knights and the Burgesses. But this was avoided. Yet suppose the Sovereign had thought fit to establish a separate estate of the citizens, would the Lower House any more have represented the people? By no means. Other classes of the people would still have remained un-represented, and classes the most numerous – for instance, the peasantry. Such estates were not unknown in the Middle Ages, and even at this day an Estate of the Peasantry meets in the Diets of Sweden and the Storthings of Norway.

By this final constitution of the English Parliament the seal was set to that glorious characteristic of our laws which various causes had been for a long period silently combining to create; to which I mainly attribute the freedom, honour, and prosperity of our country, and our singular preservation from that whirlwind of outraged passion and opinion which swept over Europe during the end of the last century, and still threatens Christendom, with its wild and moaning wail. This glorious characteristic of our laws is our equality of civil rights. By the formation of the House of Commons, the great body of the lesser nobility of England formally renounced those rights of peerage, the practical enjoyment of which had been long escaping them; and instead of that gallant but adventurous swarm of personages who, under the perplexing

title of nobles, abounded in Europe before the great French Revolution gave the last blow to the crumbling Gothic edifice of feudal polity, men who were distinguished from ordinary freemen by privileges inherent in their blood, and held their pedigrees, often their only muniments, as valid exemptions from the toils and cares of honest industry; men who were free from contributing to the public burthens; who alone might draw the sword; and whose daughters were defended by law from profaning alliances with *roturiers* – arose in this our favoured land of Albion, a class of individuals noble without privilege, noble from the generosity of their nature, the inspiration of their lineage, and the refinement of their education; a class of individuals who, instead of meanly submitting to fiscal immunities, support upon their broad and cultivated lands all the burthens of the State; men who have conquered by land and sea, who have distinguished themselves in every honourable profession, and acquired fame in every department of learning and in every province of science and of art; who support the poor instead of plundering them, and respect the court which they do not fear; friends alike to liberty and order, who execute justice and maintain truth – the gentlemen of England; a class of whom it is difficult to decide whether their moral excellence or their political utility be most eminent, conspicuous, and inspiring.

In due and sympathising deference to the lesser nobility, their former equals who subsided into gentry, the magnates were careful to arrogate to themselves no privileges which were not necessary and incidental to them in their character of an estate of the realm, and their capacity of hereditary legislators of a free people. So that even their blood was not ennobled, and their children ranked only as Commons; thus distinctly announcing that their rank was a political institution for the public weal, and not a privilege for their private gratification. Indeed, it would not be too much to affirm that the law of England does not recognise nobility. It recognises the peerage, and it has invested that estate with august accessories; but to state that a man's blood is ennobled is neither legal nor correct, and the phrase, which has crept into our common parlance, is not borrowed from the lawyers, but from the heralds. Thus, I repeat, was consummated that glorious characteristic of our laws, the equality of our civil rights, and to this cause I refer the sympathy which has ever subsisted between the great body of the English nation and their aristocracy.

## CHAPTER XV

### Why Liberty flourished under the Plantagenets – Why Liberty declined under the Tudors – Primary Effect of Protestantism in England not Favourable to our Civil Liberties.

**L**iberty flourished under the Plantagenets – and for this reason, that the aristocracy headed the nation, and the House of Commons soon learnt to combine with the discontented party among the Peers. The remedial character of our representation rapidly expanded into the legislative, and the judge matured into a law-maker. Seldom has the crown of this realm circled a more able and vigorous brow than that of our third Edward: his reign, too, was long and eminently prosperous. Yet as early as this reign the illegality of raising money without consent of Parliament was firmly and practically established, as well as the necessity of the concurrence of the two Houses in any alteration of the law. In this reign, too, for the first time, the councillors of the Crown were impeached by the Commons, though there is little doubt that the Lower House would not have ventured on so bold an advance in authority had they not been secretly stimulated by the Prince of Wales, and upheld by the majority of the Peers, jealous of the intrigues of the Duke of Lancaster against the interests of the heir-apparent. The Parliament that had ventured to resist an Edward dared to control a Richard. The Commons now inquired into the public expenditure, and even regulated the economy of the royal household. The Lancastrian Kings owed their throne to the Parliament, and the Parliament was mindful of the obligation. Under these three Sovereigns the present Constitution of England was amply, if not perfectly, developed. The right of taxation in the two Houses was never questioned; the direction of

the public expenditure was claimed and practised; the illegality of royal ordinances declared; Ministers, too, were impeached and punished, and finally the privileges of Parliament for the first time established. But perhaps the most important change in our constitutional system was the introduction, in the reign of Henry the Sixth, of complete statutes of the Commons, under the title of Bills, instead of their old method of Petitions. By these means the Sovereign was obliged to sanction or to reject the propositions of his Parliament without qualification; and as it had been previously a maxim of Parliamentary practice that all laws should originate in the form of petitions from the Lower House, the legislative right of the Commons was now completely and firmly established.

If liberty flourished under the Plantagenets, it faded under the Tudors. How was this? Compare the reigns of the third Edward or the second Richard with those of Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth, and no one can shut his eyes to the vast progression which our country has made in all the elements of civilisation. We were much more populous, infinitely wealthier. We enjoyed a great commerce, our manufactures were considerable, our ancient military reputation maintained, our advance in arts indisputable. Why were we less free? Why had that bold House of Commons, to whom the warlike and impatient Edward had to bow before he could carry on a struggle flattering to the fame of England, sunk into a servile crew, who witnessed without a murmur the forced loans of a Privy Seal and a benevolence? Where were the men who, under the wily Henry the Fourth, had declared the royal ordinances illegal? Humbling themselves before royal proclamations, crushed by the oppression of the Star Chamber, and yielding without even a remonstrance to the enormity of the Council. Who now dared to inquire into the public administration? Why were not Wolsey and Burleigh impeached as well as Lord Latimer and Suffolk? Who remembered the statute of Henry the Sixth, “for the punishment of such as assault any on their way to the Parliament”, when any member who offended the Sovereign or the Minister was, in scornful defiance of his privilege, instantly imprisoned; and Henry the Eighth vowed he would behead any of the Commons who opposed his will? We cannot account for this extraordinary change in the character of our House of Commons by the usual reason of a standing

army. Henry the Eighth commanded fifty beefeaters, and Elizabeth trusted to the guardianship of the trained bands. The truth is, the House of Commons was no longer supported by the Peers, and the aristocracy no longer headed the nation. The great advance in public liberty under the Plantagenets was carried on by a Parliament in which a perfect understanding subsisted between the two Houses. We owe that bold scheme of popular government to which Selden and Pym in other days were content to appeal to “the wisdom of their ancestors”, and to the united and harmonious efforts of the three estates of the realm.

The Wars of the Roses were mortal to the great Peers and chivalric commons of England, and the tints of those fatal flowers were only emblematic of the terror and the blood that they occasioned. Unquestionably these evils in the course of time might have been remedied, and, doubtless, in the natural order of events a new race of great national leaders would have arisen, who might have restored that noble freedom and that sweet equality which rose under the Plantagenets, struggled under the Stuarts, and triumphed under the benignant sway of the House of Brunswick: but when, in the reign of Henry the Eighth, the aristocracy afforded some indications of reviving power, a new feature appeared in European, and especially in English, politics, which changed the whole frame and coloured the complete aspect of our society – RELIGIOUS DISSENSION. It was by balancing the great parties in which this new spirit, so fertile in discord, divided the nation, that the Tudors, and especially Elizabeth and her statesmen, succeeded in establishing her power, until they delivered over to her successor the sceptre of a despot. I have myself no doubt that, although in its nature intimately and essentially connected with the cause of civil liberty, the immediate effect of the reformation on our English polity was anything but favourable to the growth of our liberties and the establishment of our political institutions. The civil despotism of the King was in that age the consequence of his religious supremacy. The creation of the High Commission Court alone, and the sanction which the religious passions of a large party in the nation gave to that dark tribunal, afforded a fatal precedent for an application of analogous discipline to civil affairs which in practice reduced our Constitution to a polity befitting the meridian of Madrid, or even Constantinople.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Of the Constitution of the House of Commons under the Tudors, and of the System of Borough Representation.

If we survey the constitution of the House of Commons under the Tudors, we shall find that, although it experienced several very considerable changes, they were far from effecting any departure from the original character of that assembly. It did not in any degree more become the House of the People. It still remained the representative of an estate of the realm, an estate in number, I apprehend, not very considerable; inferior probably to the fleeting population of any of the large fairs then common in the country, and at this day not superior to the population of a second-rate capital. The House, when it was first established, consisted of seventy-four knights, and, for the causes I have before stated, of a very fluctuating number of burgesses: in early times they amounted to two hundred and sixty. The knights, in spite of their minority, seem to have indulged in no jealousy of their humbler brethren, but appear to have exercised in the chamber which had derived from them its name all that superior authority to which their noble lineage and territorial possessions entitled them. It is curious that the idea of representation, as relative to population, never appears to have entered into the consideration of our ancestors: York and Rutland returned the same number of representatives. I ascribe the apparent anomaly to the circumstance of the constituent body being generally very limited, and particularly so in the northern counties. It was never intended that the population should be represented, but a particular class of it, and, as the spirit of the body pervaded all the county representatives, a knight of Rutland doubtless considered himself virtually as much the guardian

of the knights of the county of York or Lancaster as of his own shire or that of Huntingdon. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that earlier than is usually imagined the English knights were in the habit of being returned for boroughs; and I apprehend that the majority of the House of Commons in the reigns of the Lancastrian Kings consisted of the descendants of our former minor Barons.

On the accession of Henry the Eighth, the burgesses were in number two hundred and twenty-four. Henry extended county representation to Wales, Chester, and Monmouth, and even summoned burgesses from his Scotch town of Berwick and his French garrison of Calais. Edward the Sixth created fourteen boroughs and revived ten: Mary added twenty-one, and Elizabeth sixty. In most of these instances the right of representation was conceded to insignificant places and confined to mere nomination. Elizabeth was the first who worked on an extensive scale the great Parliamentary mine of Cornwall, and liberally enfranchised fishing-towns and miserable villages. The object of the Tudor Sovereigns in this increase of the House of Commons was to command majorities on the great religious questions. Arbitrary in every other respect, they were not unwilling to share with the compliant orthodoxy of their Parliament the responsibility of those extraordinary statutes which form an epoch in the philosophy of legislation.

But the Tudors, in this extensive exercise of the power of Parliamentary appointment, introduced no heretical elements into the constitution of our House of Commons. As early as Edward the Second the representatives of more than twenty boroughs had been added by the King to the members of that assembly. I do not believe that the representation of our boroughs was originally elective. Far from being of opinion that the popular character of the third estate had gradually become corrupt and diminished previous to the late Act of Reform, I believe, on the contrary, that since the accession of the Stuarts it had gradually become more vigorous and more comprehensive. Our Parliament long possessed, and indeed in some degree still retains, its original character of a royal council. The object of our Sovereigns was to surround themselves by the notable subjects of their realm, and they proceeded in the shortest and simplest manner to obtain their purpose. The elective character of the Parliamentary knights arose

from the peculiar circumstances of their order and the ancient juridical customs of their shires. But these circumstances bore no relation to the Parliamentary burgesses, and although, *honoris causa*, they were incorporated with the noble Commons of the realm, the machinery of their selection was far less nice and complicated. In general these returns were made by the small governing body which must exist in all mural communities, whether incorporated or not; probably in corporations the Aldermen or capital burgesses served by rotation. Sometimes, when no leading member of the society could be induced to undergo the inconvenience of quitting his home and neglecting his affairs, a neighbouring squire was substituted: sometimes the return was at once made by the Sheriff from his knowledge of the leading personages of the borough; sometimes the future members were recommended by the Privy Council; sometimes the same representatives at once returned to a new Parliament, without any intervening ceremony, who had been seated in the last. The towns in royal demesne were probably always represented by officers of the Crown, and, indeed, this class of individuals abounded in the Tudor Parliaments. If this loose practice of borough representation were occasionally in turbulent or careless times drawn into a dangerous precedent for the return of knights for shires without the due and legal convocation of the county court, it is certain that eventually the more formal and comprehensive scheme of county representation exercised a far more decided influence on that of the boroughs. As these increased in population and intelligence, and the privilege of being represented in the royal council became to be more generally understood and more finely appreciated, the system of representation by election, always more or less maintained by the return of the knights, afforded, as the origin of institutions became darker, at the same time a precedent for those inhabitants who sought a participation in the now envied privilege, and a plan by which their wishes might be accomplished. Thus the freeholders in boroughs by the right of their burgage tenure<sup>(51)</sup>, the freemen of the corporations, and sometimes the inhabitants at large, where burgage tenure was rare, and the towns,

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(51) A tenure by which lands or tenements in cities and towns were held of the King or other lord for a certain yearly rent.

though flourishing, had not been incorporated, gradually established their right to the exercise of a suffrage, and thus in the course of time the House of Commons came to consist of county members elected by the freeholders; representatives of cities and boroughs chosen by a popular constituency where a popular constituency existed; and representatives of the same class who retained the old exemption from election, because, in fact, the unimportant places for which they appeared in Parliament had never emerged from their original insignificance, or produced a population bold and flourishing enough to usurp the return of their representatives from the hands of the governing body.

This I believe to be a very just, as I am sure it is a very impartial, view of the formation of our House of Commons; and if the history of our country and our Constitution had ever been anything better than a turbulent theatre for the gladiatorial struggle of party writers, it is one, I believe, which long ere this would have been adopted: for it has the merit of being not only consistent with human nature and consonant with that profounder knowledge of the origin of our political institutions which is the privilege of the present day, but it reconciles all the characteristics and all the difficulties which have been proved and promulgated by the four great theories of borough representation that have so long puzzled our lawyers and perplexed our antiquaries. Those who may imagine that I derive any satisfaction in establishing the narrow origin of our present more popular representation greatly mistake my feelings and opinions. I am not one of those who believe that the safety of the Constitution is consulted by encouraging an exclusive principle in the formation of the constituency of our third estate. It is not the supposed democratic character which it has assumed under the new arrangement – I wish I could call it settlement – that fills me with any apprehensions. On the contrary, I wish it were even more catholic, though certainly not more Papist. It is its sectarian quality in which I discover just cause of alarm. But it has been necessary for me to show what was the original character of our Lower House, and the primary intention of the founders of our Constitution. In creating a third estate of the realm, they established an order of men, limited in number and highly privileged, styled the Commons. Although we have increased the number of these Commons, we have not increased their privileges or enlarged their political

capacity. They still remain an estate of the realm, and only an estate of the realm – in spirit as well as in law. For although their representatives may be chosen by three hundred thousand men instead of one hundred thousand, they are still only the representatives of a limited and favoured class of the kingdom. The House of Commons is not a jot more the House of the People, unless we exclude from our definition of the people many of the most essential and most important elements of a nation. I shall have occasion in due season to speak further of the great reforming scheme of 1830. Here I will only observe that, in a hasty and factious effort to get rid of representation without election, it will be as well if eventually we do not discover that we have only obtained election without representation.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Anecdote of the Pacha of Egypt – Representation without Election illustrated.

The current of these observations reminds me of an anecdote which may perhaps amuse your Lordship, nor be found altogether devoid of instruction. When I was in Egypt the Pacha of that country, a personage, as is well known, of rare capacity, and influenced by an almost morbid desire of achieving in an instant the great and gradual results of European civilisation, was extremely desirous, among other objects of passion or of fancy, of obtaining a Parliament. Emulous of the prosperity and popular power of our Kings, his Highness was eager to obtain the means by which, on reflection, he was convinced not only that our country so eminently flourished, but by which our Sovereign succeeded in commanding at the same time obedience and affection. It so happened that a young English gentleman, who was on his travels<sup>(52)</sup>, was at this period resident in Cairo, and as he had more than once had the good fortune in an audience of engaging the attention of the Pacha by the readiness or patience of his replies, his Highness determined to do the young Englishman the honour of consulting him.

Our countryman received the summons, which all instantly obey, and immediately repaired to the Divan of the citadel. He found the Pacha surrounded by his courtiers, his engineers, his colonels, and his eunuchs. At length his Highness clapped his hands, and the chamber was cleared, with the exception of a favourite Minister and a faithful dragoman.

The surprise of our countryman when he received the communication of the Pacha was not inconsiderable; but he was one of those who had seen sufficient of the world never to be astonished, not altogether untaught with political knowledge, and gifted with that philosophical exemption from prejudice which is one of the most certain and the most valuable results of extensive travel. Our countryman communicated to the Egyptian ruler with calmness and with precision the immediate difficulties that occurred to him, explained to the successor of the Pharaohs and the Ptolemies that the political institutions of England had been the gradual growth of ages, and that there is no political function which demands a finer discipline, or a more regulated preparation, than the exercise of popular suffrage. The Pacha listened in silence, nodding his head in occasional approbation: then, calling for coffee, instead of looking at his watch like a European Sovereign, delicately terminated the interview.

Some short time afterwards the young Englishman repaired, as was his occasional custom, to the levee of the Egyptian ruler. When the Pacha perceived him, he welcomed him with a favouring smile, and beckoned to him to advance to the contiguous divan. “God is great!” said Mehemet Ali to the traveller; “you are a wise man – Allah! Kerim, but you spit pearls. Nevertheless I will have a Parliament, and I will have as many Parliaments as the King of England himself. See here!” So saying, his Highness produced two lists of names, containing those of the most wealthy and influential personages of every town and district in his dominions. “See here!” said he, “here are my Parliaments; but I have made up my mind, to prevent inconvenience, to elect them myself”.

Behold, my Lord, a splendid instance of representation without election! In pursuance of this resolution of Mehemet Ali, two chambers met at Cairo, called in the jargon of the Levant the *alto Parlamento*, and the *basso Parlamento*. The first consisted of the Pachas and chief officers of the capital, the second really of the most respectable of the provincial population. Who can doubt that the *basso Parlamento* of Cairo, if the invasion of Syria had not diverted the attention of Mehemet Ali from domestic politics, might have proved a very faithful and efficient national council, and afforded the governor of the country very important information as to the resources, necessities, and grievances of

(52) Disraeli himself (see “Home Letters”, Cairo, May 28, 1831).

his subjects? Who can hesitate in believing that there was a much greater chance of its efficiency and duration when appointed by the Pacha himself than when elected by his subjects in their present condition? Who does not recognise in such an assembly the healthy seeds of a popular government? I for one should have much more confidence in the utility and duration of the Parliament of Cairo than in that of Naples or Madrid; especially as, it is but candid to confess, Mehemet Ali had further secured a practical term of political initiation for his future legislators by two capital rules: first, that the *basso Parlamento* should only petition and not debate; and, secondly, that the *alto Parlamento* should only debate and not vote!

## CHAPTER XVIII

**Why the Political Consequences of the Protestant Religion on the Continent were Different to those in England, and why Favourable to Civil Liberty – Protestantism creates a Republican Religion – Introduction of the Phrase “The People”, into European Politics.**

**T**he Protestant Reformation, which, in a political point of view, had only succeeded in dividing England into two parties and establishing arbitrary power, had produced far different effects on the Continent of Europe. There it had created a Republican religion: for such was the ecclesiastical polity of Calvin. The English Protestants, who, flying from the Marian persecution, sought refuge at Geneva, in the agony of their outraged loyalty renounced their old allegiance, applied to civil polity the religious discipline of their great apostle, and returned to their native country political republicans. Kings were the enemies of Protestantism, and Protestants naturally became the enemies of monarchy. The Hebrew history, which they studied as intently as the Christian Gospels, furnished them with a precedent and a model for a religious republic. Judges ruled in Israel before the royal dynasties of Saul or David. The anti-monarchical spirit of Protestant Europe was notorious and incontestable as early as the middle of the sixteenth century. The regicides of Holy Writ are the heroes of the turbulent tractates of the early missionaries of spiritual democracy: the slayer of Sisera, or he who stabbed the fat King of Moab in his chamber. Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, deposed Kings: Calvin and Knox were the successors of Samuel. The bloody massacre of Saint Bartholomew, occasioned by the promulgation of this dangerous political religionism, aggravated the danger and determination of its votaries. The press of

Europe swarmed with republican treatises composed by the ablest writers. Books are great landmarks in the history of human nature. Now was heard, for the first time, of the paramount authority of "THE PEOPLE". This is the era of the introduction into European politics of that insidious phrase, by virtue of which an active and unprincipled minority have ever since sought to rule and hoodwink a nation. In 1579 appeared the famous "Vindiciae contra Tyrannos" of Languet<sup>(53)</sup>, and the revolt of Holland and the League of Utrecht, which terminated in the establishment of the Dutch Republic, formed a practical commentary on its virulent and fervent pages.

The Republican Religion, which revolutionised Holland, triumphed in Scotland under Knox, and in France long balanced the united influence of the crown and the tiara. Even as late as 1621 the genius of Richelieu alone prevented France from being formed into a Federal Republic, and from being divided into circles.

Such was the spirit of the European movement when the aristocracy of England, refreshed and renovated by more than half a century of prosperity and peace, deemed the accession of Charles the First a fitting season for a struggle to restore the ancient liberties of the nation, and to regain and complete the Constitution of the Plantagenets. For nearly two centuries that Constitution had been suspended, like an old suit of armour, crusted with the blood of the civil wars, and covered with the dust of theologic logomachies: but the great spirits of the seventeenth century recognised the suit as of good proof, and, though somewhat antiquated in its style and fashion, possessing all necessary powers of protection and offence. The history of the age of Charles the First has been the literary arena of the passions of all parties. The far vaster range of political experience which, from the great French Revolution and its consequences, we enjoy than our forefathers, our increased, yet not too considerable, distance from the passionate period in question, and our decreased dependence upon its incidents as the once solitary precedents for all popular movements, the researches of ingenious scholars, and the publication of contemporary memoirs, have all combined to render us

more competent to decide upon the character of the most memorable transactions of our annals.

Until the meeting of the Long Parliament, the King appears to have had no party in the nation, and solely to have depended upon his courtiers and his Bishops. There was a general feeling throughout the leading classes of the country that the time had arrived when the settlement of the State on a broad basis of constitutional liberty was indispensable. The aristocracy of England, also, was no longer that unlettered class of mere warriors who, however great might be their political power or ardent their love of public liberty, were necessarily debarred by their habits and want of education from practising the arts of government and legislation. The cultivated intellect of England required a theatre for its display and exercise; it found this in some degree in its Parliament, but sought it more decidedly in the administration of the Empire. The time had arrived when a prelate could no longer conduct the affairs of the realm from his monopoly of learning. The age of royal favourites was about to be closed for ever. The monarch, though apparently almost a despot, was fast approaching the simplicity of his executive capacity: it not only might be then obvious to the contemplative, but it was absolutely determined by practical men, that the administration of the kingdom should soon be conducted by those of the subjects who were most eminent and distinguished in the great national council.

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(53) Hubert Languet (1518-1581).

## CHAPTER XIX

**Attempts of the English Aristocracy to restore the Constitution of the Plantagenets under Charles the First – Constitutional Reformers and Root and Branch Reformers – The Root and Branch Reformers attack the Church and alarm the Constitutional Reformers – The Root and Branch Reformers, deserted by the Constitutional Reformers, form an Anti-national Alliance with the Scotch Covenanters.**

**T**he two Houses of the first Parliament summoned by Charles contained the flower of his kingdom – men of the highest lineage, the largest estates, the most distinguished learning, and the most illustrious accomplishments. The Opposition in the House of Commons, led by Eliot, and supported by the Peers, succeeded, as early as the third year of Charles's reign, in obtaining the Petition of Right. But this concession did not satisfy the Parliament; they wished to dislodge the favourite; to change the Ministry as well as establish the Constitution. Charles recoiled from the novel heresy of not being the master of his own servant, a heresy soon doomed to become orthodox: he determined to support his friend, and the King resolved to reign without a Parliament.

It is singular that the King could have contrived to reign ten years without one, but the truth is the state of the country, as is admitted and celebrated by all foreign writers, was of a prosperity so extraordinary that it was difficult to excite discontents among the great body of the nation. In this dilemma, the leaders of the Opposition among the Commons, Hampden and Pym, but concealing their masterly machinations from the more numerous and moderate portions of their party, intrigued with the Scotch, and held out to the Presbyterian leaders of that nation

the prospect of the English Opposition assisting them in their favourite project, the overthrow of the Church of England in Scotland. The consequent troubles in Scotland plunged the King in a war, and was the occasion of the summons of the Long Parliament.

The spirit of the King when he met this famous assembly was quite broken. He was ready to make any concession consistent with the maintenance of a limited monarchy. Experience had taught him that the whole body of the aristocracy was opposed to him, and we know that Charles was perfectly aware of the sacrifices which would be demanded of him, and which he was prepared to grant without resistance. The objects of the King at this time were to obtain the establishment of a limited monarchy by constitutional concessions, and then to form a Parliamentary administration from the most eminent of his previous opponents, in which conduct alone he recognised any security for a strong government, and the only prevention of further movement.

The Long Parliament in a few months restored the Constitution of the Plantagenets. It secured the frequent assemblage of Parliaments: it terminated for ever arbitrary taxation: it abolished the Star Chamber and the High Commission Court. The concessions of Charles the First during the two sessions of this Parliament, previous to the Civil War, were so ample that the Revolution of 1688 added no important feature to our political system. Faithful to their purpose, the leaders of this famous Opposition not only established our liberties, but impeached the Ministers, and this brought about a result not less anxiously and eagerly sought after than the abolition of Ship Money: a formal attempt by the King, for which he had been long prepared, to form a Government of the more moderate portion of the Parliamentary party. I cannot believe that the death of the Earl of Bedford could alone have occasioned the failure of this intended arrangement; it is more probable that the dissensions which soon broke out in the great body of the Commons had already covertly appeared. The Parliament, although both Houses and the vast majority of the Lower had been previously opposed to the King – for we must not forget that even Hyde and Falkland were originally members of opposition – had now become divided into two parties: the Constitutional Reformers, and the Root and Branch Reformers; Pym and Hampden headed the latter. The Constitutional Reformers were alarmed by the

attack on the Church: the Lords threw out the Bill which sought to deprive the Bishops of their Parliamentary suffrage. This was the first check that the Commons had received from the Upper House. Pym and Hampden, deserted by the Constitutional Reformers, had thrown themselves into the hands of the Puritans and Root and Branch men. Instead of political unions, they appealed to the city apprentices, and the trained bands; mobs were hired, petitions forged, all the arts of insurgency practised. The Peers were daunted, the King frightened; Strafford was executed, the Bishops expelled the House of Lords, the House of Commons itself rendered independent of the King and its constituents by the act which made its dissolution consequent on its own pleasure. At length, by the Remonstrance and the Propositions the very abrogation of the monarchy being attempted, the King raised his standard, and so completely had the unhappy monarch by his conduct placed the Commons in the wrong, that the very personage who, two years before, had absolutely no party in the nation found himself supported by a considerable majority of his people, and nearly the whole of the Peerage; while the vote which virtually occasioned the struggle, and was the trial of strength of the two parties in the House of Commons, was only carried by a majority of eleven. The success of the royal arms, and the unexpected strength of the royal party, filled the Commons with consternation. The moderate members continued to flock to the King. Pym and Hampden, finding that they were deserted by their aristocratic companions, and that the Puritans and Root and Branch men were not powerful enough to support them, made an open and absolute alliance with the Scotch Presbyterians, with whom they had always had a secret understanding, swallowed the Covenant which they had before disfavoured, decreed the extermination of the Church of England, beheaded Laud, called in a Scotch army, and maintained their cause by a connection offensive to their countrymen.

## CHAPTER XX

**Parallel between passing Events and the Reign of Charles the First – Government of “the People” established in England – Its Practical Consequences – The Nation seeks Refuge from “the People” – Public Opinion not less Influential in the Age of Charles the First than at the Present Day – European Movement described – Of the Latter Stuarts.**

**A**m I indeed treating of the reign of Charles the First? or is it some nearer epoch that I am commemorating? Am I writing of the affairs of the seventeenth or the nineteenth century? There is such a marvellous similarity between the periods that, for my part, I find great difficulty in discriminating between the two Dromios. In both instances the Church of England is the great victim, and at both seasons the vast majority of the English people were warmly and tenderly attached to their establishment. In both cases the aristocratic leaders of the movement thought fit to secede from their own party, while in both cases their more determined or desperate associates compensate themselves for the desertion by the alliance of revolutionary or anti-national support. In one instance the Radicals, in the other the Root and Branch men; in one instance the Dissenters, in the other the Puritans. And in both instances, when Radicals and Dissenters in the one case and Puritans and Root and Branch men in the other fail in making up with their influence for the loss of the aristocratic connections of the leaders who had summoned them, we find the same desperate and treasonable compact, made in one age with the Scotch Presbyterians, and in the other with the Irish Papists; the Solemn League and Covenant so long repudiated swallowed as the condition in the first instance, and the Irish Church scheme, once so warmly opposed, gulped down in the other.

The Bishops expelled from the House of Lords, the King defied, then imprisoned, and then decapitated, the House of Lords disregarded, and then formally abolished, voted “a nuisance, and of no use” – you see, my Lord, there were Utilitarians even in those days – behold the great object at length consummated of concentrating the whole power and authority of the government in one estate of the realm. The verbal process by which the revolution was effected was very simple and very logical if we only grant the premises; the schoolmen themselves could not have reasoned with more invincible accuracy. The House of Commons, having first declared “that the people are the origin of all just power” – an axiom to which any person may annex any meaning of his fancy – next enunciated that the House of Commons, being chosen by the people and representing them, are the supreme authority of the nation, and that consequently whatever is declared to be law by the House of Commons hath the force of law without the consent of the King or the House of Peers. First, the constituency of the House of Commons, a small fraction of the nation, is declared to be the People; their power then becomes invested in their representatives; the majority of those representatives, acting by their supreme authority, then expel from their numbers the minority who oppose their projects; and then, still acting by their supreme authority, vote the power of the triumphant majority perpetual. This is the simple process by which we at length obtain a tolerably definite idea of what is meant by the phrase “the People”, and the easy machinery by which a band of two or three hundred individuals obtain and exercise despotic power over the lives, liberties, and property of a whole nation.

We still remember in this country the tender and happy consequences of being governed by “the People”. We have not forgotten that “the People” established Courts more infamous than the Star Chamber in every county of England, with power of fining, sequestering, imprisoning, and corporally punishing all who opposed or even murmured against their decrees; that under the plea of malignancy “the People” avenged their private hatreds, and seized for their private gain and gratification any estates or property to which they took a fancy; that “the People” consigned to Bastiles and perpetual imprisonment all those who refused to answer their illegal inquiries, and bored red-hot irons through the tongues of the contumacious; that not an appearance of law or liberty

remained in the land; that “the People” enlarged the laws of high-treason so that they comprehended verbal offences and even intentions; that “the People” practised decimation; that “the People” voted trial by Jury a breach of Parliamentary privilege; that “the People” deprived of authority all persons of family and distinction who had originally adhered to their party, because men of blood and breeding would not submit to be their disgraceful and ignoble tools, and filled every office under them with the scum of the nation; that the very individuals who had suffered and struggled under the Star Chamber were visited by “the People” with punishments and imprisonments infinitely more bloody and more grievous; that “the People” sequestered nearly one-half of the goods and chattels of the nation, and at least one-half of its rents and revenues; that in seven years “the People” raised the taxation of the country from £800,000 per annum to £7,000,000 per annum; that “the People” invented the Excise, and applied that odious impost even to provisions and the common necessaries of life; that “the People” became so barefaced in their vile extortions that one morning they openly divided £300,000 amongst themselves, and settled an annuity of £4 a day on each of their number; that “the People” committed all these enormities in the teeth of outraged England, by the aid of an antinational compact with the Scottish Covenanters; and that finally the Nation, the insulted and exhausted Nation, sought refuge from the Government of “the People” in the arms of a military despot.

I hear much in the present day of the march of intellect, and the diffusion of knowledge, and the influence of public opinion, and there are those who would assure us that in these circumstances and qualities we may safely count upon finding ample guarantees for not only the maintenance but the increase of our liberties, and very able securities for every species of good government. It will be as well for us, however, to turn aside, if possible, for a moment from the exciting tumult in which it is the destiny of the present age to flourish, and calmly condescend to spare a few moments of consideration to the history of that not less agitated and consequential age which elapsed from 1550 to the middle of the seventeenth century. The Protestant Reformation and its great political consequences, especially the formation of the Dutch Republic, had agitated men’s minds in a degree not inferior to the influence

exercised over the spirit of the eighteenth and present centuries by the French Revolution. The nature and origin of Power were not less severely scrutinised; the object and influence of Establishments not less sharply canvassed. There was as much public intelligence, as much public opinion, and as much public spirit, in Europe then as at the present hour. The exclusive and local character of nations was fast disappearing; patriotism was fast merging into philanthropy; a cosmopolite spirit pervaded Christendom: Geneva communicated with Edinburgh or Paris; there was a constant spiritual correspondence between Amsterdam and La Rochelle and London. The political movement in England originated with the aristocracy; it was supported and advanced by the great body of the nation. If the influence of the press were less considerable than at the present day, though I much doubt it, and the British Museum, which contains so many thousand pamphlets of the times of Charles the First, a fraction only of the fugitive effusions, confirms my scepticism – Public Opinion had yet another and more powerful organ, and was influenced by even a more potent and passionate medium. If there were ten thousand pamphlets, certainly there were ten thousand pulpits.

There was as much communication in 1640 as there is likely to be in 1840; if we had no railroads, we had men who rode “post haste”; there were as many committees, there was as complete an organisation; the arts of insurgency reached such a zenith of perfection that the unlicensed imagination and unbridled devices of Jacobinical France only imitated and never surpassed them; and, more important than all, the Government was much weaker. Yet, although the flame of popular liberty was fed by such various and vigorous fuel, and although the ranks of the popular party were marshalled and led on during the contest by statesmen inferior in station, capacity, and accomplishment, to none whoever figured in this land, the mighty impulse, like the most beautiful river of Germany, which, after renovating a country and commanding the admiration of a nation, never reaches the ocean, but sinks into the swamps of Brabant – the mighty impulse achieved only destruction, and the movement ended in mud.

The reigns of the latter Stuarts are the most disgraceful in our annals, but as much from the character of the nation as the character of those monarchs. The public spirit was broken and the public mind corrupted.

Good laws are of little avail without good manners, and unless there be a wholesome state of mind in the nation to regulate their exercise. Trial by Jury in the time of Charles the Second was a tyranny as fearful as the Star Chamber; and without any formal violation of our written Constitution, it is probable that the government of the Tudors would have been re-established in England, had not James the Second alarmed the Protestant spirit of the country, and the aristocracy seized the opportunity of again establishing our liberties.

The consequences of the famous revolution which raised the Prince of Orange to the throne of these realms were very important, but, as they did not affect the form or elements of the House of Commons, the remarks which it may be necessary to make upon that event will more naturally occur to me when I come to consider the nature of the executive branch of our Constitution, and the character of the kingly office. The history of England from that period until 1830 is rather political than constitutional, and, although extremely interesting to a statesman, relates to the struggles of rival parties for power instead of the more inspiring contest between royal prerogative and Parliamentary privilege, and that more noble conflict for their liberties between a nation and a Sovereign. The struggles of parties also, as connected with Ministerial responsibility, are naturally linked with the yet untouched topic of the Crown.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Blunders of the Whigs in their Reform of the House of Commons – But the Original Character of the House of Commons still retained – Not the House of the People – Of the Constitution of the House of Lords.

Viewing the Reform Bill of 1830 as the *coup d'état* of a party who, having obtained power, found themselves opposed by all the estates of the realm, and supposing that their only object was to establish themselves in power by conceding a preponderating influence in the constituency to a sectarian minority in the State favourable to their views and policy, the intended measure is very intelligible; but, dismissing for the moment from our consideration all factious imputations, it must be admitted that this reform was conceived and prosecuted in a profound ignorance of the nature of our Constitution, to which we may ascribe all the mischiefs that have occurred and that threaten us.

That the reconstruction of the third estate of the realm was necessary is an intelligible proposition; and, had it been proved, all that we had to consider was the mode by which it should be attained. But the Whigs set out with reforming the representatives of the estate instead of the estate itself, and the consequences of this capital blunder pervade the whole of their arrangement. If the proposition of the necessity had been proved, then we had to consider the principle on which the Reform should be conducted, as population, fiscal contribution, or peculiar class. But by reforming the representatives instead of the estate, no principle could be adopted, or at least could only partially be applied. Hence the present system is as anomalous as the late one: communities of two or three hundred electors return as many representatives as communities

of fourteen thousand; a man who rents a £10 house in a town enjoys a suffrage, a man who lives in a £40 house out of a town is not an elector. It might be undeniable that, if the third estate were to be reformed, the principle of representation without election no longer suited the present state of society: but why then cling to that part of the ancient scheme which gave a preponderating influence in numbers to the citizens and burgesses because, in fact, they were not elected, but only nominated? All this originated in the fallacy of supposing that the state of our representation in many towns was the consequence of decay, instead of original intention. Thus whole and important districts of the country, and considerable classes of the community, are not represented, and the land, which originally formed the third estate, assumes only a secondary character in its present elements.

Nevertheless, constituted as the third estate now is, and changed as may be its elements, has it in a political capacity deviated from its original character? The Commons form still only an estate of the realm, a privileged and limited order of the nation, in numbers a fraction of the mass, and their representatives can only be invested with the qualities of their constituents. To maintain that an estate of the realm is the People involves a contradiction in terms, for an estate implies a class of the People. The Commons of England are not the People unless we declare that every person who is not a Parliamentary constituent is without the pale of national definition. If we agree to this, the people of England consists of three or four hundred thousand persons, divided into almost equal classes professing the most contrary opinions. The absurdity of such a conclusion is evident. The House of Commons is not the House of the People, and the members of the House of Commons are not the representatives of the People.

I proceed to consider the Constitution and the character of the Upper House of Parliament. The House of Lords is the most eminent existing example of representation without election. As an estate of the realm which, from its unlimited numbers, can with convenience personally appear and assemble, the Peers of England do not meet at Westminster by their trustees, or deputies, or delegates. But this House is nevertheless representative. The House of Lords represents the Church in the Lord Bishops, the law in the Lord Chancellor and often the Lord Chief

Justice, the counties in the Lord Lieutenants, the boroughs in their noble Recorders. This estate, from the character of the property of its members, is also essentially the representative chamber of the land; and as the hereditary leaders of the nation, especially of the cultivators of the land, the genuine and permanent population of England, its peasantry.

In ruder times, when the King desired to call a great council which should represent the interests and consult over the welfare of his kingdom, he summoned the Barons or chief subjects of his realm. These great councils, which were the origin of our Parliaments, and so styled before they assumed a legislative character, assembled for the administration of justice. They formed a high court of law whither in time repaired, as I have before described, deputations of the provincial tribunals and the local executors of the law. The Barons originally held their Parliamentary privilege by tenure, but the King soon mingled among them by his writ of summons such individuals as he deemed fit and competent to assist them in their great office. Such was the origin of baronies by writ; and peerages by patent were also introduced as early as the reign of Richard the Second. Gradually, as the country advanced in civilisation, and the affairs of its population became more complicated, the Sovereign delegated portions of his judicial power to appointed and permanent tribunals of his palace, presided over by his selected councillors, and in time by professional lawyers. Such was the origin of our great courts of law – of King's Bench, of Common Pleas, and of Exchequer; but the House of Lords, even when the formal and present constitution of Parliament occurred, still retained, independent of the legislative functions of their estate, their original character of a high court of justice, which has descended to their successors, who to this day form the supreme and efficient Court of Appeal of the kingdom. It was this character, indeed, which rendered in old days the intermission of Parliaments so great a grievance. By not assembling the House of Lords, justice was delayed, and when we read in the reigns of the Plantagenets of the murmurs of the nation at the King not calling his Parliament, it was, in fact, the meeting of the Peers which the nation invoked with such loud complaints.

The House of Lords strictly consists of two estates of the realm: the Lords Spiritual and Temporal. Originally the Lords Spiritual exceeded

the Temporal Peers in number. In the last Parliament that was held before the struggles between the Houses of York and Lancaster, so fatal to our ancient Peerage, only fifty-three Temporal Lords appeared in Parliament: the Spiritual Lords, on the other hand, numbered twenty-one Bishops and thirty-six mitred Abbots and Priors. Henry the Seventh could only summon to his first Parliament twenty-nine Temporal Lords, and even in the reign of Henry the Eighth the Temporal Peers did not equal the representatives of the Church and the great ecclesiastical corporations. The dissolution of the monasteries, which expelled the mitred Abbots and Priors from the Upper House, reduced the number of the Spiritual Peers to twenty-six, five new bishoprics having been created as a species of representative compensation to the new Church. From this period the political influence of the Lords Spiritual in the Upper House has never been of a preponderating character; and although they retained their ancient privilege as a separate estate, and the precedence to which they were originally entitled, they have in fact, by blending their votes with their temporal brethren, contributed to the formation of one estate of the realm, in which they have long virtually, although not formally, merged.

## CHAPTER XXII

### Of the Spiritual Lords – The Bench of Bishops a Democratic Institution – Of the Temporal Lords.

I think, my Lord, this is not an inconvenient opportunity of considering the policy of the presence of these right reverend personages in the Upper House of Parliament, a policy so unpopular with the anticonstitutional party of this country. Whenever the factious leaders of the third estate attempt to obtain a preponderating influence in the Constitution for the House in which they sit as representatives of their order, and to usurp the entire government of the country, and exercise despotic control over the lives and liberties, the persons and properties, of their fellow-subjects, the attack upon the independence and influence of the House of Lords is invariably commenced by an assault upon the ecclesiastical elements of its composition. Thus, in the time of Charles the First the factious leaders of a majority of the representatives of that limited and privileged order of the nation called the Commons succeeded, after repeated efforts, in expelling the Bishops, or first estate, from the Upper House; and thus certain persons at the present day, who inherit all the faction of Pym and Hampden, though none of their genius, being as like to them as Butler's Hudibras is like to Milton's Satan, have, in a manner at once indecent and unconstitutional, and which, if I have any knowledge of the laws of my country, subjects them to a praemunire, soiled the notice book of the proceedings of the next session of the House of Commons with a vile and vulgar menace of this exalted order.

The great art in creating an efficient Representative Government is to secure its representation of those interests of the country which are

at the same time not only considerable, but in their nature permanent. To bind up with our form of polity the feelings of vast and influential classes of the nation obviously tends to the perpetuity of the State; though the danger of making sudden and slightly considered additions to the elements of our political estates need not be enlarged upon, nor the fatal blunder of mistaking an evanescent for a permanent interest. Independent of all those spiritual considerations, which hitherto have been held as justly and wisely influencing the elements and character of the English Constitution; dismissing for a moment from our thoughts that union of Church and State which hitherto has consecrated the commonwealth of England; granting for an instant that that religious connection, which has so long tempered power and so often elevated its exercise, should indeed cease, and that the authority of the Church of England should only be supported by the affections and voluntary succour of its votaries; I have yet to learn that the presence in the House of Peers of an order of individuals who, in the independence of their means, I may say the vastness of their possessions, are inferior to none, can be enumerated among the less desirable elements of a Senate. To me it seems that a Bishop of Durham or of Winchester affords, from his position, the probable materials of as efficient a member of the Upper House as any Earl or Marquis who bears those names.

But when I recall to my recollection the virulent antipathy of the anticonstitutional writers of the present day against what they style the Hereditary Peerage, and the unqualified legislators, who, they pretend, must be the inevitable consequences of its institution, I confess that I am somewhat astonished that their first and fiercest attack should be made on that portion of the House of Lords whose office is not hereditary, who in general spring from the humbler classes of the community, and who, from the nature of their qualification to sit in that august assembly, must necessarily be men distinguished for their learning, their talents, and their virtues. Of the many popular elements of the House of Lords, I have always considered that the bench of Bishops was the most democratic.

I have not concealed my conviction, for I plead only the cause of Truth, that the Protestant Reformation in England originally tended to the establishment of arbitrary power, and of that despotism of the Tudors of which Charles the First was the victim. The Church

transferred their allegiance from the Tiara to the Crown; the people followed the example of their national ecclesiastics. But these were the inevitable consequences of unparalleled events. The Church is part of our Constitution, and its character has changed in unison with that Constitution; the clergy in this country, thanks to that Reformation whose good fruits we have long enjoyed, both political and spiritual, are national; they are our fellow-subjects, and they have changed with their fellow-countrymen. Their errors were the errors of their age and of their nation; they were no more. The Bishops who, under James the First, maintained the High Commission Court, under James the Second were the first champions of our liberties; the Establishment which, under Laud, persecuted to obtain Conformity, is now certainly our surest, perhaps our only, guarantee of Toleration.

The English Constitution, while it has secured that toleration, absolute and illimitable, has also consecrated the State; it has proved that religious government and religious liberty are not incompatible. It is one of the leading principles of our polity that the religious discipline and future welfare of our citizens are even of greater importance than their political and present well-being. And although the pious and private munificence of an ancient people has, in the course of ages, relieved the State from the fiscal burthen of a dependent Clergy, invested that godly and learned and devoted body with a noble and decorous inheritance, and covered our land with schools and churches, with sublime temples, and august and unrivalled universities; the State has nevertheless stepped in as the trustee and guardian of the ministers of our religion, adopted them as its children, and established their order into an estate of the kingdom.

The Stuarts were prodigal in the creation of Temporal Peers; one hundred and nineteen met in the Parliament of 1640, but in 1661 the number had scarcely increased. The Peers of England led the movement against the unhappy son of James the First. A Peer was one of the five members whom the King attempted to seize; but when all those concessions were obtained from the Sovereign, which would have left the estates, and the nation at large, in the possession of even greater privileges than we enjoy at this day; when it was discovered that the monarchy itself was aimed at, and that Reform was fast approaching Revolution,

the great body of the Peerage, in unison with the great body of their fellow-subjects, withdrew themselves from the Parliament and adhered to the King. So that when the Upper House was formally abolished by the vote of the House of Commons, the customary attendance of Lords was not more than six or eight. Little more than a quarter of a century after the restoration of the Stuarts, the nation, headed by the Peers, expelled them, and established the security of a Protestant throne.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**Of the Peerage Bill – Attempts of the Whigs to establish an Oligarchy – Irresponsibility of the House of Lords considered – The Lords not more Irresponsible than the Commons – The Qualification of the Peers the same as the Commons, Hereditary – Hereditary Legislators not more Absurd than Hereditary Electors – The Principle of Hereditary Legislation not constitutionally Anomalous – The Principle of Hereditary Legislation not abstractedly Absurd.**

**F**rom the accession of William the Third to the accession of William the Fourth, a period of upwards of one hundred and forty years, the House of Lords has not only exercised an independent, but a considerable, and, as some have held, a preponderating, influence in the government of the country. The Whigs under George the First, in pursuance of their plan of reducing the English monarch to the character of a Venetian Doge, succeeded in carrying a Bill through the Upper House to deprive the King of his prerogative of creating further Peers, and thus to convert the free and democratic Peerage of England into an odious oligarchy of exclusive privilege; but the House of Commons, led by the Tory country gentlemen, rejected the proposition with becoming decision. Since that time, and especially during the active reigns of the Third and Fourth Georges, the royal prerogative has been exercised with a liberality which by some has been warmly, but I think unwisely, stigmatised. The ranks of our second estate have been periodically strengthened by an accession of some of the best blood, the greatest wealth, and the most distinguished talent, of the community, and its due influence alike in the legislature and in national opinion has thus been efficiently maintained.

The increased strength of the third estate, in consequence of its recent reconstruction, having filled the imaginations of certain factious leaders with the old and disastrous machination of establishing the supremacy of its representative chamber, and that result not being possible unless the independence of the Upper House of Parliament is first destroyed, an attack is now made with equal violence and perseverance upon the hereditary principle of its institution as productive of irresponsibility, and thus affording not only a most injurious, but an anomalous, feature in the scheme of our legislative and executive government.

Who has not heard of the fatal and anomalous irresponsibility of the House of Lords? Of what Whig journal does it not form the subject of the choice and cockbrained leading article? Is there a tavern Cleon from whose foaming lips its anathema does not flow in rabid sentences of seditious folly? Is there a plebeian oracle of a metropolitan vestry who does not warn the Peers of England with the solemn stolidity of his Delphic utterance? Nay, the authorised agitator of the administration itself is sent upon a provincial tour of treason to open the minds of the King's lieges on this urgent point of constitutional revelation – the vagabond and overrated rebel – vomiting his infamous insolence in language mean as his own soul!

And yet this fatal and anomalous irresponsibility is no more the characteristic of the House of Lords than of that third estate itself, in whose supremacy the anti-constitutional writers teach us we are alone to find a security for good government.

The estate of the Peers is in no greater degree irresponsible than the estate of the Commons. Both are alike popular classes – that is, sections of the nation, established for the public and common good into political orders or estates. For this reason are they privileged, and for no other; nor is there any privilege of importance which the Lords enjoy which the Commons do not share; though there are very many, and those, too, very important, privileges which the Commons in the course of time have acquired, and which they have jealously monopolised. The Commons, for their own convenience, meet in Parliament by their representatives; the Lords, from their limited number, meet personally. Yet a Peer is allowed to vote by proxy on the same principle that the Commons are allowed to vote by their proxies or representatives; it ever being

the wish and intention and genius of our Constitution that the three estates shall be as completely and constantly consulted on all subjects, and their consent to all laws as perfectly obtained, as human wit could devise. This is the real and original cause of the Peers voting by proxy, an analogous privilege with that enjoyed by the Commons; yet in these days of profound constitutional learning even this vote by proxy is held “an anomaly”, and no less a personage than an exalted member of the Upper House itself, eager to obtain a little vulgar popularity by falling in with the superficial humours of the day, has been found anxious to deprive his own order to an ancient, and, as I have shown, not a peculiar, privilege.

A political estate is in its nature complete, and therefore, whatever may be the amount of privileges or the degree of power with which it is invested, it is necessarily independent. Now, all power that is independent must be irresponsible. If the state of the Peers be independent and irresponsible, and undoubtedly and necessarily it is so, to whom is the estate of the Commons responsible? To whom is that privileged order of the kingdom, who at the last General Election, to the amount of three hundred thousand men, voted for the representatives of their order in Parliament – to whom are they responsible? What political dependence have they upon the nation at large? What do they care for what the unrepresented mass may think of their resolves and conduct? Are they amenable for their political behaviour to any public tribunal? Have they not, if they agree among themselves and return their representatives to that effect, the power, as far as the assent of their estate is concerned, the power to deprive all those who are not of their privileged order of their rights and liberties? What lawyer can doubt such a right in the Commons, or dispute their power, if they choose to exercise it? Have not the majority of their representatives, in fact, often exercised the delegated power of their order to this effect? Why has the House of Commons often been unpopular with the great body of the nation? Because their conduct opposed its interests or inclinations. Was the House of Commons dependent on the nation? No! They were dependent on their order, on their privileged constituents, who sent them to their chamber, and who, in their turn, are responsible to no class whatever. If the question of responsibility be mooted, what satisfaction or increased security to a nation of many millions is it that the privileged order of

Commons consists of three hundred thousand, instead of two hundred thousand, or even one hundred thousand persons? Is a privileged order of three hundred thousand individuals, represented by their deputies, likely to be more responsible than a privileged order of three hundred individuals appearing by themselves? On the contrary, everyone sees and feels in an instant that, as far as the nation is concerned, the more limited order, who appear for themselves, and are more in the eye of the world, are in fact in a moral point of view much more responsible to the general body of the people than the more numerous and more obscure class, who shuffle off that moral responsibility on their representatives.

So much for the anomalous irresponsibility of the House of Lords. You will perceive, my Lord, that nothing but the two capital blunders prevalent among the anticonstitutional writers of the present day – namely, in the first place, confounding the representatives of an estate with that estate itself, and, secondly, supposing that their presumed estate was in fact representative of no less a body than the nation itself, between whom and the House of Commons there really exists no privity – I repeat, nothing but these two capital blunders in our profound political instructors can account for the perverse absurdities of their lucubrations, or the conceited complacency with which they develop their ill-seasoned theories.

If the estate of the Peers be not more irresponsible in the exercise of the power with which it is invested than the estate of the Commons, so also the qualification by which the Peers exercise their power is in its nature the same as the qualification by which the Commons exercise their power. If the institution of hereditary legislators be absurd, I do not see that that of hereditary electors is less so. If it be absurd to enact that a man in the most elevated and cultivated class of the community should be born with a right of becoming, at a legal age, an English legislator, so is it equally absurd to maintain that a man in one of the humbler and less educated classes of the community should be born with the right of becoming, at a legal age, the nominator of a legislator. Yet the qualification of a majority of the English Commons is hereditary.

So you see, my Lord, it turns out, on a little dispassionate examination, that the “anomalous” institution of the House of Lords is not quite so irregular, so flagrantly out of rule, so absolutely alien to the genius of our

Constitution, as, were we to place credit in our profound disquisitionists and reformers, we might too hastily imagine.

The Lords, it seems, in a legal point of view, are not a jot more irresponsible than the other limited and privileged and purely conventional order of the State; in a mere moral point of view, indeed, are more amenable to the influence of public opinion than their obscurer rivals; while the qualification both of the Lords and Commons is to a great amount identical, and the Commons hold and enjoy their privileges by the very same odious principle which frights the orators of the Crown and Anchor from their propriety, and stimulates the kennel orators of Westminster and Marylebone, in the enthusiasm of their rhetoric slang, to denounce the “absurd and anomalous authority of the Lords”; to wit, that very same, that odious hereditary principle, which pervades the whole frame of our society, which has conduced more than any other principle to the perpetuity of our State, and which at the present day is so greatly abused and so little understood.

But although the exposition into which I have entered of the real principles and the genuine nature of the English Constitution has destroyed for ever, as far as reason can influence and truth prevail, the revolutionary objection which it is now the fashion to urge against the hereditary principle of the second estate of this kingdom, I am far from wishing to avoid the abstract discussion of the fitting elements of a senate in which our modern anti-constitutional writers, the gentlemen who admire abstract principles, and would build up their political fabric on a system of pure science, so freely and frequently indulge. And therefore I will at once admit that, if I were called upon to construct a Constitution *a priori* for this country, of which a senate, or superior chamber, was to be a constituent part, I am at a loss to conceive where I could obtain more suitable materials for its construction than in the body of our hereditary Peerage. So far from considering that there is anything absurd or objectionable in the principle of political inheritance, as a statesman who wished to study the perpetuity of his State it is the very principle of which I should eagerly avail myself, and to which I should cling. Assuredly I cannot understand how an efficient senate is to be secured by merely instituting another elective chamber, the members of which, being the deputies of their constituents, must either be the echo of the

Lower House, or, if returned by a different class, the factious delegates of an envious and hostile section of the community. Would the difficulty be removed, and the object obtained, by allowing the members of the senate to be chosen from the body of the Lower House itself? The trial of strength then would be elevated from the choice of a Speaker to the election of a House of Lords. This would indeed be a struggle! What a prize for an ambitious Minister! What a noble quarry for the falcon glance of a keen Opposition! After the division, after the high blood excited by such an encounter, we might, I think, retire to our homes, and return to our constituents at once, and leave the victorious party to record their decrees without the affectation of discussion and the mockery of control.

What chance do these wild schemes hold out of an effective senate? But would you then cling to your hereditary legislators? Why not? But the very idea of an hereditary legislator is absurd; whoever heard of an hereditary physician, or an hereditary surgeon, or an hereditary apothecary? Such an idea would be absurd; therefore the idea of an hereditary legislator is absurd. Granted, if legislators be apothecaries. Before we can decide whether the idea of an hereditary legislator be absurd, we must first ascertain what is meant by the word “legislator”, and what are the public duties of this personage which we are about to make a matter of inheritance to his posterity. If by the word “legislator” we mean one of those original and organising minds who occasionally arise to frame commonwealths, and to mould the minds of nations, I willingly concede that it would be very absurd to invest such a character with the necessary power to fulfil his grand objects, and simultaneously to entail the enjoyment of the same power on his posterity; I freely admit that it is not very probable that the entailed legislator, like his sire, would prove either a Moses or a Minos, a Numa or a Solon, a Saxon Alfred or a Russian Peter. But at the same time I am equally of opinion that it is just as probable that the legislative descendant of the great legislator would rival his powers, as that a Moses or a Minos, a Numa or a Solon, a Saxon Alfred or a Czar Peter, should be returned to Parliament as their representative by anybody of ten-pounders in the kingdom. Such characters are so rare that we do not count upon their force and impulse in arranging the economy of a State. If the conduct of public affairs depended upon the constant presence in the commonwealth of

such characters, the State would enjoy no quality of duration. It seems, therefore, that we must be content to require from our legislators a somewhat more moderate portion of sagacity and science. And the question then naturally arises, What portion? Whether, in fact, the qualities of a legislator in an ancient and free and highly civilised and experienced State will not be necessarily found among individuals of average intelligence and high education; and whether an order of men who, from their vast possessions, have not only a great, a palpable, and immediate interest in the welfare of a country, but by ease, and leisure, and freedom from anxiety, are encouraged to the humanising pursuits of learning and the liberal love of arts; an order of men who are born honoured, and taught to respect themselves by the good fame and glory of their ancestors; who from the womb to the grave are trained to loathe and recoil from everything that is mean and sordid, and whose honour is a more precious possession than their parks and palaces; the question is, whether an order of men thus set apart in a State, men refined, serene, and courteous, learned, brave, travelled, charitable, and magnificent, do not afford the choicest elements of a senate, especially when they are distinguished from their fellow-citizens by no civil privileges, and the supreme power in the State has the capacity of adding to their numbers at his will any individuals, however humble and plebeian their origin, whose wisdom will in his opinion swell the aggregate capacity of their assembly?

## CHAPTER XXIV

**Political Institutions must be judged by their Results – The Hereditary Peerage contributes to the Stability of the State – The House of Lords in Ability always Equal to the House of Commons – Superior since the Reform – The Principle of Hereditary Legislation prevalent in the House of Commons, and sanctioned by the National Character.**

**P**olitical institutions must be judged by their results. For nearly five centuries the hereditary Peerage, as at present constituted, has formed an active and powerful branch of our legislature. Five centuries of progressive welfare are good evidence of the efficient polity of the advancing country. No statesman can doubt that the peculiar character of the hereditary branch of our legislature has mainly contributed to the stability of our institutions, and to the order and prosperous security which that stability has produced. Nor can we forget that the hereditary principle has at all times secured a senate for this country inferior in intelligence to no political assembly on record. If we survey the illustrious history of our Parliament since 1688, whether we consider its career in reference to the patriotic energy that has at all times distinguished its councils, its unceasing vigilance, its indefatigable industry, its vast and various knowledge, its courageous firmness, its comprehensive sympathy with all classes of the community, its prescient and imperial ambition, or the luminous and accomplished eloquence in which its counsels and resolves have been recommended and expressed; assuredly the hereditary branch of our legislature need not shrink from a comparison with its elective rival. I do not think, my Lord, that anyone will be bold enough to assert – or, if bold enough to assert, skilful enough to maintain – that the late Reform, which was to open the doors

of the House of Commons to all the unearthed genius of the country, has indicated as yet any tendency to render this rivalry on the part of the Peers of England a matter of greater venture. If in old times the hereditary senate has at least equalled in capacity the elective chamber, no impartial observer at the present day can for a moment hesitate in declaring that, not only in the higher accomplishments of statesmen, in elevation of thought and feeling, in learning and in eloquence, does the hereditary assembly excel the elective, but, in truth, that for those very qualities for the possession of which at first sight we should be most disposed to give a House of Commons credit, that mastery of detail and management of complicated commonplaces which we style in this country “business-like habits”, the Peers of England are absolutely more distinguished than the humbler representatives of the third estate.

But the truth is, my Lord, that the practical good sense of this country has long ago disposed of the question of the principle of hereditary legislation, even if its defence merely depended on its abstract propriety. For if we examine the elements of the House of Commons with a little attention, we shall soon discover that hereditary legislators are not confined to the House of Lords, and that the inclination of the represented to make representation hereditary is very obvious and very natural. The representative of a county is selected from one of the first families in the shire, and ten years after the son of this member, a candidate for the same honour, adduces the very circumstances of his succession to his father as an increased claim upon the confidence of the constituency. Those who are versed in elections know that there is no plea so common and so popular. Such elections prove that, far from holding the principle of hereditary legislation absurd, public opinion has decided that the duties of an English legislator are such as, on an average of human capacity, may descend from sire to son; and that, while there is nothing to shock their reason in the circumstance, there is much at the same time to gratify the feelings and please the associations of an ancient people, who have made inheritance the pervading principle of their social polity, who are proud of their old families and fond of their old laws.

## CHAPTER XXV

**The Hereditary Principle must not be considered abstractedly – The French Senate examined – Why an Hereditary Senate, composed of the Ablest Men, may be a Political Nonentity – Necessary Qualities of an Assembly like the English House of Lords.**

**T**he hereditary character of our Peerage must be considered in relation to the other qualities of that illustrious body. No one competent to form an opinion upon public affairs can doubt for an instant that, whether the nominal honours of those insignificant personages, who at this present hour meet in the senatorial chamber of the Luxembourg, devolve upon their posterity or not, the circumstance one way or the other can neither increase nor diminish their public and political authority. The Peers of France are nonentities, and nonentities they have ever been, as insignificant before the junior French Revolution as they are after that bloody riot. If the hereditary principle could not render the French Peerage more powerful, it is equally true that the intellectual qualifications of its members, however eminent, were equally unproductive of that result. The Chamber of Peers in France since the Restoration has numbered amongst its members the most illustrious warriors and the most celebrated diplomatists of the kingdom, the ablest writers of the day, the most distinguished scientific men, marshals, ambassadors, editors of newspapers, wits, travellers, authors, mathematicians, chemists: had it been selected by a Westminster Reviewer himself, the Senate of France could not have consisted of men more qualified to develop and demonstrate all “the science of legislation”. Why, then, are they so insignificant? Formed of all the talent of the country, the Chamber has no authority. What can be

the cause? The hereditary principle, to be sure – the fatal, the absurd, the anomalous hereditary principle. The hereditary principle is destroyed! Yes, a revolution is got up to achieve, among other great objects, the destruction of the fatal, absurd, and anomalous principle of hereditary legislation in the French Charter; and the French House of Peers in consequence becomes, if possible, more odious and more contemptible.

It is not, then, necessarily the hereditary principle which renders the influence of our House of Lords so injurious to the commonweal; and it is not, then, a collection of all the clever men of a country, under the august title of a Senate, which necessarily must be productive of good government. The truth is, a nation will not allow three hundred men, however ingenious, to make laws for them because the sovereign power of the State chooses to appoint that such a number of its subjects shall possess this privilege, and meet in a room to register their decrees. The King of England may make Peers, but he cannot make a House of Lords. The order of men of whom such an assembly is formed is the creation of ages. In the first place, they must really be an estate of the realm, a class of individuals who, from their property and personal influence alone, form an important section of the whole nation. The laws and customs of England have compensated its Peers for the loss of their feudal splendour. A strong current of property and influence from the wide ocean of national prosperity perpetually flows into our House of Lords. They still form the most eminent class in the State; and, instead of the position of the Peers at the present day bearing a diminished importance, compared with the attitude of the remaining classes of the community, as the superficial vulgarly imagine, I shall be surprised that, if the subject be more profoundly inquired into, if the power and privileges with which the Constitution has invested him be duly considered, and the indirect support which he receives from his alliances with the great Commons and the aristocratic classes which have sprung up around him be not omitted in the estimate, the influence of a great Peer of the present day – a Duke of Buccleugh or a Duke of Devonshire – be ascertained to be much inferior to that of an Earl of Pembroke in the time of John, or an Earl of Leicester in the reign of his successor. A House of Lords must consist of men whose influence is not felt merely in their chamber of Parliament. They must be an order of individuals whose personal importance crosses

us in all the transactions of life, and pervades the remotest nook and corner of the country, an importance, also, which we find to arise as much from the hallowed associations, or even the inveterate prejudices of society, as from their mere public privileges and constitutional and territorial importance. Their names, office, and character, and the ennobling achievements of their order, must be blended with our history, and bound up with our hereditary sentiment. They must be felt and recognised as the not unworthy descendants or successors of a class that has always taken the lead in civilisation, and formed the advanced guard in the march of national progress. Vast property, and the complicated duties which great possessions entail upon their owners, the inspiring traditions of a heroic history, the legendary respect of ages, the fair maintenance in the order itself of that civility of manners, that love of liberal pursuits, and that public spirit which become the leaders of a free people, and a strong conviction in the nation generally that, under the constitution of which this order forms a branch, they have flourished for a longer period, and in a greater degree, than any existing commonwealth – such are some of the elements of which a Senate must be formed that attempts to cope with the House of Lords of England.

The English nation has thought that there is a greater certainty of securing a Senate of this high character by entailing its functions on the most important order of its members than by trusting to the periodical selection of any body of individuals whatsoever. It has supposed that the chance production of its carefully cultivated aristocracy may offer, on the whole, senatorial elements preferable to the selected materials of popular choice. It has desired that there should be one portion of its legislature free from the turbulent and overwhelming passions that occasionally assail the less guarded structure of its more popular assembly; and to secure all these great purposes, to contrive at the same time, in establishing this chamber, its power and its perpetuity, its independence and its ability, it has not comprehended how a more practical system could be adopted than to establish the hereditary legislation of a democratic Peerage.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**Causes of the Harmony between the Two Houses – The Hereditary Principle must also be considered in Reference to the System of Parties in this Country – Summary – That the Principle of Hereditary Legislation is neither constitutionally Anomalous, nor abstractedly Absurd, nor practically Injurious, but the Reverse.**

This, my Lord, is, I think, one of those cases in which “the wisdom of our ancestors” has been conspicuous, and the harmony which throughout our history has on the whole so remarkably subsisted between our two Houses of Parliament, and the effective manner in which the machinery of our legislature has consequently operated, prove the sound judgment of the national mind that has required and sanctioned a Senate thus constituted. So profound, indeed, is and ever must be the reciprocal sympathy between the Peers and Commons of England, that, even after the late factious reconstruction of the third estate, a majority of the representatives of the English Commons upheld the independence of our august Senate. I ascribe this sympathy to a cause I have before indicated, to the principle which is the basis of our social fabric, our civil equality. It is this great principle which has prevented the nobility of England from degenerating into a favoured and odious sect; it is this great principle which has placed the Peers at the head of the People, which has surrounded them with a popular aristocracy, and filled the chamber of the third estate with representatives connected with our senators not only by sympathy of feeling and similarity of pursuits, but by the most intimate relations of birth and blood.

Again, my Lord, the question of our hereditary Peerage must be viewed in reference to the state and system of parties in this country.

It results from the system of parties in this country that both Houses of Parliament are led and directed by a very few members, and those the most eminent for talents, and character, and station, in the respective assemblies. Thus the extreme cases, which the anti-constitutional writers are ever urging, of the legislative function devolving through the medium of an hereditary institution to individuals incompetent to discharge this high office, never in fact practically occur. By ranging himself under one of the political banners of the State, every legislator avails himself of the intelligence of his leaders; to guide his judgment and form his opinion, he has the advantage of the finest talents in the country. Thus an individual, abstractedly very incompetent, may become practically very useful, and thus even a weak brain may assist in passing a wise law.

Thus we have seen, my Lord, that, viewed in reference to the complete scheme of our legislature, the hereditary principle of the House of Lords, far from being “anomalous”, is in perfect harmony with the constitution of the other estate of the realm; that if it were as “anomalous” as it is regular and consistent, far from being “absurd”, the application of the principle is extremely rational; and that, inasmuch as it is not either constitutionally “anomalous” or abstractedly “absurd”, its practical results have been such as might have been anticipated from an institution suited to the genius of the country, in harmony with all its political establishments, and founded, not only on an intimate acquaintance with the national character, but a profound knowledge of human nature in general.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**Of the Kingly Office – Unsuccessful Attempts of the Whigs to establish an Oligarchy under William the Third – Reign of Anne – Its Influence on Parties – More Successful Attempts of the Whigs to establish an Oligarchy under George the First – They establish the Cabinet, and banish the King from his own Council; pass the Septennial Act, and introduce the Peerage Bill – Oligarchical *Coups d'État* – Policy of the Whigs under George the First compared with their Policy at the Present Day.**

In these observations on the character and history of our two Houses of Parliament, I have already incidentally traced, or referred to, the character and history of the monarchy. We have seen the Kings of England, in the reigns of the Plantagenets, exercising a sovereign power, limited, however, in its use by the privilege estates of the kingdom, who, although they held the right of legislation in its fullest extent, from the imperfect civilisation of the times assumed on the whole rather the office of powerful councillors of the Sovereign than that of the administrators of the kingdom. We have seen the same King, in the reigns of the Tudors, an arbitrary monarch. We have witnessed the same King, in the reigns of the Stuarts, engaged in a continual struggle with the reviving and at length preponderating power of the long-dormant and paralysed estates. From the accession of the Prince of Orange the character of our history changes. The old contest between prerogative and privilege, between the power of the Crown and the liberty of the subject, ceases for ever, and the war of parties succeeds to the struggles of Kings and Parliaments.

The English Constitution under William the Third did not secure greater power and privileges to our Parliament than it possessed under the

reign of Henry the Fourth; but the Lords and great Commons of England had since that time become the most civilised and highly cultured body in Europe; men exceeding the superior classes of all nations in learning, eloquence, and public spirit, in practical skill and theoretic wisdom. It is not difficult to comprehend that such a body of men in absolute and unquestioned possession of the legislature should no longer be content that the executive and administrative province of the Constitution, with all its pomp and circumstance, should be monopolised by a single individual and his personal retainers. Here, then, commences the age when the influence of the Court rapidly declined, when Ministers were virtually appointed by the Parliament instead of the Sovereign, and when, by the institution of the Cabinet, the scheme and policy of the administration devolved upon a Parliamentary committee, and the King was, in fact, excluded from his own council.

If it be perhaps too strong an expression to say that William the Third was called to the throne by the voice of the whole nation, it is certain that the whole nation ratified the abdication of James the Second. Whig and Tory, Churchman and Dissenter, had alike required, and alike assisted in, his expulsion. When the excitement of this great event had a little subsided, when the rights and liberties of the nation had been secured by its Parliament, the leaders of the Whigs, including many of the most powerful and ancient families of the kingdom, commenced a favourite scheme of that party, which was to reduce the King of England to the situation of a Venetian Doge. But William the Third, like Louis Philippe, was resolved to be his own Minister, and it is not very easy to comprehend how in a perilous and revolutionary period a Sovereign of great capacity will consent to be deprived of the benefit of his own sagacity. The Whigs therefore were obliged to postpone until a more favourable opportunity the series of measures by which their great result was to be obtained; and for the present indicated their spleen by opposing the Sovereign, to whom certainly that party had originally attracted the attention of the English nation. But William, whose administrative talents were of a high order, succeeded, by his adroit balance of parties, in keeping the Whigs in check, and throughout his reign in maintaining his authority.

The reign of Anne, which proved that the reign of a Stuart might at the same time be glorious, Protestant, and prosperous, completely

unsettled the public mind of England, and made nine-tenths of the people yearn after the lost dynasty of their native Sovereigns. The leaders of both parties were in secret communication with St. Germain, and one circumstance alone prevented the son of James the Second from regaining the throne of his ancestors – his absolute incompetence. The Pretender was an incapable bigot, totally devoid of that talent which in some degree had always characterised his family.

The Hanoverian accession was secured by the bold conduct of the Dukes of Somerset and Argyle. These great Whig Peers had the hardihood to attend a Privy Council, without being summoned, while the Queen was lying in a state almost of lethargy, and absolutely forced Her Majesty to appoint the Duke of Shrewsbury Lord Treasurer. This is one of the most dramatic scenes in our political history: the unexpected arrival of the two Dukes, the Queen's desperate state, Bolingbroke's baffled hopes, the troops summoned to London, the heralds kept in waiting with a company of guards to proclaim the new King the moment the throne was vacant. The Elector of Hanover ascended the throne of England by the sufferance rather than the consent of the nation. Unsupported by the mass of the people, ignorant of our language, phlegmatic in temperament, George the First entirely depended upon the Whig Peers, and the Whig Peers resolved to compensate themselves for the disappointment they had experienced under William the Third. They at once established the Cabinet on its present basis. It is curious to trace the kingly office from the era of the Plantagenets, when the characters of a royal council and a legislative chamber were so blended together in the House of Lords that the monarch always presided over his Parliament, to the moment when the Sovereign under the Brunswicks was virtually excluded from his own council. Having thus by the establishment of the Cabinet obtained in a great degree the executive power of the State, the Whig Peers ventured to propose a measure, in order to consolidate and confirm their strength, which is perhaps unequalled by any of the machinations of a party so remarkable in all periods of our history for the unscrupulous means with which they satisfy their lust of power. This measure was the famous Peerage Bill, proposed and supported in the House of Lords by those very Dukes of Somerset and Argyle who had forced a Queen to appoint a Prime Minister on her death-bed. This Bill, if passed into a law, would

have deprived the King of his prerogative of making further Peers, and would have occasioned a virtual revolution in our government, which from that moment would have become oligarchical. George the First assented to the Bill, and the House of Lords passed it; but the Tory country gentlemen in the House of Commons, aided on this occasion by some unusual allies, succeeded in rejecting the measure. The Peerage Bill, my Lord, made as much noise in its day as the Reform Bill in our own. There was as great a "crisis", as vehement a "collision" in 1718, as any we have lately witnessed stalking about in their lions' skins; and the press teemed then with more pamphlets about "the Lords" than even at this hour, when every briefless barrister smells out that the surest road to a commissionership or other base job is to denounce that House of Parliament which will not truckle to a rapacious and unprincipled faction. The Whigs in 1718 sought to govern the country by "swamping" the House of Commons: in 1835 it is the House of Lords that is to be "swamped". In 1718 the *coup d'état* was to prevent any further increase of the Lords; in 1835 the Lords are to be outnumbered. Different tactics to obtain the same purpose; and the variance to be accounted for by the simple circumstance that the party which has recourse to these desperate expedients is not a national party, influenced by any great and avowed principles of public policy and conduct, but a small knot of great families who have no other object but their own aggrandisement, and who seek to gratify it by all possible means.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

George the Second unsuccessfully struggles against the Whig Oligarchs – George the Third emancipates the Nation from them – Of Whigs and Tories – Their Origin explained, and their Real Character ascertained.

**A**lthough the House of Commons, supported by a roused and indignant nation, rejected the Peerage Bill, still the power of the Whig aristocracy, increased by the Septennial Act, was so considerable that they monopolised the administration of this realm for upwards of half a century. George the Second, indeed, struggled for a time against these Venetian magnificoes, but when he found himself forced to resign his favourite Minister, the brilliant Carteret, to the demands of the Pelhams and their well-organised connections, the King gave up the effort in despair. It was the clear sense and the strong spirit of his able grandson that emancipated this country from the government of “the great families”. The King put himself at the head of the nation; and, encouraged by the example of a popular monarch in George the Third, and a democratic Minister in Mr. Pitt, the nation elevated to power the Tory or national party of England, under whose comprehensive and consistent, vigorous and strictly democratic system, this island has become the metropolis of a mighty Empire, its Sovereign at the same time the most powerful and its people the most free, and second to no existing nation in arts or arms, in internal prosperity, or exterior splendour.

There is no political subject, my Lord, on which a greater confusion of ideas exists, and none on which it is more desirable that we should possess very accurate conceptions, than respecting the nature and character of the two great political parties in which England, for the last

century and a half, has been divided – the WHIGS and the TORIES. The people of England in the reign of George the First formed a community as distinguished for their public spirit as any people with which we are acquainted. How happened it, then, that nine-tenths of the nation were the avowed admirers of arbitrary power, of the Divine right of Kings, of the doctrine of non-resistance, and of the duties of passive obedience? How came it that the upholders of this servile creed, instead of imbibing it from the Court, maintained it in defiance of the Court? How happened it that the supporters of the Court themselves were the avowed admirers of the most popular opinions, of the sovereignty of the people, of the right and duty of resistance, of toleration, and of the cause of civil and religious liberty? How came it that the upholders of these popular opinions, instead of adopting them to flatter the bulk of the people, maintained them in defiance of the people? And, lastly, how came it that, while the professors of arbitrary opinions exhibited on every great occasion an unquestioned and undisguised love of freedom and their rights, and expelled from the throne the Sovereign who menaced them, the professors of popular opinions, on the other hand, seized every opportunity of curtailing popular power and abridging popular privileges, introduced a Peerage Bill in the House of Lords, carried a Septennial Act in the House of Commons, and finally organised a system of political corruption throughout the Parliament and the country from the taint of which, it is not too much to assert, the national character has never absolutely recovered?

The consequences of the Great Rebellion, Parliamentary tyranny, and sectarian fanaticism, had occasioned in due season a strong reaction throughout the country in favour of the Crown and the Church. Gradually there developed themselves two sections of the nation respectively hostile to one of these institutions – sections connected together by no other similarity of feeling or situation, yet finally co-operating for the purpose of reciprocal assistance in a united attack upon the Monarchy and the Establishment: these were a powerful party of the Lords and the Non-conformists. A republican feeling united the haughtiest of the Peers with the lowest of the Puritans; but the republican model of the House of Russell was Venice; of their plebeian allies, Geneva. The Peers, to reduce the power of the Crown, now supported by the great majority

of the nation, called in the aid of the Puritans, and to obtain the aid of the Puritans attacked the Church: the Puritans, to insure the destruction of the religious establishment, allied themselves with the Peers in their assault upon the King, whose office, apart from the ecclesiastical polity, they were inclined to respect, and even to reverence. The Puritans, headed by the Peers, formed a small minority of the nation, but at the same time a party formidable from their leaders and their organisation, for the Non-conformists abounded in the metropolis, and were chiefly resident in towns. Their cry was, "Civil and Religious Freedom" – that is, a Doge and no Bishops: advocating the liberty of the subject the Peers would have established an oligarchy; upholding toleration, the Puritans aimed at supremacy. This is the origin of the Whig party in our country.

## CHAPTER XXIX

**Why the Advocacy of Divine Right, Non-Resistance, and Passive Obedience by the Tories in the Reign of George the First were Evidences of the Democratic Character of the Party – The Whigs an Oligarchical Faction – The Tories a National Party – Why the Whigs are, ever have been, and ever must be, Odious to the English Nation – Why the Whigs are Hostile to the Establishments of the Country.**

**T**he mass of the nation still smarting under the sequestrations and imprisonments of Parliamentary committees, and loathing the recollection of the fanaticism and the hypocrisy of the Roundhead apostles of the tub, clung to the national institutions. The clergy, jealous of the Non-conformists, and fearful of another deprivation, exaggerated the power and character of the Crown, in which they recognised their only safeguard. Hence Divine right and passive obedience resounded from our Protestant pulpits, echoed with enthusiasm by a free and spirited people, who acknowledged in these phrases only a determination to maintain the mild authority of their King and of their Church. This is the origin of the Tory party in our country.

On the one hand civil and religious liberty; on the other, Divine right and passive obedience; both mere phrases, both the sheer cries of a party, both the mystifying pretexts that concealed a pregnant cause. The avowed upholders of Divine right and passive obedience, headed by the national clergy that promulgated these doctrines, were the first to expel the Sovereign who aimed at their rights and liberties; the avowed advocates of civil and religious freedom, when they finally obtained power, hazarded a blow at the only foundation of freedom, the equality

of civil rights, “swamped” the House of Commons by the Septennial Act, and nearly concentrated the whole powers of the State in the House of Lords by the Peerage Bill.

It was the intention of the Whigs to have raised the Prince of Orange to the throne by the aid of a cabal. By this means the Sovereign would have been in their power, and they could have realised the object at which they had been long aiming. The insurrection of the Tories or the national party against James frustrated this project: the movement became national, and the settlement, instead of being factious, was patriotic. The powerful capacity of William the Third was not content with the limited authority destined for him: he encouraged the Tories, he balanced parties, and he maintained his throne with all the artifices of a practised politician. The reign of Anne, a Stuart, yet strictly Protestant and eminently prosperous, broke up in a great degree the strong lines of political demarcation, and occasioned the blending of parties. In spite of the Act of Settlement, the whole nation was prepared for the restoration of the ancient line; Whigs and Tories alike corresponded with St. Germain, and served together in the same administration at home. So weak was the tie of party in this reign, that it was not then considered a point of political honour to resign your post on a change of administration which substituted a Prime Minister of different opinions to your own, and to those through whose influence you had yourself acceded to office.

The Whigs secured the Hanoverian succession by a *coup d'état*. But when the nation had recovered from its surprise, the rage of parties increased to a degree unprecedented in our history, and that formal and organised division of public men occurred which has ever since been observed in the world of politics. The dislike of the Tories to the new dynasty was, if possible, aggravated by the conviction of the impolicy of recalling the old. The truly Protestant spirit of England forbade such a recourse. The House of Brunswick was supported by the great Whig families, the Non-conformists, and what was then for the first time called “the money interest”, the fungus spawn of public loans, who began to elbow the country gentlemen, and beat them out of the representation of their boroughs by the long purses of a Plutocracy. The rest of the nation – that is to say, nine-tenths of the people of England – formed the Tory party, the landed proprietors and peasantry of the kingdom, headed by

a spirited and popular Church, and looking to the kingly power in the abstract, though not to the reigning King, as their only protection from an impending oligarchy. The Whig party has ever been odious to the English people, and, in spite of all their devices and combinations, it may ever be observed that, in the long-run, the English nation declares against them. Even now, after their recent and most comprehensive *coup d'état*, they are only maintained in power by the votes of the Irish and the Scotch members.

## CHAPTER XXX

### Probable Consequences of Whiggism, and Degrading Effects of Centralisation – Democratic Character of Toryism developed – Why Parties sometimes change their Names and Cries.

**T**he reason of this is that the Whigs are an anti-national party. In order to accomplish their object of establishing an oligarchical republic, and of concentrating the government of the State in the hands of a few great families, the Whigs are compelled to declare war against all those great national institutions the power and influence of which present obstacles to the fulfilment of their purpose. It is these institutions which make us a nation. Without our Crown, our Church, our Universities, our great municipal and commercial Corporations, our Magistracy, and its dependent scheme of provincial polity, the inhabitants of England, instead of being a nation, would present only a mass of individuals governed by a metropolis, whence an arbitrary senate would issue the stern decrees of its harsh and heartless despotism. A class of the subjects, indeed, might still possess the fruitless privilege of electing its representatives in Parliament, but without any machinery to foster public spirit and maintain popular power, the whole land a prey to the most degrading equality, the equality that levels, not the equality that elevates, we should soon see these mock representatives the mere nominees of a Praefect, and the very first to tamper with our privileges and barter away our freedom. In such a state of society, a state of society which France has accomplished, and to which the Whigs are hurrying us, no public avenues to wealth and honour would subsist save through the Government. To that government all the ambition and aspirations, all the talent and the energy of the subject, would be devoted; and from the

harsh seat of the provincial governor, to the vile office of the provincial spy, every place would be filled by the ablest and most unprincipled of a corrupted people.

The Tory party in this country is the national party; it is the really democratic party of England. It supports the institutions of the country because they have been established for the common good, and because they secure the equality of civil rights, without which, whatever may be its name, no government can be free, and based upon which principle every government, however it may be styled, is in fact a Democracy. The Whig leaders at the commencement of the last century, men of consummate ability and great experience in affairs, were not blind to the advantage which might be obtained by enlarging on the apparent unpopular character of Tory tenets. In the reign of George the First, both parties in their eagerness had recourse to their old cries, without reflecting that the circumstances of their respective positions had considerably changed; that the advocates of enlarged and comprehensive freedom were now attempting to establish an oligarchy on the ruins of the national institutions, and that the votaries of Divine right and passive obedience were prepared to rebel against the Sovereign whose authority, by the original Act of Settlement, they themselves had mainly contributed to establish. However inconsistent might be the practice and the professions of the respective parties, it was obvious that, in the mutual misrepresentations, the Whigs had the advantage. An oligarchy sought to establish itself by the plea of public freedom; a nation struggled to maintain its rights on the principles of arbitrary power. This was, indeed, a false position; yet so clear-sighted was the people of England, and so apt to distinguish their cause from their pretext, that its inconvenience was for a long time unfelt, and in the preceding reign the nation had sympathised with the triumph of Sacheverell, and ridiculed the false pretensions of the Whigs to the advocacy and trusteeship of the popular cause.

When, however, the Tory party – that is, the English nation – had renounced all hope or wish for the restoration of their native Sovereigns; when, in their Protestant feeling, they had taught themselves to look upon the establishment of the Hanoverian succession as indispensable to the maintenance of their liberties, and had thus authorised and

ratified, without redress or appeal, the very political opinions which they had hitherto opposed, the inconvenience became more apparent. There are periods when the titles and watchwords of political parties become obsolete; and when, by adhering to an ancient and accustomed cry, a party often appears to profess opinions less popular than it really practises, and yields a proportionate advantage to its more dexterous competitor. In times of great political change and rapid political transition, it will generally be observed that political parties find it convenient to rebaptise themselves. Thus, in the present day, Whigs have become Reformers, and Tories Conservatives. In the early part of the last century, the Tory party required a similar reorganisation to that which it has lately undergone; and as it is in the nature of human affairs that the individual that is required shall not long be wanting, so, in the season of which I am treating, arose a man remarkable in an illustrious age, who, with the splendour of an organising genius, settled the confused and discordant materials of English faction, and reduced them into a clear and systematic order. This was Lord Bolingbroke.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**Character of Lord Bolingbroke – His Influence on our History – Reorganises the Tory Party – Founder of Modern Toryism – The Whigs pursuing the Same Machinations now as under George the First.**

**G**ifted with that fiery imagination, the teeming fertility of whose inventive resources is as necessary to a great statesman or a great general as to a great poet; the ablest writer and the most accomplished orator of his age, that rare union that in a country of free Parliaments and a free press insures to its possessor the privilege of exercising a constant influence over the mind of his country, that rare union that has rendered Burke so memorable; blending with that intuitive knowledge of his race, which creative minds alone enjoy, all the wisdom which can be derived from literature, and a comprehensive experience of human affairs – no one was better qualified to be the Minister of a free and powerful nation than Henry St. John; and Destiny at first appeared to combine with Nature in the elevation of his fortunes. Opposed to the Whigs from principle, for an oligarchy is hostile to genius, and recoiling from the Tory tenets, which his un-prejudiced and vigorous mind taught him at the same time to dread and to contemn, Lord Bolingbroke, at the outset of his career, incurred the common-place imputation of insincerity and inconsistency, because, in an age of unsettled parties with professions contradictory of their conduct, he maintained that vigilant and meditative independence which is the privilege of an original and determined spirit. It is probable that in the earlier years of his career he meditated over the formation of a new party, that dream of youthful ambition in a perplexed and discordant age, but destined in English politics to be never more substantial than a vision.

More experienced in political life, he became aware that he had only to choose between the Whigs and the Tories, and his sagacious intellect, not satisfied with the superficial character of these celebrated divisions, penetrated their interior and essential qualities, and discovered, in spite of all the affectation of popular sympathy on one side, and of admiration of arbitrary power on the other, that this choice was in fact a choice between oligarchy and democracy. From the moment that Lord Bolingbroke, in becoming a Tory, embraced the national cause, he devoted himself absolutely to his party: all the energies of his Protean mind were lavished in their service; and although the ignoble prudence of the Whig Minister restrained him from advocating the cause of the nation in the senate, it was his inspiring pen that made Walpole tremble in the recesses of the Treasury, and in a series of writings, unequalled in our literature for their spirited patriotism, their just and profound views, and the golden eloquence in which they are expressed, eradicated from Toryism all those absurd and odious doctrines which Toryism had adventitiously adopted, clearly developed its essential and permanent character, discarded *jure divino*, demolished passive obedience, threw to the winds the doctrine of non-resistance, placed the abolition of James and the accession of George on their right basis, and in the complete reorganisation of the public mind laid the foundation for the future accession of the Tory party to power, and to that popular and triumphant career which must ever await the policy of an administration inspired by the spirit of our free and ancient institutions.

Upwards of a century has elapsed since the Whigs, by a series of *coups d'état*, attempted to transform the English Constitution into an oligarchy. George the Third routed the Whigs; but had their India Bill been more fortunate than their Peerage Bill, all the energy of that spirited Sovereign would have been fruitless. Stung to the quick by their long and merited exclusion from power, the Whigs are now playing the same great game which was partially successful at the commencement of the last century. They have again formed a close and open alliance with the Dissenters, and again declared war against the national institutions. Instead of "swamping" the Tory House of Commons by a Septennial Act, they have moulded it to their use and fancy by a reconstruction which has secured a preponderating influence to their sectarian allies: instead of restricting

the royal prerogative in the creation of Peers, they have counselled its prodigal exercise; but before they had only to confirm their power in the House of Lords, now they have to create their power. They boast that they hold the King in *duress*, and probably their boast is not ill-founded, but let us hope that our gracious Sovereign may take warning from the first of his house that ruled these realms, and follow the example of George the Third rather than George the First. The House of Commons remodelled, the House of Lords menaced, the King unconstitutionally controlled, the Church is next attacked, then the Corporations, and they do not conceal that the Magistracy is to be the next victim: and the nation is thus mangled and torn to pieces, its most sacred feelings outraged, its most important interests destroyed, by a miserable minority arrogating to themselves the bewildering title of "the People", and achieving all this misery and misfortune, all this havoc and degradation, in the sacred name of liberty, and under the impudent pretence of advancing the great cause of popular amelioration, and securing the common good and general happiness. My Lord, the Whigs invoke "the People"; let us appeal to the nation.

Mark these friends of "the People" installed in power. What are their great measures? The Poor Law Bill and the projected disfranchisement of all the freemen of England. Is this their service to the "People"? Are these their measures of popular amelioration? Is this their scheme to secure the happiness and increase the power of "the People"? Who does not in an instant detect that "the People" of the Whigs is that part of the constituency or Commons of England who yield them the advantage of their suffrages? Now, at the last General Election, warm as was the contest, there were not more – I doubt whether as many – than one hundred and fifty thousand votes polled in favour of the Whigs. And this, too, after they had remodelled the third estate with a mere view to the consolidation of their own interest. So, then, "the People" of the Whigs is about one hundred and fifty thousand persons, and of these, too, the great majority sectarians, a class necessarily hostile to our Constitution, and long excluded by the nation from the exercise of political power for that very reason. It might have been very odious, it might have been very illiberal, it might have been very unwise, to exclude the Dissenters from the exercise of political power; but is it less odious, is it more liberal, is it wiser, to carry on the government of the State by the aid of the Dissenters alone?

## CHAPTER XXXII

### Three Points to which the Tories must at the Present Moment apply themselves – Tories vindicated from the Charge of Corruption, Bigotry, and Hostility to Improvement – Causes and Consequences of Political Conciliation.

If the Whigs at this moment be pursuing the same desperate and determined policy that they prosecuted so vigorously a century back, it will be well for their rivals to adopt the same cautious yet energetic system of conduct which, developed at the same period by the genius of a Bolingbroke, led in due season to the administration of a Pitt. In the conduct of the Tory party at this moment, it appears to me that there are three points to the furtherance of which we should principally apply ourselves: First, that the real character and nature of Toryism should be generally and clearly comprehended: secondly, that Toryism should be divested of all those qualities which are adventitious and not essential, and which, having been produced by that course of circumstances which are constantly changing, become in time obsolete, inconvenient, and by the dexterous misrepresentation of our opponents even odious: thirdly, that the efficient organisation of the party should be secured and maintained.

The necessity of the third point has already been anticipated by the party; but they have blundered in the second, and totally neglected the first.

Toryism, or the policy of the Tories, being the proposed or practised embodiment, as the case may be, of the national will and character, it follows that Toryism must occasionally represent and reflect the passions and prejudices of the nation, as well as its purer energies and

its more enlarged and philosophic views. In a perilous age of war and revolution, throughout the most terrible struggle of modern history, the destiny of England was regulated by the Tories. They carried us through the sharp and flaming ordeal to transcendent triumph and unparalleled prosperity. A factious and anti-national Opposition, who predicted our discomfiture in every engagement, and exaggerated and extolled on every occasion the power and pre-eminence of our foe, raised a cry of corruption against the Tories during this mighty contest because, in the creation of our colonial empire, immense establishments were necessarily raised, the details of which in the desperate heat of war could not be severely scanned; raised a cry of enmity to improvement against the Tories during this mighty contest, because they opposed any examination or remodelling of our ancient institutions and domestic polity at a time when all the attention and energies of the nation and its rulers should be devoted to their foreign enemy, the most terrible for his power, his resources, his talents, and his activity, which England had ever encountered; raised a cry of narrow-minded bigotry and hostility to civil and religious liberty against the Tories during this mighty contest, because at such a moment they refused to sanction extensive alterations in the Constitution of the country, and declined the responsibility of entrusting, at a season ill-suited for experiments, new classes of their fellow subjects with the exercise of political power. Corruption, bigotry, hostility to all improvement – these were the false cries raised by the Whigs against the national party during the immortal struggle between Toryism and Napoleon. Yet were the Tories advocates of corruption when they introduced a Bill into the House of Commons for the banishment of all placemen from that assembly, and denounced Walpole? Were the Tories hostile to civil and religious liberty when they crushed the Papacy, opposed a standing army, cherished free elections, upheld short Parliaments? Were the Tories inimical to national improvement when, under Pitt, they first applied philosophy to commerce, and science to finance; when, under their auspices, the most severe retrenchment was practised in every department of the public expenditure; when a Bill for the Commutation of Tithes was not only planned, but printed; and when nothing but the violence of the French Revolution prevented the adoption of a matured scheme of Ecclesiastical Reform, which would not

have left our revolutionary oligarchs a single pretext to veil their present plundering purpose? Why! The cry of Parliamentary Reform was first raised by a Tory Minister, struggling against the bigoted and corrupt authority of the Whig oligarchy; and it was not until the united efforts of the Sovereign, the Minister, and the nation, succeeded in piercing the serried ranks of the anti-national faction, that the Whigs, alarmed at the Tories beginning, by their acquisitions, to neutralise the only ill effects of the close borough system, borrowed the watchword of their patriotic opponents, became friends of “the People” and Parliamentary Reformers. Corruption, bigotry, hostility to improvement, may be but other names for the just and decent influence of a vigorous government, a determination to uphold the religious establishment of the country, and a resolution to oppose the crude and indigested schemes of adventurous charlatans. However this may be, it is sufficient for me to show that the qualities popularly associated with these titles are not peculiar to Toryism, that they form no essential portion of that national policy, and that when from the course of circumstances they have been temporarily adopted by the Tories in power, it has been in deference to the national voice, of which Toryism is the echo; for we must not forget that the war, and all its concomitant expenditure, was heartily sanctioned by the English nation, and that sagacious community discountenanced with an almost unanimous expression any experimental tampering with our civil or religious establishments, or the general scheme of our domestic polity, during the war of the Revolution.

When that war terminated, the alleged advocates of “corruption” pursued so vigorous a system of retrenchment that, when their rivals entered office, pledged to such marvels of financial regeneration, they were absolutely baffled to surpass their misrepresented predecessors; the opposers of “national improvement” reformed our criminal code, revised our currency, remodelled our commercial system; the enemies of civil and religious freedom relieved the Dissenters, and emancipated the Papists. Far from being corrupt, far from cherishing abuses, far from withstanding improvement and upholding a system of exclusive bigotry, we know now, and we know it too well, that Toryism had unwisely weakened the indispensable influence of government, that it indulged in a dangerous liberality, in a fallacious conciliation, in fantastic empiricism

and unnecessary concession.

But this was not the fault of the Tory leaders; it was the fault of the party – of Toryism – of the nation. The triumph of the national party at the Peace of Paris over their anti-English opponents was so complete that they fancied, in the fullness of their pride, that all future competition was impossible, so the Tories became merciful and condescendingly lenient. Conciliation was the national motto from the Parliament to the Vestry, and Conciliation conducted us in due time to a Revolution. The supineness of the nation forced the Tory leaders to yield much of which they disapproved. At length the reconstruction of the third estate was demanded, and of such a change the Tory leaders would not incur the responsibility. The old Whig party took advantage of the dissensions which it had deeply sown and sedulously watched, and appeared again upon the public stage to play the old game of a century back, with their mouths full of the People, Reform, and Liberty, and their portfolios bursting with oligarchical *coups d'état*.

The English nation has now recovered its senses, and Toryism has resumed its old healthy complexion. The social power of a national party can never be destroyed, but a State trick may terribly curtail its political power. So it is with the Tories. I do not think there ever was a period in our history when the English nation was so intensely Tory in feeling as at the present moment; but the Reform Act has placed the power of the country in the hands of a small body of persons hostile to the nation, and therefore there is no due proportion between the social and the political power of the national party.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### Vindication of the Recent Policy of Sir Robert Peel and his Cabinet – The Political Power of the Tories distinguished from their Social Power – The Political Power maintained at Present by a Series of Great Democratic Measures.

If, in confirmation of the argument which I have been pursuing, I appeal to the measures brought forward by Sir Robert Peel and the Cabinet, in which your Lordship held the Great Seal of England, as evidence that the Tories are not opposed to measures of political amelioration, I shall perhaps be met with that famous dilemma of insincerity or apostasy which was urged during the last General Election on the Whig hustings, with an air of irrefutable triumph, which, had it been better grounded, had been less amusing. I will grant that Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues had previously resisted the measures which they then proposed. But in the interval the third estate of the realm had been reconstructed, and a preponderating influence had been given to a small class who would not support any Ministry unprepared to carry such measures. If once the Tories admitted that it was impossible for them to propose the adoption of these measures they simultaneously admitted that they could never again exercise power; they conceded to the Whigs a monopoly of power, under the specious title of a monopoly of Reform; and the oligarchy against which we had so long struggled would finally have been established. Was this the duty of Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues? If they had held it to be such, the nation would have rejected them for its leaders. The nation, struggling with a sect, menaced by an insolent minority of its members, recognised the absolute necessity of such concessions on the part of its leaders as would deprive this hostile

and privileged minority of every just or plausible ground of opposition to the national will. The determination of Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues to carry these measures has already shaken the oligarchy to its centre; it has forced it, only four years after having reconstructed the third estate for its purposes, to rely upon the treasonable support of a foreign priesthood; and it has prepared the way for the regeneration of the national character. This great deed therefore, instead of being an act of insincerity or apostasy, was conceived in good faith, and in perfect harmony with the previous policy of the party: it was at the same time indispensable, and urged alike by the national voice and the national interests, and history will record it as the conduct of patriotic wisdom.

I think, my Lord, that I have now shown how unjust are those, and how liable to error, who form their opinion of Toryism from those accidental qualities which are inseparable from all political parties that have been long in power, and have exercised that prolonged authority under circumstances of extreme difficulty and danger. And it is curious to observe that, so difficult is it to destroy the original character and eradicate the first principles of human affairs, those very members of the Tory party who were loudest in upbraiding the Whig Reform Act as a democratic measure were simultaneously, and have ever since been, urging and prosecuting measures infinitely more democratic than that cunning oligarchical device. However irresistible may be the social power of the Tory party, their political power, since 1831, has only been preserved and maintained by a series of democratic measures of the greatest importance and most comprehensive character. No sooner was the passing of the Whig Reform Act inevitable than the Tories introduced a clause into it which added many thousand members to the estate of the Commons. No sooner was the Whig Reform Act passed, and circumstances had proved that, with all their machinations, the oligarchy was not yet secure, than the Whigs, under the pretence of reforming the corporations, attempted to compensate themselves for the democratic increase of the third estate, through the Chandos clause, by the political destruction of all the freemen of England; but the Tories again stepped in to the rescue of the nation from the oligarchy, and now preserved the rights of eighty thousand members of the third estate. And not content with adding many thousands to its numbers, and preserving eighty

thousand, the Tories, ever since the passing of the oligarchical Reform Act of the Whigs, have organised societies throughout the country for the great democratic purpose of increasing to the utmost possible extent the numbers of the third estate of the realm. The clause of Lord Chandos, your Lordship's triumphant defence of the freemen of England, and the last Registration, are three great democratic movements, and quite in keeping with the original and genuine character of Toryism.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### General View of the English Constitution – Shown to be a Complete Democracy – English and French Equality contrasted – Conclusion.

If we take a superficial view of the nature of the English Constitution, we shall perceive that the government of the country is carried on by a King and two limited orders of his subjects: but if we indulge in a more profound and comprehensive survey – if we examine not only the political Constitution, but the political condition of the country – we shall in truth discover that the state of our society is that of a complete democracy, headed by an hereditary chief, the executive and legislative functions performed by two privileged classes of the community, but the whole body of the nation entitled, if duly qualified, to participate in the exercise of those functions, and constantly participating in them.

The basis of English society is Equality. But here let us distinguish. There are two kinds of equality: there is the equality that levels and destroys, and the equality that elevates and creates. It is this last, this sublime, this celestial equality, that animates the laws of England. The principle of the first equality, base, terrestrial, Gallic, and grovelling, is that no one should be privileged; the principle of English equality is that everyone should be privileged. Thus the meanest subject of our King is born to great and important privileges; an Englishman, however humble may be his birth, whether he be doomed to the plough or destined to the loom, is born to the noblest of all inheritances, the equality of civil rights; he is born to freedom, he is born to justice, and he is born to property. There is no station to which he may not aspire; there is no master whom he is obliged to serve; there is no magistrate who dares imprison him against the law; and the soil on which he labours must supply him with an honest and

decorous maintenance. These are rights and privileges as valuable as King, Lords, and Commons; and it is only a nation thus schooled and cradled in the principles and practice of freedom which, indeed, could maintain such institutions. Thus the English in politics are as the old Hebrews in religion, "a favoured and peculiar people". As Equality is the basis, so Gradation is the superstructure; and the English nation is essentially a nation of classes, but not of castes. Hence that admirable order, which is the characteristic of our society; for in England every man knows or finds his place; the law has supplied every man with a position, and nature has a liberal charter to amend the arrangement of the law. Our equality is the safety-valve of tumultuous spirits; our gradation the security of the humble and the meek. The latter take refuge in their order; the former seek relief in emancipating themselves from its rank. English equality calls upon the subject to aspire; French equality summons him to abase himself. In England the subject is invited to become an object of admiration or respect; in France he is warned lest he become an object of envy or of ridicule. The law of England has invested the subject with equality in order that, if entitled to eminence, he should rise superior to the mass. The law of France has invested the subject with equality, on condition that he prevent the elevation of his fellow. English equality blends every man's ambition with the perpetuity of the State; French equality, which has reduced the subject into a mere individual, has degraded the State into a mere society. English equality governs the subject by the united and mingled influences of reason and imagination; French equality, having rejected imagination and aspiring to reason, has, in reality, only resolved itself into a barren fantasy. The Constitution of England is founded not only on a profound knowledge of human nature, but of human nature in England; the political scheme of France originates not only in a profound ignorance of human nature in general, but of French human nature in particular; thus in England, however vast and violent may be our revolutions, the Constitution ever becomes more firm and vigorous, while in France a riot oversets the government, and after half a century of political experiments one of the most intellectual of human races has succeeded in losing every attribute of a nation, and has sought refuge from anarchy in a despotism without lustre, which contradicts all its theories and violates all the principles for which it has ever affected to struggle.

The English nation, to obtain the convenience of monarchy, have established a popular throne, and, to enjoy the security of aristocracy, have invested certain orders of their fellow-subjects with legislative functions: but these estates, however highly privileged, are invested with no quality of exclusion; and the Peers and the Commons of England are the trustees of the nation, not its masters. The country where the legislative and even the executive office may be constitutionally obtained by every subject of the land is a democracy, and a democracy of the noblest character. If neither ancient ages nor the more recent experience of our newer time can supply us with a parallel instance of a free government, founded on the broadest basis of popular rights, yet combining with democratic, liberty aristocratic security and monarchical convenience; if the refined spirit of Greece, if the great Roman soul, if the brilliant genius of feudal Italy, alike failed in realising this great result, let us cling with increased devotion to the matchless creation of our ancestors, and honour with still deeper feelings of gratitude and veneration the English Constitution. That Constitution, my Lord, established civil equality in a rude age, and anticipated by centuries, in its beneficent practice, the sublime theories of modern philosophy: having made us equal, it has kept us free. If it have united equality with freedom, so also has it connected freedom with glory. It has established an Empire which combines the durability of Rome with the adventure of Carthage. It has at the same time secured us the most skilful agriculture, the most extended commerce, the most ingenious manufactures, victorious armies, and invincible fleets. Nor has the intellectual might of England, under its fostering auspices, been less distinguished than its imperial spirit, its manly heart, or its national energy. The authors of England have formed the mind of Europe, and stamped the breathing impression of their genius on the vigorous character of a new world. Under that Constitution the administration of justice has become so pure that its exercise has realised the dreams of some Utopian romance. That Constitution has struggled successfully with the Papacy, and finally, and for the first time, proved the compatibility of sectarian toleration and national orthodoxy. It has made private ambition conducive to public welfare, it has baffled the machinations of factions and of parties, and when those more violent convulsions have arisen, from whose periodic visitations no human

institutions can be exempt, the English Constitution has survived the moral earthquake, and outlived the mental hurricane, and been sedulous that the natural course of our prosperity should only be disturbed, and not destroyed. Finally, it has secured for every man the career to which he is adapted, and the reward to which he is entitled; it has summoned your Lordship to preside over Courts and Parliaments, to maintain law by learning, and to recommend wisdom by eloquence: and it has secured to me, in common with every subject of this realm, a right the enjoyment of which I would not exchange even for

“The ermined stole,

The starry breast, and coroneted brow”

– the right of expressing my free thoughts to a free people.

# The Spirit of Whiggism

## CHAPTER I

### Historical

**E**ngland has become great by her institutions. Her hereditary Crown has in a great degree insured us from the distracting evils of a contested succession; her Peerage, interested, from the vast property and the national honours of its members, in the good government of the country, has offered a compact bulwark against the temporary violence of popular passion; her House of Commons, representing the conflicting sentiments of an estate of the realm not less privileged than that of the Peers, though far more numerous, has enlisted the great mass of the lesser proprietors of the country in favour of a political system which offers them a constitutional means of defence and a legitimate method of redress; her ecclesiastical establishment, preserved by its munificent endowment from the fatal necessity of pandering to the erratic fancies of its communicants, has maintained the sacred cause of learning and religion, and preserved orthodoxy while it has secured toleration; her law of primogeniture has supplied the country with a band of natural and independent leaders, trustees of those legal institutions which pervade the land, and which are the origin of our political constitution.

That great body corporate, styled a nation – a vast assemblage of human beings knit together by laws and arts and customs, by the necessities of the present and the memory of the past – offers in this country, through these its vigorous and enduring members, a more substantial and healthy framework than falls to the lot of other nations. Our stout-built constitution throws off with more facility and safety those crude and dangerous humours which must at times arise in all human

communities. The march of revolution must here at least be orderly. We are preserved from those reckless and tempestuous sallies that in other countries, like a whirlwind, topple down in an instant an ancient crown, or sweep away an illustrious aristocracy. This constitution, which has secured order, has consequently promoted civilisation; and the almost unbroken tide of progressive amelioration has made us the freest, the wealthiest, and the most refined society of modern ages. Our commerce is unrivalled, our manufacturers supply the world, our agriculture is the most skilful in Christendom. So national are our institutions, so completely have they arisen from the temper and adapted themselves to the character of the people, that when for a season they were apparently annihilated, the people of England voluntarily returned to them, and established them with renewed strength and renovated vigour.

The constitution of England is again threatened, and at a moment when the nation is more prosperous, more free, and more famous than at any period of its momentous and memorable career. Why is this? What has occasioned these distempered times, which make the loyal tremble and the traitor smile? Why has this dark cloud suddenly gathered in a sky so serene and so splendid? Is there any analogy between this age and that of the first Charles? Are the same causes at work, or is the apparent similarity produced only by designing men, who make use of the perverted past as a passport to present mischief? These are great questions which it may be profitable to discuss and wise to study.

Rapin, a foreigner who wrote our history<sup>(54)</sup>, in the course of his frigid yet accurate pages, indulged in one philosophical observation. Struck at the same time by our greatness and by the fury of our factions, the Huguenot exclaimed, "It appears to me that this great society can only be dissolved by the violence of its political parties".

What are these parties? Why are they violent? Why should they exist? In resolving these questions, we may obtain an accurate idea of our present political position, and by pondering over the past we may make that past not a prophecy, as the disaffected intend, but a salutary lesson by which the loyal may profit.

The two great parties in which England has during the last century and a half been divided originated in the ancient struggle between the Crown and the aristocracy. As long as the Crown possessed or aspired to despotic power, the feeling of the nation supported the aristocracy in their struggles to establish a free government. The aristocracy of England formed the constitution of the Plantagenets; the wars of the Roses destroyed that aristocracy, and the despotism of the Tudors succeeded. Renovated by more than a century of peace and the spoils of the Papacy, the aristocracy of England attacked the first Stuarts, who succeeded to a despotism which they did not create. When Charles the First, after a series of great concessions which ultimately obtained for him the support of the most illustrious of his early opponents, raised the royal standard, the constitution of the Plantagenets, and more than the constitution of the Plantagenets, had been restored and secured. But a portion of the able party which had succeeded in effecting such a vast and beneficial revolution was not content to part with the extraordinary powers which they had obtained in this memorable struggle. This section of the aristocracy were the origin of the English Whigs, though that title was not invented until the next reign. The primitive Whigs – "Parliament-men", as they liked to call themselves, "Roundheads", as they were in time dubbed – aspired to an oligarchy; for a moment they obtained one; but unable to maintain themselves in power against the returning sense and rising spirit of a generous and indignant people, they called to their aid that domestic revolutionary party which exists in all countries, and an anti-national enemy in addition. These were the English Radicals, or Root-and-Branch men, and the Scotch Covenanters. To conciliate the first they sacrificed the Crown; to secure the second they abolished the Church. The constitution of England in Church and State was destroyed, and the Whig oligarchy, in spite of their machinations, were soon merged in the common ruin.

The ignoble tyranny to which this great nation was consequently subject produced that reaction which is in the nature of human affairs. The ancient constitution was in time restored, and the Church and the Crown were invested with greater powers than they had enjoyed previously to their overthrow. So hateful had been the consequences of Whig rule that the people were inclined rather to trust the talons of

(54) Paul de Rapin de Thoyras, whose "Histoire d'Angleterre", in eight volumes, appeared in 1724.

arbitrary power than to take refuge under the wing of these pretended advocates of popular rights. A worthless monarch and a corrupted Court availed themselves of the offered opportunity; and when James the Second ascended the throne, the nation was again prepared to second the aristocracy in a struggle for their liberties. But the Whigs had profited by their previous experiment: they resolved upon a revolution, but they determined that that revolution should be brought about by as slight an appeal to popular sympathies as possible. They studiously confined that appeal to the religious feelings of the nation. They hired a foreign prince and enlisted a foreign army in their service. They dethroned James, they established themselves in power without the aid of the mass; and had William the Third been a man of ordinary capacity, the constitution of Venice would have been established in England in 1688. William the Third told the Whigs that he would never consent to be a Doge. Resembling Louis Philippe in his character as well as in his position, that extraordinary Prince baffled the Whigs by his skilful balance of parties; and had Providence accorded him an heir, it is probable that the oligarchical faction would never have revived in England.

The Whigs have ever been opposed to the national institutions because they are adverse to the establishment of an oligarchy. Local institutions, supported by a landed gentry, check them; hence their love of centralisation and their hatred of unpaid magistrates. An independent hierarchy checks them; hence their affected advocacy of toleration and their patronage of the Dissenters. The power of the Crown checks them; therefore they always labour to reduce the sovereign to a nonentity, and by the establishment of the Cabinet they have virtually banished the King from his own councils. But, above all, the Parliament of England checks them, and therefore it may be observed that the Whigs at all times are quarrelling with some portion of those august estates. They despair of destroying the Parliament; by it, and by it alone, can they succeed in their objects. Corruption for one part, force for the other, then, is their motto. In 1640 they attempted to govern the country by the House of Commons, because the aristocracy was then more powerful in the House of Commons than in the House of Lords, where a Peerage, exhausted by civil wars, had been too liberally recruited from the courtiers of the Tudors and the Stuarts. At the next revolution which the Whigs

occasioned, they attempted to govern the country by the House of Lords, in which they were predominant; and, in order to guarantee their power forever, they introduced a Bill to deprive the King of his prerogative of making further Peers. The revolution of 1640 led to the abolition of the House of Lords because the Lords opposed the oligarchy; the revolution of 1688 led to the remodelling of the House of Commons by the Septennial Act, because the House of Commons then were influenced by the same feelings as the Lords during the great rebellion.

The accession of the House of Hanover revived the hopes of the Whigs, baffled by the subtle policy of William, and by the Tory triumphs of Anne. The new dynasty was unpopular with the mass of the nation, and proportionately dependent on the Whig oligarchy. Having a majority in the House of Lords, the Whigs introduced the Peerage Bill, by which the House of Lords would have been rendered independent of the sovereign; unpopular with the country, the Whigs attacked the influence of popular election, and the moment that, by the aid of the most infamous corruption, they had obtained a temporary majority in the Lower House, they passed the Septennial Act. The Whigs of the eighteenth century “swamped” the House of Commons; the Whigs of the nineteenth would “swamp” the House of Lords. The Whigs of the eighteenth century would have rendered the House of Lords unchangeable; the Whigs of the nineteenth remodel the House of Commons.

I conclude here the first chapter of the “Spirit of Whiggism” – a little book which I hope may be easily read and easily remembered. The Whig party have always adopted popular cries. In one age it is Liberty, in another Reform; at one period they sound the tocsin against popery, in another they ally themselves with papists. They have many cries, and various modes of conduct; but they have only one object – the establishment of an oligarchy in this free and equal land. I do not wish this country to be governed by a small knot of great families, and therefore I oppose the Whigs.

## CHAPTER II

### At war with the constitution

When the Whigs and their public organs favour us with their mysterious hints that the constitution has provided the sovereign with a means to re-establish at all times a legislative sympathy between the two Houses of Parliament, it may be as well to remind them that we are not indebted for this salutary prerogative to the forbearance of their party. Suppose their Peerage Bill had passed into an Act, how would they have carried the Reform Bill of 1832? The Whigs may reply, that if the Peerage Bill had become a law, the Reform Bill would never have been introduced; and I believe them. In that case, the British House of Lords would have been transformed into a Venetian Senate, and the old walls of St. James's might have witnessed scenes of as degrading mortification as the famous ducal palace of the Adriatic.

George the Third routed the Whigs, consolidated by half a century of power; but an ordinary monarch would have sunk beneath the Coalition and the India Bill. This scheme was the last desperate effort of the oligarchical party previous to 1830. Not that they were inactive during the great interval that elapsed between the advent of Mr. Pitt and the resurrection of Lord Grey: but, ever on the watch for a cry to carry them into power, they mistook the yell of Jacobinism for the chorus of an emancipated people, and fancied, in order to take the throne by storm, that nothing was wanting but to hoist the tricolour and to cover their haughty brows with a red cap. This fatal blunder clipped the wings of Whiggism; nor is it possible to conceive a party that had effected so many revolutions and governed a great country for so long a period, more broken, sunk, and shattered, more desolate and disheartened, than these

same Whigs at the Peace of Paris. From that period till 1830, the tactics of the Whigs consisted in gently and gradually extricating themselves from their false position as the disciples of Jacobinism, and assuming their ancient post as the hereditary guardians of an hereditary monarchy. To make the transition less difficult than it threatened, they invented Liberalism, a bridge by which they were to regain the lost mainland, and daintily re-cross on tiptoe the chasm over which they had originally sprung with so much precipitation. A dozen years of "liberal principles" broke up the national party of England, cemented by half a century of prosperity and glory, compared with which all the annals of the realm are dim and lacklustre. Yet so weak intrinsically was the oligarchical faction that their chief, despairing to obtain a monopoly of power for his party, elaborately announced himself as the champion of his patrician order, and attempted to coalesce with the liberalised leader of the Tories. Had that negotiation led to the result which was originally intended by those interested, the Riots of Paris would not have occasioned the Reform of London.

It is a great delusion to believe that revolutions are ever effected by a nation. It is a faction, and generally a small one, that overthrows a dynasty or remodels a constitution. A small party, stung by a long exile from power, and desperate of success except by desperate means, invariably has recourse to a *coup d'état*. An oligarchical party is necessarily not numerous. Its members in general attempt, by noble lineage or vast possessions, to compensate for their poverty of numbers. The Whigs, in 1830, found themselves by accident in place, but under very peculiar circumstances. They were in place but not in power. In each estate of the realm a majority was arrayed against them. An appeal to the Commons of England, that constituency which, in its elements, had undergone no alteration since the time of Elizabeth, either by the influence of the legislature or the action of time – that constituency which had elected Pym, and Selden, and Hampden, as well as Somers, Walpole, and Pulteney – an appeal to this constituency, it was generally acknowledged, would be fatal to the Whigs, and therefore they determined to reconstruct it. This is the origin of the recent parliamentary reform: the Whigs, in place without being in power, resolved as usual upon a *coup d'état*, and looked about for a stalking-horse. In general the difficult task had devolved upon

them of having to accomplish their concealed purpose while apparently achieving some public object. Thus they had carried the Septennial Act on the plea of preserving England from popery, though their real object was to prolong the existence of the first House of Commons in which they could command a majority.

But in the present instance they became sincerely parliamentary reformers, for by parliamentary reform they could alone subsist; and all their art was dedicated so to contrive, that in this reformation their own interest should secure an irresistible predominance.

But how was an oligarchical party to predominate in popular elections? Here was the difficulty. The Whigs had no resources from their own limited ranks to feed the muster of the popular levies. They were obliged to look about for allies wherewith to form their new popular estate. Any estate of the Commons modelled on any equitable principle, either of property or population, must have been fatal to the Whigs; they, therefore, very dexterously adopted a small minority of the nation, consisting of the sectarians, and, inaugurating them as the people with a vast and bewildering train of hocus-pocus ceremonies, invested the Dissenters with political power. By this *coup d'état* they managed the House of Commons, and having at length obtained a position, they have from that moment laid siege to the House of Lords, with the intention of reducing that great institution and making it surrender at discretion. This is the exact state of English politics during the last five years. The Whigs have been at war with the English constitution. First of all they captured the King; then they vanquished the House of Commons; now they have laid siege to the House of Lords. But here the fallacy of their grand scheme of political mystification begins to develop itself. Had, indeed, their new constituency, as they have long impudently pretended, indeed been “the people”, a struggle between such a body and the House of Lords would have been brief but final. The absurdity of supposing that a chamber of two or three hundred individuals could set up their absolute will and pleasure against the decrees of a legislative assembly chosen by a whole nation, is so glaring that the Whigs and their scribes might reasonably suspect that in making such allegations they were assuredly proving too much. But as “the people” of the Whigs is in fact a number of Englishmen not exceeding in amount the population of a third-rate

city, the English nation is not of opinion that this arrogant and vaunting moiety of a class privileged for the common good, swollen though it may be by some jobbing Scots and rebel Irish, shall pass off their petty and selfish schemes of personal aggrandisement as the will of a great people, as mindful of its duty to its posterity as it is grateful for the labours of its ancestors. The English nation, therefore, rallies for rescue from the degrading plots of a profligate oligarchy, a barbarising sectarianism, and a borough mongering Papacy round their hereditary leaders – the Peers. The House of Lords, therefore, at this moment represents everything in the realm except the Whig oligarchs, their tools – the Dissenters, and their masters – the Irish priests. In the meantime the Whigs bawl aloud that there is a “collision”! It is true there is a collision; but it is not a collision between the Lords and the People, but between the Ministers and the Constitution.

## CHAPTER III

### The republic of the Whigs

It may be as well to remind the English nation that a revolutionary party is not necessarily a liberal one, and that a republic is not indispensably a democracy. Such is the disposition of property in England that, were a republic to be established here tomorrow, it would partake rather of the oligarchical than of the aristocratic character. We should be surprised to find in how few families the power of the State was concentrated. And although the framers of the new commonwealth would be too crafty to base it on any avowed and ostensible principle of exclusion, but on the contrary would in all probability ostentatiously inaugurate the novel constitution by virtue of some abstract plea about as definite and as prodigal of practical effects as the Rights of Man or the Sovereignty of the People; nevertheless I should be astonished were we not to find that the great mass of the nation, as far as any share in the conduct of public affairs was concerned, were as completely shut out from the fruition and exercise of power as under that Venetian polity which has ever been the secret object of Whig envy and Whig admiration. The Church, under such circumstances, would probably have again been plundered, and therefore the discharge of ecclesiastical duties might be spared to the nation; but the people would assuredly be practically excluded from its services, which would swarm with the relations and connections of the senatorial class; for, whether this country be governed only by the House of Commons, or only by the House of Lords, the elements of the single chamber will not materially differ; and although in the event of the triumph of the Commons, the ceremony of periodical election may be retained (and we should not forget that the

Long Parliament soon spared us that unnecessary form), the selected members will form a Senate as irresponsible as any House of Parliament whose anomalous constitution may now be the object of Whig sneers or Radical anathemas.

The rights and liberties of a nation can only be preserved by institutions. It is not the spread of knowledge or the march of intellect that will be found sufficient sureties for the public welfare in the crisis of a country's freedom. Our interest taints our intelligence, our passions paralyse our reason. Knowledge and capacity are too often the willing tools of a powerful faction or a dexterous adventurer. Life is short, man is imaginative; our means are limited, our passions high.

In seasons of great popular excitement, gold and glory offer strong temptations to needy ability. The demagogues throughout a country, the orators of town-councils and vestries, and the lecturers of mechanics' institutes, present, doubtless in most cases unconsciously, the ready and fit machinery for the party or the individual that aspires to establish a tyranny. Duly graduating in corruption, the leaders of the mob become the oppressors of the people. Cultivation of intellect and diffusion of knowledge may make the English nation more sensible of the benefits of their social system, and better qualified to discharge the duties with which their institutions have invested them, but they will never render them competent to preserve their liberties without the aid of those institutions. Let us for a moment endeavour to fancy Whiggism in a state of rampant predominance; let us try to contemplate England enjoying all those advantages which our present rulers have not yet granted us, and some of which they have as yet only ventured to promise by innuendo. Let us suppose our ancient monarchy abolished, our independent hierarchy reduced to a stipendiary sect, the gentlemen of England deprived of their magisterial functions, and metropolitan prefects and subprefects established in the counties and principal towns, commanding a vigorous and vigilant police, and backed by an army under the immediate orders of a single House of Parliament. Why, these are threatened changes – ay, and not one of them that may not be brought about tomorrow, under the plea of the “spirit of the age” or “county reform” or “cheap government”. But where then will be the liberties of England? Who will dare disobey London? the enlightened and reformed metropolis! And can we think,

if any bold Squire, in whom some of the old blood might still chance to linger, were to dare to murmur against this grinding tyranny, or appeal to the spirit of those neighbours whose predecessors his ancestors had protected, can we flatter ourselves that there would not be judges in Westminster Hall prepared and prompt to inflict on him all the pains and penalties, the dungeon, the fine, the sequestration, which such a troublesome Anti-Reformer would clearly deserve? Can we flatter ourselves that a Parliamentary Star Chamber and a Parliamentary High Commission Court would not be in the background to supply all the deficiencies of the laws of England? When these merry times arrive – the times of extraordinary tribunals and extraordinary taxes – and, if we proceed in our present course, they are much nearer than we imagine – the phrase “Anti-Reformer” will serve as well as that of “Malignant”, and be as valid a plea as the former title for harassing and plundering all those who venture to wince under the crowning mercies of centralisation.

Behold the Republic of the Whigs! Behold the only Republic that can be established in England except by force! And who can doubt the swift and stern termination of institutions introduced by so unnatural and irrational a process. I would address myself to the English Radicals, I do not mean those fine gentlemen or those vulgar adventurers, who, in this age of quackery, may sail into Parliament by hoisting for the nonce the false colours of the Movement; but I mean that honest and considerable party, too considerable, I fear, for their happiness and the safety of the State – who have a definite object which they distinctly avow – I mean those thoughtful and enthusiastic men who study their unstamped press, and ponder over a millennium of operative amelioration. Not merely that which is just, but that which is also practicable, should be the aim of a sagacious politician. Let the Radicals well consider whether, in attempting to achieve their avowed object, they are not, in fact, only assisting the secret views of a party whose scheme is infinitely more adverse to their own than the existing system, whose genius I believe they entirely misapprehend. The Monarchy of the Tories is more democratic than the Republic of the Whigs. It appeals with a keener sympathy to the passions of the millions; it studies their interests with a more comprehensive solicitude. Admitting for a moment that I have mistaken the genius of the English constitution, what chance, if our institutions

be overthrown, is there of substituting in their stead a more popular polity? This hazard, both for their own happiness and the honour of their country, the English Radicals are bound to calculate nicely. If they do not, they will find themselves, too late, the tools of a selfish faction or the slaves of a stern usurper.

## CHAPTER IV

### The estates of the realm

A chapter on the English constitution is a natural episode in the spirit of Whiggism. There is this connection between the subjects – that the spirit of Whiggism is hostile to the English constitution. No political institutions ever yet flourished which have been more the topic of discussion among writers of all countries and all parties than our famous establishment of “King, Lords, and Commons”; and no institutions ever yet flourished, of which the character has been more misrepresented and more misconceived. One fact alone will illustrate the profound ignorance and the perplexed ideas subsisting on this point. The present Whig leader of the House of Commons, a member of a family who pique themselves on their constitutional reputation, an author who has even written an elaborate treatise on our polity, in one of his speeches, delivered only so late as the last session of Parliament, declared his desire and determination to uphold the present settlement of the “three estates of the realm, viz. – King, Lords, and Commons”. Now, His Gracious Majesty is no more an estate of the realm than Lord John Russell himself. The three estates of the realm are the estate of the Lords Spiritual, the estate of the Lords Temporal, and the estate of the Commons. An estate is a popular class established into a political order. It is a section of the nation invested for the public and common good with certain powers and privileges. Lord John Russell first writes upon the English constitution, and then reforms it, and yet, even at this moment, is absolutely ignorant of what it consists. A political estate is a complete and independent body. Now, all power that is independent is necessarily irresponsible. The sovereign is responsible because he is not

an estate; he is responsible through his Ministers; he is responsible to the estates and to them alone.

When the Whigs obtained power in 1830, they found the three estates of the realm opposed to them, and the Government, therefore, could not proceed. They resolved, therefore, to remodel them. They declared that the House of Commons was the House of the people, and that the people were not properly represented. They consequently enlarged the estate of the Commons; they increased the number of that privileged order who appear by their representatives in the Lower House of Parliament. They rendered the estate of the Commons more powerful by this proceeding, because they rendered them more numerous; but they did not render their representatives one jot more the representatives of the people. Throwing the Commons of Ireland out of the question, for we cannot speculate upon a political order so unsettled that it has been thrice remodelled during the present century, some 300,000 individuals sent up, at the last general election, their representatives to Westminster. Well, are these 300,000 persons the people of England? Grant that they are; grant that these members are divided into two equal portions. Well, then, the people of England consist of 150,000 persons. I know that there are well-disposed persons that tremble at this reasoning, because, although they admit its justice, they allege it leads to universal suffrage. We must not show, they assert, that the House of the people is not elected by the people. I admit it; we must not show that the House of the people is not elected by the people, but we must show that the House of Commons is not the House of the people, that it never was intended to be the House of the people, and that, if it be admitted to be so by courtesy, or become so in fact, it is all over with the English constitution.

It is quite impossible that a whole people can be a branch of a legislature. If a whole people have the power of making laws, it is folly to suppose that they will allow an assembly of 300 or 400 individuals, or a solitary being on a throne, to thwart their sovereign will and pleasure. But I deny that a people can govern itself. Self-government is a contradiction in terms. Whatever form a government may assume, power must be exercised by a minority of numbers. I shall, perhaps, be reminded of the ancient republics. I answer, that the ancient republics were as aristocratic communities as any that flourished in the Middle

Ages. The Demos of Athens was an oligarchy living upon slaves. There is a great slave population even in the United States, if a society of yesterday is to illustrate an argument on our ancient civilisation.

But it is useless to argue the question abstractedly. The phrase “the people” is sheer nonsense. It is not a political term. It is a phrase of natural history. A people is a species; a civilised community is a nation. Now, a nation is a work of art and a work of time. A nation is gradually created by a variety of influences – the influence of original organisation, of climate, soil, religion, laws, customs, manners, extraordinary accidents and incidents in their history, and the individual character of their illustrious citizens. These influences create the nation – these form the national mind, and produce in the course of centuries a high degree of civilisation. If you destroy the political institutions which these influences have called into force, and which are the machinery by which they constantly act, you destroy the nation. The nation, in a state of anarchy and dissolution, then becomes a people; and after experiencing all the consequent misery, like a company of bees spoiled of their queen and rifled of their hive, they set to again and establish themselves into a society.

Although all society is artificial, the most artificial society in the world is unquestionably the English nation. Our insular situation and our foreign empire, our immense accumulated wealth and our industrious character, our peculiar religious state, which secures alike orthodoxy and toleration, our church and our sects, our agriculture and our manufactures, our military services, our statute law and supplementary equity, our adventurous commerce, landed tenure, and unprecedented system of credit, form, among many others, such a variety of interests, and apparently so conflicting, that I do not think even the Abbe Sieyes himself could devise a scheme by which this nation could be absolutely and definitely represented.

The framers of the English constitution were fortunately not of the school of Abbe Sieyes. Their first object was to make us free; their next to keep us so. While, therefore, they selected equality as the basis of their social order, they took care to blend every man’s ambition with the perpetuity of the State. Unlike the levelling and destructive equality of modern days, the ancient equality of England elevates and creates. Learned in human nature, the English constitution holds out privilege to every subject as the inducement to do his duty. As it has secured freedom,

justice, and even property to the humblest of the commonwealth, so, pursuing the same system of privileges, it has confided the legislature of the realm to two orders of the subjects – orders, however, in which every English citizen may be constitutionally enrolled – the Lords and the Commons. The two estates of the Peers are personally summoned to meet in their chamber: the more extensive and single estate of the Commons meets by its representatives. Both are political orders, complete in their character, independent in their authority, legally irresponsible for the exercise of their power. But they are the trustees of the nation, not its masters; and there is a High Court of Chancery in the public opinion of the nation at large, which exercises a vigilant control over these privileged classes of the community, and to which they are equitably and morally amenable. Estimating, therefore, the moral responsibility of our political estates, it may fairly be maintained that, instead of being irresponsible, the responsibility of the Lords exceeds that of the Commons. The House of Commons itself not being an estate of the realm, but only the representatives of an estate, owes to the nation a responsibility neither legal nor moral. The House of Commons is responsible only to that privileged order who are its constituents. Between the Lords and the Commons themselves there is this prime difference – that the Lords are known, and seen, and marked; the Commons are unknown, invisible, and unobserved. The Lords meet in a particular spot; the Commons are scattered over the kingdom. The eye of the nation rests upon the Lords, few in number, and notable in position; the eye of the nation wanders in vain for the Commons, far more numerous, but far less remarkable. As a substitute the nation appeals to the House of Commons, but sometimes appeals in vain; for if the majority of the Commons choose to support their representatives in a course of conduct adverse to the opinion of the nation, the House of Commons will set the nation at defiance. They have done so once; may they never repeat that destructive career! Such are our two Houses of Parliament – the most illustrious assemblies since the Roman Senate and Grecian Areopagus; neither of them is the “House of the People”, but both alike represent the “Nation”<sup>(55)</sup>.

(55) The argument of this chapter, and indeed the language, may be found in the *Morning Post* articles (Chapters V., VI., XII.), and in the “Vindication” (Chapter XXIII).

## CHAPTER V

### A democratic constitution

**T**here are two propositions, which, however at the first glance they may appear to contradict the popular opinions of the day, are nevertheless, as I believe, just and true. And they are these: –

First. That there is no probability of ever establishing a more democratic form of government than the present English constitution.

Second. That the recent political changes of the Whigs are, in fact, a departure from the democratic spirit of that constitution.

Whatever form a government may assume, its spirit must be determined by the laws which regulate the property of the country. You may have a Senate and Consuls, you may have no hereditary titles, and you may dub each householder or inhabitant a citizen; but if the spirit of your laws preserves masses of property in a particular class, the government of the country will follow the disposition of the property. So also you may have an apparent despotism without any formal popular control, and with no aristocracy, either natural or artificial, and the spirit of the government may nevertheless be republican. Thus the ancient polity of Rome, in its best days, was an aristocracy, and the government of Constantinople is the nearest approach to a democracy on a great scale, and maintained during a great period, that history offers. The constitution of France during the last half century has been fast approaching that of the Turks. The barbarous Jacobins blended modern equality with the refined civilisation of ancient France; the barbarous Ottomans blended their equality with the refined civilisation of ancient Rome. Paris secured to the Jacobins those luxuries that their system never could have produced: Byzantium served the same purpose to the

Turks. Both the French and their turbaned prototypes commenced their system with popular enthusiasm, and terminated it with general subjection. Napoleon and Louis Philippe are playing the same part as the Soleimans and the Mahmouds. The Chambers are but a second-rate Divan; the Prefects but inferior Pachas: a solitary being rules alike in the Seraglio and the Tuileries, and the whole nation bows to his despotism on condition that they have no other master save himself.

The disposition of property in England throws the government of the country into the hands of its natural aristocracy. I do not believe that any scheme of the suffrage, or any method of election, could divert that power into other quarters. It is the necessary consequence of our present social state. I believe, the wider the popular suffrage, the more powerful would be the natural aristocracy. This seems to me an inevitable consequence; but I admit this proposition on the clear understanding that such an extension should be established on a fair, and not a factious, basis. Here then, arises the question of the ballot, into the merits of which I shall take another opportunity of entering, recording only now my opinion that, in the present arrangement of the constituencies, even the ballot would favour the power of the natural aristocracy, and that, if the ballot were simultaneously introduced with a fair and not a factious extension of the suffrage, it would produce no difference whatever in the ultimate result.

Quitting, then, these considerations, let us arrive at the important point. Is there any probability of a different disposition of property in England – a disposition of property which, by producing a very general similarity of condition, would throw the government of the country into the hands of any individuals whom the popular esteem or fancy might select?

It appears to me that this question can only be decided by ascertaining the genius of the English nation. What is the prime characteristic of the English mind? I apprehend I may safely decide upon its being industry. Taking a general but not a superficial survey of the English character since the Reformation, a thousand circumstances convince me that the salient point in our national psychology is the passion for accumulating wealth, of which industry is the instrument. We value our freedom principally because it leaves us unrestricted in our pursuits; and that reverence

for law and all that is established, which also eminently distinguishes the English nation, is occasioned by the conviction that, next to liberty, order is the most efficacious assistant of industry.

And thus we see that those great revolutions which must occur in the history of all nations, when they happen here produce no permanent effects upon our social state. Our revolutions are brought about by the passions of creative minds taking advantage, for their own aggrandisement, of peculiar circumstances in our national progress. They are never called for by the great body of the nation. Churches are plundered, long rebellions maintained, dynasties changed, parliaments abolished; but when the storm is passed, the features of the social landscape remain unimpaired; there are no traces of the hurricane, the earthquake, or the volcano; it has been but a tumult of the atmosphere, that has neither toppled down our old spires and palaces nor swallowed up our cities and seats of learning, nor blasted our ancient woods, nor swept away our ports and harbours. The English nation ever recurs to its ancient institutions – the institutions that have alike secured freedom and order; and after all their ebullitions, we find them, when the sky is clear, again at work, and toiling on at their eternal task of accumulation.

There is this difference between the revolutions of England and the revolutions of the Continent – the European revolution is a struggle against privilege; an English revolution is a struggle for it. If a new class rises in the State, it becomes uneasy to take its place in the natural aristocracy of the land: a desperate faction or a wily leader takes advantage of this desire, and a revolution is the consequence. Thus the Whigs in the present day have risen to power on the shoulders of the manufacturing interest. To secure themselves in their posts, the Whigs have given the new interest an undue preponderance; but the new interest, having obtained its object, is content. The manufacturer, like every other Englishman, is as aristocratic as the landlord. The manufacturer begins to lack in movement. Under Walpole the Whigs played the same game with the commercial interest; a century has passed, and the commercial interest are all as devoted to the constitution as the manufacturers soon will be. Having no genuine party, the Whigs seek for succour from the Irish papists; Lord John Russell, however, is only imitating Pym under the same circumstances. In 1640, when the English movement was

satisfied, and the constitutional party, headed by such men as Falkland and Hyde, were about to attain power, Pym and his friends, in despair at their declining influence and the close divisions in their once unanimous Parliament, fled to the Scotch Covenanters, and entered into “a close compact” for the destruction of the Church of England as the price of their assistance. So events repeat themselves; but if the study of history is really to profit us, the nation at the present day will take care that the same results do not always occur from the same events.

When passions have a little subsided, the industrious ten-pounder, who has struggled into the privileged order of the Commons, proud of having obtained the first step of aristocracy, will be the last man to assist in destroying the other gradations of the scale which he or his posterity may yet ascend; the new member of a manufacturing district has his eye already upon a neighbouring park, avails himself of his political position to become a county magistrate, meditates upon a baronetcy, and dreams of a coroneted descendant.

The nation that esteems wealth as the great object of existence will submit to no laws that do not secure the enjoyment of wealth. Now, we deprive wealth of its greatest source of enjoyment, as well as of its best security, if we deprive it of power. The English nation, therefore, insists that property shall be the qualification for power, and the whole scope of its laws and customs is to promote and favour the accumulation of wealth and the perpetuation of property. We cannot alter, therefore, the disposition of property in this country without we change the national character. Far from the present age being hostile to the supremacy of property, there has been no period of our history where property has been more esteemed, because there has been no period when the nation has been so industrious.

Believing, therefore, that no change will occur in the disposition of property in this country, I cannot comprehend how our government can become more democratic. The consequence of our wealth is an aristocratic constitution; the consequence of our love of liberty is an aristocratic constitution founded on an equality of civil rights. And who can deny that an aristocratic constitution resting on such a basis, where the legislative, and even the executive office may be obtained by every subject of the realm, is, in fact, a noble democracy? The English

constitution, faithfully representing the national character, secures to all the enjoyment of property and the delights of freedom. Its honours are a perpetual reward of industry; every Englishman is toiling to obtain them; and this is the constitution to which every Englishman will always be devoted, except he is a Whig.

In the next chapter I shall discuss the second proposition.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Recent political changes**

**T**he Tories assert that the whole property of the country is on their side; and the Whigs, wringing their hands over lost elections and bellowing about “intimidation”, seem to confess the soft impeachment. Their prime organ also assures us that every man with £500 per annum is opposed to them. Yet the Whig-Radical writers have recently published, by way of consolation to their penniless proselytes, a list of some twenty Dukes and Marquises, who, they assure us, are devoted to “Liberal” principles, and whose revenues, in a paroxysm of economical rodomontade, they assert, could buy up the whole income of the rest of the hereditary Peerage. The Whig-Radical writers seem puzzled to reconcile this anomalous circumstance with the indisputably forlorn finances of their faction in general. Now, this little tract on the “Spirit of Whiggism” may perhaps throw some light upon this perplexing state of affairs. For myself, I see in it only a fresh illustration of the principles which I have demonstrated, from the whole current of our history, to form the basis of Whig policy. This union of oligarchical wealth and mob poverty is the very essence of the “Spirit of Whiggism”.

The English constitution, which, from the tithingman to the Peer of Parliament, has thrown the whole government of the country into the hands of those who are qualified by property to perform the duties of their respective offices, has secured that diffused and general freedom, without which the national industry would neither have its fair play nor its just reward, by a variety of institutions, which, while they prevent those who have no property from invading the social commonwealth, in whose classes every industrious citizen has a right to register himself,

offer also an equally powerful check to the ambitious fancies of those great families, over whose liberal principles and huge incomes the Whig-Radical writers gloat with the self-complacency of lackeys at the equipages and establishments of their masters. There is ever an union in a perverted sense between those who are beneath power and those who wish to be above it; and oligarchies and despotisms are usually established by the agency of a deluded multitude. The Crown, with its constitutional influence over the military services; a Parliament of two houses, watching each other's proceedings with constitutional jealousy; an independent hierarchy, and, not least, an independent magistracy, are serious obstacles in the progressive establishment of that scheme of government which a small knot of great families, these Dukes and Marquises, whose revenues, according to the Government organ, could buy up the income of the whole peerage, naturally wish to introduce. We find, therefore, throughout the whole period of our more modern history, a powerful section of the great nobles ever at war with the national institutions; checking the Crown; attacking the independence of that House of Parliament in which they happen to be in a minority, no matter which; patronising sects to reduce the influence of the Church; and playing town against country to overcome the authority of the gentry.

It is evident that these aspiring oligarchs, as a party, can have little essential strength; they can count upon nothing but their mere retainers. To secure the triumph of their cause, therefore, they are forced to manoeuvre with a pretext, and while they aim at oligarchical rule, they apparently advocate popular rights. They hold out, consequently, an inducement to all the uneasy portion of the nation to enlist under their standard; they play their discontented minority against the prosperous majority, and, dubbing their partisans "the people", they flatter themselves that their projects are irresistible. The attack is unexpected, brisk, and dashing, well matured, dexterously mystified. Before the nation is roused to its danger, the oligarchical object is often obtained; and then the oligarchy, entrenched in power, count upon the nation to defend them from their original and revolutionary allies. If they succeed, a dynasty is changed, or a Parliament reformed, and the movement is stopped; if the Tories or the Conservatives cannot arrest the fatal career which the Whigs have originally impelled, then away go the national

institutions; the crown falls from the King's brow; the crosier is snapped in twain; one House of Parliament is sure to disappear, and the gentlemen of England, dexterously dubbed Malignants, or Anti-Reformers, or any other phrase in fashion, the dregs of the nation, sequester their estates and install themselves in their halls; and "liberal principles" having thus gloriously triumphed, after a due course of plunder, bloodshed, imprisonment, and ignoble tyranny, the people of England, sighing once more to be the English nation, secure order by submitting to a despot, and in time, when they have got rid of their despot, combine their ancient freedom with their newly-regained security by re-establishing the English constitution.

The Whigs of the present day have made their assault upon the nation with their usual spirit. They have already succeeded in controlling the sovereign and in remodelling the House of Commons. They have menaced the House of Lords, violently assailed the Church, and reconstructed the Corporations. I shall take the two most comprehensive measures which they have succeeded in carrying, and which at the time certainly were popular, and apparently of a very democratic character – their reform of the House of Commons, and their reconstruction of the municipal corporations. Let us see whether these great measures have, in fact, increased the democratic character of our constitution or not – whether they veil an oligarchical project, or are, in fact, popular concessions inevitably offered by the Whigs in their oligarchical career.

The result of the Whig remodelling of the order of the Commons has been this – that it has placed the nomination of the Government in the hands of the popish priesthood. Is that a great advance of public intelligence and popular liberty? Are the parliamentary nominees of M'Hale and Keogh more germane to the feelings of the English nation, more adapted to represent their interests, than the parliamentary nominees of a Howard or a Percy? This papist majority, again, is the superstructure of a basis formed by some Scotch Presbyterians and some English Dissenters, in general returned by the small constituencies of small towns – classes whose number and influence, intelligence and wealth, have been grossly exaggerated for factious purposes, but classes avowedly opposed to the maintenance of the English constitution. I do not see that the cause of popular power has much risen, even with the

addition of this leaven. If the suffrages of the Commons of England were polled together, the hustings-books of the last general election will prove that a very considerable majority of their numbers is opposed to the present Government, and that therefore, under this new democratic scheme, this great body of the nation are, by some hocus-pocus tactics or other, obliged to submit to the minority. The truth is, that the new constituency has been so arranged that an unnatural preponderance has been given to a small class, and one hostile to the interests of the great body. Is this more democratic? The apparent majority in the House of Commons is produced by a minority of the Commons themselves; so that a small and favoured class command a majority in the House of Commons, and the sway of the administration, as far as that House is concerned, is regulated by a smaller number of individuals than those who governed it previous to its reform.

But this is not the whole evil: this new class, with its unnatural preponderance, is a class hostile to the institutions of the country, hostile to the union of Church and State, hostile to the House of Lords, to the constitutional power of the Crown, to the existing system of provincial judicature. It is, therefore, a class fit and willing to support the Whigs in their favourite scheme of centralisation, without which the Whigs can never long maintain themselves in power. Now, centralisation is the deathblow of public freedom; it is the citadel of the oligarchs from which, if once erected, it will be impossible to dislodge them. But can that party be aiming at centralised government which has reformed the municipal corporations? We will see. The reform of the municipal corporations of England is a covert attack on the authority of the English gentry – that great body which perhaps forms the most substantial existing obstacle to the perpetuation of Whiggism in power. By this apparently democratic Act the county magistrate is driven from the towns where he before exercised a just influence, while an elective magistrate from the towns jostles him on the bench at quarter sessions, and presents in his peculiar position an anomaly in the constitution of the bench, flattering to the passions, however fatal to the interests, of the giddy million. Here is a lever to raise the question of county reform whenever an obstinate shire may venture to elect a representative in Parliament hostile to the liberal oligarchs. Let us admit, for the moment, that the Whigs ultimately

succeed in subverting the ancient and hereditary power of the English gentry. Will the municipal corporations substitute themselves as an equivalent check on a centralising Government? Whence springs their influence? From property? Not half a dozen have estates. Their influence springs from the factitious power with which the reforming Government has invested them, and of which the same Government will deprive them in a session, the moment they cease to be corresponding committees of the reforming majority in the House of Commons. They will either be swept away altogether, or their functions will be limited to raising the local taxes which will discharge their expenses of the detachment of the metropolitan police, or the local judge or governor, whom Downing Street may send down to preside over their constituents. With one or two exceptions, the English corporations do not possess more substantial and durable elements of power than the municipalities of France. What check are they on Paris? These corporations have neither prescription in their favour, nor property. Their influence is maintained neither by tradition nor substance. They have no indirect authority over the minds of their townsmen; they have only their modish charters to appeal to, and the newly engrossed letter of the law. They have no great endowments of whose public benefits they are the official distributors; they do not stand on the vantage-ground on which we recognise the trustees of the public interests; they neither administer to the soul nor the body; they neither feed the poor nor educate the young; they have no hold on the national mind; they have not sprung from the national character; they were born by faction, and they will live by faction. Such bodies must speedily become corrupt; they will ultimately be found dangerous instruments in the hands of a faction. The members of the country corporations will play the game of a London party, to secure their factitious local importance and obtain the consequent results of their opportune services.

I think I have now established the two propositions with which I commenced my last chapter: and I will close this concluding one of the “Spirit of Whiggism” with their recapitulation, and the inferences which I draw from them. If there be slight probability of ever establishing in this country a more democratic government than the English constitution, it will be as well, I conceive, for those who love their rights to maintain that constitution; and if the recent measures of the Whigs, however plausible

their first aspect, have, in fact, been a departure from the democratic character of that constitution, it will be as well for the English nation to oppose, with all their heart, and all their soul, and all their strength, the machinations of the Whigs and the “Spirit of Whiggism”.

# Conservative Principles

Speech at Manchester, April 3, 1872.

The right honourable gentleman said: Gentlemen, the Chairman has correctly reminded you that this is not the first time that my voice has sounded in this hall. But that was an occasion very different from that which now assembles us together – was nearly thirty years ago, when I endeavoured to support and stimulate the flagging energies of an institution in which I thought there were the germs of future refinement and intellectual advantage to the rising generation of Manchester, and since I have been here on this occasion I have learnt with much gratification that it is now counted among your most flourishing institutions. There was also another and more recent occasion when the gracious office fell to me to distribute among the members of the Mechanics' Institution those prizes which they had gained through their study in letters and in science. Gentlemen, these were pleasing offices, and if life consisted only of such offices you would not have to complain of it. But life has its masculine duties, and we are assembled here to fulfil some of the most important of these, when, as citizens of a free country, we are assembled together to declare our determination to maintain, to uphold the Constitution to which we are debtors, in our opinion, for our freedom and our welfare.

Gentlemen, there seems at first something incongruous that one should be addressing the population of so influential and intelligent a county as Lancashire who is not locally connected with them, and, gentlemen, I will frankly admit that this circumstance did for a long time make me hesitate in accepting your cordial and generous invitation. But, gentlemen, after what occurred yesterday, after receiving more than 200 addresses from every part of this great county, after the welcome which then greeted me, I feel that I should not be doing justice to your feelings, I should not do duty to myself, if I any longer considered my presence here tonight to be an act of presumption. Gentlemen, though it may not be an act of presumption, it still is, I am told, an act of great difficulty. Our opponents assure us that the Conservative party have no political programme; and, therefore, they must look with much satisfaction to one whom you honour tonight by considering him the leader and representative of your opinions when he comes forward, at your invitation, to express to you what that programme is. The Conservative party are accused of having no programme of policy. If by a programme

is meant a plan to despoil churches and plunder landlords, I admit we have no programme. If by a programme is meant a policy which assails or menaces every institution and every interest, every class and every calling in the country, I admit we have no programme. But if to have a policy with distinct ends, and these such as most deeply interest the great body of the nation, be a becoming programme for a political party, then, I contend, we have an adequate programme, and one which, here or elsewhere, I shall always be prepared to assert and to vindicate.

Gentlemen, the programme of the Conservative party is to maintain the Constitution of the country. I have not come down to Manchester to deliver an essay on the English Constitution; but when the banner of Republicanism is unfurled – when the fundamental principles of our institutions are controverted – I think, perhaps, it may not be inconvenient that I should make some few practical remarks upon the character of our Constitution – upon that monarchy, limited by the co-ordinate authority of Estates of the realm, which, under the title of Queen, Lords and Commons, has contributed so greatly to the prosperity of this country, and with the maintenance of which I believe that prosperity is bound up.

Gentlemen, since the settlement of that Constitution, now nearly two centuries ago, England has never experienced a revolution, though there is no country in which there has been so continuous and such considerable change. How is this? Because the wisdom of your forefathers placed the prize of supreme power without the sphere of human passions. Whatever the struggle of parties, whatever the strife of factions, whatever the excitement and exaltation of the public mind, there has always been something in this country round which all classes and parties could rally, representing the majesty of the law, the administration of justice, and involving, at the same time, the security for every man's rights and the fountain of honour. Now, gentlemen, it is well clearly to comprehend what is meant by a country not having a revolution for two centuries. It means, for that space, the unbroken exercise and enjoyment of the ingenuity of man. It means, for that space, the continuous application of the discoveries of science to his comfort and convenience. It means the accumulation of capital, the elevation of labour, the establishment of those admirable factories which cover your

district; the unwearied improvement of the cultivation of the land, which has extracted from a somewhat churlish soil harvests more exuberant than those furnished by lands nearer to the sun. It means the continuous order which is the only parent of personal liberty and political right. And you owe all these, gentlemen, to the Throne.

There is another powerful and most beneficial influence which is also exercised by the Crown. Gentlemen, I am a party man. I believe that, without party, Parliamentary government is impossible. I look upon Parliamentary government as the noblest government in the world, and certainly the one most suited to England. But without the discipline of political connection, animated by the principle of private honour, I feel certain that a popular Assembly would sink before the power or the corruption of a minister. Yet, gentlemen, I am not blind to the faults of party government. It has one great defect. Party has a tendency to warp the intelligence, and there is no minister, however resolved he may be in treating a great public question, who does not find some difficulty in emancipating himself from the traditionary prejudice on which he has long acted. It is, therefore, a great merit in our Constitution that before a minister introduces a measure to Parliament, he must submit it to an intelligence superior to all party, and entirely free from influences of that character.

I know it will be said, gentlemen, that, however beautiful in theory, the personal influence of the Sovereign is now absorbed in the responsibility of the minister. Gentlemen, I think you will find there is great fallacy in this view. The principles of the English Constitution do not contemplate the absence of personal influence on the part of the Sovereign; and if they did, the principles of human nature would prevent the fulfilment of such a theory. Gentlemen, I need not tell you that I am now making on this subject abstract observations of general application to our institutions and our history. But take the case of a Sovereign of England who accedes to his throne at the earliest age the law permits and who enjoys a long reign – take an instance like that of George III. From the earliest moment of his accession that Sovereign is placed in constant communication with the most able statesmen of the period, and of all parties. Even with average ability it is impossible not to perceive that such a Sovereign must soon attain a great mass of political information and political experience.

Information and experience, gentlemen, whether they are possessed by a Sovereign or by the humblest of his subjects, are irresistible in life. No man with the vast responsibility that devolves upon an English minister can afford to treat with indifference a suggestion that has not occurred to him, or information with which he had not been previously supplied.

But, gentlemen, pursue this view of the subject. The longer the reign, the influence of that Sovereign must proportionately increase. All the illustrious statesmen who served his youth disappear. A new generation of public servants rises up. There is a critical conjuncture in affairs – a moment of perplexity and peril. Then it is that the Sovereign can appeal to a similar state of affairs that occurred perhaps thirty years before. When all are in doubt among his servants he can quote the advice that was given by the illustrious men of his early years; and though he may maintain himself within the strictest limits of the Constitution, who can suppose when such information and such suggestions are made by the most exalted person in the country that they can be without effect? No, gentlemen; a minister who could venture to treat such influence with indifference would not be a Constitutional minister, but an arrogant idiot.

Gentlemen, the influence of the Crown is not confined merely to political affairs. England is a domestic country. Here the home is revered and the hearth is sacred. The nation is represented by a family – the Royal Family; and if that family is educated with a sense of responsibility and a sentiment of public duty, it is difficult to exaggerate the salutary influence they may exercise over a nation. It is not merely an influence upon manners; it is not merely that they are a model for refinement and for good taste – they affect the heart as well as the intelligence of the people; and in the hour of public adversity, or in the anxious conjuncture of public affairs, the nation rallies round the Family and the Throne, and its spirit is animated and sustained by the expression of public affection.

Gentlemen, there is yet one other remark that I would make upon our monarchy, though, had it not been for recent circumstances, I should have refrained from doing so. An attack has recently been made upon the Throne on account of the costliness of the institution. Gentlemen, I shall not dwell upon the fact that if the people of England appreciate the monarchy, as I believe they do, it would be painful to them that their Royal and representative family should not be maintained with becoming

dignity, or fill in the public eye a position inferior to some of the nobles of the land. Nor will I insist upon what is unquestionably the fact, that the revenues of the Crown estates, on which our Sovereign might live with as much right as the Duke of Bedford or the Duke of Northumberland has to his estates, are now paid into the public exchequer. All this, upon the present occasion, I am not going to insist upon. What I now say is this, that there is no sovereignty of any first-rate State which costs so little to the people as the sovereignty of England. I will not compare our Civil List with those of European empires, because it is known that in amount they treble and quadruple it; but I will compare it with the cost of sovereignty in a republic, and that a republic with which you are intimately acquainted – the republic of the United States of America.

Gentlemen, there is no analogy between the position of our Sovereign, Queen Victoria, and that of the President of the United States. The President of the United States is not the Sovereign of the United States. There is a very near analogy between the position of the President of the United States and that of the Prime Minister of England, and both are paid at much the same rate – the income of a second-class professional man. The Sovereign of the United States is the people; and I will now show you what the sovereignty of the United States costs. Gentlemen, you are aware of the Constitution of the United States. There are 37 independent States, each with a sovereign legislature. Besides these, there is a Confederation of States to conduct their external affairs, which consists of a House of Representatives and a Senate. There are 285 members of the House of Representatives, and there are 74 members of the Senate, making altogether 359 members of Congress. Now each member of Congress receives 1,000*l.* sterling per annum. In addition to this he receives an allowance called “mileage”, which varies according to the distance which he travels, but the aggregate cost of which is about 30,000*l.* per annum. That makes 389,000*l.*, almost the exact amount of our Civil List.

But this, gentlemen, will allow you to make only a very imperfect estimate of the cost of sovereignty in the United States. Every member of every Legislature in the 37 States is also paid. There are, I believe, 5,010 members of State Legislatures who receive about \$350 per annum each. As some of the returns are imperfect, the average which I have given of

expenditure may be rather high, and therefore I have not counted the “mileage”, which is also universally allowed. 5,010 members of State Legislatures at \$350 each make \$1,753,500, or 350,700*l.* sterling a year. So you see, gentlemen, that the immediate expenditure for the sovereignty of the United States is between 700,000*l.* and 800,000*l.* a year. Gentlemen, I have not time to pursue this interesting theme, otherwise I could show you that you have still but imperfectly ascertained the cost of sovereignty in a republic. But, gentlemen, I cannot resist giving you one further illustration.

The government of this country is considerably carried on by the aid of Royal Commissions. So great is the increase of public business that it would be probably impossible for a minister to carry on affairs without this assistance. The Queen of England can command for these objects the services of the most experienced statesmen, and men of the highest position in society. If necessary, she can summon to them distinguished scholars or men most celebrated in science and in art: and she receives from them services that are unpaid. They are only too proud to be described in the Commission as Her Majesty’s “trustworthy councillors” and if any member of these Commissions performs some transcendent services, both of thought and of labour, he is munificently rewarded by a public distinction conferred upon him by the Fountain of Honour. Gentlemen, the Government of the United States, has, I believe, not less availed itself of the services of Commissions than the Government of the United Kingdom; but, in a country where there is no Fountain of Honour, every member of these Commissions is paid.

Gentlemen, I trust I have now made some suggestions to you respecting the monarchy of England which at least may be so far serviceable that when we are separated they may not be altogether without advantage; and now, gentlemen, I would say something on the subject of the House of Lords. It is not merely the authority of the Throne that is now disputed, but the character and influence of the House of Lords that are held up by some to public disregard. Gentlemen, I shall not stop for a moment to offer you any proofs of the advantage of a Second Chamber; and for this reason. That subject has been discussed now for a century, ever since the establishment of the Government of the United States, and all great authorities, American, German, French, Italian, have agreed in this, that

a Representative Government is impossible without a Second Chamber. And it has been, especially of late, maintained by great political writers in all countries that the repeated failure of what is called the French Republic is mainly to be ascribed to its not having a Second Chamber.

But, gentlemen, however anxious foreign countries have been to enjoy this advantage, that anxiety has only been equalled by the difficulty which they have found in fulfilling their object. How is a Second Chamber to be constituted? By nominees of the sovereign power? What influence can be exercised by a Chamber of nominees? Are they to be bound by popular election? In what manner are they to be elected? If by the same constituency as the popular body, what claim have they, under such circumstances, to criticise or to control the decisions of that body? If they are to be elected by a more select body, qualified by a higher franchise, there immediately occurs the objection, why should the majority be governed by the minority? The United States of America were fortunate in finding a solution of this difficulty; but the United States of America had elements to deal with which never occurred before, and never probably will occur again, because they formed their illustrious Senate from the materials that were offered them by the thirty-seven States. We, gentlemen, have the House of Lords, an assembly which has historically developed and periodically adapted itself to the wants and necessities of the times.

What, gentlemen, is the first quality which is required in a Second Chamber? Without doubt, independence. What is the best foundation of independence? Without doubt, property. The Prime Minister of England has only recently told you, and I believe he spoke quite accurately, that the average income of the members of the House of Lords is 20,000*l.* per annum. Of course there are some who have more and some who have less; but the influence of a public assembly, so far as property is concerned, depends upon its aggregate property, which, in the present case, is a revenue of 9,000,000*l.* a year. But, gentlemen, you must look to the nature of this property. It is visible property, and therefore it is responsible property, which every ratepayer in the room knows to his cost. But, gentlemen, it is not only visible property; it is, generally speaking, territorial property; and one of the elements of territorial property is that it is representative. Now, for illustration, suppose – which God

forbid – there was no House of Commons, and any Englishman – I will take him from either end of the island – a Cumberland or a Cornish man, finds himself aggrieved. The Cumbrian says, “This conduct I experience is most unjust, I know a Cumberland man in the House of Lords, the Earl of Carlisle or the Earl of Lonsdale; I will go to him; he will never see a Cumberland man ill-treated”. The Comish man will say, “I will go to the Lord of Port Eliot; his family have sacrificed themselves before this for the liberties of Englishmen, and he will get justice done me”.

But, gentlemen, the charge against the House of Lords is that the dignities are hereditary, and we are told that if we have a House of Peers they should be peers for life. There are great authorities in favour of this, and even my noble friend<sup>(56)</sup> near me the other day gave in his adhesion to a limited application of this principle. Now, gentlemen, in the first place let me observe that every peer is a peer for life, as he cannot be a peer after his death; but some peers for life are succeeded in their dignities by their children. The question arises, who is most responsible – a peer for life whose dignities are not descendible, or a peer for life whose dignities are hereditary? Now, gentlemen, a peer for life is in a very strong position. He says, “Here I am; I have got power and I will exercise it”. I have no doubt that, on the whole, a peer for life would exercise it for what he deemed was the public good. Let us hope that. But, after all, he might and could exercise it according to his own will. Nobody can call him to account; he is independent of everybody. But a peer for life whose dignities descend is in a very different position. He has every inducement to study public opinion, and, when he believes it just, to yield; because he naturally feels that if the order to which he belongs is in constant collision with public opinion, the chances are that his dignities will not descend to his posterity.

Therefore, gentlemen, I am not prepared myself to believe that a solution of any difficulties in the public mind on this subject is to be found by creating peers for life. I know there are some philosophers who believe that the best substitute for the House of Lords would be an assembly formed of ex-Governors of Colonies. I have not sufficient

experience on that subject to give a decided opinion upon it. When the Muse of Comedy threw her frolic grace over society, a retired Governor was generally one of the characters in every comedy; and the last of our great actors – who, by the by, was a great favourite at Manchester – Mr. Farren, was celebrated for his delineation of the character in question. Whether it be the recollection of that performance or not, I confess I am inclined to believe that an English gentleman – born to business, managing his own estate, administering the affairs of his county, mixing with all classes of his fellow-men, now in the hunting field, now in the Railway Direction, unaffected, unostentatious, proud of his ancestors, if they have contributed to the greatness of our common country – is, on the whole, more likely to form a senator agreeable to English opinion and English taste than any substitute that has yet been produced.

Gentlemen, let me make one observation more, on the subject of the House of Lords, before I conclude. There is some advantage in political experience. I remember the time when there was a similar outcry against the House of Lords, but much more intense and powerful; and, gentlemen, it arose from the same cause. A Liberal Government had been installed in office, with an immense Liberal majority. They proposed some violent measures. The House of Lords modified some, delayed others, and some they threw out. Instantly there was a cry to abolish or to reform the House of Lords, and the greatest popular orator that probably ever existed was sent on a pilgrimage over England to excite the people in favour of this opinion. What happened? That happened, gentlemen, which may happen tomorrow. There was a dissolution of Parliament. The great Liberal majority vanished. The balance of parties was restored. It was discovered that the House of Lords had behind them at least half of the English people. We heard no more cries for their abolition or their reform, and before two years more passed England was really governed by the House of Lords, under the wise influence of the Duke of Wellington and the commanding eloquence of Lyndhurst; and such was the enthusiasm of the nation in favour of the Second Chamber that at every public meeting its health was drunk, with the additional sentiment, for which we are indebted to one of the most distinguished

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(56) Lord Derby.

members that ever represented the House of Commons<sup>(57)</sup>, “Thank God, there is the House of Lords”.

Gentlemen, you will perhaps not be surprised that, having made some remarks upon the Monarchy and the House of Lords, I should say something respecting that House in which I have literally passed the greater part of my life and to which I am devotedly attached. It is not likely, therefore, that I should say anything to depreciate the legitimate position and influence of the House of Commons. Gentlemen, it is said that the diminished power of the Throne and the assailed authority of the House of Lords are owing to the increased power of the House of Commons, and the new position which of late years, and especially during the last forty years, it has assumed in the English Constitution. Gentlemen, the main power of the House of Commons depends upon its command over the public purse and its control of the public expenditure; and if that power is possessed by a party which has a large majority in the House of Commons, the influence of the House of Commons is proportionately increased, and, under some circumstances, becomes more predominant. But, gentlemen, this power of the House of Commons is not a power which has been created by any Reform Act, from the days of Lord Grey in 1832 to 1867. It is the power which the House of Commons has enjoyed for centuries – which it has frequently asserted and sometimes even tyrannically exercised. Gentlemen, the House of Commons represents the constituencies of England, and I am here to show you that no addition to the elements of that constituency has placed the House of Commons in a different position with regard to the Throne and the House of Lords from that it has always constitutionally occupied.

Gentlemen, we speak now on this subject with great advantage. We recently have had published authentic documents upon this matter which are highly instructive. We have, for example, just published the Census of Great Britain, and we are now in possession of the last registration of voters for the United Kingdom. Gentlemen, it appears that by the census the population at this time is about 32,000,000. It is shown by the last registration that, after making the usual deductions

for deaths, removals, double entries, and so on, the constituency of the United Kingdom may be placed at 2,200,000. So, gentlemen, it at once appears that there are 30,000,000 people in this country who are as much represented by the House of Lords as by the House of Commons, and who, for the protection of their rights, must depend upon them and the majesty of the Throne. And now, gentlemen, I will tell you what was done by the last Reform Act.

Lord Grey, in his measure of 1832, which was no doubt a statesmanlike measure, committed a great and for a time it appeared an irretrievable error. By that measure he fortified the legitimate influence of the aristocracy; and accorded to the middle classes great and salutary franchises; but he not only made no provision for the representation of the working classes in the Constitution, but he absolutely abolished those ancient franchises which the working classes had peculiarly enjoyed and exercised from time immemorial. Gentlemen, that was the origin of Chartism, and of that electoral uneasiness which existed in this country more or less for thirty years. The Liberal party, I feel it my duty to say, had not acted fairly by this question. In their adversity they held out hopes to the working classes, but when they had a strong Government they laughed their vows to scorn. In 1848 there was a French Revolution and a Republic was established. No one can have forgotten what the effect was in this country. I remember the day when not a woman could leave her house in London, and when cannon were planted on Westminster Bridge. When Lord Derby became Prime Minister affairs had arrived at such a point that it was of the first moment that the question should be sincerely dealt with. He had to encounter great difficulties, but he accomplished his purpose with the support of a united party. And, gentlemen, what has been the result? A year ago there was another revolution in France, and a Republic was again established of the most menacing character. What happened in this country? You could not get half a dozen men to assemble in a Street and grumble. Why? Because the people had got what they wanted. They were content and they were grateful.

But, gentlemen, the Constitution of England is not merely a Constitution in State, it is a Constitution in Church and State. The wisest Sovereigns and statesmen have ever been anxious to connect authority

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(57) O’Connell.

with religion – some to increase their power, some, perhaps, to mitigate its exercise. But the same difficulty has been experienced in effecting this union which has been experienced in forming a Second Chamber – either the spiritual power has usurped upon the civil and established a sacerdotal society, or the civil power has invaded successfully the rights of the spiritual, and the ministers of religion have been degraded into stipendiaries of the State and Instruments of the Government. In England we accomplish this great result by an alliance between Church and State, between two originally independent powers. I will not go into the history of that alliance, which is rather a question for those archaeological societies which occasionally amuse and instruct the people of this city. Enough for me that this union was made and has contributed for centuries to the civilisation of this country. Gentlemen, there is the same assault against the Church of England and the union between the State and the Church as there is against the Monarchy and against the House of Lords. It is said that the existence of Nonconformity proves that the Church is a failure. I draw from these premises an exactly contrary conclusion; and I maintain that to have secured a national profession of faith with the unlimited enjoyment of private judgment in matters spiritual is the solution of the most difficult problem, and one of the triumphs, of civilisation.

It is said that the existence of parties in the Church also proves its incompetence. On that matter, too, I entertain a contrary opinion. Parties have always existed in the Church; and some have appealed to them as arguments in favour of its Divine institution, because, in the services and doctrines of the Church have been found representatives of every mood in the human mind. Those who are influenced by ceremonies find consolation in forms which secure to them the beauty of holiness.’ Those who are not satisfied except with enthusiasm find in its ministrations the exaltation they require, while others who believe that “the anchor of faith” can never be safely moored except in the dry sands of reason find a religion within the pale of the Church which can boast of its irrefragable logic and its irresistible evidence.

Gentlemen, I am inclined sometimes to believe that those who advocate the abolition of the union between Church and State have not carefully considered the consequences of such a course. The Church is a

powerful Corporation of many millions of Her Majesty’s subjects, with a consummate organisation and wealth which in its aggregate is vast. Restricted and controlled by the State, so powerful a Corporation may be only fruitful of public advantage, but it becomes a great question what might be the consequence of the severance of the controlling tie between these two bodies. The State would be enfeebled, but the Church would probably be strengthened. Whether that is a result to be desired is a grave question for all men. For my own part, I am bound to say that I doubt whether it would be favourable to the cause of civil and religious liberty. I know that there is a common idea that if the union between Church and State was severed, the wealth of the Church would revert to the State; but it would be well to remember that the great proportion of ecclesiastical property is the property of individuals. Take, for example, the fact that the great mass of Church patronage is patronage in the hands of private persons. That you could not touch without compensation to the patrons. You have established that principle in your late Irish Bill, where there was very little patronage. And in the present state of the public mind on the subject, there is very little doubt that there would be scarcely a patron in England – irrespective of other aid the Church would receive – who would not dedicate his compensation to the spiritual wants of his neighbours.

It was computed some years ago that the property of the Church, in this manner if the union was terminated, would not be less than between 80,000,000*l.* and 90,000,000*l.*; and since that period the amount of private property dedicated to the purposes of the Church has very largely increased. I therefore trust that when the occasion offers for the country to speak out, it will speak out in an unmistakable manner on this subject; and, recognising the inestimable services of the Church, that it will call upon the Government to maintain its union with the State. Upon this subject there is one remark I would make. Nothing is more surprising to me than the plea on which the present outcry is made against the Church of England. I could not believe that in the nineteenth century the charge against the Church of England should be that Churchmen, and especially the clergy, had educated the people. If I were to fix upon one circumstance more than another which redounded to the honour of Churchmen, it is, that they should fulfil this noble office; and, next to

being “the stewards of Divine mysteries”, I think the greatest distinction of the clergy is the admirable manner in which they have devoted their lives and their fortunes to this greatest of national objects.

Gentlemen, you are well acquainted in this city with this controversy. It was in this city – I don’t know whether it was not in this hall – that that remarkable meeting was held of the Nonconformists to effect important alterations in the Education Act, and you are acquainted with the discussion in Parliament which arose in consequence of that meeting. Gentlemen, I have due and great respect for the Nonconformist body. I acknowledge their services to their country, and though I believe that the political reasons which mainly called them into existence have entirely ceased, it is impossible not to treat with consideration a body which has been eminent for its conscience, its learning, and its patriotism; but I must express my mortification that, from a feeling of envy or of pique, the Nonconformist body, rather than assist the Church in their great enterprise, should absolutely have become the partisans of a merely secular education. I believe myself, gentlemen, that without the recognition of a superintending Providence in the affairs of this world all national education will be disastrous, and I feel confident that it is impossible to stop at that mere recognition. Religious education is demanded by the nation generally and by the instincts of human nature. I should like to see the Church and the Nonconformists work together; but I trust, whatever maybe the result, the country will stand by the Church in its efforts to maintain the religious education of the people. Gentlemen, I foresee yet trials for the Church of England; but I am confident in its future. I am confident in its future because I believe there is now a very general feeling that to be national it must be comprehensive. I will not use the word “broad”, because it is an epithet applied to a system with which I have no sympathy. But I would wish Churchmen, and especially the clergy, always to remember that in our “Father’s Home there are many mansions”, and I believe that comprehensive spirit is perfectly consistent with the maintenance of formularies and the belief in dogmas without which I hold no practical religion can exist.

Gentlemen, I have now endeavoured to express to you my general views upon the most important subjects that can interest Englishmen. They are subjects upon which, in my mind, a man should speak with

frankness and clearness to his countrymen, and although I do not come down here to make a party speech, I am bound to say that the manner in which those subjects are treated by the leading subject of this realm is to me most unsatisfactory. Although the Prime Minister of England is always writing letters and making speeches, and particularly on these topics, he seems to me ever to send forth an “uncertain sound”. If a member of Parliament announces himself a Republican, Mr. Gladstone takes the earliest opportunity of describing him as “a fellow worker” in public life. If an inconsiderate multitude calls for the abolition or reform of the House of Lords, Mr. Gladstone says that it is no easy task, and that he must think once or twice, or perhaps even thrice, before he can undertake it. If your neighbour the member for Bradford, Mr. Miall, brings forward a motion in the House of Commons for the severance of Church and State, Mr. Gladstone assures Mr. Miall with the utmost courtesy that he believes the opinion of the House of Commons is against him; but that if Mr. Miall wishes to influence the House of Commons he must address the people out of doors; whereupon Mr. Miall immediately calls a public meeting, and alleges as its cause the advice he has just received from the Prime Minister.

But, gentlemen, after all, the test of political institutions is the condition of the country whose fortunes they regulate; and I do not mean to evade that test. You are the inhabitants of an island of no colossal size; which, geographically speaking, was intended by nature as the appendage of some Continental Empire – either of Gauls and Franks on the other side of the Channel, or of Teutons and Scandinavians beyond the German Sea. Such indeed, and for a long period, was your early history. You were invaded; you were pillaged and you were conquered; yet amid all these disgraces and vicissitudes there was gradually formed that English race which has brought about a very different state of affairs. Instead of being invaded, your land is proverbially the only “inviolable land” – “the inviolable land of the sage and free”. Instead of being plundered, you have attracted to your shores all the Capital of the world. Instead of being conquered, your flag floats on many waters, and your standard waves in either zone. It may be said that these achievements are due to the race that inhabited the land, and not to its institutions. Gentlemen, in political institutions are the embodied experiences of a race. You have established a society

of classes which give vigour and variety to life. But no class possesses a single exclusive privilege, and all are equal before the law. You possess a real aristocracy, open to all who deserve to enter it. You have not merely a middle class, but a hierarchy of middle classes, in which every degree of wealth, refinement, industry, energy, and enterprise is duly represented.

And now, gentlemen, what is the condition of the great body of the people? In the first place, gentlemen, they have for centuries been in the full enjoyment of that which no other country in Europe has ever completely attained – complete rights of personal freedom. In the second place, there has been a gradual, and therefore a wise, distribution on a large scale of political rights. Speaking with reference to the industries of this great part of the country, I can personally contrast it with the condition of the working classes forty years ago. In that period they have attained two results – the raising of their wages and the diminution of their toil. Increased means and increased leisure are the two civilisers of man. That the working classes of Lancashire and Yorkshire have proved not unworthy of these boons may be easily maintained; but their progress and elevation have been during this interval wonderfully aided and assisted by three causes, which are not so distinctly attributable to their own energies. The first is the revolution in locomotion, which has opened the world to the working man, which has enlarged the horizon of his experience, increased his knowledge of nature and of art, and added immensely to the salutary recreation, amusement, and pleasure of his existence. The second cause is the cheap postage, the moral benefits of which cannot be exaggerated. And the third is that unshackled press which has furnished him with endless sources of instruction, information, and amusement.

Gentlemen, if you would permit me, I would now make an observation upon another class of the labouring population. This is not a civic assembly, although we meet in a city. That was for convenience, but the invitation which I received was to meet the county and all the boroughs of Lancashire; and I wish to make a few observations upon the condition of the agricultural labourer. That is a subject which now greatly attracts public attention. And, in the first place, to prevent any misconception, I beg to express my opinion that an agricultural labourer has as much right to combine for the bettering of his condition as a manufacturing

labourer or worker in metals. If the causes of his combination are natural – that is to say, if they arise from his own feelings and from the necessities of his own condition, the combination will end in results mutually beneficial to employers and employed. If, on the other hand, it is factitious and he is acted upon by extraneous influences and extraneous ideas, the combination will produce, I fear, much loss and misery both to employers and employed; and after a time he will find himself in a similar or in a worse position.

Gentlemen, in my opinion the farmers of England, as a body, cannot afford to pay higher wages than they do, and those who will answer me by saying that they must find their ability by the deduction of rents are, I think, involving themselves with economic laws which may prove too difficult for them to cope with. The profits of a farmer are very moderate. The interest upon capital invested in land is the smallest that any property furnishes. The farmer will have his profits and the investor in land will have his interest, even though they may be obtained at the cost of changing the mode of the cultivation of the country. Gentlemen, I should deeply regret to see the tillage of this country reduced, and a recurrence to pasture take place. I should regret it principally on account of the agricultural labourers themselves. Their new friends call them Hodge, and describe them as a stolid race. I must say that, from my experience of them, they are sufficiently shrewd and open to reason. I would say to them with confidence, as the great Athenian said to the Spartan who rudely assailed him, “Strike, but hear me”.

First, a change in the cultivation of the soil of this country would be very injurious to the labouring class; and secondly, I am of opinion that that class instead of being stationary has made, if not as much progress as the manufacturing class, very considerable progress during the last forty years. Many persons write and speak about the agricultural labourer with not so perfect a knowledge of his condition as is desirable. They treat him always as a human being who in every part of the country finds himself in an identical condition. Now, on the contrary there is no class of labourers in which there is greater variety of condition than that of the agricultural labourers. It changes from north to south, from east to west, and from county to county. It changes. even in the same county, where there is an alteration of soil and of configuration. The

hind in Northumberland is in a very different condition from the famous Dorsetshire labourer – the tiller of the soil in Lincolnshire is different from his fellow agriculturist in Sussex. What the effect of manufactures is upon the agricultural districts in their neighbourhood it would be presumption in me to dwell upon – your own experience must tell you whether the agricultural labourer in North Lancashire, for example, has had no rise in wages and no diminution in toil. Take the case of the Dorsetshire labourer – the whole of the agricultural labourers on the south-western coast of England for a very long period worked only half the time of the labourers in other parts of England, and received only half the wages.

In the experience of many, I dare say, who are here present, even thirty years ago a Dorsetshire labourer never worked after three o'clock in the day; and why? Because the whole of that part of England was demoralised by smuggling. No one worked after three o'clock in the day for a very good reason – because he had to work at night. No farmer allowed his team to be employed after three o'clock, because he reserved his horses to take his illicit cargo at night and carry it rapidly into the interior. Therefore, as the men were employed and remunerated otherwise, they got into a habit of half work and half play so far as the land was concerned, and when smuggling was abolished – and it has only been abolished for thirty years – these imperfect habits of labour continued, and do even now continue to a great extent. That is the origin of the condition of the agricultural labourer in the south-western part of England.

But now, gentlemen, I want to test the condition of the agricultural labourer generally; and I will take a part of England with which I am familiar, and can speak as to the accuracy of the facts – I mean the group described as the south-midland counties. The conditions of labour there are the same, or pretty nearly the same, throughout. The group may be described as a strictly agricultural community, and they embrace a population of probably a million and a half. Now, I have no hesitation in saying that the improvement in their lot during the last forty years has been progressive and is remarkable. I attribute it to three causes. In the first place, the rise in their money wages is no less than fifteen per cent. The second great cause of their improvement is the almost total disappearance of excessive and exhausting toil, from the general

introduction of machinery. I don't know whether I could get a couple of men who could, or, if they could, would thrash a load of wheat in my neighbourhood. The third great cause which has improved their condition is the very general, not to say universal, institution of allotment grounds. Now, gentlemen, when I find that this has been the course of affairs in our very considerable and strictly agricultural portion of the country, where there have been no exceptional circumstances, like smuggling, to degrade and demoralise the race, I cannot resist the conviction that the condition of the agricultural labourers, instead of being stationary, as we are constantly told by those not acquainted with them, has been one of progressive improvement, and that in those counties – and they are many – where the stimulating influence of a manufacturing neighbourhood acts upon the land, the general conclusion at which I arrive is that the agricultural labourer has had his share in the advance of national prosperity.

Gentlemen, I am not here to maintain that there is nothing to be done to increase the well-being of the working classes of this country, generally speaking. There is not a single class in the country which is not susceptible of improvement; and that makes the life and animation of our society. But in all we do we must remember, as my noble friend told them at Liverpool, that much depends upon the working classes themselves; and what I know of the working classes in Lancashire makes me sure that they will respond to this appeal. Much also may be expected from that sympathy between classes which is a distinctive feature of the present day; and, in the last place, no inconsiderable results may be obtained by judicious and prudent legislation. But, gentlemen, in attempting to legislate upon social matters the great object is to be practical – to have before us some distinct aims and some distinct means by which they can be accomplished.

Gentlemen, I think public attention as regards these matters ought to be concentrated upon sanitary legislation. That is a wide subject, and, if properly treated, comprises almost every consideration which has a just claim upon legislative interference. Pure air, pure water, the inspection of unhealthy habitations, the adulteration of food, these and many kindred matters may be legitimately dealt with by the Legislature; and I am bound to say the Legislature is not idle upon them; for we have

at this time two important measures before Parliament on the subject. One – by a late colleague of mine, Sir Charles Adderley – is a large and comprehensive measure, founded upon a sure basis, for it consolidates all existing public Acts and improves them. A prejudice has been raised against that proposal, by stating that it interferes with the private Acts of the great towns. I take this opportunity of contradicting that. The Bill of Sir Charles Adderley does not touch the Acts of the great towns. It only allows them if they think fit to avail themselves of its new provisions.

The other measure, by the Government, is of a partial character. What it comprises is good, so far as it goes, but it shrinks from that bold consolidation of existing Acts which I think one of the great merits of Sir Charles Adderley's Bill, which permits us to become acquainted with how much may be done in favour of sanitary improvement by existing provisions. Gentlemen, I cannot impress upon you too strongly my conviction of the importance of the Legislature and society uniting together in favour of these important results. A great scholar and a great wit, 300 years ago, said that, in his opinion, there was a great mistake in the Vulgate, which as you all know is the Latin translation of the Holy Scriptures, and that, instead of saying "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" – *Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas* – the wise and witty King really said *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas*. Gentlemen, it is impossible to overrate the importance of the subject. After all, the first consideration of a minister should be the health of the people. A land may be covered with historic trophies, with museums of science and galleries of art, with universities and with libraries; the people may be civilised and ingenious; the country may be even famous in the annals and action of the world, but, gentlemen, if the population every ten years decreases, and the stature of the race every ten years diminishes, the history of that country will soon be the history of the past.

Gentlemen, I said I had not come here to make a party speech. I have addressed you upon subjects of grave, and I will venture to believe of general, interest; but to be here and altogether silent upon the present state of public affairs would I not be respectful to you, and, perhaps, on the whole, would be thought incongruous. Gentlemen, I cannot pretend that our position either at home or abroad is in my opinion satisfactory. At home, at a period of immense prosperity, with a people contented

and naturally loyal, we find to our surprise the most extravagant doctrines professed and the fundamental principles of our most valuable institutions impugned, and that too by persons of some authority. Gentlemen, this startling inconsistency is accounted for, in my mind, by the circumstances under which the present Administration was formed. It is the first instance in my knowledge of a British Administration being avowedly formed on a principle of violence. It is unnecessary for me to remind you of the circumstances which preceded the formation of that Government. You were the principal scene and theatre of the development of statesmanship that then occurred. You witnessed the incubation of the portentous birth. You remember when you were informed that the policy to secure the prosperity of Ireland and the content of Irishmen was a policy of sacrilege and confiscation. Gentlemen, when Ireland was placed under the wise and able administration of Lord Abercorn, Ireland was prosperous, and I may say content. But there happened at that time a very peculiar conjuncture in politics. The civil war in America had just ceased; and a band of military adventurers – Poles, Italians, and many Irishmen – concocted at New York a conspiracy to invade Ireland, with the belief that the whole country would rise to welcome them. How that conspiracy was baffled – how those plots were confounded, I need not now remind you. For that we were mainly indebted to the eminent qualities of a great man who has just left us. You remember how the constituencies were appealed to to vote against the Government who had made so unfit an appointment as that of Lord Mayo to the Viceroyalty of India. It was by his great qualities when Secretary for Ireland, by his vigilance, his courage, his patience, and his perseverance that this conspiracy was defeated. Never was a minister better informed. He knew what was going on at New York just as well as what was going on in the city of Dublin.

When the Fenian conspiracy had been entirely put down, it became necessary to consider the policy which it was expedient to pursue in Ireland; and it seemed to us at that time that what Ireland required after all the excitement which it had experienced was a policy which should largely develop its material resources. There were one or two subjects of a different character, which, for the advantage of the State, it would have been desirable to have settled, if that could have been

effected with a genera; concurrence of both the great parties in that country. Had we remained in office, that would have been done. But we were destined to quit it, and we quitted it without a murmur. The policy of our successors was different. Their specific was to despoil churches and plunder landlords, and what has been the result? Sedition rampant, treason thinly veiled, and whenever a vacancy occurs in the representation a candidate is returned pledged to the disruption of the realm. Her Majesty's new ministers proceeded in their career like a body of men under the influence of some delirious drug. Not satiated with the spoliation and anarchy of Ireland, they began to attack every institution and every interest, every class and calling in the country.

It is curious to observe their course. They took into hand the Army. What have they done? I will not comment on what they have done. I will historically state it, and leave you to draw the inference. So long as Constitutional England has existed, there has been a jealousy among all classes against the existence of a standing army. As our Empire expanded, and the existence of a large body of disciplined troops became a necessity, every precaution was taken to prevent the danger to our liberties which a standing army involved. It was a first principle not to concentrate in the island any overwhelming number of troops, and a considerable portion was distributed in the colonies. Care was taken that the troops generally should be officered by a class of men deeply interested in the property and the liberties of England. So extreme was the jealousy that the relations between that once constitutional force, the militia, and the Sovereign were rigidly guarded, and it was carefully placed under local influences. All this is changed. We have a standing army of large amount, quartered and brigaded and encamped permanently in England, and fed by a considerable and constantly increasing Reserve. It will in due time be officered by a class of men eminently scientific, but with no relations necessarily with society; while the militia is withdrawn from all local influences, and placed under the immediate command of the Secretary of War. Thus, in the nineteenth century, we have a large standing army established in England, contrary to all the traditions of the land, and that by a Liberal Government, and with the warm acclamations of the Liberal party.

Let us look what they have done with the Admiralty. You remember, in this county especially, the denunciations of the profligate expenditure of the Conservative Government, and you have since had an opportunity of comparing it with the gentler burden of Liberal estimates. The Navy was not merely an instance of profligate expenditure, but of incompetent and inadequate management. A great revolution was promised in its administration. A gentleman<sup>(58)</sup>, almost unknown to English politics, was strangely preferred to one of the highest places in the councils of Her Majesty. He set to at his task with ruthless activity. The Consultative Council, under which Nelson had gained all his victories, was dissolved. The Secretaryship of the Admiralty, an office which exercised a complete supervision over every division of that great department – an office which was to the Admiralty what the Secretary of State is to the kingdom, which, in the qualities which it required and the duties which it fulfilled was rightly a stepping-stone to the Cabinet, as in the instances of Lord Halifax, Lord Herbert, and many others – was reduced to absolute insignificance. Even the office of Control, which of all others required a position of independence, and on which the safety of the Navy mainly depended, was deprived of all its important attributes. For two years the Opposition called the attention of Parliament to these destructive changes, but Parliament and the nation were alike insensible. Full of other business, they could not give a thought to what they looked upon merely as captious criticism. It requires a great disaster to command the attention of England; and when the “Captain” was lost, and when they had the detail of the perilous voyage of the “Megaera”, then public indignation demanded a complete change in this renovating administration of the Navy.

And what has occurred? It is only a few weeks since that in the House of Commons I heard the naval statement made by a new First Lord<sup>(59)</sup> and it consisted only of the rescinding of all the revolutionary changes of his predecessor, the mischief of every one of which during the last two years has been pressed upon the attention of Parliament and the

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(58) Mr. Childers.

(59) Mr. Goschen.

country by that constitutional and necessary body the Opposition. Gentlemen, it will not do for me – considering the time I have already occupied, and there are still some subjects of importance that must be touched – to dwell upon any of the other similar topics of which there is a rich abundance. I doubt not there is in this hall more than one farmer who has been alarmed by the suggestion that his agricultural machinery should be taxed<sup>(60)</sup>. I doubt not there is in this hall more than one publican who remembers that last year an Act of Parliament was introduced to denounce him as a “sinner”. I doubt not there are in this hall a widow and an orphan who remember the profligate proposition to plunder their lonely heritage<sup>(61)</sup>.

But, gentlemen, as time advanced it was not difficult to perceive that extravagance was being substituted for energy by the Government. The unnatural stimulus was subsiding. Their paroxysms ended in prostration. Some took refuge in melancholy, and their eminent chief alternated between a menace and a sigh. As I sat opposite the Treasury Bench the ministers reminded me of one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous. There are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumbling of the sea.

But, gentlemen, there is one other topic on which I must touch. If the management of our domestic affairs has been founded upon a principle of violence, that certainly cannot be alleged against the management of our external relations. I know the difficulty of addressing a body of Englishmen on these topics. The very phrase “foreign affairs” makes an Englishman convinced that I am about to treat of subjects with which he has no concern. Unhappily, the relations of England to the rest of the world, which are “foreign affairs”, are the matters which most influence his lot. Upon them depends the increase or reduction of taxation. Upon them depends the enjoyment or the embarrassment of his industry. And yet, though so momentous are the consequences of the mismanagement

of our foreign relations, no one thinks of them till the mischief occurs, and then it is found how the most vital consequences have been occasioned by mere inadvertence.

I will illustrate this point by two anecdotes. Since I have been in public life there has been for this country a great calamity and there is a great danger, and both might have been avoided. The calamity was the Crimean War. You know what were the consequences of the Crimean War – a great addition to your debt, an enormous addition to your taxation, a cost more precious than your treasure – the best blood of England. Half a million of men, I believe, perished in that great undertaking. Nor are the evil consequences of that war adequately described by what I have said. All the disorders and disturbances of Europe, those immense armaments that are an incubus on national industry and the great obstacle to progressive civilisation, may be traced and justly attributed to the Crimean War. And yet the Crimean War need never have occurred. When Lord Derby acceded to office, against his own wishes, in 1852, the Liberal party most unconstitutionally forced him to dissolve Parliament at a certain time by stopping the supplies, or at least by limiting the period for which they were voted. There was not a single reason to justify that course, for Lord Derby had only accepted office, having once declined it, on the renewed application of his Sovereign. The country, at the dissolution, increased the power of the Conservative party, but did not give to Lord Derby a majority, and he had to retire from power. There was not the slightest chance of a Crimean War when we retired from office; but the Emperor of Russia, believing that the successor of Lord Derby was no enemy to Russian aggression in the East, commenced those proceedings, with the result of which you are familiar. I speak of what I know, not of what I believe, but of what I have evidence in my possession to prove – that the Crimean War would never have happened if Lord Derby had remained in office<sup>(62)</sup>.

The great danger is the present state of our relations with the United States. When I acceded to office I did so, so far as regarded the United States of America, with some advantage. During the whole of the Civil War

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(60) Suggested by Mr. Lowe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(61) Allusion to the proposal for taxing charities.

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(62) So thought Mr. Cobden, see *Life*, by Mr. Morley, v. ii. p. 127.

in America both my noble friend near me and I had maintained a strict and fair neutrality. This was fully appreciated by the Government of the United States, and they expressed their wish that with our aid the settlement of all differences between the two Governments should be accomplished. They sent here a plenipotentiary<sup>(63)</sup>, an honourable gentleman, very intelligent and possessing general confidence. My noble friend near me, with great ability, negotiated a treaty for the settlement of all these claims. He was the first minister who proposed to refer them to arbitration, and the treaty was signed by the American Government. It was signed, I think, on November 10<sup>th</sup>, on the eve of the dissolution of Parliament. The borough elections that first occurred proved what would be the fate of the ministry, and the moment they were known in America the American Government announced that Mr. Reverdy Johnson had mistaken his instructions, and they could not present the treaty to the Senate for its sanction – the sanction of which there had been previously no doubt.

But the fact is that, as in the case of the Crimean War, it was supposed that our successors would be favourable to Russian aggression, so it was supposed that by the accession to office of Mr. Gladstone and a gentleman you know well, Mr. Bright, the American claims would be considered in a very different spirit. How they have been considered is a subject which, no doubt, occupies deeply the minds of the people of Lancashire. Now, gentlemen, observe this – the question of the Black Sea involved in the Crimean War, the question of the American claims involved in our negotiations with Mr. Johnson, are the two questions that have again turned up, and have been the two great questions that have been under the management of his Government.

How have they treated them? Prince Gortschakoff, thinking he saw an opportunity, announced his determination to break from the Treaty of Paris, and terminate all the conditions hostile to Russia which had been the result of the Crimean War. What was the first movement on the part of our Government is at present a mystery. This we know, that they selected the most rising diplomatist<sup>(64)</sup> of the day, and sent him to Prince

Bismarck with a declaration that the policy of Russia, if persisted, was war with England. Now, gentlemen, there was not the slightest chance of Russia going to war with England, and no necessity, as I shall always maintain, of England going to war with Russia. I believe I am not wrong in stating that the Russian Government were prepared to withdraw from the position they had rashly taken; but suddenly Her Majesty's Government, to use a technical phrase, threw over the plenipotentiary, and, instead of threatening war if the Treaty of Paris was violated, they agreed to arrangements by which the violation of that treaty should be sanctioned by England, and, in the form of a congress, they showed themselves guaranteeing their own humiliation.

That Mr. Odo Russell made no mistake is quite obvious, because he has since been selected to be Her Majesty's ambassador at the most important Court of Europe<sup>(65)</sup>. Gentlemen, what will be the consequence of this extraordinary weakness on the part of the British Government it is difficult to foresee. Already we hear that Sebastopol is to be refortified, nor can any man doubt that the entire command of the Black Sea will soon be in the possession of Russia. The time may not be distant when we may hear of the Russian Power in the Persian Gulf, and what effect that may have upon the dominions of England and upon those possessions on the productions of which you every year more and more depend, are questions upon which it will be well for you on proper occasions to meditate.

I come now to that question which most deeply interests you at this moment, and that is our relations with the United States. I approved the Government referring this question to arbitration. It was only following the policy of Lord Stanley. My noble friend disapproved the negotiations being carried on at Washington. I confess that I would willingly have persuaded myself that this was not a mistake, but reflection has convinced me that my noble friend was right. I remember the successful negotiation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty by Sir Henry Bulwer. I flattered myself that treaties at Washington might be successfully negotiated; but I agree with my noble friend that his general view was far more sound than my own. But no one when that Commission was sent forth for a moment could

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(63) Mr. Reverdy Johnson.

(64) Mr. Odo Russell.

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(65) Court of Berlin.

anticipate the course of their conduct under the strict injunctions of the Government. We believed that Commission was sent to ascertain what points should be submitted to arbitration, to be decided by the principles of the law of nations. We had not the slightest idea that that Commission was sent with power and instructions to alter the law of nations itself. When that result was announced we expressed our entire disputation; and yet trusting to the representation of the Government that matters were excluded satisfactorily, we had to decide whether it was win, if the great result was obtained, to mangle upon points, however important, such as those to which I have referred.

Gentlemen, it appears that, though all parts of England were ready to make those sacrifices, the two negotiating States – the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of United States placed a different interpretation upon the treaty when the time had arrived to put its prevention into practise. Gentlemen, in my mind, and in the opinion of my noble friend near me, there was but one course to take under the circumstances, painful as it might be, and that won at ones to appeal to the good feeling and good sense of the United States and then, stating the difficulty, to invite continental conference whether it might not be removed. But Her Majesty's Government took a different course. On December 13 Her Majesty's Government were aware of a contrary interpretation being planned on the treaty of Washington by the American Government. The Prime Minister received a copy of their counter cause, and he confessed he had never read it. He had considerable number of copies sent to him to distribute among his colleagues, and you remember, probably, the remarkable statement in which he informed the House that he had distributed those copies to everybody except those for whom they were intended.

Time went on, and the adverse interpretation of the American Government gouged out and was noticed by the press. Public alarm and public indignation were excited and it was only seven weeks afterwards, on the very eve of the meeting of Parliament. Some Twenty-four hours before the meeting in Parliament – that Her Majesty's Government felt they were absolutely obligated to make a “friendly communication” to the United States that they had arrived at an interpretation of the treaty the reverse of that of American Government. What was the position of the American Government? Seven weeks had passed without their having

received the obligatory intervention from Her Majesty's ministers. They had circulated their case throughout the world. They had translated it into every European language. It had been sent to every court and cabinet, to every sovereign and prime minister. It was impossible for the American Government to recede from their position, even if they had believed it to be an erroneous one. And then, to aggravate the difficulty, the Prime Minister goes down to Parliament, declares that there is only one interpretation to be placed on the treaty, and defies and attacks everybody who believes it susceptible of another.

Was there ever such a combination of negligence and blundering? And now, gentlemen, what is about to happen? All we know is that Her Majesty's ministers are doing everything in their power to evade the cognisance and criticism of Parliament. They have received an answer to their “friendly communication”; of which, I believe, it has been ascertained that the American Government adhere to their interpretation; and yet they prolong the controversy. What is about to occur it is unnecessary for one to predict; but if it be this – if after a fruitless ratiocination worthy of a schoolman, we ultimately agree so far to the interpretation of the American Government as to submit the whole case to arbitration, with feeble reservation of a protest if it be decided against us, I venture to say that we shall be entering on a course not more distinguished by its feebleness than by its impending peril. There is before us every prospect of the same incompetence that distinguished our negotiations respecting the independence of the Black Sea; and I fear that there is every chance that this incompetence will be sealed by our ultimately acknowledging these indirect claims of the United States, which, both as regards principle and practical results, are fraught with the utmost danger to this country.

Gentlemen, don't suppose, because I counsel firmness and decision at the right moment, that I am of that school of statesmen who are favourable to a turbulent and aggressive diplomacy. I have resisted it during a great part of my life. I am not unaware that the relations of England to Europe have undergone a vast change during the century that has just elapsed. The relations of England to Europe are not the same as they were in the days of Lord Chatham or Frederick the Great. The Queen of England has become the Sovereign of the most powerful of Oriental States. On the

other side of the globe there are now establishments belonging to her, teeming with wealth and population, which will, in due time, exercise their influence over the distribution of power. The old establishments of this country, now the United States of America, throw their lengthening shades over the Atlantic, which mix with European waters. These are vast and novel elements in the distribution of power. I acknowledge that the policy of England with respect to Europe should be a policy of reserve, but proud reserve; and in answer to those statesmen – those mistaken statesmen who have intimated the decay of the power of England and the decline of its resources, I express here my confident conviction that there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible.

And yet, gentlemen, it is not merely our fleets and armies, our powerful artillery, our accumulated Capital, and our unlimited credit on which I so much depend, as upon that unbroken spirit of her people, which I believe was never prouder of the Imperial country to which they belong. Gentlemen, it is to that spirit that I above all things trust. I look upon the people of Lancashire as a fair representative of the people of England. I think the manner in which they have invited me here, locally a stranger, to receive the expression of their cordial sympathy, and only because they recognise some effort on my part to maintain the greatness of their country, is evidence of the spirit of the land. I must express to you again my deep sense of the generous manner in which you have welcomed me, and in which you have permitted me to express to you my views upon public affairs. Proud of your confidence and encouraged by your sympathy, I now deliver to you, as my last words, the cause of the Tory Party, the English Constitution, and of the British Empire.

Disraeli Benjamin, *Conservative Principles*, [in:] *Selected Speeches of the late right honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield, arranged and edited with introduction and explanatory notes by T. E. Kebbel, M. A.*, volume II, London 1882, p. 490-522.

# Conservative and Liberal Principles

Speech at Crystal Palace, June 24, 1872

**M**Y LORD DUKE AND GENTLEMEN, – I am very sensible of the honour which you have done me in requesting that I should be your guest today, and still more for your having associated my name with the important toast which has been proposed by the Lord Mayor. In the few observations that I shall presume to make on this occasion I will confine myself to some suggestions as to the present state of the Constitutional cause and the prospects which you, as a great Constitutional party, have before you. Gentlemen, some years ago – now, indeed, not an inconsiderable period, but within the memory of many who are present – the Tory party experienced a great overthrow. I am here to admit that in my opinion it was deserved. A long course of power and prosperity had induced it to sink into a state of apathy and indifference, and it had deviated from the great principles of that political association which had so long regulated the affairs and been identified with the glory of England. Instead of the principles professed by Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville, and which those great men inherited from Tory statesmen who had preceded them not less illustrious, the Tory system had degenerated into a policy which found an adequate basis on the principles of exclusiveness and restriction. Gentlemen, the Tory party, unless it is a national party, is nothing. It is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is a party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm – classes alike and equal before the law, but whose different conditions and different aims give vigour and variety to our national life.

Gentlemen, a body of public men distinguished by their capacity took advantage of these circumstances. They seized the helm of affairs in a manner the honour of which I do not for a moment question, but they introduced a new system into our political life. Influenced in a great degree by the philosophy and the politics of the Continent, they endeavoured to substitute cosmopolitan for national principles; and they baptized the new scheme of politics with the plausible name of “Liberalism”. Far be it from me for a moment to intimate that a country like England should not profit by the political experience of Continental nations of not inferior civilisation; far be it from me for a moment to maintain that the party which then obtained power and which has since generally possessed it did not make many suggestions for our public life

that were of great value, and bring forward many measures which, though changes, were nevertheless improvements. But the tone and tendency of Liberalism cannot be long concealed. It is to attack the institutions of the country under the name of Reform, and to make war on the manners and customs of the people of this country under the pretext of Progress. During the forty years that have elapsed since the commencement of this new system – although the superficial have seen upon its surface only the contentions of political parties – the real state of affairs has been this: the attempt of one party to establish in this country cosmopolitan ideas, and the efforts of another – unconscious efforts, sometimes, but always continued – to recur to and resume those national principles to which they attribute the greatness and glory of the country.

The Liberal party cannot complain that they have not had fair play. Never had a political party such advantages, never such opportunities. They are still in power; they have been for a long period in power. And yet what is the result? I speak not I am sure the language of exaggeration when I say that they are viewed by the community with distrust and, I might even say, with repugnance. And, now, what is the present prospect of the national party? I have ventured to say that in my opinion Liberalism, from its essential elements, notwithstanding all the energy and ability with which its tenets have been advocated by its friends – notwithstanding the advantage which has accrued to them, as I will confess, from all the mistakes of their opponents, is viewed by the country with distrust. Now in what light is the party of which we are members viewed by the country, and what relation does public opinion bear to our opinions and our policy? That appears to me to be an instructive query; and on an occasion like the present it is as well that we should enter into its investigation as pay mutual compliments to each other, which may in the end, perhaps, prove fallacious.

Now, I have always been of opinion that the Tory party has three great objects. The first is to maintain the institutions of the country – not from any sentiment of political superstition, but because we believe that they embody the principles upon which a community like England can alone safely rest. The principles of liberty, of order, of law, and of religion ought not to be entrusted to individual opinion or to the caprice and passion of multitudes, but should be embodied in a form of permanence and power.

We associate with the Monarchy the ideas which it represents – the majesty of law, the administration of justice, the fountain of mercy and of honour. We know that in the Estates of the Realm and the privileges they enjoy, is the best security for public liberty and good government. We believe that a national profession of faith can only be maintained by an Established Church, and that no society is safe unless there is a public recognition of the Providential government of the world, and of the future responsibility of man. Well, it is a curious circumstance that during all these same forty years of triumphant Liberalism, every one of these institutions has been attacked and assailed – I say, continuously attacked and assailed. And what, gentlemen, has been the result? For the last forty years the most depreciating comparisons have been instituted between the Sovereignty of England and the Sovereignty of a great Republic. We have been called upon in every way, in Parliament, in the Press, by articles in newspapers, by pamphlets, by every means which can influence opinion, to contrast the simplicity and economy of the Sovereignty of the United States with the cumbrous cost of the Sovereignty of England.

Gentlemen, I need not in this company enter into any vindication of the Sovereignty of England on that head. I have recently<sup>(66)</sup> enjoyed the opportunity, before a great assemblage of my countrymen, of speaking upon that subject. I have made statements with respect to it which have not been answered either on this side of the Atlantic or the other. Only six months ago the advanced guard of Liberalism<sup>(67)</sup>, acting in entire unison with that spirit of assault upon the Monarchy which the literature and the political confederacies of Liberalism have for forty years encouraged, flatly announced itself as Republican, and appealed to the people of England on that distinct issue. Gentlemen, what was the answer? I need not dwell upon it. It is fresh in your memories and hearts. The people of England have expressed, in a manner which cannot be mistaken, that they will uphold the ancient Monarchy of England, the Constitutional Monarchy of England, limited by the co-ordinate authority of the Estates

(66) i.e.. In preceding speech, April 3.

(67) The advanced Radical Party of which Sir Charles Dilke was supposed to be one of the leaders.

of the Realm, but limited by nothing else. Now, if you consider the state of public opinion with regard to those Estates of the Realm, what do you find? Take the case of the House of Lords. The House of Lords has been assailed during this reign of Liberalism in every manner and unceasingly. Its constitution has been denounced as anomalous, its influence declared pernicious; but what has been the result of this assault and criticism of forty years? Why, the people of England, in my opinion, have discovered that the existence of a second Chamber is necessary to Constitutional Government; and, while necessary to Constitutional Government, is, at the same time, of all political inventions the most difficult. Therefore, the people of this country have congratulated themselves that, by the aid of an ancient and famous history, there has been developed in this country an Assembly which assesses all the virtues which a Senate should possess – independence, great local influence, eloquence, all the accomplishments of political life, and a public training which no theory could supply.

The assault of Liberalism upon the House of Lords has been mainly occasioned by the prejudice of Liberalism against the land laws of this country. But in my opinion, and in the opinion of wiser men than myself, and of men in other countries beside this, the liberty of England depends much upon the landed tenure of England – upon the fact that there is a class which can alike defy despots and mobs, around which the people may always rally, and which must be patriotic from its intimate connection with the soil. Well, gentlemen, so far as these institutions of the country – the Monarchy and the Lords Spiritual and Temporal – are concerned, I think we may fairly say, without exaggeration, that public opinion is in favour of those institutions, the maintenance of which is one of the principal tenets of the Tory party, and the existence of which has been unceasingly criticised for forty years by the Liberal party. Now, let me say a word about the other Estate of the Realm, which was first attacked by Liberalism.

One of the most distinguishing features of the great change effected in 1832 was that those who brought it about at once abolished all the franchises of the working classes. They were franchises as ancient as those of the Baronage of England; and, while they abolished them, they proposed no substitute. The discontent upon the subject of the representation which has from that time more or less pervaded our

society dates from that period, and that discontent, all will admit, has now ceased. It was terminated by the Act of Parliamentary Reform of 1867-8. That Act was founded on a confidence that the great body of the people of this country were “Conservative”. When I say “Conservative”, I use the word in its purest and loftiest sense. I mean that the people of England, and especially the working classes of England, are proud of belonging to a great country, and wish to maintain its greatness – that they are proud of belonging to an Imperial country, and are resolved to maintain, if they can, their empire – that they believe, on the whole, that the greatness and the empire of England are to be attributed to the ancient institutions of the land.

Gentlemen, I venture to express my opinion, long entertained, and which has never for a moment faltered, that this is the disposition of the great mass of the people; and I am not misled for a moment by wild expressions and eccentric conduct which may occur in the metropolis of this country. There are people who may be, or who at least affect to be, working men, and who, no doubt, have a certain influence with a certain portion of the metropolitan working classes, who talk Jacobinism. But, gentlemen, that is no novelty. That is not the consequence of recent legislation or of any political legislation that has occurred in this century. There always has been a Jacobinical section in the City of London. I don’t particularly refer to that most distinguished and affluent portion of the metropolis which is ruled by my right honourable friend the Lord Mayor. Mr. Pitt complained of and suffered by it. There has always been a certain portion of the working class in London who have sympathised – perverse as we may deem the taste – with the Jacobin feelings of Paris. Well, gentlemen, we all know now, after eighty years’ experience, in what the Jacobinism of Paris has ended, and I hope I am not too sanguine when I express my conviction that the Jacobinism of London will find a very different result.

I say with confidence that the great body of the working class of England utterly repudiate such sentiments. They have no sympathy with them. They are English to the core. They repudiate cosmopolitan principles. They adhere to national principles. They are for maintaining the greatness of the kingdom and the empire, and they are proud of being subjects of our Sovereign and members of such an Empire. Well, then,

as regards the political institutions of this country, the maintenance of which is one of the chief tents of the Tory party, so far as I can read public opinion, the feeling of the nation is in accordance with the Tory party. It was not always so. There was a time when the institutions of this country were decried. They have passed through a scathing criticism of forty years; they have passed through that criticism when their political upholders have, generally speaking, been always in opposition. They have been upheld by us when we were unable to exercise any of the lures of power to attract force to us, and the people of this country have arrived at these conclusions from their own thought and their own experience.

Let me say one word upon another institution, the position of which is most interesting at this time. No institution of England, since the advent of Liberalism, has been so systematically, so continuously assailed as the Established Church. Gentlemen, we were first told that the Church was asleep, and it is very possible, as everybody, civil and spiritual, was asleep forty years ago, that that might have been the case. Now we are told that the Church is too active, and that it will be destroyed by its internal restlessness and energy. I see in all these efforts of the Church to represent every mood of the spiritual mind of man, no evidence that it will fall, no proof that any fatal disruption is at hand. I see in the Church, as I believe I see in England, an immense effort to rise to national feelings and recur to national principles. The Church of England, like all our institutions, feels it must be national, and it knows that, to be national, it must be comprehensive. Gentlemen, I have referred to what I look upon as the first object of the Tory party – namely, to maintain the institutions of the country, and reviewing what has occurred, and referring to the present temper of the times upon these subjects, I think that the Tory party, or, as I will venture to call it, the National party, has everything to encourage it. I think that the nation, tested by many and severe trials, has arrived at the conclusion which we have always maintained, that it is the first duty of England to maintain its institutions, because to them we principally ascribe the power and prosperity of the country.

Gentlemen, there is another and second great object of the Tory party. If the first is to maintain the institutions of the country, the second is, in my opinion, to uphold the Empire of England. If you look to the history of this country since the advent of Liberalism – forty years ago – you will find that

there has been no effort so continuous, so subtle, supported by so much energy, and carried on with so much ability and acumen, as the attempts of Liberalism to effect the disintegration of the Empire of England.

And, gentlemen, of all its efforts, this is the one which has been the nearest to success. Statesmen of the highest character, writers of the most distinguished ability, the most organised and efficient means, have been employed in this endeavour. It has been proved to all of us that we have lost money by our colonies. It has been shown with precise, with mathematical demonstration, that there never was a jewel in the Crown of England that was so truly costly as the possession of India. How often has it been suggested that we should at once emancipate ourselves from this incubus. Well, that result was nearly accomplished. When those subtle views were adopted by the country under the plausible plea of granting self-government to the Colonies, I confess that I myself thought that the tie was broken. Not that I for one object to self-government. I cannot conceive how our distant colonies can have their affairs administered except by self-government. But self-government, in my opinion, when it was conceded, ought to have been conceded as part of a great policy of Imperial consolidation. It ought to have been accompanied by an Imperial tariff, by securities for the people of England for the enjoyment of the unappropriated lands which belonged to the Sovereign as their trustee, and by a military code which should have precisely defined the means and the responsibilities by which the colonies should be defended, and by which, if necessary, this country should call for aid from the colonies themselves. It ought, further, to have been accompanied by the institution of some representative council in the metropolis, which would have brought the Colonies into constant and continuous relations with the Home Government. All this, however, was omitted because those who advised that policy – and I believe their convictions were sincere – looked upon the Colonies of England, looked even upon our connection with India, as a burden upon this country, viewing everything in a financial aspect, and totally passing by those moral and political considerations which make nations great, and by the influence of which alone men are distinguished from animals.

Well, what has been the result of this attempt during the reign of Liberalism for the disintegration of the Empire? It has entirely failed. But

how has it failed? Through the sympathy of the Colonies with the Mother Country. They have decided that the Empire shall not be destroyed, and in my opinion no minister in this country will do his duty who neglects any opportunity of reconstructing as much as possible our Colonial Empire, and of responding to those distant sympathies which may become the source of incalculable strength and happiness to this land. Therefore, gentlemen, with respect to the second great object of the Tory party also – the maintenance of the Empire – public opinion appears to be in favour of our principles – that public opinion which, I am bound to say, thirty years ago, was not favourable to our principles, and which, during a long interval of controversy, in the interval had been doubtful.

Gentlemen, another great object of the Tory party, and one not inferior to the maintenance of the Empire, or the upholding of our institutions, is the elevation of the condition of the people. Let us see in this great struggle between Toryism and Liberalism that has prevailed in this country during the last forty years what are the salient features. It must be obvious to all who consider the condition of the multitude with a desire to improve and elevate it, that no important step can be gained unless you can effect some reduction of their hours of labour and humanise their toil. The great problem is to be able to achieve such results without violating those principles of economic truth upon which the prosperity of all States depends. You recollect well that many years ago the Tory party believed that these two results might be obtained – that you might elevate the condition of the people by the reduction of their toil and the mitigation of their labour, and at the same time inflict no injury on the wealth of the nation. You know how that effort was encountered – how these views and principles were met by the triumphant statesmen of Liberalism. They told you that the inevitable consequence of your policy was to diminish capital, that this, again, would lead to the lowering of wages, to a great diminution of the employment of the people, and ultimately to the impoverishment of the kingdom.

These were not merely the opinions of Ministers of State, but those of the most blatant and loud-mouthed leaders of the Liberal party. And what has been the result? Those measures were carried, but carried, as I can bear witness, with great difficulty and after much labour and a long struggle. Yet they were carried; and what do we now find? That

capital was never accumulated so quickly, that wages were never higher, that the employment of the people was never greater, and the country never wealthier. I ventured to say a short time ago, speaking in one of the great cities of this country, that the health of the people was the most important question for a statesman. It is, gentlemen, a large subject. It has many branches. It involves the state of the dwellings of the people, the moral consequences of which are not less considerable than the physical. It involves their enjoyment of some of the chief elements of nature – air, light, and water. It involves the regulation of their industry, the inspection of their toil. It involves the purity of their provisions, and it touches upon all the means by which you may wean them from habits of excess and of brutality. Now, what is the feeling upon these subjects of the Liberal party – that Liberal party who opposed the Tory party when, even in their weakness, they advocated a diminution of the toil of the people, and introduced and supported those Factory Laws, the principles of which they extended, in the brief period when they possessed power, to every other trade in the country? What is the opinion of the great Liberal party – the party that seeks to substitute cosmopolitan for national principles in the government of this country – on this subject? Why, the views which I expressed in the great capital of the county of Lancaster have been held up to derision by the Liberal Press. A leading member – a very rising member, at least, among the new Liberal members – denounced them the other day as the “policy of sewage”.

Well, it may be the “policy of sewage” to a Liberal member of Parliament. But to one of the labouring multitude of England, who has found fever always to be one of the inmates of his household – who has, year after year, seen stricken down the children of his loins, on whose sympathy and material support he has looked with hope and confidence, it is not a “policy of sewage”, but a question of life and death. And I can tell you this, gentlemen, from personal conversation with some of the most intelligent of the labouring class – and I think there are many of them in this room who can bear witness to what I say – that the policy of the Tory party – the hereditary, the traditional policy of the Tory party, that would improve the condition of the people – is more appreciated by the people than the ineffable mysteries and all the pains and penalties of the Ballot Bill. Gentlemen, is that wonderful? Consider the condition of the great body

of the working classes of this country. They are in possession of personal privileges – of personal rights and liberties – which are not enjoyed by the aristocracies of other countries. Recently they have obtained – and wisely obtained – a great extension of political rights; and when the people of England see that under the constitution of this country, by means of the constitutional cause which my right honourable friend the Lord Mayor has proposed, they possess every personal right of freedom, and, according to the conviction of the whole country, also an adequate concession of political rights, is it at all wonderful that they should wish to elevate and improve their condition, and is it unreasonable that they should ask the Legislature to assist them in that behest as far as it is consistent with the general welfare of the realm?

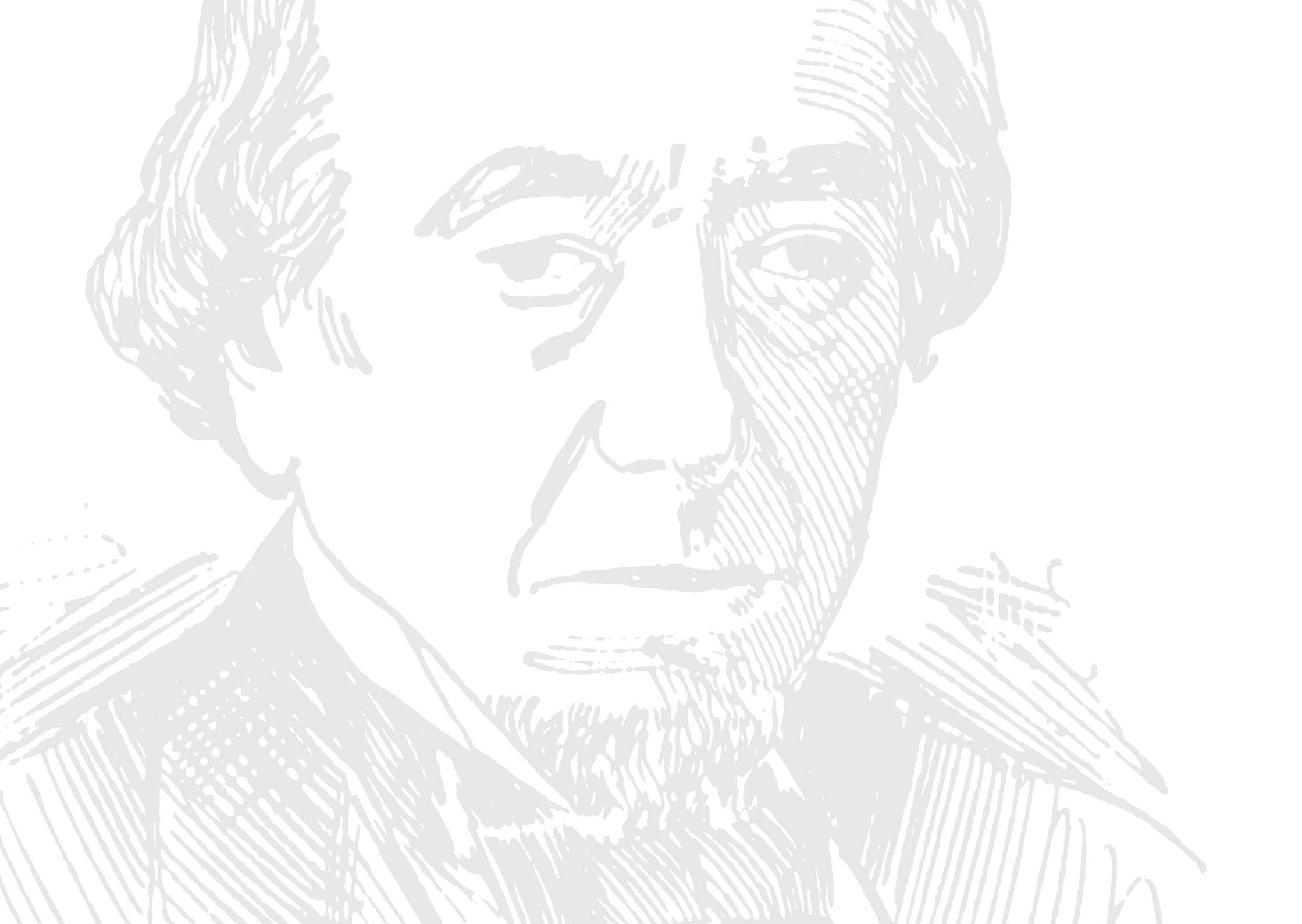
Why, the people of England would be greater idiots than the Jacobinical leaders of London even suppose, if, with their experience and acuteness, they should not long have seen that the time had arrived when social, and not political improvement is the object which they ought to pursue. I have touched, gentlemen, on the three great objects of the Tory party. I told you I would try to ascertain what was the position of the Tory party with reference to the country now. I have told you also with frankness what I believe the position of the Liberal party to be. Notwithstanding their proud position, I believe they are viewed by the country with mistrust and repugnance. But on all the three great objects which are sought by Toryism – the maintenance of our institutions, the preservation of our Empire, and the improvement of the condition of the people – I find a rising opinion in the country sympathising with our tenets, and prepared, I believe, if the opportunity offers, to uphold them until they prevail.

Before sitting down, I would make one remark particularly applicable to those whom I am now addressing. This is a numerous assembly; this is an assembly individually influential; but it is not on account of its numbers, it is not on account of its individual influence, that I find it to me deeply interesting. It is because I know that I am addressing a representative assembly. It is because I know that there are men here who come from all districts and all quarters of England, who represent classes and powerful societies, and who meet here not merely for the pleasure of a festival, but because they believe that our assembling together may lead to national advantage. Yes, I tell all who are here

present that there is a responsibility which you have incurred today, and which you must meet like men. When you return to your homes, when you return to your counties and to your cities, you must tell to all those whom you can influence that the time is at hand, that, at least, it cannot be far distant, when England will have to decide between national and cosmopolitan principles. The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon Continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country, – an Imperial country – a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world.

Upon you depends the issue. Whatever may be the general feeling, you must remember that in fighting against Liberalism or the Continental system you are fighting against those who have the advantage of power – against those who have been in high places for nearly half a century. You have nothing to trust to but your own energy and the sublime instinct of an ancient people. You must act as if everything depended on your individual efforts. The secret of success is constancy of purpose. Go to your homes, and teach there these truths, which will soon be imprinted on the conscience of the land. Make each man feel how much rests on his own exertions. The highest, like my noble friend the chairman, may lend us his great aid. But rest assured that the assistance of the humblest is not less efficient. Act in this spirit, and you will succeed. You will maintain your country in its present position. But you will do more than that – you will deliver to your posterity a land of liberty, of prosperity, of power, and of glory.

Disraeli Benjamin, *Conservative and Liberal Principles*, [in:] *Selected Speeches of the late right honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield, arranged and edited with introduction and explanatory notes by T. E. Kebbel, M. A.*, volume II, London 1882, p. 523-535.





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