

Fernandus Lesson

MODERN ENGLAND

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The England around us becomes our own England, an England whose chief forces are industry and science, the love of popular freedom and of law, an England which presses steadily forward to a larger social justice and equality, and which tends more and more to bring every custom and tradition, religious, intellectual, and political, to the test of pure reason.

—JOHN RICHARD GREEN.

MODERN ENGLAND

A RECORD OF OPINION AND ACTION FROM
THE TIME OF THE FRENCH REVOLU-
TION TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

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NINETEENTH CENTURY"

IN TWO VOLUMES

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TO
BERNHARD BERENSON

PREFACE

THE scope and limits of the present work are to some extent indicated by its second title. A record of opinion and action, as distinguished from a record of events, deals especially with those elements of history which are determined by mental causes, by human feelings, human reason, and human will, rather than by those unconscious agencies which the great historians of antiquity were wont to group together under the names of fortune or fate. In pursuance of this method I have omitted masses of detail which bulk very largely in the pages of most English Histories, such as the particulars of battles and sieges, incidents in the lives of great personages possessing merely biographical interest, Court pageants, and so forth. On the other hand, this economy of space has enabled me to include some intellectual events that other historians have altogether omitted, and to give a much greater relative prominence to those general tendencies by which social changes are ultimately determined. In particular, I have devoted special attention to that widespread disintegration of theological beliefs which Nietzsche has called the greatest event of modern history, bringing into view on the one side its antecedents in the philosophy, science, and scholarship of the age, and on the other side its reaction on literature and politics.

This task has involved the reproduction in a summary form of much that has already appeared in my *History of English Rationalism*; but a repeated survey of the field has enabled me to include a few details not mentioned in the larger work.

On matters not connected with the Rationalistic movement I have sometimes found myself obliged to go somewhat more into detail than the general scope of this History seemed to demand, because the ground was pre-occupied by views that in my opinion are either false or incomplete. For instance, the praise for efficiency so often bestowed on our old oligarchical government appears to me undeserved. The credit for philanthropic legislation so freely given by modern Tories to the Tory party at the expense of Whigs and Radicals is, so far as I can make out, totally unjustified. The services rendered to good government by the philosophic Radicals have been strangely overlooked, even by their special historians, M. Elie Halévy and the late Sir Leslie Stephen. I feel extreme diffidence in opposing, on his own ground, so high an authority as Professor Albert Dicey. But I cannot help thinking that in his important work on *Law and Opinion* he has enormously exaggerated the part given to individualism and *laissez-faire* in the philosophy of Bentham and his school. It seems to me that our modern socialistic legislation was in part anticipated by the old Utilitarians, in part has been directly developed out of their principles.

With regard to English foreign policy, I do not think George Canning has yet received anything like his due meed of recognition as a "hero of the nations." And

the same observation applies with even greater force to Canning's true successor, Palmerston. The serious errors that mark Palmerston's closing years have somewhat clouded his reputation. But they were errors inspired by the same noble love of justice and freedom which, together with a patriotism more antique than modern, was the moving principle of his whole political career. As a part of this policy he fought the Crimean War, which, if I am not mistaken, was no such ghastly blunder as is now commonly believed, but a necessary step in the deliverance of Europe from the old despotisms and its reconstitution on the lines of national independence. I hold that Kinglake, genuinely Liberal as in many ways he was, has obscured the true interpretation of the war waged by England and France against Russia by representing it in the light of a mere dynastic intrigue of Louis Napoleon's for obliterating the memory of the *Coup d'État*. My view is that France was drawn into the war by England, acting under Palmerston's guidance; but that England's motives were not self-interested, the object of her people being to avenge the wrongs of Hungary and to deliver Europe from the despotism that had been weighing on it for forty years. And the profound mistake of Disraeli, when he fancied himself the inheritor of Palmerston's policy, was not to see this—not to see that the English people are always on the side of freedom, and that freedom in 1876 was not represented by Turkey, but by Russia.

To all appearances, it has not been reserved for the twentieth century to discard the enthusiasms of its predecessor; and any English statesman who imagines

that the idea of freedom has been played out will sooner or later—and sooner rather than later—discover to his cost what potentialities of energy that idea still contains.

My best thanks are due to Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, who has kindly read through this work in MS., and suggested some important corrections; to my wife, who has given me invaluable assistance in revising the proof-sheets; and to the press-reader of Messrs. Watts and Co., whose criticisms have enabled me to rectify some inaccuracies of statement and style.

A. W. B.

January 19th, 1908.

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CHAPTER I.

ORGANISED ANARCHY

FORTY years before the French Revolution began the greatest of French political philosophers, Montesquieu, declared that liberty was the organic principle of the English Constitution, the supreme end for whose attainment every part of its complicated mechanism had been devised. And there can be no doubt that, next to the republics of classical antiquity—if not, indeed, before them—England continued to be the ideal by which Montesquieu's saner countrymen were guided in their endeavour to substitute a more rational form of government for the decrepit despotism of their Bourbon kings.

This admiration, although excessive, rested on a solid basis of fact. At the opening of the revolutionary era England had for a century possessed far more political liberty than was enjoyed by any other great European State. Except among her own emancipated children, the newly-constituted United States of North America, no parallel to it could be found. It must not, of course, be forgotten that the term "political liberty" bears two independent senses. It stands for the absence of vexatious trammels on individual action. But it stands also for self-government, for the participation of the people in the passing and the administration of their laws, in the choice of their rulers, in shaping the

general policy of the State. Now, in both senses of the word England had much less liberty than she afterwards obtained; but the amount realised was still considerable. So far as the higher and middle classes were concerned, people could generally go about without let or hindrance, and, within the limits of mutual respect, could say or do what they liked; while the country was governed by public opinion to an extent elsewhere unknown. The voice of the educated classes and the wishes of the great interests—so far as they had become articulate—which divided English society among them found a tolerably efficacious expression in representative institutions which, however defective from a modern point of view, were not ill adapted to the wants of the time, in trial by jury, in public meetings, in pamphlet literature, and in the newspaper Press.

Political observers thought it much to preserve without extending what, in their opinion, had been so completely won. The spirit of English liberty during the latter part of the eighteenth century took the form of jealous opposition to all encroachments, real or supposed, on the part of what was called the power of the Crown. The tyranny of the Stuarts and, it must be added, of Cromwell had left bitter memories behind, not always manifested in the most reasonable ways.

Under the first two Georges there could be little to fear from the personal ambition of the king. Those sovereigns were entirely in the hands of the great Whig families to whom they owed their throne, and who could alone maintain them on it against the steady hostility of the country gentlemen

and the occasional ill-will of the masses, always ready to resent the intrusion of a foreigner.

Still the royal authority, though not directly in evidence, continued to exist, and made itself felt in more than one way. It was responsible, largely through the silent influence of Queen Caroline, for Sir Robert Walpole's long tenure of office, and, so far, must be reckoned as a mainly beneficent force. On the other hand, royalty has to be debited with abuses recalling the bad days of the Stuarts. The Court still set an example of profligacy and extravagance. The national wealth was squandered on unworthy favourites. The country was entangled in foreign wars with which it had no concern, through the dynastic interests of the reigning family; and incompetent princes received high military commands, with disastrous results to our arms.

With the accession of George III. the king's personal power both in principle and practice returned to vigorous life. Various causes simultaneously worked to the same effect. Bolingbroke, the ablest and most brilliant political writer of his age, had for many years been preaching the gospel of the Patriot King, of a ruler who, raised by his position above the strife of factions, should devote himself entirely to the good of the country; he had won over the intellect of England to this new form of Toryism; and his principles, so far as they made for absolutism, were highly acceptable to the circle in which the heir to the throne had been brought up. George III.'s mother, the Princess of Wales, had imported the same tradition of absolutism from Germany, and had often told her son to be a king.

Any lingering prejudices against the foreign dynasty were dispelled by the young sovereign's public declaration that, "born and bred an Englishman, he gloried in the name of Briton"—a phrase peculiarly calculated to secure the enthusiastic loyalty of his northern subjects. Jacobite gentlemen crowded to his Court, and were received with marked favour. Their new master proved an excellent substitute for the once chivalrous and fascinating Charles Edward, who by this time had degenerated into a brutal drunkard.

The new reign, in fact, amounted to a second Stuart restoration, including guarantees for Protestantism—which, by the way, Charles Edward would also have given—and it soon led to peace with France, the old ally of the Stuarts, the great War Minister, Pitt, being replaced at the head of affairs by a royal favourite, Lord Bute. Peace, though expedient, proved unpopular; and this first triumph over public opinion was followed by a prolonged conflict, in which the King suffered many humiliations. Not until ten years later did he find a Minister to his mind in Lord North. Personal government then had a free hand; but the experiment did not succeed as Bolingbroke had expected. Under the management of George III. a series of disastrous defeats led up to the permanent separation of the chief North American colonies from the mother-country, and to the temporary recognition of an independent Parliament in Dublin. A hostile vote of the House of Commons compelled the King to part with the subservient instrument of his designs, to accept Ministers whom he hated, and to sue for peace to the Powers whom

the elder Pitt had left prostrate at England's feet. As if to put the seal on his discomfiture, the new Administration passed a Bill involving a considerable reduction in the offices and pensions by which the unconstitutional influence of the Crown seemed to have been chiefly maintained.

Nevertheless, in the very year that saw the signature of an ignominious peace with France and her allies, George felt himself strong enough to dismiss a Ministry forced on him by the House of Commons, to bestow office on the younger Pitt, then only twenty-four years old, and to maintain him in that position against a series of hostile Parliamentary votes. What was more, the General Election of 1784 confirmed the King's choice by such an overwhelming majority of the constituencies that his opponents found themselves reduced to political impotence for twenty years to come.

The ostensible reasons for this momentous decision were the details of a Bill for the better government of India, tending, as was alleged, to reserve an enormous amount of patronage for the Whig leaders; and the scandal caused by an unprincipled coalition between Fox, the great Whig orator, and North, the Minister whose American policy he had long denounced in terms of unmeasured vituperation. But it was only reasonable that Indian patronage should be kept out of the hands which had dispensed English patronage with such disastrous effects; and that Fox should ally himself with North seems hardly, if at all, more immoral than that Chatham's son should make himself the instrument of one by whom Chatham's policy of conciliation had been rejected

and Chatham's imperial work undone. In truth, the popular feeling had deeper sources than any interests of the hour. It sprang from a genuine royalism, which in all obscure or doubtful issues inevitably went for the King and against those whom he was pleased to call his enemies.

Two more significant facts may be quoted in attestation of the personal authority exercised by the English monarch at the time of the French Revolution. One is furnished by the American Constitution as finally determined in 1789. The legislators who drew up that instrument evidently designed it as an adaptation of English institutions to the requirements of a new and more democratic society. Now, not only did they place a monarch, under the name of President, at the head of their Federation, but they gave that monarch, during his four years' tenure of office, powers of controlling the Executive and interfering with the Legislature such as George III. rather pretended to than actually possessed.

The other fact is connected with the celebrated Regency debates of 1788. In that year the King was overtaken by a fit of insanity, temporarily incapacitating him for the discharge of his duties, which, had it continued, would have necessitated the appointment of a Regent. The question came before Parliament, and some nice Constitutional questions were raised as to whether the Regency devolved by right of birth on the Heir Apparent or should be conferred on him by special legislation; and on the second alternative what restrictions, if any, should limit his exercise of the royal authority. From first to last the points at issue were debated

on purely party lines, and it was understood throughout that the whole interest of the conflict depended on the undoubted assumption that the Prince of Wales, when invested with his father's authority, would dismiss his father's Ministers, replacing them by the heads of the Whig Opposition. The Prince was known as a drunken and faithless libertine; but it seemed to be agreed on all hands that the majority of the House would transfer their allegiance from Pitt to Fox at his bidding; or that, in the event of a General Election, the constituencies would ratify the policy of the Regent as obediently as they had ratified the directly opposite policy of the King four years previously. In point of fact, a dissolution would have been unnecessary. For we know, on good authority, that in the House of Commons, as then constituted, the party of the Crown numbered 185, Fox's party 138, and Pitt's personal following only 52.¹

Thus the King was far from being a Venetian Doge. With almost any character or capacity he was the most powerful individual in the country. With a first-rate intellect he would have been an all-powerful and irremovable Prime Minister. Nevertheless, both then and long afterwards the English Constitution might with some reason have been described as an oligarchy. The sovereign both possessed and exercised the right to choose his Ministers, but in practice he had to choose them from among the great governing families and their nominees, and it was by the character of these men as a class that the character of the Government was determined in the long run.

¹ Lord Rosebery's *Pitt*, p. 71.

Much has been written in praise of what is called the English aristocracy; that is, presumably, the titled possessors of hereditary territorial wealth; and sometimes even in foreign countries it is credited with the possession not only of large estates, but also of extraordinary virtues, and more particularly virtues of a political order. Yet, as compared with the hereditary governing classes of ancient Greece and Rome, or even of modern France and Germany, our nobles do not show to advantage as regards intellectual eminence. Up to the period we are now considering they had contributed no name of the first order to English literature, unless Henry St. John is to be counted as an exception. Their services to physical science and erudition do not exceed the limits of respectable amateurship. Two names, Peterborough and Howe, represent their achievements as commanders by land and sea. In the field of statesmanship, where most might have been expected, their sterility is most remarkable. The true makers of England's greatness and vigour—Thomas Cromwell, Cranmer, Burghley, Walsingham, Pym, Oliver Cromwell, Somers, Marlborough, Sir Robert Walpole, Chatham, Clive, Warren Hastings, Burke, Canning, Peel, Cobden, and Gladstone—all sprang from the gentry or the middle classes. On the other hand, our notorious incompetency in negotiating advantageous treaties of peace, although perhaps no misfortune as regards the more solid interests of the country, must be counted to the discredit of a diplomatic service which is peculiarly aristocratic in its composition.

A notion has been sedulously propagated by

modern Tory writers that the Whigs were an eminently oligarchical party, and that men of ability but without aristocratic connections were more systematically excluded from high office by them than by the Tories. But this view is hardly borne out by the facts. High social position was as largely represented in the Cabinets of Lord North and of Pitt as in the Cabinets of their predecessors, if not more largely. Edmund Burke is the standing example of Whig exclusiveness, the truth being that his violent temper would have made him impossible in any Cabinet. After the French Revolution a few outsiders of exceptional talent or ability to please were admitted to high office by the Tory party. This, however, may be explained by its being the party in power—a circumstance which would naturally attract ambitious young men into its ranks, where also the general average of stupidity would make their assistance more desirable. In the eighteenth century what really distinguished the Whigs from the Tories was not their oligarchical tendencies, but their steady opposition to the personal government of the King, to his interference with the choice of Ministers and with the conduct of affairs. For the rest, Toryism appealed more to the landed interest, Whiggism more to the commercial and industrial interests of the country. And in the conflict with America the landowners supported the king in his policy of coercion, while the business classes were for yielding to the demands of the Colonies.

At the same time, it would be a serious mistake to identify the Whigs of those times with what are

now called Liberal principles, with the idea of perpetual progress in speculation and practice, with democratic politics, or with reason as opposed to tradition ; still less were the Tories in any sense a party of reaction or conservation, or in any pre-eminent sense a party of order. The Liberal party of our own day is indeed connected by an unbroken chain of development with the Revolution Whigs ; while their opponents, by reviving the name of Tory, seem to claim a still more direct filiation from the Jacobites and the King's friends. But this sort of historical continuity does not necessarily involve a continuity of principles. With parties as with all other organisations, the first law of existence is self-preservation, and in obedience to it they may transform themselves almost out of recognition.

It is a familiar commonplace that to be in office tends to foster one set of opinions, while to be in opposition tends to foster the contrary opinions. Under the first Hanoverian Kings the Tories were excluded from power, and this circumstance gave them an individuality, a love of liberty, one may almost say an ideality, which their return to Court favour could not so soon destroy. Johnson, the typical Tory, loved originality, he believed in human progress, he hated West Indian slavery ; if he upheld American taxation, it was on grounds of justice. Burke, the great Whig theorist, always appealed to expediency and experience ; the sanctities of tradition had no more staunch upholder ; his own time even seemed to him degenerate in comparison with the Middle Ages. The younger Pitt was long the idol of the Tory party, the founder

of its glory and success in modern England. But Pitt was no Conservative. The three great measures on which Liberal politicians since his time have successively staked their existence—Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, and Free Trade—were his measures. And of these Catholic Emancipation was opposed by the Duke of Portland, Parliamentary Reform by Burke, and Free Trade by Fox; while the first and third were afterwards taken up by Pitt's disciple, Canning.

There is, however, one vital issue with respect to which the lines of party division exhibit a more unbroken continuity than with respect to any other difference of opinion. That is the question of permitting or prohibiting free criticism in politics and religion. As compared with their opponents, the Revolution Whigs had stood more or less for free speech all round; and their prolonged exercise of power had not made them entirely forgetful of the cause they originally represented. Their subsequent exile from office revived those earlier memories; and all through the French revolutionary storm a Whig remnant clung to personal freedom more ardently than ever, now that it had been recognised as not merely the privilege of Englishmen, but as the right of all mankind.

The King and the oligarchs exercised power through Parliament, and in Parliament through the House of Commons. The so-called popular Chamber did not outwardly represent the people. "One hundred and seventy-two of the English and Welsh members were returned on the direct nomination of the Treasury or of individuals. The

forty-five Scotch members were nominated by thirty-five persons. Three hundred and fifty-four members were therefore returned on the recommendation of the Treasury or of some patron."¹ But, although these 354 gentlemen were not elected by the people, it would be a mistake to suppose that they did not represent the people, or that an equal number of members elected by popular suffrage would have been better qualified to sit in the Sovereign Assembly. Merely to occupy such a position gives a sense of responsibility not necessarily associated with the exercise of demagogic arts. Even the Irish Parliament of the eighteenth century, composed as it was of nominees and managed by corruption, had that sense to some extent. Even the servile Corps Législatif of the second Napoleonic Empire successfully resisted a proposal made by its master to entail an estate on the family of one of his favourites, against the law of modern France. And when the Liberal Opposition came to muster very strong in that body they were soon joined by so many supporters of the Government as to form a working majority. The members of our unreformed Parliament no doubt sold their votes. But they would equally have sold them, without losing their seats, under any system of popular suffrage that could have been devised.

In the earlier part of the eighteenth century the Peers were in advance of the Commons, and the Commons were both then and much later in advance of average English opinion. Had the

¹ Spencer Walpole, *History of England from 1815*, vol. i., p. 117 (Cabinet ed.).

borough members of Walpole's age represented the wishes of the urban constituencies as genuinely as the county members represented the feelings of the rural constituencies, the Stuarts would probably have been restored. A century later it is not clear that a reformed Parliament would have passed Catholic Emancipation. What enabled George III. on more than one occasion to carry out a disastrous policy was that he had a majority of the country at his back.

It seems at first sight an optimistic hallucination to maintain that a system full of anomalies, the unintentional and incalculable result of one historical accident after another, should have miraculously turned out to be the best fitted for the people which had somehow blundered into it. But really no more is meant than that the old English Constitution, such as it was, fairly represented the balance of forces then at work; and above all that it organised, in a way, that liberty for the possession and preservation of which our island was famed. And, in fact, such political thinkers as Burke and Canning, in proclaiming the supreme excellence of the Constitution, rotten boroughs and all, dwelt most on the practical experience that it worked well, securing the largest amount of liberty compatible with public order. They failed to see that it fell lamentably short of what a Government ought to be, that it provided neither for social order nor for social progress, that the boasted system of checks and balances was responsible for a paralysis which the people felt obscurely, and that the only hope of salvation lay in the development of the democratic and

freethinking elements whose explosion on the Continent filled them with such dismay.

What we find, then, professing to perform the functions of government is an oligarchy always controlled and sometimes directed by the public opinion of the upper and middle classes. Sometimes opinion embodied itself in a great statesman, sometimes in a king of average judgment and ability who mistook the will of the people for his own will. The result was a moving equilibrium of competing interests, favourable to the development of individual genius; not favourable to orderly progress, to a wise economy of the national resources. So much industry, ability, and money were spent on making the Parliamentary machine work smoothly that nothing was left for securing legislative and administrative efficiency.

A theory had been gaining ground since Locke that the duty of the State goes no further than the protection of its citizens against domestic and foreign aggression. The theory may be good or bad; but, at any rate, the duties it recognises were not fulfilled by the so-called Government of England. There was no police to speak of; the roads were infested with highwaymen, the streets with footpads and pickpockets, the seas with pirates, the avenues of credit with forgers. Groups of irritated interests appealed to their Parliamentary representatives for protection; it was given by extending the death penalty to such a multitude of trivial offences that in many cases the wronged individuals would not prosecute, or juries would not convict, or judges would not condemn, or the

executive would not carry out the sentence, with the result that depredations were multiplied by the chances of impunity; while the prisons, instead of being deterrents or preventives, were so mismanaged as to become nurseries for the propagation of crime and disease.

Foreign aggression being chiefly conceived under the form of foreign industrial competition in the shape of imported goods, it was resisted by prohibitive or protective duties, calling into existence a host of smugglers who introduced the competing products duty free. The division of military authority between the King and the Parliamentary War Minister fatally undermined the efficiency of the army, which, besides, was weak and ill-officered through the whole hierarchy of command. As it happens, fleets cannot be sailed without a relatively high degree of professional ability; and in the case of the English navy the supply, to some extent, corresponded with the demand. The country was guaranteed against invasion, in a military sense, by an Admiralty which seems to have been the best-equipped branch of the public service, and was at least better than any on the Continent. Still, at a great crisis of the national fortunes England's maritime supremacy was nearly wrecked by corruption in high places; while on that and another occasion the national security was still further hazarded by the English Government's insistence on the exercise of certain alleged rights, which the neutral powers united in arms to repel. It remains to add that, as a maritime conscription would have been repugnant to English ideas of liberty, violent

impressment of merchant sailors was used as a means for recruiting the fleet, to the general satisfaction of free-born landmen.

Not only did the Government fail to provide adequately for public order and safety, but it allowed the machinery of justice to be perverted into a means for the spoliation of its subjects. Viewed from the standpoint of scientific jurisprudence, English civil law was a chaos; as an instrument for filling the coffers of lawyers at the expense of litigants it was contrived with consummate skill; while in applying it to that sinister purpose counsel on both sides might reckon on the cordial co-operation of the judge, for he regarded them as the parties whose interest he sat on the bench to protect.

A secular power that failed to perform the primary duties of government found its appropriate pendant in a spiritual power that could neither edify nor instruct. Through the eighteenth century the Church of England had no other object than to preserve what she had won in the seventeenth century—that is to say, a monopoly of those endowments and privileges, which for the higher clergy meant a position of opulent and dignified idleness, and for the lower clergy a position of indigent and despicable idleness. As a body these men supported every reactionary measure, initiating no reform themselves, and opposing the reforms initiated by others. The great movement for the evangelisation of the people known as Methodism was carried out without their authority and against their wishes.

The universities whose wealth they monopolised were seats neither of learning, nor of research, nor of liberal culture. Controversial writings directed against rationalism were the most imposing clerical performances of the age; but of the two strongest apologists, one, Bishop Butler, had been bred a Dissenter, and the other, Archdeacon Paley, borrowed his arguments from a Dissenting divine, Dr. Lardner.

At the beginning of this chapter it was remarked that political liberty consists in two things—in the subjection of the Government to public opinion exercised through legal channels, and in the unhindered play of individual activity within the limits of mutual respect. Now the development of English individuality was great precisely because the governing powers were so feebly organised. It was this that, in the absence of any steady or coherent system of training and policy, gave England such original statesmen as Chatham, Clive, and Warren Hastings; such party leaders as Bolingbroke, Burke, and Fox; such generals as Marlborough, Peterborough, Clive, Coote, and Wolfe; such religious apostles as Law, Wesley, and Whitefield; such reformers as Bentham and Howard; such a historian as Gibbon; such philosophers as Berkeley, Hume, and Burke; such novelists as Richardson and Fielding; such a humorist as Sterne; such a critic of life as Johnson; such mechanical inventors as Brindley, Hargreaves, Arkwright, and Watt; such explorers as Cook, Bruce, and Mungo Park. On the Continent, also, the eighteenth century was a period of great

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individual initiative ; but, for one thing, in no Continental country did it attain such a diversified development as here ; and, for another thing, there also it owed much to political and social disorganisation, although of a different kind—the sub-division of Italy and Germany among many rulers, the growing contempt for all rule in France, the continual migration of eminent men from one country to another.

This last factor told also for much in the evolution of British genius and thought. Among English men of letters, Swift, Berkeley, Farquhar, Burke, Goldsmith, and Malone were born and educated in Ireland ; Steele, Sterne, Francis, and Sheridan were of Irish birth and English education. Toland, the founder of English Deism, was an Irishman of Scotch education ; Hutcheson, the founder of Scotch philosophy, was born in Ulster ; Hume spent his most studious years in France ; and if Adam Smith's six years' residence at Oxford not unnaturally prejudiced him against endowments, it saved him from Hume's prejudice against England ; Gibbon first found his true self at Lausanne ; Bentham was first revealed to his own countrymen through the French translations of Dumont, a Genevese refugee ; Smollett, the first novelist of the English navy, and Boswell, the devoted biographer of England's most characteristic worthy, were Scotchmen born and bred.

This expansion of the English intellect was not directed towards high or ideal ends. Discounting Scotland—whose achievements, belonging as they do to a distinct social organisation, should be

separately estimated—England in the eighteenth century shows conspicuous literary poverty as compared with what the preceding and following ages produced; while in science and philosophy, after the exhaustion of Newton's generation, there came a period of total sterility, followed by a period of gradual recovery due to foreign influences. When the revival comes, it is carried on by the labours of two distinguished amateurs, Cavendish and Priestley, neither of them occupying an official position, and of Sir William Herschel, who was not only an amateur but a foreigner. The last alone formed great and comprehensive views on the constitution of nature. Not until some years after the French Revolution did English men of science rise to the construction of truly philosophical explanations of phenomena.

When we compare this sterility of the higher English intellect with the contemporary achievements of Scotland, considered not merely in reference to the much smaller wealth and population of the northern kingdom, but absolutely, weight for weight; or, again, when we think of what was being done at the same time in France, formerly so far behind England—we cannot but seek for a general cause of the disparity in some difference of social conditions.

The decline of English science has been explained by a continued survival of theological bigotry, with which a further development would have brought it into direct collision. But theological prejudices were then more potent in Scotland and France than among ourselves; nor does there seem any reason why religious beliefs should be more

alarmed by further progress in the higher mathematics, or in physics, chemistry, and natural history, than they had been by the researches of Newton, Boyle, and Ray. Geology was destined to prove a more irreconcilable study; but the speculations of Buffon and Hutton on the subject do not seem to have been hampered by clerical opposition. Moreover, the great religious revival of the eighteenth century, so far from being associated with a further decline of English science, coincided, step by step, with its resuscitation.

We must look for the real cause among more material agencies. Ideal pursuits in general declined because the English intellect was diverted towards the creation and enjoyment of wealth. It was an era of vast territorial expansion, avowedly sought after with a view to the extension of commerce; of great mechanical inventions chiefly intended to facilitate manufacturing industry, of sweeping enclosures made in order to bring fresh soil under cultivation, of corresponding improvements in the means of communication and transport. In reference to this movement, it was no misfortune, but the contrary, that government should be so torpid, that individual initiative should have the freest play where it was most needed, that protectionist legislation should not be aggravated by misguided attempts to supervise the mechanism of industry. Even clerical inertness told as a negative condition of conquest. Clive and Hastings could never have accomplished their great work had a swarm of missionaries been sent out to rouse Oriental fanaticism against the rule of the Feringhees.

It had been believed in the seventeenth century that the new physical sciences imported from Italy and Germany would lead to an immediate and enormous increase of material wealth as well as to new triumphs over death and disease. Except for being premature, the expectation was right, but right only by accident. What Bacon really anticipated has never been accomplished; nor did Newton succeed in the great object of his studies, which was the transmutation of baser metals into gold. With the failure of such hopes English statesmen withdrew their interest from the investigations of the Royal Society. Probably their opinions in the matter are pretty faithfully reflected in Swift's account of the philosophers of Laputa, written, be it remembered, by one who had human well-being passionately at heart, and grudged every intellectual exercise not given to its promotion. But science had now reached a point where it could not be carried further without disinterested love of knowledge on the part of its professors, upheld by a like feeling on the side of the public, nor without considerable endowments from public or private sources. This truth is singularly illustrated by the lives of the only three savants that England for a long period had to show. Cavendish possessed enormous private means; Priestley was first the librarian and afterwards the pensioner of Lord Shelburne; Herschel owed the leisure needed for his observations to the munificence of George III. Maladministration of the public funds left nothing over for the promotion of liberal studies; and the universities, which should have been homes of research, had allowed their professorships to lapse

into sinecures for the additional sustenance of hard-drinking idle Fellows. To draw in as much wealth as possible in the shape of students' fees, and to give as little in exchange for it as possible, was the object of the ruling powers at Oxford and Cambridge. All pass-examinations were made easy, and young lords got their degrees without being examined at all. Scotland and Ireland, being much poorer countries, felt the need of qualifying men to work for their living, and therefore a much more efficient education was given in their universities.

The decline of literature presents a more difficult problem, and any explanations that are offered here must be taken merely as suggestions towards a possible solution. There was, first of all, as with philosophy, science, and scholarship, the diversion of creative genius into the more lucrative channels of politics, business, and mechanical industry, or, failing these, of parasitism on the holders of wealth and power with little taste for the disinterested activities of the spirit. There was, in the next instance, amid the general decline of authority, a most unhappy erection of authority where it was least to be desired—in the field of poetry. This invasion was due to the influence of France, which had set in with the Restoration. The facility and charm of French literature would in any case have made it attractive, and at this period its attractiveness was enormously enhanced by the absence of any rival except the classic literatures of Greece and Rome, which, so far from counteracting it, contributed to the same effect. For the French themselves were

enslaved to the classic tradition of Rome—that is, to the conventions of a literary school artificially brought into existence by the lessons of Greek rhetoricians and of Greek philosophy in its old age. Hence, poetry as expression was tied down to such monotonous metres as lent themselves most readily to the dictation of pedants; while poetry as ideas was made an instrument of instruction, indirectly as a satire on social vices, or directly as a series of elegant platitudes. And this petty didacticism overflowed, to its great detriment, into the realm of prose fiction, where the highest literary originality of the century had sought out a last refuge and defence.

One idea of Greek philosophy proved a saving element in this desert of pedantry and convention—the idea of Nature. It had been the master-thought of Stoicism; and on the downfall of Aristotelian Scholasticism the Stoics once more came to the front as leaders of European thought. Their “natural religion” became the fashionable form of theology, their appeal to nature the watch-word of morality, their dogma of natural rights, and more particularly the right to liberty, the rallying-cry of politics. In taste it took the form—at first not very sincere, but gradually growing more serious—of a preference for rural solitudes to crowded streets, bringing in the idyll as a competitor with the satire, the elegy, and the moral apologue in poetry; in painting, the landscape as a competitor with the portrait; in gardening, the wilderness as at least an adjunct to the trim parterre.

This worship of Nature led to an increased

interest in the common people—who were supposed to be in closer touch with her than the rich—and in uncivilised races; to the study of primitive literatures, chiefly as represented by ballad poetry; and to a re-interpretation of Homer, Shakespeare, and the Hebrew Scriptures as expressions of natural feeling. In this way also the Middle Ages came to attract increased attention, under the impression that simplicity and individuality flourished to a greater extent at that period than in more civilised times. But Romanticism, to call it by its later name, was not then the reactionary movement that it afterwards became when the consequences of the French Revolution threw men back on ideals dissociated from the application of reason to politics and religion. Nor did the mediævalising or Romantic movement at first place itself in conscious opposition to the study of Greek and Roman literature, however much its votaries may have revolted from the spurious classicism of their age. The two enthusiasms harmonised perfectly, the only innovation being a tendency to concentrate attention on the older and greater masters to the exclusion of their later imitators.

The great wave of enthusiasm that flooded English thought and feeling in the late thirties of the eighteenth century, bringing about the fall of Sir Robert Walpole and the rise of the elder Pitt, seems to have flowed partly from the combination of classical with romantic studies, so prominent also a little later in the poetry of Collins and of Gray. And parallel with this somewhat pagan movement we find the great Methodist

revival, less disconnected with it than might seem. For both involved an appeal to popular passion, a return to those primordial sources of inspiration whence the supreme political and religious leaders of other ages have derived their power.

The movement against convention in literature struggled fitfully for half a century before it could make any headway. The emotional and popular movement in religion was more successful. Outside the Church large masses were won over to Methodism. Inside the Church and the Nonconformist bodies, under the name of Evangelicalism, it commanded an ever-increasing number of adherents, and finally became associated with the agitation for the suppression of the slave trade—an agitation, however, first begun and then mainly carried on by the Quakers. The religious revival may also have had something to do with the efforts for prison reform made by Howard, himself a deeply religious character; but it is among the Unitarians rather than the Evangelicals that his chief coadjutors are to be found.

It was natural that English idealism, whatever its inspiration, should concentrate its opposition to English mammonism on the most criminal and scandalous iniquity that had been fostered by our unscrupulous greed. This was the African slave trade. As an important branch of British industry the traffic in human beings dates from the Peace of Utrecht (1713). By a special arrangement between the Crowns of England and Spain, it was then provided that English merchants should have the privilege of importing any number of negroes up

to 4,800 annually for thirty years into the Spanish-American colonies at a fixed duty per head, the profits being equally divided between the Kings of England and Spain. Under cover of this arrangement English goods were smuggled into Spanish territory to such an extent as to provoke a war between the two countries in 1739, when the allotted term had not yet expired. To make up for this deficiency it was provided by the Treaty of Aix la Chapelle that the trade should be resumed for four years more. After that we hear no more about the privilege of supplying slaves as the subject of an express stipulation with Spain. But meanwhile England's own North American colonies had come to provide a far more important market for human flesh, raising the export from Africa to an annual average of 20,000, and in a year of exceptional activity to 50,000.¹ The period following the American War of Independence showed a still further development, the annual average from 1783 to 1793 amounting to 74,000.² Of the number torn from their African homes, one in eight died on board ship; if it was desirable in the interests of the owners to lighten the cargo, they could legally be flung overboard like cattle.³ Of those who reached the West Indies seventeen per cent. "died in about nine weeks, and not more than fifty per cent. lived to become effective labourers in our islands."⁴ At the same time the

¹ Cunningham, *Growth of English Industry and Commerce: Modern Times*, p. 317.

² Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. vii., p. 366 (Cabinet ed.).

³ *Ibid*, p. 367.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 369.

continuous demand for slaves fomented savage wars between the tribes of the African Continent, reducing its inhabitants to a state of barbarism whence they have not yet recovered.

To our people at home the trade that caused such horrors was a subject of unmixed congratulation. It encouraged English shipping, bringing into the port of Liverpool alone a profit of nearly £300,000 a year.¹ "It took off a considerable amount of English manufactures"; and it conferred a still more considerable indirect benefit on our industry by discouraging the growth of manufactures in the colonies, the effect of slave labour being to confine their industry to planting, with the happy result also of preventing English mechanics from emigrating to North America.² Accordingly, when the colonies imposed a heavy duty on the importation of negroes, whose increasing numbers were inspiring them with just alarm, "the law was rescinded by the Crown."³

To discourage by such indirect measures the growth of manufacturing industry in America was not enough for the governing classes in England; when certain manufactures came into existence they were forcibly suppressed. The colonies were, indeed, permitted to manufacture pig and bar iron, for in so doing they helped to supply the home industry with the raw material at a cheaper rate; but it was provided that "no mill or other engine for rolling iron, or furnace for making steel, should be permitted."⁴ "The manufacture of hats was a flourishing trade, but it was rigorously put

¹ Lecky, vii., p. 366.
³ Lecky, iv., p. 43.

² Cunningham, p. 315.
⁴ Lecky, ii., p. 239.

down,"¹ and the exportation of woollen goods from one colony to another was also prohibited.² Their sea-borne trade, "so far as the most important articles were concerned, was limited to the British dominions."³ In Ireland the woollen and glass industries were effectually strangled by trade prohibitions imposed for the benefit of English manufacturers.

Neither in Ireland nor in America was this abuse of power due solely to the covetousness of private interests. It partly arose from the divided and disorganised state of the central Government. The English Parliament did not wish Ireland to prosper lest the Crown, by raising a large revenue from that kingdom, might become independent of their support. And neither Crown nor Parliament wished America to be self-supporting lest she should be enabled to break off her connection with the mother country. As a result of this mismanagement the colonies were lost, while Ireland was preserved only to become a source of future difficulty and danger.

Nowhere was the mingled weakness and strength of England so signally displayed as in her dealings with India. We owe the conquest and retention of that magnificent dependency to the free and enterprising spirit, so characteristic of the English genius, displayed by the servants of the East India Company. But India once won was nearly ruined, first by the unchecked greed of a horde of hungry adventurers suddenly let loose on her inhabitants,

¹ Cunningham, p. 329.

² *Ibid.*

³ Lecky, ii., p. 238.

then by the administrative chaos resulting from the transfer of party conflicts from London to Calcutta, by the imposition of English law and an English judicature on a people of wholly alien traditions, and a Government jealous of any competing authority, by a new system of landed ownership which converted Hindoo tax-farmers into the likeness of English country gentlemen. Practical unreason reached its climax in the impeachment of Warren Hastings. Hastings was a wise and beneficent ruler, sweet-natured in private life, and popular with the Hindoos. Yet Burke, the great denouncer of Jacobinism, under the stress of party politics anticipated the rant of Jacobin orators in their attacks on the tyrant Capet by reviling him as the common enemy of the human race.

Yet, mistaken as were the Whigs in singling out the greatest benefactor of the Empire for the object of their attack, the attack itself probably led to the better government of India. It certainly excited popular interest in the subject, and was inconsistent with the system of leaving things to take care of themselves.

The policy of letting things alone suffered a remarkable exception in the one case where it might with advantage have been followed; and the genius of the century found its happiest exercise in making war on commercial restrictions. Adam Smith showed in the *Wealth of Nations* that capital and labour were most profitably employed in the ways spontaneously chosen by the self-interest of the parties principally concerned in their application to the production of commodities. By

the simple action of economic causes every individual would be told off to do the work for which he was best fitted by nature; and similarly the inhabitants of every country would take to growing or manufacturing what it was best qualified by circumstances to yield; and an unfettered system of exchange would enable them to supply each other's wants in exact proportion to their respective demands.

Smith's economic theory fell in admirably with the traditions of English liberty as they had been organised by Locke, and justified, on unexpected grounds, the principle that government should be limited to the maintenance of national integrity, public order, and private faith. Where the theory failed was principally in accounting for Adam Smith himself. His book advocates the complete surrender of the higher education to private enterprise—which, according to him, has succeeded admirably in teaching women just what they ought to know—and yet, as a great thinker and teacher, he was essentially a product of the Scotch University system, still further developed by long residence at Oxford, and perfected by the tenure of a professor's chair at Glasgow; while Pitt, one of the first statesmen to put Smith's principles into practice, had been prepared for his great office by long years of studious seclusion at Cambridge.

As regards the education of the people, however, Adam Smith held other views. He considered that it ought not to be left to private enterprise, but that as a matter of public interest it should receive public assistance and direction. In Scotland the want was supplied by an excellent system of

parochial teaching; in England popular education took on a degrading character; and, although the charity schools begun under Queen Anne continued to multiply through the century, a name carrying with it such sordid and repulsive associations was little likely to attract the children of self-respecting parents. Elsewhere Protestantism had at least the good effect of diminishing illiteracy. In this country the division of authority among a number of rival religious bodies, while favourable to religious liberty, proved unfavourable to elementary instruction; indirectly because it weakened the Government, and directly because it fomented jealousies which prevented the different sects from agreeing on a common scheme. And a further obstacle was found in the plutocratic spirit, which deliberately opposed the education of the working classes on the plea that it would unfit them for the performance of manual labour. At a later period the governing classes feared that, if the newspapers were widely read, their own tenure of power would be less secure; while the clergy held, not without reason, that the diffusion of knowledge would be fatal to their Establishment.

As compared, however, with the institutions directly created by law for the benefit of the poor, the charity schools deserve nothing but praise. The system of parochial relief established under Elizabeth had become, from being left to itself, a most calamitous institution. It meant oppression and enslavement to the labourers, civil war under the form of costly litigation to adjoining parishes. For each parish, being chargeable with the maintenance of its poor, tried to shuffle the burden on

to its neighbours, with the result that the actions at law regarding settlements and removals previous to the reform of 1834 seldom cost less than from £300,000 to £350,000 a year.¹ A poor man was not allowed to migrate from the parish to which he belonged without a certificate from the parochial authorities, who could give or withhold it as they pleased. He could be forcibly removed from a parish where he had not obtained a settlement, even without becoming chargeable on the rates; nor could he marry without leave from the authorities. To prevent the growth of a pauper population cottages were pulled down and new ones were not allowed to be built. The aim of the overseer "was to depopulate his parish; to prevent the poor from obtaining a settlement; to make the workhouse a terror by placing it under the management of a bully; and by all kinds of chicanery to keep down the rates at whatever cost to the comfort and morality of the poor."²

The parochial system bred a regular slave trade. When the manufacturers wanted labour they got it from the workhouses in the shape of pauper children submitted to their inspection by the overseers, picked out to suit their requirements, and handed over to them "nominally as apprentices, but really as mere slaves, who got no wages, and whom it was not worth while even to feed or clothe properly, because they were so cheap, and their places could be easily supplied. It was often arranged by the parish authorities, in order to get

¹ McCulloch's edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, p. 65, note.

² Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, vol. i., pp. 91-2.

rid of the imbeciles, that one idiot should be taken with every twenty sane children."¹

All other victims of oppression throughout the Empire who could not help themselves found defenders or advocates in Parliament or in the Press. Voices were raised to plead the cause of the despoiled Hindoo, of the kidnapped African, of the outlawed Catholic, of the Colonial rebel; nor were they raised in vain. But for these little ones, for England's own orphan children, no justice or mercy was ever asked, no plea ever heard, no account ever taken, except indeed as an asset in the national wealth, to increase which they were tortured to death. In their brief passage from the squalid cradle to the nameless grave, without play-time, without Sunday,² as much as possible without sleep, they knew neither love nor light nor joy, nor any hope, except, perhaps, hope for the final and everlasting rest, of which they could not be deprived.

The economic principle of *laissez-faire* must not be made responsible for these abuses, nor yet the theory of natural law as opposed to artificial regulation; for nothing can be a greater infringement on individual liberty than making children work without wages, and nothing more unnatural than making them work for eighteen hours a day. Here and everywhere the root of the evil was that the State should abdicate those functions of supervision and control in whose absence delegated authorities are sure to degenerate into instruments of rapacious tyranny.

Bentham, Adam Smith's younger contemporary,

¹ H. de B. Gibbins, *Industry in England*, p. 389.

² *Ibid.*
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in some ways his disciple, and destined to absorb the whole movement started by the great Scotchman into his own school of social reform, was not, like him, a friend to popular liberty, but a Tory, and even an absolutist. This was due in part to early training, but still more to the bias given by his pursuits. His labours had for their object the recasting of England's whole civil and criminal jurisprudence, and he seems to have expected more help towards putting his schemes into execution from the power of the Crown than from the initiative of a governing Assembly. The examples of what had been done by Frederick the Great in Prussia, by Joseph II. in Austria, by Catherine II. in Russia, by Charles III. in Spain, by Pombal in Portugal, and of what might have been done with autocratic power by Turgot in France, were well fitted to encourage such a belief. At any rate, Bentham's sympathies went neither with the revolted colonists in America nor with the revolutionists in France. Late in life his hopes were fixed on a purely democratic legislature as the most promising instrument of reform; but he never believed, any more than Burke did, in liberty as a natural right, nor, indeed, in natural rights of any kind; and his passion for submitting human conduct to a system of minute regulation put him out of sympathy with the spirit of liberty as such. *Laissez-faire* had, in fact, no more than an accidental and transitory connection with Bentham's school; and we shall be prepared to recognise, against the general opinion, how much his disciples had to do with the great constructive and centralising reforms of a later day.

Before closing this chapter a few words must be added in reference to the great religious movement which had been in progress for fifty years before the French Revolution. In no sense a reaction against the Deism which preceded it, but rather an upheaval of popular ignorance and superstition through the upper crust of society, it was represented outside the Establishment by the two divergent sects of Methodism, and within the Establishment by what has been called the Evangelical succession, from John Newton to Henry Venn, in literature by Cowper, in politics latterly by Wilberforce. The movement was essentially pietistic—that is, it strove to draw off men's attention from the interests of the present life and of this world to the destinies that awaited them after death. Practically it made for a severe, almost ascetic morality, for charitable attention to sufferers, and for at least one act of public beneficence—the abolition of the slave trade. On the other hand, most of its leaders took the reactionary side in politics; while their frugal habits, by promoting the accumulation of capital, indirectly promoted that love of money for its own sake which had already proved so unfavourable to the higher idealism in England. Some of the Cambridge Evangelicals were scholars and mathematicians; but the approaching development of science, criticism, and literature in a sense opposed to the old dogmatic theology was certain to be strenuously resisted by their disciples. Already, indeed, faith and reason were tending to draw apart. John Wesley was grossly superstitious; Cowper's naturally large and liberal mind was thrown completely off its balance by a logical

application of his Calvinistic convictions. The highest intellect of England was becoming hostile or indifferent to what had nothing stronger than mysticism or tradition in its favour.

CHAPTER II.

THE GODS ARRIVE

THE first effect of the French Revolution on English society, when its full significance became appreciated, was to give all existing tendencies a more excited self-consciousness, a clearer appreciation of their true principles and ultimate goals. There had been for some time past a number of Englishmen who combined democratic politics with a philosophic theory of human progress and free-thinking views about religion. A few of them were opposed to the perpetuity of the marriage-bond. What was happening in Paris seemed to open out a more immediate prospect for the realisation of their ideals than could have been hoped before. From that moment English Radicalism, as a more or less definite creed and party, came into existence, and has continued active ever since. Their sympathy with the French people gave the Radicals a rallying-point and a sign for mutual recognition ; but it would be a mistake to suppose that they drew any peculiar inspiration from the ideas of Voltaire, of Rousseau, or of the Encyclopédists. Mary Wollstonecraft has been called a disciple of Rousseau, but in advocating the higher education and political enfranchisement of women she directly contravenes the teaching of his *Émile*. In theory the French Jacobinism founded on

Rousseau's *Contrat Social* stood for absolute government exercised by the numerical majority of the adult male population; in practice it stood for absolute government exercised by a small ring falsely claiming to represent the people. Godwin's *Political Justice*, on the other hand, is in some ways a gospel of anarchy without the constable; it altogether condemns coercion, and proposes that the business of society should be carried on entirely by reasoning, just as in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. In practice Godwin objected even to the party system in politics as an irrational surrender of one's own individual judgment to the control of others. Here we have the old spirit of English liberty asserting itself under an extreme form without a parallel in France, but preceded in Germany by a similar manifesto from the pen of Wilhelm von Humboldt.

A more opportune and practical result of the Revolution was a revival of the agitation for Parliamentary Reform. Chatham, to whom popular support meant everything, had long since proposed to place the representation of the people on a broader basis; and the younger Pitt had three times attempted to carry out his father's ideas, on the last occasion as Prime Minister at the head of a powerful following. But neither the King nor the majority of the House would support him; and the country seems to have been either indifferent or inert. His scheme involved no more than a redistribution of seats without any extension of the franchise. The Duke of Richmond had gone very much further, proposing universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, and annual Parliaments; and

the same extreme position was adopted on the ground of natural right by the democratic societies founded after the French Revolution.

Burke had argued passionately against Pitt's very moderate Reform Bill; the more advanced democratic theories almost threw him into hysterics. Dr. Price had compared the revolt of the French people against despotism with the expulsion of James II. from England a hundred years before. Not content with pointing out the very important points of contrast between the modes of action respectively adopted by the two nations on those occasions, Burke proceeded to lay down principles of political philosophy which would make all progress impossible, and certainly would not justify the methods by which the relation of the Church to the State and of the King to Parliament were finally reconstituted in England. While very properly repudiating theories of abstract right and replacing them by an appeal to expediency as the supreme arbiter in practical issues, he fails to see that there are times—and the time when he wrote was one of them—when revolutionary methods are alone expedient: because alone possible, as a means of deliverance from intolerable suffering. And he also fails to see that the appeal to natural rights, however fallacious in its absolute extension to all times and places, had at that particular crisis, nor at that alone, a relative justification on the narrowest grounds of expediency, as the only rallying-cry by which multitudes of famishing human beings could be brought together to act as one man.

The truth is that Burke looked on any attempt

to remodel the existing state of things as something very like an impious interference with the divinely appointed order of nature. Politically he had always been a Conservative. In standing up for the Whig families and their system of party government against the personal rule of George III., in resisting the imposition of imperial taxation on America, in upholding the immunities of the native Hindoo princes against Warren Hastings, his motive had been respect for established usage. And now this reverence for ancient prescription had gained strength by being brought into relation with his equally steadfast religious convictions. The appeal to natural right in France had been preceded by an appeal to the religion of nature against revelation, latterly passing into an appeal to natural science against supernatural theology in every form ; nor did it justify the Freethinkers in Burke's eyes that their attacks had been primarily directed against the Roman Catholic Church, for it had been the Church of his mother. The secularisation of Church property by the National Assembly had, in his opinion, been one of their worst crimes. To find the Revolution assuming a more and more anti-clerical aspect must have more and more confirmed his identification of democracy with atheism ; and the sympathy of the leading English Unitarians with France would illustrate the sinister tendencies of any departure from the traditional orthodoxy.

If the revolutionists, with their doctrine of abstract rights, were in what Auguste Comte calls the metaphysical stage of social science, Burke is still less advanced ; he remains in the theological

stage. The nearest approach to political Positivism had been made by Bentham with his doctrine of utility.

It may be said that prediction is the test of truth, and that Burke's principles were verified by the fact of their having enabled him to foretell the future course of the Revolution. But to anticipate the coming Terror and the final subjection of France to a military despot needed no extraordinary sagacity. The known character of the French people, read in conjunction with the lessons of Thucydides and Plutarch and the omens of 1789, were enough to suggest the most dismal prophecies of democratic excess ; while Cromwell's career was there as a warning to all men of what a violent revolution must necessarily bring about. And, in fact, before the *Reflections* appeared Lafayette, of all men, had been pointed to as the coming dictator.

To say that the fated enslavement of France when it came would be exceptionally rigorous, because every barrier to tyranny had been levelled by the National Assembly, was no doubt an acute observation. But in Burke's mouth it has only the merit of a new application. For Montesquieu had already said of the English that, if they once lost their liberty, no people on earth would be so enslaved, for want of those great ecclesiastical and legal corporations which in other countries were interposed between the sovereign and his subjects. In point of fact, the remark was quite untrue of England, and very imperfectly true of France. Napoleon only maintained his tyranny at the cost of continual wars ; and the same administrative

machinery in the hands of his successor proved quite insufficient to keep the spirit of liberty permanently under.

Where Burke was original, where he trusted to the guidance of his peculiar political philosophy, events proved him utterly wrong. So far from ruining France, the Revolution raised her within a few years to an unprecedented height of military power; within a generation her population had grown twenty-five per cent., with a more than proportionate augmentation of wealth—a rate of increase never known before; within two generations it inspired a literature and a philosophy richer and more splendid than that of her Augustan age. All who have read the *Reflections* will recognise how much the contrary of what Burke expected these results have been.

There is, however, a sense in which this great man may more truly be called a prophet, and truly transcended his age. He created Conservative philosophy—in other words, he constructed the theoretical barriers that have ever since been used to shut out political reforms of every kind. No other thinker has so well exhibited the subtlety, complexity, and obscurity of the forces by which societies are bound together, or the incalculable consequences to be expected from their paralysis; no one else has made more of the traditions by which the present is interwoven with and grows out of the past.

Burke also led the way in basing his hostility to democracy on the danger to property of a wide suffrage, and the necessity of property to the stability of society. But both he and his followers

erred by an imperfect appreciation of what they saw. The forces of social cohesion are too strong to lie at the mercy of revolutionists, as France soon proved by recovering her unity and balance far more quickly than after the troubles of the sixteenth century, when religion reigned supreme. The security of private property, too, has proved much greater and much more independent of political organisation than Burke imagined. The propertied classes have shown a singular knack of coming to the top after every revolution and under every form of government; while the wide diffusion of landed property among the community, where it has been effected, seems to make for rather than against the conservative spirit.

Another achievement of Burke's was to capture the Romantic movement for Conservatism, to associate the maintenance of existing institutions with a distrust of modern civilisation, a reactionary enthusiasm for the ideals of mediæval chivalry. There had till then been no such association. Walpole, a leader in the Romantic movement, was a Whig; and its great enemy, Johnson, a Tory of modern tastes. The Revolution, as a revolt against mediæval institutions, tended to unite all mediæval sympathies in an alliance against it.

Among the replies to Burke, Mackintosh's *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* won great celebrity for its author at the time, but is now never read, and only remembered as an instance of his political instability, for in a few years he became a convert to Burke's philosophy, and before the end of the

century was attacking with extreme violence in his public lectures what he conceived to be the principles of the Revolution. Mackintosh was pre-eminently a historical scholar, and his favourite studies had supplied him with two guiding ideas. One was the essential mutability of all human institutions; the other was the relative adaptation of all institutions to the circumstances in which they have originated. It will be observed that this is merely a more specific way of saying that institutions are evolved in response to the conditions of their environment; and, in fact, we owe to this writer the famous aphorism that constitutions are not made, but grow. It is said to have done the cause of Continental liberty incalculable harm, and certainly, if taken literally, would have destroyed it. The analogy between institutions and organisms does not really go very far; and, where they differ, institutions are immeasurably the more adaptable of the two. The reason is very simple: societies of human beings are capable of re-arranging their structures in conscious accord with the lessons of experience, and especially they have a power of conscious imitation which plants and animals have not. Representative government and trial by jury may or may not be good things, but, at any rate, they are easy things to copy, and actually have been copied by nations from whose traditions they were widely removed—sometimes receiving improvements from the imitator which might be advantageously adopted by the original model. All imitations, to be successful, imply, of course, a certain degree of civilisation on the part of those who adopt them; and it may be truly said of certain

communities that they are not fit for self-government as we understand it; but it might be said of others with equal truth that they are not fit for steam engines, which nevertheless it would be absurd to count among the things that are not made, but grow.

Mackintosh preserves so much of his early Liberalism as to make liberty the object of all government.¹ But then he defines liberty as security against wrong. In this way he keeps up the metaphysical illusion of his opponents under a more confused form. They made liberty a right; he turns rights into modes of liberty. Oddly enough, with his historical view of government pushed, as we have seen, to the extreme of evolutionary conservatism, he combines the genuinely metaphysical notion that there are no discoveries in morality, instancing in support of his position the Pentateuchal legislation, which accepts slavery, polygamy, and blood revenge as things of course. What he wanted was probably to form a coalition of moralists in all ages against the excesses of the Revolution.

Notwithstanding its inauspicious title, Thomas Paine, in his pamphlet on *The Rights of Man*, is sometimes more modern-minded than either Burke or Mackintosh. The first part of that work is chiefly occupied with a historical vindication of the French people, and does not concern us here. The second part is an argument for abolishing the English monarchy and putting a republic in its

¹ *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. i., p. 372.

place—an utterly impracticable proposal, and more likely at that time to hamper than to help the cause of reform. Paine had done much by his other great pamphlet, *Common Sense*, to persuade the American colonists to organise themselves as an independent republic; and on the occasion of Louis XVI.'s flight to Varennes he had vainly urged the French people to follow their example. The good effect of taking his advice in the one case, and the bad effect of not taking it in the other, may have inspired him with too much confidence in his favourite panacea. After all, Burke and Pitt were still more fatally blind to political realities when they tried to destroy the new French Government by force of arms.

Apart from cheap criticism, the interesting thing is to note what was Paine's idea of government, irrespective of its form. "It is," he tells us, "nothing more than a national association; and the object of this association is the good of all, as well individually as collectively. Every man wishes to pursue his occupation and to enjoy the fruits of his labour and the produce of his property in peace and safety, and with the least possible expense. When these things are accomplished all the objects for which governments ought to be established are answered."¹ The phrase "fruits of labour" is open to conflicting interpretations, and is understood by some who have adopted it in the sense of a collectivist organisation of industry. But this is very unlikely to have entered Paine's thoughts; so far we may class him as an individualist like

¹ *Rights of Man*, Part II., p. 60 (first ed.).

Mackintosh. Nevertheless, his criticisms on the actual Government of England, and still more his suggestions for its reform, imply a strong leaning to what would now be called socialism. It is, he complains, "so absorbed by foreign affairs and the means of raising taxes that it seems to exist for no other purpose. Domestic concerns are neglected; and with respect to regular law there is scarcely such a thing."¹ "When we see old age going to the workhouse and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government."² "Civil government does not consist in executions, but in making that provision for the instruction of youth and the support of age as (*sic*) to exclude, as much as possible, profligacy from the one, and despair from the other."³

Accordingly he proceeds to offer a scheme for old-age pensions, and another for universal elementary instruction; the cost to be provided by an enormous reduction in the present establishment, and by a progressive income-tax on landed property, amounting, in the case of large estates, to something like fifty per cent. The needs of elementary education are to be met by a truly English system of subsidies; that is, by a grant of so much per child, with orders to the parish officials to see that it is sent to school. On the other hand, no provision is made for schools or teachers. A few old people in every village will readily come forward to meet the new demand, and will be perfectly qualified for the office.⁴

Paine was prosecuted for high treason, and in all

¹ *Rights of Man*, p. 56.

² P. 90.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ P. 132.

probability only escaped death by a timely retreat to France. He was tried in his absence by a special jury, found guilty, and outlawed. But by the end of the following year (1793) 200,000 copies of the *Rights of Man* had been sold; and the number would probably have been much greater had not the sale been made penal.

With the execution of Louis XVI. a royalist reign of terror began in England, having for its object to suppress the utterance of liberal opinions in print or even by word of mouth. John Frost, an attorney, exclaimed in a public room: "I am for equality and no King!" He was tried, found guilty, sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Newgate, to stand for one hour in the pillory at Charing Cross, and to find security for his good behaviour for five years; his name was also struck off the roll of attorneys. The part of the sentence relating to the pillory was not executed—according to Frost himself, from fear of the populace. "William Winterbotham, a Dissenting minister at Plymouth," was alleged to have "preached two sermons in which he instructed his auditory that the laws were not equal, the application of public money corrupt and vicious; that the people of this country had as much right as those of France to stand up for their liberty; that the King had no title to the throne any more than the Stuarts had, and that it was time for the people to come forward in defence of their rights." Several persons swore that they were present and heard no such words; nevertheless, the preacher was found guilty, and sentenced to be fined £200 and to be imprisoned for four

years.¹ This was in 1793. In the following year Horne Tooke and several other persons were prosecuted for high treason, substantially on the ground that they belonged to a society for obtaining Parliamentary reform; but juries could not be got to find them guilty.

Other methods of coercion were then adopted, placing the right of public meeting, and even the right to open reading-rooms and circulating libraries, under magisterial control; while the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act from 1794 to 1800 enabled the Government to imprison its critics for any length of time without a trial, and to treat them, "when in confinement, with shameful severity."² "The stamp and advertisement duties were increased; more stringent provisions made against unstamped publications; and securities taken for ensuring the responsibility of printers."³ "Printers and booksellers all over the country were hunted out for prosecution."⁴ In order to procure evidence against the reformers, "society was everywhere infested with espionage";⁵ a watch being set even on the metaphysical conversations of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

In Scotland the policy of repression was exercised with much greater severity, four persons being sentenced to fourteen years', and a fifth to seven years', transportation, because they had agitated for Parliamentary reform. Pitt gave it as his opinion that the judges would have been highly culpable

¹ Adolphus, *History of England*, vol. v., pp. 528-9.

² Buckle, *History of Civilisation in England*, vol. i., p. 449 (2nd ed.).

³ May, *Constitutional History of England*, vol. ii., p. 172.

⁴ Buckle, p. 447. ⁵ May, p. 289.

had they shown more lenity to the prisoners, and the House of Commons approved of their conduct by an enormous majority.

At this time the men who ruled England seem to have become animated by an actual love of slavery as such. This is no metaphor, no exaggeration. Begun in 1787, the movement for abolishing the slave-trade had gained the approval of George III.; the question was brought before Parliament at the suggestion of Pitt, who powerfully supported abolition, and resolutions in its favour were passed by a unanimous vote in 1789. But in the spring of 1791 it was rejected in the House of Commons by a majority of two to one, and by the end of the year "the King had become strongly opposed to a measure which would be approved by the Jacobins. His opposition made it impossible that the question should be taken up by the Ministry."¹ Besides the unfortunate fact that the Jacobins disapproved of the slave-trade, a negro insurrection in San Domingo helped to complicate the situation. Any reasonable human being would have looked on this incident as an additional argument against a system that went to increase the servile population of the West Indies; and it was accordingly pressed in that sense by Wilberforce. The general effect, however, was to "cool public feeling on the subject, and Pitt's zeal manifestly declined."² His colleagues, Dundas, Thurlow, and Jenkinson, showed zeal enough—but it was zeal for the trade; and in the House of Lords the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV., stood foremost

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. lxi., p. 211.

² Lecky, vol. v., p. 341.

among those who fought against its abolition. The usual arguments urged for the continuance of man-stealing were regard for the commercial prosperity of England, and that other nations would take up the trade if we abandoned it. To which Fox replied that no gain would justify such a crime, and that highway robbery might be defended on the same plea. For their final victory the abolitionists were indebted to him, although it was not won till after his death. It might have been indefinitely postponed had Pitt lived ; and, as it was, the trade more than doubled under his administration.

It is the chief glory of Pitt's life that he was most unwilling to engage in a war with revolutionary France, and only entered on it under compulsion. How that compulsion ultimately took effect still remains a controverted question—whether it came more from the reactionary fanatics of England, or from the regicidal fanatics of the Convention ; or from neither of these, but from a blindly disastrous combination of circumstances. But it is beyond doubt that the first provocation came from Burke ; that Burke wished for war long before it was declared, and that, once begun, he wished it to be carried on until the Republic was destroyed. And it is equally certain that Pitt, when he consented to fight, fought, at least ostensibly, against what he called Jacobinism in the same spirit of implacable hostility as Burke, one of his ablest colleagues, Windham, holding that the restoration of the Bourbons was the object of the war.¹

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. lxii., p. 174.

An Irish rebellion, provoked by the incompetence and mismanagement of the English oligarchy, occurred in 1798, and was put down with a severity accompanied by every circumstance of indiscriminating atrocity. True, these horrors were inflicted on Irish victims by Irish ruffians; but they were condoned by Pitt and the King. Lord Moira brought the matter twice before the House of Lords. "The Government refused to credit his account, or to interfere with the measures taken by the Irish Ministers to suppress the rebellion."¹ Two years later the very limited amount of self-government that Ireland possessed was taken from her by the lavish use of corruption, coupled with a promise of Catholic emancipation, which was not fulfilled.

Thus England, after taking rank fifty years before as the most glorious representative of European liberty, seemed at the end of the eighteenth century to have become its most determined foe, at home and abroad, in its highest developments and in its most elementary forms, lending to the cause of its oppression what had begun as the most potent instruments of its maintenance and extension—the supreme eloquence of Burke and the supreme energy of Pitt.

Immunity from resistance or criticism, concentration of all the national resources under one hand, and command of unprecedented wealth, had not created military power, nor given our aristocracy victory in the field. Warfare by subsidised coalitions did as

¹ *The Political History of England, 1760-1800*, p. 406.

little for the destruction of the enemy abroad as government by the corrupt management of competing interests did for the instruction of the people at home. Prussia took Pitt's money, and deserted him to secure her share in the partitionment of Poland. Austria took it, and fought his battles without success, until the more substantial bribe of Venetia reconciled her to an ignominious peace. As to the English troops, it is enough to say that they were placed under the command of the Duke of York, an utterly incapable general, for no better reason than that he was the King's son. When at last Pitt insisted on his supersession, George III. declared himself "very much hurt."¹ We shall see later on what sort of figure His Royal Highness made as Commander-in-Chief.

An abler commander than the Duke could perhaps not have done much better with the materials at his disposal. The officers were uneducated and the men undisciplined. It is remarkable that the only two generals who much distinguished themselves during the first French War—Sir Ralph Abercrombie and Sir John Moore—were both Scotchmen and both trained abroad. They divide the glory of having restored the old traditions of the British army and prepared the way for its Peninsular triumphs.

During the same period five great victories at sea carried England's naval reputation to the highest pitch it had yet reached, rivalling the glories of the French army, and showing Nelson

¹ *Political History, ut supra, p. 362.*

as the first sailor even more indisputably than Napoleon is the first soldier in history. Naval warfare, perhaps more than any other field, offers an opportunity for the exercise of that individuality which English liberty has done so much to develop, and of which Nelson is a supreme example. Nor was liberty alone the secret of our victories. The same democratic principle that made her rival so successful by land made England equally successful by sea—the principle of *la carrière ouverte aux talents*. Of our naval heroes Howe alone was nobly born; the Hoods and Jervis were middle-class men; Nelson, Collingwood, and Duncan came of good but untitled families, English or Scotch. The hardships of a sea life acted as a tolerably effective barrier in keeping out the idle, luxurious, and brainless young gentlemen by whom the other services used to be infested. But the Admiralty was in aristocratic hands, and its maladministration provoked a mutiny in the fleet which, occurring at a critical moment, put the existence of the Empire in peril.

Those years of oppression and military disaster were signalised by an extraordinary revival of British literature and science. Since the close of the American War very few books of permanent value had been written by Englishmen; and those who wrote what is still held to be worth reading were rather the survivors of an old than the inaugurators of a new time. "Poetry," as Macaulay observes, "had fallen into such utter decay that Hayley was thought a great poet." In fiction Fanny Burney passed for a prodigy.

English science was almost concentrated in Priestley, and was almost wrecked in the destruction of his books and apparatus by a Church-and-King mob. English philosophy, what little there was of it, lay buried in the manuscripts of Bentham. The Revolution seemed at first sight likely to increase this alienation from imaginative and speculative interests, in its commencement by offering the spectacle of a drama with which no fiction could compete, and in its later developments as the cause of agonising terrors for what so great a portent might bring forth. Only when those early hopes were dashed and those premature alarms appeased did the stimulus begin to take effect, and the energies that found no practical outlet begin to be turned into the channels of ideal emotion.

All the chief animating tendencies of what was to be the new literature had been at work long before 1789. A revived romanticism, noticed with alarm by Shaftesbury, had already begun under Queen Anne. There was genuine observation of nature in Thomson, enthusiasm for Greece in Collins, sense of reality in Cowper; all these together, combined with a new curiosity about Northern sagas, in Gray. The fertile *motif* of foreign travel had been successfully cultivated by Goldsmith. Yet these velleities of innovation, after a more or less prolonged struggle, had succumbed to the tyranny of convention; and even in Cowper, or rather most of all in Cowper, the didactic had reasserted its sway.

Sympathy with American freedom did something to loosen the conventional yoke, but only the French Revolution could finally break it. The

first tendency to profit by the release was Romanticism. In this instance, however, the French influence was not unmixed; republican ideas associated themselves more readily with Hellenic than with mediæval traditions. But it so happened that the first revelation of German literature came to England simultaneously with the first enthusiasm for France's political regeneration. At that time Unitarians either took the lead or followed closely on every new departure. William Taylor, of Norwich, who belonged to a Unitarian set, was the first Englishman to make a systematic study of German poetry, while also making himself prominent in the proceedings of the Revolutionary Society, a mildly Jacobin body. His translation of Bürger's *Lenore* (1790) first fully awoke the genius of Scott. Another young Englishman, Matthew Lewis, after learning German at seventeen, visited Weimar and was introduced to Goethe in 1792. Two years later he read Schiller's *Robbers*, and wrote a romantic story called *The Monk*. Visiting Edinburgh in 1798, he met Scott, encouraged him to translate from the German, and found him a publisher. Lewis himself had been stimulated by Ann Radcliffe's romance, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Both this and its successor, *The Italian*, won enormous popularity, and bear witness to the sudden revolution in taste. Blake's *Poetic Sketches*, published in 1783, are deeply penetrated with the romantic spirit; but their complete failure at the time shows how much the Revolution had to do with their ultimate success. Blake himself sympathised ardently with the Revolution, and his best poetic work, the

Songs of Experience, was evidently produced under its inspiration.

If by romanticism we are to understand the excitement of emotion by the imaginative presentation of extraordinary events, more particularly those of a really or apparently supernatural character, then unquestionably the chief, or rather the only, great poet of the school at its first beginning was Coleridge. On him the action of the French Revolution was intense, while the influence of German literature, as poetry, seems to have counted for nothing; for, though he read and admired Schiller's *Robbers* in an English translation, it can hardly have left a trace on the development of his genius. When he visited Germany it was to study not literature, but philosophy; and his most vital work in poetry was done before he went there, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan* having all been written in 1797. It may be noticed also in this connection that the first literary result of Coleridge's residence in Germany, his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, had no success with the English public until several years later, no doubt because its classic form seemed out of keeping with the prevalent romantic taste.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were at first closely united by mutual admiration, by a common enthusiasm for the Revolution, by common studies in philosophy, and by a common dislike for the school of Pope; moreover, their association in the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* gave an impression that they represented a common literary movement. This, however, was a mistake; and, in fact, their

poetic methods were widely different. Realism is not romance, and Wordsworth was a realist. He took up and carried to a much higher power the naturalist current of eighteenth-century poetry; that is, the direct representation of elementary feeling, and of the scenes where such feeling is most freely displayed, depicted by preference under their most enduring aspects. And for this choice of subject and method French influence is to be thanked. The Revolutionists had sought to carry Rousseau's gospel of nature into effect; and when their aspirations were or seemed to be defeated, nature remained as an ideal refuge until the return of better times.

By a remarkable coincidence, the year 1797, which saw the publication of Ann Radcliffe's second great romance, *The Italian*, saw also the completion of Jane Austen's masterpiece, *Pride and Prejudice*, swiftly followed by *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, although not one of the three appeared in print until several years later. Of these novels the last-named is a direct protest against romanticism; and the same animus is present, although slightly veiled, in the second also. All three are reproductions, so far as they go, of actual contemporary life. No one would accuse Miss Austen of being a revolutionist; yet without the Revolution I question whether these novels would have been written. Her style is correct and temperate, but also to an extraordinary degree curt, direct, and trenchant. The epithets "exquisite" and "delicate" have been consecrated to her service with a stupid monotony which seems to show that the critics have failed to

recognise what is still more characteristic—her energy and decision. The word of command from the lips of a Nelson or an Arthur Wellesley could not be more peremptory or to the point. She breathes the air of a new time, demanding the swiftest resolutions in council, the most unwearied fortitude in execution. There is energy enough in the imperious self-assertion of Elizabeth Bennet and the headlong passion of Marianne Dashwood to furnish out a hundred heroines of later English fiction. And, with all Miss Austen's contempt for the vulgar *bourgeoisie*, there is something in the victory of Elizabeth over Darcy, as long afterwards in the victory of Fanny Price over the Crawfords and Bertrams, suggesting the rise of a new power before which the aristocracy of birth was destined to succumb.

Maria Edgeworth belongs to the same period as Jane Austen, and, like her, represents an intenser development of the earlier realism entering into rivalry with romance, illustrated by the same qualities of energy and decision in style. Her name has become identified with a didactic tendency characteristic of the whole century that gave her birth. But that tendency had also been powerfully stimulated by the Revolution, and is found mingling strangely with the visionary raptures of Blake and Coleridge no less than with the philosophic reveries of Wordsworth. One of the *Songs of Experience* is about a little sweep; *The Ancient Mariner* is a protest against field sports, *Peter Bell* a plea for humanity to the most despised and ill-treated of domesticated animals. Such teachings have obviously democratic affinities; and, as if to

point the contrast with aristocratic fashions, Windham, the model of an English gentleman, defended bull-baiting in Parliament.

The period from the Revolution to the Peace of Amiens is no less rich in scientific than in literary promise. Those years saw the first public appearance of Dalton, who constituted meteorology as a science, and to whom we owe the theory of atomic equivalents which is the basis of modern chemistry; of Davy, who analysed the alkalis into their elements, and proved by experiment the dynamic nature of heat; of Young, who discovered the phenomenon of optical interference, thereby placing the undulatory theory of light on an experimental basis; of William Smith, who founded stratigraphy by his laborious geological survey of England and Wales, and fixed its method by using the fossils found in rocks as a means of determining their relative antiquity. It was also in the middle of this period (1794-6) that Erasmus Darwin published his *Zoonomia*, in which Lamarck's theory of organic evolution is anticipated. Finally, the foundation of the Royal Institution, which gave Davy and Young an opportunity for expounding their great discoveries to popular audiences, falls in the year 1797.

It is to be observed that the English scientific work of the new age not only exceeds what had gone before it in amount, but also, and to a still greater extent, in quality. Cavendish and Priestley count only as discoverers of isolated facts, Priestley even remaining all his life obstinately wedded to a false chemical theory. Dalton, Davy, and Young were