

ultimately depends on what they know ; and, just as political economy studies the laws governing the accumulation and distribution of wealth, so the scientific historian of civilisation has to study in what ways knowledge is acquired and diffused.

We cannot tell how Buckle would have worked out this part of his great scheme, for he did not live to finish even the General Introduction to his *History*. But the book, so far as it goes, contributed very powerfully to the emancipation of English thought from theological prejudices. Here he falls in with the whole trend of modern English historiography. Without concert and without any hint at a common purpose, Dr. Arnold, Carlyle, Grote, Macaulay, Milman, and Froude had all been waging war against the fashionable Romanticism, the Oxford Movement, and Young England. But so far a smug Protestantism had been permitted to reap the fruit of their labours. Now, Buckle made no secret of his opinion that, so far as bigotry and superstition went, there was little to choose between the Catholic and Protestant Churches. It is already prominent in his first volume ; while the second, published four years later (1861), illustrates it from beginning to end, Spain and Scotland being made to furnish examples of the ills wrought by priestly domination under widely contrasted forms of theological belief.

Buckle had a profound faith, resting, apparently, on no very logical grounds, in God and a future life ; and in his first volume he showed a dislike, amounting to intolerance, of their open denial. Mill, who personally rejected all theology, although



he considered that a fairly good case might be made out for what is called "natural religion," strongly objected to having an embargo laid on its public discussion. To secure this right, it was not enough, in his opinion, that all the legal restrictions on its exercise should be repealed. Alexis de Tocqueville had put into currency a telling phrase, "The tyranny of the majority"; and Mill well knew that such tyranny could make itself felt without any appeal to mob violence. His most popular work, the essay *On Liberty*, published in 1859, has for its object to define the limits beyond which social restraint on the sayings and doings of the individual should not be pushed. According to him, liberty of discussion should be absolute; while liberty of action should be allowed where the actions are purely self-regarding—that is, where the interests of the agent, or of the agents in cases where different persons agree in a common line of conduct, are alone concerned.

Evidently we have here also, as in the case of Buckle and the evolutionists, a generalisation of the economic principles associated with Bentham's school. Bentham himself had no love for liberty or individuality as such, and would not have objected to making people happy without asking their leave, if the thing could be done. Nor does Mill, at least avowedly, claim individual liberty as an indefeasible right. He argues for it as a means, and the best means, for securing the happiness of the community. Nevertheless, it looks as if he had inherited a certain metaphysical bias in favour of liberty as such, which made him more sensible to the utilitarian arguments on its side than to



those that might have been urged on the opposite side.

A hard-and-fast line between society and the units of which it is composed cannot, in fact, be drawn; and, therefore, no general law of liberty can be laid down. With such an imitative animal as man, an action, to be strictly self-regarding, must also be strictly private, and so by its very nature withdrawn from the cognisance of others. Various vices of a purely self-regarding character may, of course, be very effectually prevented by not allowing the means for indulging in them to be sold. But, on self-defensive principles, society is surely justified in shielding its members against temptation; and Mill himself seems to admit this in discussing the ethics of public-house legislation, and the expediency of prohibiting the pandar's trade.

In his argument against religious intolerance Mill occupies much firmer ground, though not all of it is of equal value; and the question of whether or not it is desirable to sanction the education of children in beliefs generally rejected by the educated classes remains untouched. Like most Benthamites, he was against having religion of any kind taught at the public expense.

Mill's claim of the right to question every dogma of religion, even the most fundamental, made at least one illustrious convert in the person of Buckle, who wrote an enthusiastic review of the essay *On Liberty*, and, contrary to the strong language used in his own first volume, expressed his readiness to consider patiently anything that could be said against his own belief in a future life. He also



took the opportunity of denouncing Sir John Coleridge for an oppressive sentence passed on a poor man, found afterwards to be insane, for scribbling some blasphemous expressions on a gate. Holyoake, who supplied Buckle with the information on which he wrote, afterwards admitted that his version of the case was not absolutely correct. At the same time, it remains true that there was a gross miscarriage of justice, directly due to religious prejudice, and that Buckle performed a great public service by exposing it. His conduct, according to Holyoake, "is the only example of a gentleman coming forward in that personal way to vindicate the right of free thought in the friendless and obscure."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile a devoted band of scholars were struggling to secure the right to free thought where hitherto it had been held not to exist—that is, among the clergy of the Established Church. We have already seen how, towards the middle of the century, a freethinking movement, which had been gaining ground during the whole previous decade, suddenly burst into public notice. All through the 'fifties a number of writers, representing every shade of advanced opinion, from liberal Christianity to something not very distinguishable from atheism, kept up a fire of criticism on the current religious beliefs. Among others, James Martineau, the foremost Unitarian divine of the century, made himself conspicuous by articles, contributed to the *Westminster* and *National Reviews*, exposing the weakness of clerical apologies

<sup>1</sup> G. J. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. ii., p. 96.



for the old dogmas, and introducing the revolutionary Biblical criticism of Germany to English readers. But the most telling assaults were delivered within the pale of the Establishment itself. A band of clergymen, collectively known as the Broad Church, although some of them earnestly repudiated the name, kept the attention of religious circles on the stretch by the audacity of their speculations, sometimes uttered even in the pulpit. F. W. Robertson, the most powerful of English preachers after Dr. Newman, and F. D. Maurice, the most profound of Anglican theologians, made themselves the organs of a semi-mystical religion, whose positive significance remained much less intelligible than its sharp antagonism to the dogmas of Original Sin and the Atonement, as held by Catholic and Calvinist alike. Maurice, in particular, gave a new interpretation to the Christian doctrine of damnation, which seemed to hold out some hope of final redemption to the lost; but he had to pay for being so far in advance of his age by the surrender of his professorship at King's College, London. However, Maurice's friend and disciple Kingsley continued to preach his gospel, unmolested, to rural congregations in Somerset.

Soon the neology of the cloister, as it was called, far outran the neology of the pulpit. It flourished at Oxford, and most of all in the most intellectual of Oxford Colleges, Balliol, whose then Tutor and future Master, Benjamin Jowett, already passed for being an "infidel" in 1851. In 1855 he edited some of St. Paul's Epistles, with accompanying essays in which his gift for subtle and daring speculation found the freest exercise. Not only



were the current doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement unsparingly dissected, but the hollowness of the stock arguments for Theism was exposed by a few dexterous punctures. His orthodox opponents revenged themselves by compelling him to sign the Thirty-nine Articles on being appointed Greek Professor, and, less excusably, by defeating for several years a proposal for the better endowment of his chair. In this and other ways it was attempted to crush out liberal theology in the Universities.

As a protest against this repressive system, seven liberal theologians issued a collective manifesto of their opinions in the shape of a volume entitled *Essays and Reviews*. All but two of the contributors were Oxford men, and all but one, Charles Goodwin, were clerics. Professor Baden Powell, already mentioned as one of the earliest champions of evolution, sent the most advanced of all the essays. He had recently published a volume on *The Order of Nature*, almost openly denying the possibility of miracles; and of that volume his paper is a simple summary, with the addition of a triumphant reference to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which had appeared in the interim. Next to this in importance ranks a review of Bunsen's *Biblical Researches* by Professor Rowland Williams, a Cambridge Hebraist with the Cambridge directness of speech. Without endorsing in all particulars the views of his German guide, Williams intimates pretty plainly that the Bible contains no supernatural predictions, that much of its history is inauthentic, and not all of its morality immaculate. Bunsen's pantheistic



interpretation of the most essential Christian dogmas is also quoted with manifest complacency. H. B. Wilson, who had acted as the informal editor of the volume, practically denies the claim of Christianity to be taken in any exclusive sense as a divine revelation; while Temple, the future Primate, points out that the doctrine of immortality seems to have been discovered without any supernatural aid by the Persians, and borrowed from them by the Jews. The volume closes with a long essay by Professor Jowett, *On the Interpretation of Scripture*, the drift of which is that, if the Bible were read like any other book, much of its supposed dogmatic teaching would melt into air.

A policy of discreet silence in official circles nearly caused *Essays and Reviews* to fail of its intended effect, which was to excite discussion and controversy. Not until ten months after its publication was attention drawn to what had been done. An article in the *Westminster Review* for October, 1860, written by Mr. Frederic Harrison, the future Positivist leader, emphasised with passionate eloquence the true inwardness of the manifesto, at the same time inviting the Essayists to abandon their futile attempts at a compromise between the old beliefs and the new. Bishop Wilberforce followed suit with an article in the *Quarterly Review*, accepting the *Westminster* estimate of the Essayists, but denouncing them as traitors to Christian truth. At his suggestion, also, the whole Bench of Bishops joined in a public protest against the volume. Finally, Arthur Stanley, himself an advanced but extremely reticent Broad Churchman, summed up the situation in the *Edinburgh Review*



with that sort of impartiality which consists in distributing more or less scathing censures all round, his own personal friends Temple and Jowett being alone excepted from the general condemnation.

All these discussions excited public interest to the highest pitch, and the printing-presses could barely keep pace with the demand for a book supposed to have shaken Christianity to its foundations.

Baden Powell, the most advanced Rationalist of the band, had died soon after the publication of *Essays and Reviews*. Of the five remaining clerical contributors only two, Williams and Wilson, had laid themselves open to any tangible charge of heresy, and these two, as it happened, were also beneficed clergymen. They were prosecuted before the Court of Arches, and acquitted on all but a few counts of the accusation. On this occasion the Judge decided that a clergyman might, consistently with his ordination vows, deny the historical accuracy or the moral soundness of any passage in the Bible. On the points where his judgment went against them, Williams and Wilson appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and obtained a reversal of the adverse sentence in every particular. Of the issues finally decided in their favour the most important related to the eternity of future punishment. The supreme tribunal declared, by the mouth of Lord Chancellor Westbury, that the formularies of the Church were not sufficiently distinct to warrant the condemnation of a clergyman who hoped for the ultimate salvation of the sinner.



Dr. Pusey and his Evangelical allies were less charitably disposed. They drew up a declaration of belief in Scriptural infallibility and the eternity of hell, which every clergyman was invited "for the love of God" to sign. Less than half of those in holy orders responded to this touching appeal; and few names carrying much authority figured in the list.

For those to whom faith means the negation of reason the occasion offered by Pusey must have seemed singularly well-timed. Not long before his declaration was circulated the untrustworthiness of various Biblical statements had been mathematically demonstrated by a missionary Bishop, who was also the greatest living authority on arithmetic. While the foremost German and Dutch Hebraists were exhausting their ingenuity in trying to discover how many distinct documents had been laid under contribution by the compilers of the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua, Dr. Colenso felt himself impelled by the naïve appeal of a Zulu convert to investigate the more elementary question, Are they true? A novice in the higher criticism, he at that time merely knew that geology had done much towards demolishing the first chapters of Genesis as genuine history. But a few months' labour led him to more destructive conclusions than all his predecessors put together had made good in two hundred years. What was more damaging to the credit of the priestly historians whose work has come down to us under the names of Moses and Joshua than their too literal acceptance of ancient mythical cosmogonies, it



appeared, from the Bishop's statistical method of criticism, that they had been guilty over and over again of deliberate fabrication, committed in the interest of their religious beliefs. This discovery came like a revelation to the Dutch critic Kuenen, and soon set him on the track of those new theories which, in his and Wellhausen's hands, have revolutionised the study of Old Testament history and converted the most orthodox divines to views much more advanced than those originally put forward by Colenso.

It is doubtful whether the Bishop of Natal would have felt justified in publishing the result of his inquiries had not the judgment of the Court of Arches proved that their avowal was quite compatible with the retention of his position in the Church. Alluding to the academic rank of the Essayists, Lord Shaftesbury prayed to be saved from the tyranny of Professors. So far from being tyrants, Baden Powell, Rowland Williams, and Jowett were enabling the English middle classes to think for themselves. "By all means let us have free inquiry," said Disraeli, "but let it be from free inquirers." Not only were the clergy free inquirers, but they were guiding the more timid steps of the laity in what Carlyle called the Exodus from Houndsditch—the deliverance from Rabbinical superstition.

Privately some of the Essayists—and indeed some of their opponents also—were known to hold far more subversive opinions than those they put in print; indeed, the hostility to their printed opinions partly arose from a knowledge of their conversational utterances. Not only a desire to



preserve their social position, but also a vague dread of revolutionary convulsions as a result of having Rationalism diffused among the working classes, may have been the excuse for a reticence rather apt to be confounded with insincerity.

Be this as it may, no such need of reticence was felt among those whose mental balance the Broad Church were fearful of upsetting. A tradition not only of free thinking, but of plain speaking, had been kept up by the democratic working-class leaders ever since Thomas Paine; and we have seen to what lengths it was carried by Holyoake. In his hands, however, Secularism remained, like the Positivism of Comte, rather a constructive social doctrine ignoring theology than an aggressive criticism labouring to destroy it. A younger friend of Holyoake's, Charles Bradlaugh, gave Secularism this more aggressive character by setting up, in 1860, a journal called the *National Reformer*, an article in whose programme was avowed "antagonism to every known religious system," and especially to every form of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

Bradlaugh and his colleagues carried on for several years an Atheistic propaganda by pamphlets and lectures which the upper and middle classes regarded with affected contempt and quite unaffected aversion. Public opinion had by this time advanced so far that the blasphemy laws were not put in action, but a good deal of ruffianism was employed for the purpose of suppressing free discussion, against which the sufferers could not obtain legal redress. Where public debates

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Charles Bradlaugh*, vol. i., p. 120.



between the Freethinkers and their clerical opponents were tolerated, insulting and mendacious personalities too often passed as good substitutes for argument on the orthodox side.

Just as the religious crisis was becoming acute, Herbert Spencer began to publish in serial form the first of those important works which won for him during his life a more extended reputation than any other philosopher in the world's history has ever enjoyed. It was called *First Principles*, and its object was to establish on grounds of experience and of *a priori* reasoning combined the law of evolution as the most comprehensive of scientific generalisations. None knew better than Spencer how radically inconsistent was that law with the belief in a creating or interfering Providence ; and indeed a prime object of all his speculations was to show, so far as possible, that all phenomena are produced by mechanical causation. This was also what the founders of the *National Reformer* believed, and, in their opinion, such a doctrine left no room for anything that has ever been called a God or a religion. Spencer did not agree with their negations. The antiquity and wide diffusion of religion convinced him that there must be some truth mixed up with its errors. On the other hand, even those ultimate truths in which evolution itself is rooted leave us, he thinks, confronted by the inexplicable mystery of consciousness and existence itself, the dim sense of a Power behind phenomena, impossible either to define or to refine away. To recognise that this ever-present Power exists, but can never be known, is the essence of



religion, and also the reconciliation of religion with science.

All that Spencer tells us—and he tells us a good deal—about the Unknowable Power goes to identify it with the whole of what is. Such absoluteness necessarily excludes personality, which at any rate involves the antithesis of subject and object; and his psychology also suggests, to say the least of it, that there is no consciousness without a nervous system. Precisely for that reason, indeed, Spencer rejected the doctrine of personal immortality; and, although he afterwards came to find in the notion of a spirit surviving its mortal body the very root of religion itself, it did not occur to him that his pretended reconciliation of religion with science was thereby ruined at its base.

On the religious side, also, difficulties no less serious opposed themselves to the proffered alliance. Worship has always had for its object not an abstraction or a negation, but a living, concrete individual, conceived as resembling the highest types of humanity; while religious belief, so far from being directed towards an Unknowable, habitually appeals for confirmation to a revelation of its object, given through a book, or a community, or a set of mysterious intimations whose import it is the office of a privileged order to declare.

Some years after the appearance of *First Principles*, Professor Huxley, a friend and admirer of Spencer's, coined the word "Agnosticism" to designate the attitude of himself and his school towards theology. As originally used, it served to connote at once the impassable barrier that separated



them from all the Churches, and the almost imperceptible shading that distinguished them from the followers of Bradlaugh. Like all very popular party-names, Agnosticism paid the penalty of success by losing the perfectly definite meaning it was at first intended to convey, and by becoming associated with all sorts of hazy scepticisms which the original Agnostics would have been the first to disown. An impression has thus been created that those who reject the popular religion have no alternative but a comprehensive profession of ignorance about themselves and the world in which they live. An older and somewhat less ambiguous word, "Rationalism," has been coming into more favour of recent years to denote the position of those who trust their reason so far as it goes, while refusing to believe any proposition on evidence that would not be admitted in natural science or in the affairs of common life, and absolutely rejecting what is inconsistent either with itself or with any truth generally acknowledged as such.

*A History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism*, by the late Mr. Lecky, published in 1865, did much to promote a better appreciation among English readers of what reason has done to further the happiness of mankind by insensibly undermining the credence once given to various noxious superstitions. Lecky was not himself a deep or a logical thinker, and his dependence on authority is the reverse of rational; but his suave and conciliatory style did much to procure an entry for Buckle's ideas in circles which Buckle's extremely plain speaking had tended to alienate and alarm.



Lecky called himself a Christian, and no doubt he could claim the title with as good a right as many Broad Churchmen. The same may be said of the late Sir John Seeley, whose most celebrated work, *Ecce Homo*, also appeared in 1865. In form a survey of the life and work of Christ, the book is in reality a brilliant adaptation of the Gospel to modern Liberal politics, with nearly the whole supernatural element left out and Comte's religion of humanity dexterously put in its place. Some of the very elect were, perhaps not unwillingly, deceived, and Gladstone for one was so delighted with *Ecce Homo* and so satisfied with its orthodoxy that he afterwards made the author—who never put his name to it—Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Lord Shaftesbury, on the other hand, said it was "vomited from the jaws of hell," which, if hell meant Positivism, was a rather strong way of stating a fact.

We have now reached a point of English history where the current of democratic opinion set going by the American War combines with the profounder current of religious liberalism to initiate and carry through the great legislative reforms by which the next five years are signalised.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### A STUDY IN EXPLOSIVES

THE House of Commons which placed Lord Palmerston in power after the General Election of 1859 counted a nominal Liberal majority of fifty and a working Ministerial majority, on decisive party divisions, of less than twenty. Yet the veteran leader played the game with such skill that his administration is remembered as the most powerful and popular of the reign. The elections of July, 1865, gave him one last triumph, resulting as they did in a gain of twenty-five seats, counting fifty on a division. But the battle had been fought largely on the question of Parliamentary Reform, which he disliked, and on the merits of his Financial Minister, Gladstone, whose policy he viewed with extreme distrust. And what in the last resort told most decisively for Liberalism was the victory, in America, of the Northern Anti-slavery cause, to which Palmerston and Gladstone had been alike opposed. Not only had a democratic Republic, representing, as by this time was generally admitted, a most righteous cause, overcome at the cost of enormous sacrifices the most formidable rebellion known to history, but it had also treated the vanquished rebels with a magnanimity of which history offered no example.

Besides this general reaction on English opinion, the American War exercised other more indirect



effects on our domestic politics. It greatly strengthened a secret society known as the Fenian Brotherhood, formed for the purpose of making Ireland an independent State. Fenianism had begun in 1858, but attracted little attention until it enlisted American support. The constant stream of Irish emigration across the Atlantic would in any case have given Irish Nationalism a powerful body of sympathisers in the United States; and the experiences of war taught sympathy to assume a more aggressive shape. Many Irishmen had served in the Northern armies, where they acquired habits of military discipline; and some of these, when the restoration of peace threw them out of employment, made their way home to join the Fenian movement, which under their direction quickly developed into a formidable conspiracy against English rule. Their agitation had little success in promoting insurrection, but much success in drawing the attention of Great Britain to the chronic grievances of the sister island.

Of these grievances the most intelligible to English and Scotch opinion was the existence of a Protestant Establishment among a Catholic people, the fact that nearly all the religious endowments of the country went to relieve a small and comparatively wealthy minority from the duty of maintaining their religion at their own expense, as the Presbyterians and the Catholics were for the most part obliged to do. We have seen how that very moderate concession to religious justice known as the Appropriation Clause was successfully resisted in the House of Lords thirty years before, probably because it excited no enthusiasm



among the English people. But now, thanks no doubt to the great Freethought movement of the previous decade, English Dissenters and Scotch Presbyterians, formerly so bigoted in their hostility to Rome, were ready to join hands with Irish Catholics in demanding the destruction of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. These religionists would have maintained with complete sincerity that modern science and modern criticism had left their faith stronger than ever. But it remained true that the effect of Rationalism had been to make sectarian differences count for less in the face of a common danger than the fundamental principles on which all Christians were agreed.

By a still more remarkable change of opinion, not only the English Nonconformists, but some High Churchmen also, had come to approve in principle of Irish Disestablishment. Foremost among these stood Gladstone, destined before long to make it the first article in the Liberal programme. The mere suspicion of such a possibility led to his rejection as her representative by the University of Oxford at the General Election of 1865; but on that occasion he received the support of John Keble, whose Assize Sermon had started the Tractarian Movement thirty-two years before, and who had so strongly resented Earl Grey's suppression of ten superfluous Irish bishoprics. More significantly still, in conversation with J. H. Newman about the much more drastic course anticipated from Gladstone, Keble whispered, "And is not that just?" We must suppose that the Tractarian leaders had advanced so far towards



Rome and away from Evangelicalism as to be favourably disposed to what would benefit Irish Catholics at the expense of Irish Evangelicals. And this was because Newman had taught them to look to Rome as a bulwark against the rising rationalism of the age.

The overthrow of the Slave Power and the abolition of slavery over the whole territory of the United States was followed within six months by a negro outbreak in Jamaica. So far as I know, these two events have never been brought into relation as cause and effect. But it seems not unlikely that there was some connection between them, for the immense importance given to the negro race by the war can hardly have failed to react on the coloured population of Jamaica, rousing them to a keener sense of the wrongs, real or imaginary, under which they suffered, and exciting hopes of redress, to be won, if necessary, by armed force. At any rate, on October 11th, 1865, a riot took place at Morant Bay. Eighteen white men were killed, thirty-two were wounded, and two houses were burned down. Edward John Eyre, governor of the island, at once proclaimed martial law, and launched his soldiers on the black population of the disaffected district, apparently with a free hand to commit whatever atrocities they pleased. For every white man killed more than twenty blacks were executed; for every white man wounded nearly twenty blacks, some of them women, were flogged. In one place the tails of the cat were twisted and knotted with wires. A thousand native houses were burned down. Owing



to the summary character of the proceedings, various persons were executed whose participation in the riot could not be proved. Indeed, some negroes were shot down merely because they ran away from the troops. On October 30th, by Eyre's own admission, the insurrection had been thoroughly crushed. Yet martial law with all its horrors was allowed to continue for nearly a fortnight longer. Finally a coloured man named Gordon, a member of the House of Representatives, accused without adequate proof of having instigated the insurrection, was judicially murdered by Eyre's express orders, at a time when the case might have been reserved for a regular trial without any danger to the English inhabitants of the island.

Lord Palmerston died while these events were in progress. Had he lived, he would probably have supported and rewarded Governor Eyre; nor by doing this would he have forfeited any popularity in the country—at least among the bulk of the upper and middle classes, who looked on black men as entitled to no more consideration than gorillas. But with his departure a new *régime* had already begun. Earl Russell, who succeeded to the Premiership, and Gladstone, who succeeded to the leadership of the House of Commons, whatever their private opinions about Eyre might be, were under the necessity of not alienating the Radical section of their party, in view of the Reform Bill they intended to introduce; nor was there any doubt about the attitude of that section on the present occasion. No sooner had detailed accounts of the atrocities perpetrated in



Jamaica begun to come in than a demand for immediate inquiry into the conduct of the responsible parties was raised by Radical politicians and journalists, supported by some of the most advanced thinkers of the age. Under pressure from this quarter Eyre was first suspended and then recalled, after a Commission sent out to collect information on the spot had brought to light the full extent of the enormities to which his sanction had been given.

An unofficial committee was formed for the purpose of having Eyre's guilt or innocence decided in the only regular manner—by putting him on his trial before an English Court of Justice. At its head stood John Stuart Mill, then at the zenith of his reputation and of his intellectual powers. His *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, published in the spring of 1865, had destroyed the authority of the reactionary Scotch metaphysician at a single blow, ruining at the same time the elaborate framework of sceptical sophistry by which Hamilton's Oxford disciple, Mansel, had tried to prop up the immoral dogmas of popular Christianity. He had also recently brought out a volume on Auguste Comte, giving a luminous summary of the great French thinker's system, and distinguishing with rare ability and impartiality between the truths and errors that it embodies. He had been returned to Parliament free of expense for Westminster, as of all reasoners the most competent to defend a wide extension of the suffrage against the redoubtable attacks of Robert Lowe, who, although himself on all other points a strong Liberal, had been adopted by the



Tories as their spokesman in the coming conflict on Parliamentary Reform.

Around Mill, as members of the Jamaica Committee, were grouped such men of light and leading in the spheres of thought and action as Darwin, Spencer, Wallace, Professor Huxley, Professor Goldwin Smith, Leslie Stephen, and Mr. Frederic Harrison. But, as usually happens in England, the intellectualists were by no means unanimous. Carlyle, who hated the negro race, gave the support of his irrelevantly picturesque rhetoric to Governor Eyre. Tennyson, Ruskin, Froude, Kingsley, Murchison, and Tyndall more or less openly took the same side. On the whole, the division of opinion as regarded the Jamaica question corresponded to the division on the American War, and, like that, indicated a conflict between two widely divergent ideals of society—more than that, between two different theories of the world; for, as Herbert Spencer has observed, “the evolutionists, considering their small number, contributed a far larger proportion to the committee than any other class.”<sup>1</sup>

So strong was the feeling in favour of Eyre that the Jamaica Committee failed in their efforts to put him on his trial, although Lord Chief Justice Cockburn charged the Old Bailey Grand Jury strongly against him. But, as Mill says, their efforts “gave an emphatic warning to those who might be tempted to similar guilt hereafter that, though they might escape the actual sentence of a criminal tribunal, they were not safe against being

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. ii., p. 143.



put to some trouble and expense in order to avoid it."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the Fenian and Jamaican troubles, the new Government had to deal with a more immediate difficulty—the cattle plague, a destructive pestilence for which no remedy could be found except the slaughter of the diseased animals, and of those exposed to the risk of infection. Accordingly, when Parliament met a Bill was introduced prescribing this drastic remedy against the spread of the plague, and awarding an amount of compensation to the owners of the animals sacrificed suited rather to the interests and wishes of a land-owning oligarchy than to the just claims of the people at large, who were already suffering severely by a great rise in the price of meat. An absurdly high amount of compensation was assigned in the first Ministerial proposal, and two-thirds of the sum were to be provided by a local rate, one-third only being raised by a special tax on cattle. Thus the owners would be paid twice over—first by the legal indemnity, and then by the rise in prices. Against this iniquitous arrangement Mill protested in a speech which drew down on him the bitter hatred of the whole Tory party, and of not a few lukewarm Liberals into the bargain. His recommendations were not fully adopted, but they had the effect of reducing the proposed compensation by a considerable amount.

While the questions associated with Ireland,

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 299.



Jamaica, and the cattle plague greatly aggravated the difficulties and responsibilities of the Russell-Gladstone Government, they also made the tension between the respective representatives of advanced and of conservative opinion more acute, thus adding enormously to the virulence of party feeling on the issue in which all other differences were soon to be swallowed up—the issue of Parliamentary Reform. The newly-elected House of Commons included a much larger proportion of serious reformers than its predecessor, and the two chief Ministers were convinced advocates of popular suffrage. They brought in a Bill which would have given votes to 144,000 working men, together with a much larger number of middle-class householders. Mill, Bright, and the Radicals generally gave this exceedingly mild proposal a warm support; but the mere fact of their approval seemed to awaken a corresponding strength of opposition on the other side, recalling the passionate hostility evoked by the Reform Bill of 1831, and backed by arguments of much the same description, amounting to a general claim that our representative system was working admirably, and could not be improved.

This general objection to all change as such might not have counted for much, even with professed Conservatives, had it not been the expression of a more specific animosity towards the class whose partial enfranchisement was in contemplation. There was in 1866 among well-to-do people, more than at any time since the collapse of Chartism, a definite dread and hatred of the working classes, or at least of their Trade Unions,



which had been smouldering through the Palmerstonian period, and which, although partially alleviated by the experiences of the Cotton Famine, broke out again at the termination of the American War. In order to understand how this state of feeling came to exist we must go back to an earlier period of English industrial history; but the digression will not detain us long.

Previous to 1824 combinations to procure an increase of wages were more or less forbidden by law and punished as crimes. Among other consequences of the great Liberal movement begun soon after the accession of George IV., complete freedom of contract was obtained in that year, chiefly through the efforts of two Radicals, Francis Place and Joseph Hume. This concession led to an epidemic of strikes, frequently accompanied by rioting and outrage, with the result that in 1825 a new Bill was passed "prohibiting any person doing any act or making any threat to induce any manufacturer to alter the rules of his factory, or any workman to accept or leave any employment, or to join any club";<sup>1</sup> and this law continued in force for more than forty years. Nevertheless, the operatives continued to fight for an increase of wages or for shorter hours, with varying degrees of success, by means of strikes, which their Trade Unions proved highly efficacious instruments for carrying through. The masters retorted by lock-outs—that is to say, by refusing to employ men who, though consenting to work for the usual wages, either belonged to Trade Unions or were suspected

<sup>1</sup> Walpole, *History of England*, vol. ii., p. 181.



of contributing to the support of strikes. This sort of civil war raged with particular virulence after the commercial crisis of 1857, and led to a great pitched battle between employers and employed in the building trade, lasting from November, 1858, to February, 1860. On that occasion neither side succeeded in carrying its point, but the conflict left Trade Unionism in a stronger position than before.<sup>1</sup>

At that time "society," and indeed the educated classes generally, looked on strikes not only as a most disagreeable interruption to business, but also as a revolt against the natural law of supply and demand. They took this view on trust from the leading political economists, all of whom, including J. S. Mill, taught the existence of something that they called the Wages Fund—that is, "a sum of wealth unconditionally devoted to the wages of labour," and limited, "at any given moment, to a pre-determined amount.....so that, the sum to be divided being fixed, the wages of each depend solely on the number of participants." Thus strikes could not possibly increase wages or prevent them from falling, although indirectly they might, and actually did, lower wages by diminishing the fund whence they were paid.<sup>2</sup>

By a singular inadvertence the economists long failed to observe that the employer's profits constituted an additional fund on which it was possible for his men to encroach to any extent short of what would leave him without a motive for carrying on

<sup>1</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>2</sup> Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions*, vol. iv., pp. 43 *sqq.*



the business—a fact first pointed out by W. T. Thornton in 1869, and immediately accepted as true by Mill.

Working men naturally set little store on a science whose teachings were contradicted by experience before they were corrected by theory. One of the new members of Parliament, Thomas Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, who had been elected in the labour interest, speaking in the debate on the second reading of Gladstone's Reform Bill, vainly urged on his hearers the expediency of giving working men a share in the national representation, precisely because their views on the price of labour and the laws of supply and demand differed so widely from the middle and upper-class theory. The only effect of his arguments was to send votes over to the other side.

On the occasion of Lord Russell's previous abortive Reform Bills no enthusiasm had been shown for them by the unenfranchised masses, nor any anger when they failed; and this popular indifference furnished Conservatives on both sides of the House with a standing argument in favour of letting the subject sleep. In fact, the wage-earners had come to believe that their condition could be much more effectively bettered by means of Trade Unionism than by such a remote and feeble share in legislation as a tenth or so of the whole voting power would bestow. But the Parliamentary debates of 1866 totally changed their views. What was seen to be withheld with such alarm seemed to be worth demanding with equal passion on the part of those to whom it was denied;



and the more so as indications were not wanting of a desire to destroy the Trade Unions by Act of Parliament, and to deal with resistance to such a measure by suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, as in Ireland, or by proclaiming martial law, as in Jamaica.

I have said that the Parliament of 1865 included many more sincere reformers than its predecessor. But they numbered altogether less than half the whole House ; so that by allying themselves with every section of discontented Liberalism in turn the Tory Opposition at last succeeded in wrecking Gladstone's very moderate Bill. The Liberal Ministry at once resigned, and Disraeli (with Lord Derby as his nominal chief) took office for the third time, and retained it two years and a half by faithfully copying that policy of Conservative surrender on which he had poured such fierce sarcasm when Sir Robert Peel inaugurated it less than a quarter of a century before, without Peel's justification that his change of policy was necessary for the safety of the country.

As Leader of the House of Commons Gladstone had failed utterly ; but his fall made him a popular hero, and his name became a rallying cry for the new enthusiasm on behalf of Reform which had spread from the North to London. He had told the opponents of his Bill that the working men were their own flesh and blood ; and the masses do not forget such words. Before the formation of a new Government had been officially announced crowds of working men were parading the streets of London with unmistakable indications of the



side on which their sympathies were enlisted. Three weeks later it was announced that a great Reform demonstration would be held in Hyde Park. Contrary to the advice of their Home Secretary, the Government closed the park gates against the meeting. On this the responsible leaders withdrew, leaving behind them, however, a disorderly crowd, who broke down the park railings, spread over the enclosure, and did much mischief to the flowers and shrubs. This rather childish exhibition proved no less effective for its purpose than the terrible riots at Bristol had been a generation before. On this occasion much more serious consequences might have happened, as a body called the Reform League summoned another meeting to be held in the park a few days afterwards, at a time when troops were being kept in readiness to prevent it. Mill, who could hardly have been mistaken on the subject, tells us that the League were only dissuaded from carrying out their intention by his remonstrances—a fact which all the historians of the period but one have passed over in silence.<sup>1</sup>

During the subsequent autumn and winter the working men adopted a more efficacious and less dangerous method of showing their opinions, by marching through the streets of London in long processions, among which those organised by the Trade Unions made the most conspicuous figure. The men who walked in these processions presented such a well-to-do appearance that the spectators who watched them from the club windows asked

<sup>1</sup> Mill's *Autobiography*, pp. 190-1. Herbert Paul, *Modern England*, vol. iii., p. 55.



one another in surprise, Was it possible these people could not afford to live in a ten-pound house? Such may, in fact, have been their rental; but as a class their interests obviously led them to combine with the householders who paid less rather than with those who paid more than that modest sum.

Payment of a seven-pound rental had been the qualification for exercising the borough franchise fixed by Gladstone's Bill, and an amendment proposing to substitute a rating for a rental value was what finally wrecked it in Committee. The object in view was merely to diminish the number of new electors, as houses are habitually rated at a figure below their letting value. But the distinction between a rating and a rental franchise acquired a new significance when Disraeli introduced a Reform Bill of his own in the Session of 1867. After a variety of abortive schemes presented and withdrawn for the sole purpose of keeping his party in office, the Tory leader proposed a measure the most important provision of which gave the borough franchise to all householders rated for the relief of the poor. Now, as regarded the payment of rates there was no uniform rule in English boroughs as to whether it should be made by the householder or by his landlord. It was a question determined in each instance by the majority of the ratepayers themselves. The more general arrangement was that the landlord should pay, although, of course, he indemnified himself by raising the rent. In that case the tenant was called a compound householder. But there were certain boroughs where this arrangement did not exist, and there a rating franchise would have meant



Household Suffrage pure and simple. It was a piece of the grossest political hypocrisy to pretend, as Disraeli did, that such an accident determined a man's fitness or the contrary to join in the choice of a Parliamentary representative. Finally, to the great astonishment of both parties, the Tory leader found his way out of this ridiculous position by accepting the proposal of a Liberal member abolishing the compound householder, and directing that none but occupiers should be rated for the relief of the poor within the limit of Parliamentary boroughs. This amounted to unqualified Household Suffrage, which Disraeli had declared he would never accept. In what way the compound householder would become better fitted for the exercise of his new privilege by being subjected to the gratuitous inconvenience of paying his rates in person instead of by proxy did not appear. Nor, in fact, was he destined to benefit long by that magical operation. Two years subsequently the old system of compounding was quietly reinstated, without depriving the compounder of his vote.

Soon after passing his Bill, or rather the Bill forced on him by the Liberal Opposition, Disraeli described himself in a public speech as having educated the Conservative party to believe in democratic reform. Finding that the assertion provoked some murmurs, he first altered it into "we"—that is, Lord Derby and himself—"were educating the Conservative party," and finally into "the Conservative party were educating the country." In each version the claim can only be described as an impudent falsehood. So far from being educated by the Conservative party, the



country taught them, in unmistakable accents, that they must yield to its demands without delay. Lord Derby, who called Household Suffrage "a leap in the dark," never pretended to be convinced, still less to convince others, of its expediency. As for Disraeli himself, the only educator we can compare him to is the Faliscan schoolmaster of early Roman history who surrendered his young charges to Camillus. Three Secretaries of State, who may be taken as fairly representing what the party really thought, resigned rather than agree to a much more limited franchise than that ultimately accepted. One of them, the future Lord Salisbury, was credited with an article in the *Quarterly Review*, passionately denouncing what it called the Conservative surrender. As for the rank and file, they simply yielded to the obligations of party discipline and to the dread of a dissolution in case they refused to follow their chief.

If Disraeli expected his party to gain by the Tory Reform Bill, he was grievously mistaken. Their domestic policy suffered a crushing defeat on an appeal to the people in 1868; their foreign policy a defeat still more crushing in 1880. His dream of restoring the royal authority has not been fulfilled; his friends of the territorial aristocracy have yielded to considerable inroads on their dignities and proprietary rights; an entire branch of the Anglican Establishment has been lopped off, and its privileges as against Dissent have been sensibly curtailed. Tory statesmen, beginning with himself, have, it is true, enjoyed extensive terms of office; but this, which would have come



to pass under any suffrage, has been due to the mistakes and divisions of their opponents far more than to any popular preference for themselves; while any attempt to revive old Tory principles has met with speedy discomfiture on an appeal to the democratic vote. Even the office for whose tenure they held no sacrifice too great has had to be shared with dissentient Liberals, and the coalitions which, according to Disraeli, England does not love have been used to strengthen the position of those on whom the mantle of this modern Hebrew prophet has fallen.

Before the working classes could enter into possession of their new privileges the organisations that had led them to victory found their very existence put in peril. An outrage perpetrated at Sheffield in October, 1866, by order of a Trade Union, coming as it did after a long series of similar atrocities, excited public opinion to fresh manifestations of hostility against the system of which they were held to be the inevitable result, and led to the appointment of a Royal Commission for the investigation of the whole subject. Under promise of impunity certain witnesses were induced to come forward and give a circumstantial narrative of the crimes committed by themselves or at their instigation in order to compel non-unionist workmen "to join the Union or to punish them for their refusal." The means of coercion ranged from putting needles into the brick-makers' clay for the purpose of injuring their hands to blowing up their houses with gunpowder or shooting them dead. Sheffield had the worst record for outrages;



but Manchester and other places were not far behind.<sup>1</sup> Only a small minority of Trade Unions were implicated in these crimes; but the public indignation provoked by their disclosure extended itself to Unionism in general, and led the employers to hope for its abolition.

Meanwhile, the prosecution of a defaulting Trade Union treasurer had elicited an important legal decision from the Court of Queen's Bench. It appeared that the society which sought redress had no claim to protection against the embezzlement of its funds, the reason given being that its objects, if not actually criminal, were yet so far in restraint of trade as to render it an illegal association.<sup>2</sup> The same judgment applied equally to all the Trade Unions in the country, classing them with illegal associations, and placing their funds—which, in the aggregate, amounted to a quarter of a million—at the mercy of their dishonest employees.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately for their cause, the Trade Unions had enlisted the support of the English Positivists, a small band of high-minded, able, and eloquent thinkers, who had recently formed themselves into a society for the propagation of Auguste Comte's teaching in England. Unlike Mill, G. H. Lewes, and Harriet Martineau, these new disciples did not stop short at the intellectual side of Positivism, but dwelt also and more particularly on its religious and ethical aspects. Without being in any way affected by Comte's theories, or indeed by French influences of any kind, Trade Unionism appealed to

<sup>1</sup> Molesworth, *History of England*, vol. iii., pp. 370-75.

<sup>2</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.



these men as a practical and efficacious protest against the anarchic individualism of the orthodox political economy, which Comte also regarded with extreme disfavour. While joining in the general condemnation of the Sheffield outrages, two members of the Positivist Society, Professor Beesly and Dr. Richard Congreve, had not hesitated to brave the public opinion of the upper classes by placing them in the same category of crimes with the atrocities perpetrated by Governor Eyre and his confederates in Jamaica. Another Positivist, Mr. Frederic Harrison, author of the article on "Neo-Christianity," in the *Westminster Review*, which first revealed the full meaning and significance of *Essays and Reviews*, had so thoroughly won the confidence of the Unionist leaders that they obtained his appointment to a place on the Royal Commission for inquiring into the facts of Trade Unionism. While holding that position he, in conjunction with Thomas Hughes, already mentioned as the Parliamentary champion of labour, conducted the Trade Union case against its opponents. Without being able to persuade the majority of the Commissioners to adopt their view in its entirety, they succeeded in dissipating some prejudices against the Unions; while their Minority Report, described as "a complete charter of Trade-Union liberty," "became for seven years the political programme of the Trade Unionists."<sup>1</sup> "It advocated the removal of all special legislation relating to labour contracts, on the principle, first, that no act should be illegal if committed by a

<sup>1</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 255.



workman unless it was equally illegal if committed by any other person ; and, secondly, that no act by a combination of men should be regarded as criminal if it would not have been criminal in a single person."<sup>1</sup>

With a view to getting this programme passed into law, Mr. Harrison strongly urged on the newly-enfranchised working men the importance of registering themselves as voters and pledging candidates to support their interests in Parliament. We shall see hereafter what were the fruits of this agitation. In the meantime it will be instructive to note a good effect of the Reform Act independent of any actual change in the labour laws. By conferring political equality on the working men it raised them in the estimation of the masters, and enabled the two to sit side by side on boards of conciliation. "The employers used to say that it would degrade them to sit at the same board with their workmen ; but it is noticeable that directly the political independence of the latter was recognised, as soon as he (*sic*) possessed the franchise, these objections began to disappear."<sup>2</sup>

English public opinion—or at least the public opinion of the governing classes—habitually yields to violence what it will not yield to reason. The raid on Hyde Park had won Reform ; the Sheffield murders had drawn attention to the claims of labour ; Fenian outrages were now to procure a certain measure of redress for the wrongs of Ireland. In September, 1867, two Fenians on their way to prison in Manchester were rescued by a band of

<sup>1</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *The Industrial Revolution*, p. 149.



armed men, and the police sergeant who had charge of the van conveying them was shot dead—an offence for which the murderer himself and two others were hanged. Three weeks after their execution an attempt was made to rescue two other Fenians from Clerkenwell by blowing up the prison wall with gunpowder. The attempt failed, but twelve persons were killed and a hundred and twenty others injured by the explosion. Disraeli, who since February, 1868, had become in name as well as in reality Prime Minister, replied by a fresh suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland, and by an Irish Reform Bill giving the franchise to only half as many electors in proportion to the population as in England. Then his great rival seized the opportunity to rally the whole Liberal party, which alike in office and opposition had broken from his lead on the Reform question, round the standard of religious equality. Before the end of March Gladstone began his campaign against the Irish Church, and on the morning of May 1st he carried a resolution advising its disestablishment and disendowment by a majority of 65. Thirty-one years earlier the far milder proposals known as the Appropriation Clause had been carried by a majority of only 33.<sup>1</sup> This significant advance, as I have already taken occasion to point out, is an index of the ground gained by rationalism in the interval. And, as if to supply a further confirmation of the same momentous change, an Act for the abolition of compulsory Church rates was carried in the same Session by

<sup>1</sup> Spencer Walpole, *History of England*, vol. iv., p. 21.



the same statesman, who had begun life as a champion of ecclesiastical privilege.

Nor was this only a Parliamentary, a political, or a Nonconformist victory. The approaching fall of the Irish Establishment was welcomed with acclamation by the intellectual and literary classes, who also disdainfully rejected the old Whig idea, now once more put forward, of concurrent endowment—that is, the distribution of the confiscated revenues among the three Irish Churches in proportion to their numerical strength. In their opinion the time had gone by for subsidising religious teaching in any form, for that would be merely building up what at no distant period would have to be pulled down again.

It only remained to ascertain by an appeal to the country what the newly-enfranchised classes thought on the subject. Their answer came in figures whose meaning could not be doubted. Household Suffrage in the English boroughs returned a great Liberal majority. Scotland, the best educated part of the United Kingdom, returned a Liberal majority of five to one. The Liberal majority in the whole House was 120. Mill's defeat at Westminster nearly consoled the Tories for this tremendous disaster. But the great philosopher's work was done. During his brief Parliamentary career Mill had done England a service not easily matched among the achievements of private members. In a single speech of remarkable eloquence he convinced Gladstone, and eventually Gladstone's pupil Stafford Northcote, that a provision should be made for paying off the National Debt while our resources are still available for the



purpose. England's prosperity depends on the productivity of her coalfields, and it is certain that these will be exhausted within a measurable period of time. It is, therefore, desirable to clear off our present liabilities before that fatal moment arrives. There may be stronger arguments for establishing a Sinking Fund than this; but none have so stimulated the imagination of statesmen as Mill's appeal on behalf of posterity, urged with impressive dignity on the House of Commons more than forty years ago. Immediately on the delivery of his speech a considerable sum was set aside for the reduction of the Debt; and from the second year after his death, which took place in 1873, a regular provision for its progressive extinction has formed part of our financial system.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRANSFERS OF POWER

WHEN the verdict of the new constituencies had been declared, Disraeli set the excellent example of resigning before Parliament met, and Gladstone was charged for the first time with the formation of a Government. His Ministry contained an exceptionally large proportion of untitled ability, thus indicating the class whence the agents of the new Sovereign were likely more and more to be chosen. The new Administration brought with it a mandate for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Irish Church; and to this work the Session of 1869 was principally devoted.

Of the funds set free by disendowment too large a proportion found its way into the pockets of persons whose claims could not compare with those of the peasantry, by whose labour the amount of wealth disposable had been originally created. If English Church property should ever be resumed by the community, which is its rightful heir, we may hope that such jobbery will be avoided, and that the sum accruing after all vested interests have been equitably, and no more than equitably, provided for will be used to pay off a part of the National Debt, setting free a corresponding amount of the revenue to meet whatever increased expenditure the defence of the country or the furtherance of its happiness may demand.



It need hardly be mentioned that Irish discontent did not disappear, any more than after Catholic Emancipation, because another instalment of justice had been conceded; nor, indeed, was it desirable that the wrongs still unredressed should be so easily condoned. Nevertheless, the survivors of that period have no reason to regret the policy they then pursued. Had the battle against privilege been fought on some less intelligible issue, the whole fabric of injustice might have remained intact until the agitation for Irish self-government swelled to an irresistible height. In the opinion of many political thinkers, this would have been no misfortune; but, without entering on the general merits of the radical solution they favour, it should suffice to recall that an independent Irish Parliament, legislating under priestly dictation, would probably have begun its work by handing over the spoils of the Protestant Establishment to the Bishops and clergy of the Roman Church, with little or no regard to the vested interests of their former possessors. And, in the opinion of all who are opposed on principle to ecclesiastical endowments, such a disposition would have been far more objectionable than the arrangements actually made, however open to criticism these may be.

To the mass of the Irish people Protestant ascendancy was a less terrible grievance than the conditions of land tenure. Farms, as a rule, were let on yearly tenancies; improvements were habitually made by the tenants and habitually confiscated by the landlords; even tenants who paid their rent regularly were liable to be evicted and



replaced by others who undertook to pay a higher rent. In Ulster alone tenant farmers possessed, by the custom of the country, a right of property in the goodwill of their holdings, which, when the land was relet, they could sell for a substantial sum to the new occupier; but this custom was not recognised by law.

A Bill, introduced in February, 1870, proposed to deal with these grievances by giving the Ulster custom force of law, by extending it to the whole of Ireland, and by providing that the tenant, in case of eviction, should be compensated for improvements made by him, the insertion of any proviso to the contrary in leases being forbidden. Bright as a private member, and Mill in a pamphlet entitled *England and Ireland* (1868), had proposed the partial buying out of the landlords, and the sale of their estates on easy terms to the occupiers, as the most satisfactory solution of the land question. Bright was now a Cabinet Minister; and in deference to his authority clauses were introduced into the Irish Land Bill directing advances of public money to be made for the purpose of enabling tenants to buy their holdings in cases where the landlords were willing to sell. Gladstone, who framed and conducted the measure, had no belief in peasant proprietors, and Bright was disabled by illness from pushing his favourite scheme; nor did the purchase clauses prove adequate to carry it out. It is, however, interesting to observe that two such men as Mill and Bright, one of them representing the Benthamite school of philosophy and the other the Manchester school of politics, should have abandoned the traditions of *laissez-*



*faire* in favour of State intervention for the purpose of giving the poor advantages which, under a system of free competition and free contract, they had been unable to secure.

The same Session that saw the first considerable attempt to interfere with economic freedom in reference to Irish land tenure saw also a much more sweeping interference with the economic laws of supply and demand in their relation to the elementary education of the English people. It will be remembered that State aid to education first began after the Reform Act of 1832, and that it then took the form of money grants to voluntary associations whose interest in the subject was chiefly religious. Under this system the number of schools built, and of children attending them, steadily increased. But it fell far short of the whole number wanted; and the quality of the instruction given was not satisfactory. With a view to its improvement, Robert Lowe, who practically controlled the Education Department from 1859 to 1864, introduced what was called the system of payment by results—that is to say, the amount of money granted to the State-aided schools was made to depend on the number of children whose proficiency in the elementary subjects suited to their age or standing was such as to satisfy the Government inspectors.

Lowe's standards only took secular knowledge into account; and this sort of testing gave great offence to the clerical school managers, whose interest did not lie with the three R's, but with a fourth R—namely, religion, which was not allowed



to count for anything in the qualifying examinations. Under the lead of Lord Robert Cecil, afterwards so famous as Lord Salisbury, the Parliamentary obscurantists drove Lowe from office, not much, as would seem, to the displeasure of his colleagues, on whom he revenged himself by wrecking their Reform Bill in 1866. On the passing of Household Suffrage he uttered the famous apophthegm, "We must educate our masters." And now, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Gladstone's Ministry, he belonged to a Government with an unrivalled opportunity for redeeming that obligation.<sup>1</sup>

They did not show themselves altogether equal to the situation. W. E. Forster, the Minister charged with preparing the new Education Bill, was not a statesman of high intellect or wide views. But as an educational enthusiast, not belonging to any religious denomination, he had the advantage of most of his colleagues, and was in some ways a more advanced reformer than the Prime Minister himself. His Bill marked a considerable improvement on the existing system. It provided that the denominational schools in receipt of State aid should henceforth be subject to undenominational inspection, and that no child who attended such schools should be forced to receive religious instruction of which its parents disapproved. This

<sup>1</sup> Lowe had begun life as an Oxford coach, but he had no practical knowledge of elementary teaching, and his system of payment by results exercised a most baneful influence on the schools, where it greatly stimulated cramming, and led to the treatment of children as machines for obtaining increased grants. This, however, does not alter the fact that he fell on the question of religious *versus* secular education.



provision, known as the Conscience Clause, had been first proposed by the Education Department in 1853; but, owing to the violent resistance of the Church managers, had not been insisted on until 1864. It was now re-enacted under a more stringent form, and definitely accepted in principle by the bigots who had fought against it so long. Where no efficient schools existed, Boards were to be created with power to levy rates "either to assist voluntary schools or to establish schools of their own."<sup>1</sup> And, subject of course to a Conscience Clause, they were free to settle what form of religious instruction should be followed, or even to order that none should be given. In addition to what they drew from the rates, the new schools were to receive a grant from the Consolidated Fund, and the children attending them were to pay a small fee. Finally, the Boards might enforce the attendance of all children whose education was not otherwise provided for, but they were not bound to enforce it. Forster himself would have preferred absolute compulsion; but he had the majority of the Cabinet against him.<sup>2</sup>

It will be seen that the Bill, as at first framed, while in some ways restricting the evils of the sectarian system, in other ways perpetuated and extended them. The outrageous provision enabling the School Boards to have whatever religion they chose taught at the public expense was, indeed, subsequently withdrawn, and replaced by the famous Cowper-Temple clause, directing that in rate-supported schools "no catechism or religious

<sup>1</sup> Sir H. Craik, *The State in its Relation to Education*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> H. Paul, *Modern England*, vol. iii., p. 216.



formulary distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught";<sup>1</sup> while the Boards themselves, instead of being appointed by the vestries or other local bodies, as had been originally provided, were handed over to direct popular election. On the other hand, the denominational schools, which in practice were mostly Church schools, continued to be subsidised by the Exchequer, and the subsidy was even raised from one-third to one-half of the total cost; besides which, "by the twenty-fifth clause, School Boards were enabled to pay in denominational schools the fees of parents who, though not paupers, were unable to pay them."<sup>2</sup> "Training schools were left mostly in the hands of the sects, so that almost the only teachers to be procured by the model unsectarian schools were persons brought up in the lines of active sectarianism."<sup>3</sup>

What made the new lease of life given to the old system not only a theoretical injustice, but also a great practical mischief, was the proved inefficiency of the denominational schools. This had been brought to light by the requirements of Lowe's Revised Code, with its system of payment by results. To pass in its highest standard "a child must be able to read with fluency and expression, to write a short letter, and to work rule-of-three sums and fractions." Now, "of the two million children on the school registers in 1872 only 8,819 passed without failure in the three

<sup>1</sup> Elementary Education Act, 32 and 34 Vic., clause 14.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer Walpole, *History of Twenty-five Years*, vol. ii., p. 410.

<sup>3</sup> John Morley, *The Struggle for National Education*, p. 15.



subjects.”<sup>1</sup> And this highest standard, that so few could succeed in, was “below the lowest Saxon, Prussian, or Swiss standard, even for the country schools.” Where we had never passed 20,000 children in one year, Prussia, with a smaller population, passed nineteen times that number every year.<sup>2</sup>

Such, according to Mr. Morley, was “the consequence of entrusting public money.....to little knots of managers” engrossed in the interests of “their sect and its dogmas and shibboleths.”<sup>3</sup>

The inspectors of training schools for teachers had to report a similar range of deficiencies higher up in the educational scale. The pupils acquitted themselves creditably in Holy Scripture, but fell below the mark in English grammar, mental arithmetic, and penmanship. The object was to make them “not only religious people, but sound Church people”; to impress them with the idea that “‘there is no more effective way of benefiting their fellow-creatures than by giving them a sound education in the theology of the Church of England.’”<sup>4</sup>

At no time would the pretensions of the Church of England to control popular education have been tolerated by Dissenting or Secularist Liberals. Least of all could they be tolerated at a time when the most active and influential section of the Church’s members were working, without disguise, to remodel her doctrines on Roman Catholic lines,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25 (quoting Mundella).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 35-37.



exalting the pretensions of the priesthood, introducing the practice of private confession, and exhibiting sacramentalism as the very essence of religion. Their efforts were connected by an unbroken continuity of teaching with the Tractarian and Puseyite movement, on which they had made no essential advance. But they had given it a new and telling advertisement by appearing at the altar in garments of wonderful cut and colour, known as vestments, supposed to have the sanction of ancient ecclesiastical practice, but of very doubtful legality or good taste when donned by ministers of the reformed Anglican communion, and flaunted before congregations assembled to worship in the manner prescribed by the rubrics of the reformed Anglican Establishment. Some of these Ritualists, as they were called, openly advocated reunion with Rome; others went over to her communion; all were, not without reason, popularly regarded as the most efficacious propagandists of her faith. Now, it so happened that, at the very time when the Education Bill was under discussion, an Ecumenical Council, assembled for the purpose, was preparing to sanction by its decrees the Pope's claim to infallibility in questions of faith and morals—a claim which, as understood at the time, would give dogmatic authority to a protest against religious toleration recently issued by the reigning Pontiff, Pius IX.

But for the personal preferences of Gladstone and Forster, a much more satisfactory settlement of the education question might well have been carried in the most Liberal House of Commons the nineteenth century was destined to see; and



had it been rejected by the Lords—which seemed unlikely—an appeal to the constituencies would have sent the same majority back in triumph to Westminster. Parliament showed its true temper plainly enough, not only by the disestablishment of the Irish Church, but also, and even more, by an Act enabling atheists to give evidence on their affirmation in courts of law, passed the same year, and by the abolition of religious tests at Oxford and Cambridge, passed in 1871. It had been asserted with confidence not many years before that English parents wished university education to remain exclusively in the hands of the clergy. Experience has shown that they are perfectly willing to entrust both their sons and daughters to lay tuition. And their supposed prejudice against secular elementary education is, to all appearances, an equally baseless assumption.

While the Gladstonian Government were alienating the most advanced section of their majority within and without Parliament, both the Government and the majority of the House of Commons were making enemies of the working men, to whom they owed their very existence. “At the beginning of 1869 Mr. Frederic Harrison had drafted a comprehensive Bill embodying all the legislative proposals of his minority report. This was introduced by Messrs. Hughes and Mundella; and, although its provisions were received with denunciations by the employers, it gained some support among the newly-elected members, and was strongly backed outside the House. The Liberal Government of that day and nearly all the members of the House



of Commons were still covertly hostile to the principle of Trade Unionism, and every attempt was made to burke the measure. But the Junta [a little band of leading Trade Union officials who acted as a Cabinet for the whole movement] were determined to make felt their new political power. From every part of the country pressure was put upon members of Parliament. A great demonstration of workmen was held at Exeter Hall, at which Messrs. Mundella and Hughes declared their intention of forcing the House and the Ministry to vote upon the hated measure. Finding evasion no longer possible, the Government abandoned its attitude of hostility, and agreed to a formal second reading upon the understanding that the Cabinet would next year bring in a Bill of its own. A provisional measure, giving temporary protection to Trade Union funds, was accordingly hurried through Parliament at the end of the session, pending the introduction of a complete Bill."<sup>1</sup>

Two years passed before the appearance of the promised Bill, and then it proved highly unsatisfactory. Complete legal recognition was, indeed, granted to the Unions; but their means of action were seriously hampered. A series of judicial decisions, by which even peaceful picketing was made a crime, were re-enacted in a codified form, thus becoming "more uniformly effectual."<sup>2</sup> As a concession to the Unionists, this penalising provision was made into a separate Bill; but it passed as such, and an amendment introduced by the Lords made the prohibition of peaceful picketing

<sup>1</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 258-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 263.



even more stringent, "watching and besetting by a single individual being made as criminal as watching and besetting" by a multitude.<sup>1</sup> Thus "almost any action taken by Trade Unionists to induce a man not to accept employment at a struck shop resulted, under the new Act, in imprisonment with hard labour."<sup>2</sup> Yet "Mr. Gladstone refused, in 1872, to admit that there was any necessity for further legislation, and utterly declined to take the matter up; and during that session" no member could be found "willing to introduce a Bill for the repeal of" the obnoxious law.<sup>3</sup>

In order to understand the reactionary attitude of even Liberal politicians towards the claims of working men we must once more turn our attention to Continental affairs.

Bismarck's high-handed intervention in Schleswig-Holstein, related in a former chapter, was merely a first step towards the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership. His next step was the expulsion of Austria from the German Confederation. To secure the neutrality of France, illusory promises of territorial aggrandisement were dangled before the eyes of her Emperor, whose faculties, never very considerable, had for some time past been undermined by disease and fatigue. Italy gave her alliance in exchange for the prospective cession of Venetia, which, with Rome, was alone wanting to complete her independence and unity. A campaign of a few days in Bohemia (June-July, 1866) laid the Hapsburg

<sup>1</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 266. <sup>2</sup> P. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 269-70.



monarchy prostrate at the feet of its rival ; and, but for French jealousy, the great Prussian statesman's dream might have been at once realised. For the moment North Germany alone was permitted to unite in a new Confederation, to which, however, the South German States were bound by secret treaties of alliance in the event of a foreign war.

Napoleon III. came out of the crisis with a loss of prestige still further aggravated by the failure of his feeble attempts to obtain some of the promised compensation, which in this instance would have been no better than blackmail. Nor did his discomfitures end here. One of his schemes for giving France a sort of hegemony among the Latin races had been to set up an empire in Mexico under a creature of his own, the Austrian Archduke Maximilian. But the Mexicans did not want an Emperor ; and the ruler thrust upon them could only be maintained by a French army of occupation. On the overthrow of the Southern Confederacy this army had to be withdrawn, as a French opposition speaker expressed it, "before an imperious gesture of the United States." Under pressure from his Clericalist supporters, whom also perhaps he felt bound in honour not to abandon, Maximilian kept up a hopeless struggle with the Republican forces for a year longer. In June, 1867, he fell into the hands of President Juarez, who, in accordance with the usual Spanish custom—a custom followed by Maximilian himself when in power—had him shot as a disturber of the peace. Had their positions been reversed, the Austrian filibuster would probably have inflicted the same fate on the Mexican patriot without offending European prejudices.



By a singular combination of misfortunes, a little before the tragedy of Queretaro was announced the French Emperor had seen himself defeated in a paltry scheme of annexation. By a private bargain with its titular sovereign, the King of Holland, he had hoped to possess himself of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, a detached fragment of the old Germanic Confederation, deriving importance only from the great fortress with which its little capital used to be crowned. Unfortunately, Prussia still kept the fortress garrisoned with her troops, and, on hearing of the bargain made behind her back, refused to let it pass into the hands of a rival Power. War seemed imminent, but was temporarily averted, chiefly through the exertions of Lord Stanley, the English Conservative Foreign Minister, who assembled a European Conference in London and persuaded both parties to submit their claims to its decision. It was agreed that the fortress should be demolished, and that the Grand Duchy should be constituted as a neutral and independent territory. But the real diplomatic victory remained with the conquerors of Sadowa, whose breechloaders Napoleon III. was evidently afraid to face.

In the autumn of the same year, 1867, Garibaldi, with the almost undisguised approval and support of the Italian Government, led his volunteers to an attack on Rome, whence the French garrison had been withdrawn some years previously on an understanding that Italy was to suspend her designs for its annexation, at least during the lifetime of the reigning Pope. Garibaldi was within reach of success when the arrival of a French force,



dispatched, as is believed, against the Emperor's will, arrested him on the field of Mentana. De Failly, the French commander, an incompetent Court favourite, discredited his piteous victory by adding to its announcement a phrase destined to everlasting infamy: "The chassepots have done wonders." By a second blunder this was published in the *Moniteur*, evidently as a petty defiance to Prussia, for the chassepot was a newly-invented breechloader with which the French army was being rapidly supplied in view of a future war for the conquest of the Rhine frontier.

As the power and prestige of the Empire declined the strength and confidence of its domestic enemies increased. In the Press, in the Legislature, even in the law courts, the attacks of the Liberal Opposition on the Government grew more frequent and fearless, its home and foreign policy equally giving occasion for damaging criticism, sometimes conveyed in a style of high literary finish. At length, in 1869, the elections to the Corps Legislatif, although they still left the Bonapartists in a great majority, showed a gain of so many seats by the united sections of Liberal opinion as to permit no doubt that, in the absence of official pressure on the electors, their verdict would have been cast for constitutional freedom, as under Louis Philippe—a result which may perhaps be partly credited to the parallel democratic movement across the Channel. Personally, the Emperor rather welcomed such a change, tending, as it did, to lighten the overwhelming burden of his responsibilities, and a Liberal Cabinet was installed in power with his full acquiescence. Many, however, among his



old supporters looked on the new departure with alarm, and set their hopes on a successful war with Prussia, leading to a substantial increase of French territory, as the only chance of preserving the dynasty when Napoleon, whose health was rapidly failing, should be gone.

In these circumstances Bismarck adopted a course which has been severely censured for its apparent unscrupulousness, but for which something may be said even on grounds of the highest political morality. Seeing that the dominant party in France—and, indeed, any party likely to take its place should there be a revolution—might be expected to make war, whenever it suited their convenience, for the disruption and spoliation of Germany, he determined to promote a conflict between the two countries at a time when Germany still stood far better prepared for it than her hereditary enemy. For this purpose, early in 1870 he secretly put forward a young Prince of the Hohenzollern family as a candidate for the Spanish throne, which had remained vacant ever since the overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty by a military revolution in September, 1868. Prim, the author of the revolution, and still practically dictator of Spain, accepted the German nominee, and would have imposed his choice on the Cortes had not the rulers of France, in complete accord with Bismarck's previsions, intervened to forbid the Hohenzollern candidature immediately on its promulgation in July. Had the direct annexation of Spain to Prussia been contemplated, the language of the Emperor's representatives could not have been more violent. In point of fact, there neither



was nor could be any foundation for the affected alarm, the alliances of modern States not being determined by the family connections of their sovereigns; and Spain, of all European States, having the least motive for allying herself with a Protestant Power against Catholic France. The real grievance, if any, seems to have been that Spain, under a Liberal Government, would not have lent herself to the designs of the clerical party at the Tuileries. If we may trust a report current at the time, their plan was to replace the French expeditionary corps that had won Mentana by an equal number of Spanish troops, thus setting their own soldiers free for service on the Rhine in case of war. In this way the disagreeable alternative between abandoning Pius IX. or driving Italy into a second Prussian alliance would have been evaded. At any rate, on no imaginable contingency could it matter to France what became of the Spanish throne, unless some service was expected from its occupant in the event of a war to be fought at the imperial convenience for the disunion and dismemberment of Germany. And Germany's great leader had a perfect right to offer a challenge that none but an adversary bent on quarrelling would have taken up.

As it happened, the adversary found himself forced to fight on grounds that exhibited him much more completely in his true character of wanton aggressor and bully. In deference to public opinion, and at his father's desire, the Hohenzollern Prince withdrew his candidature. France scored a diplomatic victory; but the war party in the Emperor's councils continued to play Bismarck's



game. At their instance Benedetti, the French Ambassador to the Prussian Court, received instructions to demand a pledge from King William that the Prince's candidature should not be renewed on any future occasion. The King, who was at that time drinking the waters at Ems, refused to give any such pledge, refusing also, when his answer had been given, to hold any further communications on the subject with Benedetti during the short remainder of his stay at Ems. An account of these proceedings was telegraphed to Bismarck, then at his country seat with the Prussian generals Moltke and Roon as his guests. All three felt much disappointed at the pacific turn events seemed to be taking. According to his own account, Bismarck, by skilful compression, gave the King's message a rather more peremptory appearance than it really possessed, making it look as if William I. had altogether declined to discuss the question of future guarantees in a personal interview with the French Ambassador, which was not true. With the high approval of the two generals Bismarck then telegraphed his amended version of the Ems affair all over Europe. Whether by this bold stroke he really decided the question between peace and war may well be doubted, for the refusal of the last French demands would in any case have been far more effectual than a mere neglect of diplomatic forms in showing that the limits of concession had been reached—especially as the slightest inquiry would have shown that no breach of courtesy had, in fact, been committed; nor does it appear that the Empress Eugénie, who openly spoke of the war as her



work, needed any such trifling occasion to fix a purpose of which dynastic considerations were the sole determining motive.

Bismarck's skilful diplomacy had simply forced the French Empire to appear as what it really was, the aggressor. But for its desire to prevent the completion of German unity and to seize the Rhine provinces there would have been no war. And when the declaration of war came from Paris, the Prussian Minister excited still further prejudice against Napoleon III. by publishing the draft project of a treaty confidentially submitted to him in 1866 for the forcible annexation of Belgium to France, with a guarantee of Prussia's armed support against any Power opposing itself to this act of spoliation. The draft was in the handwriting of the Duc de Gramont, at that time French Ambassador at Berlin; and its genuineness, although long denied, is now admitted on all sides. Even in 1870 the Orleanist *Revue des Deux Mondes* saw nothing objectionable or surprising about the proposal, except that it should have been betrayed by Bismarck.

England, as the Power most interested in Belgian independence, was evidently the Power threatened with war by her imperial ally in the draft treaty, and her Government now hastened to guard against the danger by contracting a treaty with the two belligerents respectively, providing that, "if the armies of either violated the neutrality of Belgium, Great Britain should co-operate with the armies of the other for its defence."<sup>1</sup> Both

<sup>1</sup> Walpole, *History of Twenty-five Years*, vol. ii., p. 505.



Continental Powers eventually agreed to the treaty; but the delay of the French Government in accepting it, as compared with the alacrity of the Germans, suggested that their predatory designs were not yet entirely abandoned. In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, England might have prevented the whole war by threatening to fight the party, whichever it might be, that began hostilities—and in this he was almost certainly right; but the actual state of public morality would hardly have enabled the most popular Government to risk the responsibility of following his chivalrous suggestion.

Within a few weeks from the beginning of hostilities the whole fabric of French Imperialism, so adulated by the higher classes in England, had collapsed. Its legions had laid down their arms to the invader; the Emperor was a prisoner; the Empress and her son, to secure whose succession she had wrought such evils, were fugitives; the temporal power of the Pope had ceased to exist; Paris was surrounded by German armies; and the far-sighted patriots who had vainly protested against making war on such a frivolous pretext as the Ems telegram were vainly struggling under the name of a French Republic to save their country from the dismemberment entailed on it by twenty years of corruption and folly.

The first effect of this catastrophe on European politics was to allow the unification of Italy and of Germany to be completed. The next was to undo one of the results of the Crimean War. As a guarantee for Turkish independence, it had been provided in the Treaty of Paris that Russia should



only be allowed to keep a certain very limited number of warships in the Black Sea, and that the construction or maintenance of arsenals on its shores should be forbidden. The Czar now took advantage of France's prostration to give notice that he no longer considered himself bound by these humiliating restraints on his sovereign rights. In deference to English susceptibilities, it was arranged that a European Conference should be assembled to grant Russia a release from her treaty obligations—a ceremony that she would certainly have dispensed with had the release been refused. What was really the most important consequence of the Crimean War could not be undone by any Czar or any Conference. It stood plain to the eyes of all men in the shape of a united and victorious Germany, constituting a far more effective barrier to Russian ambition than any Black Sea Treaty. Still, the whole transaction proved highly injurious to the prestige of the Gladstone Government; and this impression was still further aggravated not long afterwards by the sentence of a Court of Arbitration condemning England to pay heavy damages for the loss inflicted on American shipping through the depredations of the *Alabama* and her consorts.

Meanwhile, the surrender of Paris brought the war to an end, and France accepted terms dictated by the conqueror. A National Assembly, elected by universal suffrage, succeeded the Government of National Defence imposed on the French people by the mob of Paris. But this Assembly, while it represented the desire of the country for peace, represented it in nothing else. A majority of the



members were Monarchists ; and, had it not been for their internal dissensions, a Bourbon Prince utterly out of sympathy with the ideas of modern France would have been placed on the vacant throne. The Parisian working men, already half-maddened by the privations of the siege, still retained the arms and the military organisation given them to be used against the invader. In a frenzy of rage, suspicion, baffled hopes, and Utopian dreams, they refused to obey the newly-constituted Government, drove its agents out of Paris, established a municipal reign of terror, and held the city against the armies of their own countrymen, under the eyes of a German garrison, until the tragedy closed seven weeks later in a carnival of blood and fire.

In France the Paris Commune—to give this abortive attempt at secularist municipalisation its historic name—nearly destroyed the new Republic. In England it not only revived the disdainful old commonplace that the French were unfit for a free government, but it also went far to counteract the democratic current set up by the Northern victory in the American War ; and this reaction told especially against Trade Unionism, with which the Commune was, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be in some way connected. A society called the “International Association of Working Men,” having for its object to establish a system of mutual support and co-operation among the working men of different countries, came in for a most unwarranted amount of suspicion and abuse on this occasion ; and an idea gained ground, recalling upper-class opinion at the time



of the first French Revolution, that the events in Paris heralded the explosion of a vast European conspiracy against property and religion. This sudden panic may account both for the refusal of the Parliamentary Liberals to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and for the Conservative reaction which, in a few years, reduced the Gladstonian majority to two-thirds of the figure it stood at in 1869.

One more triumph, however, remained for the reforming Cabinet before it succumbed, inwardly and outwardly, to the forces of obscurantism and privilege.

English Radicalism had been identified in Palmerston's time with a policy of retrenchment and disarmament. Now, it might seem at first sight as if the results of the Franco-German War had removed a formidable objection to the application of the anti-militarist programme. For the constant source of our disquietude during Palmerston's last Ministry had been the proximity to our shores of a great military and naval Power, flushed with recent victories, and ruled by a despotic chief, heir to the traditions of the first Napoleon, and suspected of harbouring vindictive designs against England as his uncle's most inveterate enemy. But now, with the overthrow of the French Empire, it seemed as if all fears from that quarter must be dissipated. Absorbed in the work of recovering their old military position, our neighbours would for many years to come have something else to think of than provoking a naval contest with England. If they ever fought again, it would be



in the first instance with Germany for the recovery of the provinces torn away from them by the Treaty of Frankfort; and, in view of that conflict, on which they could not venture without allies, their obvious interest was to cultivate a good understanding with every other nation. With regard to Germany, only panic-mongers could then dream of her as a possible foe, except in the peaceful competitions of industry; indeed, as an effective counterpoise to Russia, her commanding European position seemed more fitted to reassure than to alarm us.

Plausible as such reasonings were, they fell to pieces before the broad fact that Austria and France had indulged in similar dreams of security, and that each had gone down at the first blow because she neglected to keep her military organisation on a level with the requirements of modern warfare. Neither event had been anticipated by political or military experts, nor could either be made a sure ground of prediction for the immediate future. One thing only impressed itself as the paramount condition of national integrity, and this was that the whole fighting power of the country should be held at the disposition of its responsible rulers for employment, if need be, at a week's notice in its defence.

Such was the ideal of Army reorganisation; and to this as near an approach as circumstances permitted was made by the ablest administrator in the Liberal Cabinet, the War Minister, Edward Cardwell, a statesman trained in the unrivalled school of Sir Robert Peel. Sprung like Gladstone from the commercial classes, and, like him, adorned with the highest University honours, Cardwell,



after filling various great offices of State with marked success, undertook the War Office in 1868. Next year his reforms began. He strengthened the home army by withdrawing a considerable number of regiments from the Colonies for service in the British Islands, while at the same time he brought the regular troops into organic connection with the Militia and the Volunteers. In 1870 he made some approach to the German system of short service. Under his predecessors the term of enlistment, originally for life, had been lowered first to twenty-one years, and then to twelve. Cardwell maintained this limit, but divided the term into two periods of six years each, the first to be spent with the colours and the second with the Reserves—an arrangement permitting the soldier's return in early life to some civil occupation. Those who enlisted in regiments destined for home service only might be passed into the Reserves after three years with the colours. It was hoped that in consequence of this change more recruits, and recruits of a better class, would be engaged. In the same year the army was for the first time placed entirely under the control of a responsible Parliamentary head, the Commander-in-Chief being definitely subordinated to the War Office.

In 1871, under the heightened stimulus of Continental example, Cardwell took a further step towards creating an efficient army—the most conspicuous and difficult, if not the most important, of all. He substituted promotion by seniority and merit for promotion by seniority and purchase. This reform is an instance of the beneficent influence exercised by Indian experience on



English administration. It had been first brought into the sphere of practical politics by Sir Charles Trevelyan, a veteran Anglo-Indian official, who also had a great share in opening the Civil Service to candidates chosen by competitive examination; and his son, the present Sir George Trevelyan, became an enthusiastic advocate of the same cause on entering Parliament in 1865, after a residence of six months in India.

Cardwell's scheme for the abolition of army purchase proved an expensive measure, as the existing officers had to be compensated not only for the legal, but also for the illegal, prices they had paid for their commissions. Now, although England is the richest country in Europe, if the continuance of an abuse saves public money, even at the risk of financially ruinous consequences at some future time, arguments against its abolition are always forthcoming; nor were they wanting on this occasion. Had the defenders of the purchase system on its merits been serious, they should have advocated its extension to the navy, the scientific army corps, and, indeed, to the whole public service.

On this as on other occasions the Lords made themselves the agents of plutocratic interests, and passed a wrecking amendment to Cardwell's Bill. Then, to the delight of their supporters in the Commons, the Government took advantage of the circumstance that army purchase had originally been created by Royal Warrant to abolish it by the same means, in defiance of privileged obstruction. Queen Victoria disliked promotion by merit, and did not like offending the Lords; but the habit



of obeying her Prime Minister and the pleasure of exercising her prerogative carried the day, and the barbarous custom of selling offices of trust was abolished by the equally barbarous instrumentality of a Royal Proclamation. Now, as after 1832, the extension of democracy brought with it a more unified authority, making for increased legislative and administrative efficiency.

Army reform was the last triumph of the Liberal Government. As already mentioned, they settled the *Alabama* question, but at the expense of paying an indemnity much in excess of what could be justly claimed for the depredations of the Birkenhead privateers. They passed a Ballot Bill, which, for some unexplained reason, seems to have benefited the Conservative more than the Liberal candidates. Their drink legislation made mortal enemies of the publicans, without doing much to check intemperance. Finally, in order to complete the pacification of Ireland, they proposed to establish a new Irish University without a Professor of Moral Philosophy, without a Professor of Modern History, and with a provision that such Professors as did exist should say nothing at which any of their pupils might think fit, on theological grounds, to take offence. A vote in favour of this grotesque proposal was described by one of the Liberal speakers as a vote of confidence in Cardinal Cullen and his priests. Unluckily for its authors, Cardinal Cullen had no confidence in the Bill. By his orders, or rather by the Pope's, the Irish Catholics voted against it on the second reading. Many Liberals joined in their defection, the whole



Conservative party threw its weight into the same scale, and the Bill was lost by a majority of three. Gladstone at once resigned, and the Queen sent for Disraeli, who, however, refused to take office, leaving his rival to drag out a few more months of discredited political existence.

In January, 1874, the Liberal leader dissolved Parliament on a promise to abolish the income-tax if he were returned to power. But income-taxpayers did not form a majority of the new electorate, and as a class they were more than satisfied with the amount of reform already secured, many even fearing that a new lease of Radicalism would leave them no income to be taxed. Dissenters and Secularists resented the re-endowment of Church schools. Trade Unionist working men were actively hostile to a Government which, against their earnest remonstrances, had passed the Bill making peaceful picketing a crime. Their remedy was to run Labour candidates in opposition to Liberals and Conservatives alike, with the result that in most cases where a triangular contest took place the Conservative won the seat. Working men of an inferior sort resented the actual or threatened restrictions on their opportunities for getting drunk. Thus, although the Conservatives were in a minority on the total poll, they secured a majority of at least fifty in the House of Commons, and that, too, a majority of the most obedient sort; while a large number of the Irish Liberals had been returned as Home Rulers, and might be expected to vote with exclusive regard to obtaining autonomy for their island.

Gladstone resigned before the new Parliament



met, and Disraeli accepted an office which, for the first time in his life, gave him power as well as place. But his ignorance of the English temper remained complete, and the commanding position he now filled merely gave him an opportunity for exhibiting that ignorance more conspicuously than ever before.



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE REVOLT OF LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

A PERIOD of Conservative reaction in politics is often, if not always, marked by a forward movement in Liberal ideas. We saw how Pitt's reign of terror coincided with a great outburst of speculative activity, and how Peel's triumph was similarly illustrated by the forward-looking thought of early Victorian literature and philosophy. A second and even higher wave of progress follows under the aging Palmerston's retrograde rule, and comes to a pause with the political re-awakening of 1865. Then a more rapid movement of ebb and flow makes itself felt. The Irish Church Bill marks a climax in political Liberalism; the Education Bill and the refusal of fair play to the Trade Unions betray a slackening of fibre in its official representatives, a weak concession to religious and social prejudices. But this temporary halt or retreat is more than compensated by advances in another field.

Matthew Arnold, himself the son of a great Liberal divine, had pushed, at an early age, his father's innovating method to the acceptance of modern pantheism in its most outspoken form. Then, in a strangely obscurantist mood, he had attacked Bishop Colenso for postponing edification



to truth. Yet his last great poem, *Obermann Once More*, published in 1867, and presumably addressed to a popular audience, treats Christianity as an outworn illusion. The triumph of Dissent in 1868 irritated his refined susceptibilities; but this was chiefly because he looked on Dissenters as more illiberal and hardened dogmatists than Catholic Churchmen, whether Anglican or Roman. Religion was the best thing in the world; but, according to Arnold, it stood for enthusiastic morality. His work on *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870) has for its object to show that this was, in effect, what the great Apostle of the Gentiles meant, or, at any rate, that his essential teaching might be preserved without accepting the specific doctrines of orthodox Christianity, or even the doctrines of a personal God and a future life.

Although Arnold had begun as a rather supercilious critic of Dissent, he soon found himself practically fighting on the side of Dissent against the advocates of denominational religious teaching in the Board schools. His next work, *Literature and Dogma* (1873), is an impassioned plea for making the Bible the basis of moral instruction, but a Bible interpreted on principles like those already applied to St. Paul's Epistles—in other words, a Bible totally divested of supernaturalist implications. The objects of his ridicule are not now to be found among members of the Liberation Society, but on the Episcopal Bench; while his most eager readers are to be sought in the Secularist or Agnostic ranks. Finally, his apologetic treatise, *God and the Bible* (1875), is much more successful as a popular version of extreme



rationalistic views than as an attempt to associate new meanings with old beliefs.

Apart from their intrinsic literary merit, which is high, these works of Arnold's deserve to be studied as evidence of the new freedom granted to those who took the unpopular side in religious discussions. Dr. Lushington's decision that a clergyman might lawfully subject any part of the Bible to adverse criticism seems to have released not only the clergy, but the laity also, from those bonds which had hitherto operated in restraint of plain speaking about religion among a people who habitually talked of themselves as the freest in the world. Opinions of a more advanced kind had, indeed, been openly professed for the last twenty years by Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and others, on the platform and in the Press. But these men formed almost a separate world, with publishers and a public of their own, any attempt on their part to associate themselves with the general interests of the people being resented almost as an outrage by the respectables. Indeed, it told heavily against Mill at the Westminster election of 1868 that he had subscribed to the election expenses of Bradlaugh, at that time already a candidate for Northampton. It was a new thing that opinions indistinguishable on the negative side from Bradlaugh's should not only be professed by one of the foremost literary men of the age, but also that they should be first published as articles in the *Cornhill Magazine* and the *Contemporary Review*.

Matthew Arnold passed for being a candid friend of the Churches, and no doubt his mind was so constituted as to feel itself more in sympathy with



their most believing members than with their uncompromising assailants. But there was not room on the needle's point for more than one such graceful performer. Mr. Swinburne, the great rising poet of the day, after devoting some of the loveliest of his *Poems and Ballads* (1866) to the glorification of Greek Paganism at the expense of Christianity, now proceeded, in a volume of revolutionary hymns entitled *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), to denounce the idea of God with hardly less vehemence than the French Emperor or the Catholic Church. James Thomson, the strong, sombre poet of English pessimism, in his *City of Dreadful Night*, first published in Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* (1874), proclaims as "good tidings of great joy" that there is no God, and that "this little life is all we must endure." Robert Browning, a theistic optimist, who had formerly looked to Christianity for a definite guarantee of immortality, now let it be known that he rejected revelation, contenting himself with the natural religion of Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, and Byron.<sup>1</sup>

Another very distinct indication of the rising current is to be found in Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Although this poem first appeared in 1859, its great popularity among the cultivated classes dates only from the early

<sup>1</sup> I have put together all the evidence furnished by Browning's poems respecting his attitude towards supernatural religion in my *History of English Rationalism*, vol. ii., pp. 275-83. As the force of my citations has been questioned, I may here refer also to the poet's own categorical statement made in conversation with Robert Buchanan that he was not a Christian (*The Outcast*, p. 198), and to his friend Mrs. Sutherland Orr's equally categorical statement that Browning's faith did not extend to a belief in revealed religion (*Contemporary Review*, vol. ix., p. 880).



'seventies, when the spirit of the age had come into closer sympathy with the hostility to theological teaching expressed in its quatrains, and most of all in those quatrains where the translator's altering and interpolating hand is most clearly visible.

Prose fiction also, where it touches the horizons of life, now indicates a distinct change of outlook as compared with the early Victorian period. Not to mention the novelists who, like Charlotte Yonge, wrote with an avowedly dogmatic purpose, there is a distinct pietistic vein running through the stories of Bulwer Lytton, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Reade, and Anthony Trollope. Somewhat later George Eliot, without being herself a believer, adopts a highly sympathetic attitude towards religion. It is therefore somewhat remarkable that, on returning to prose fiction, after a silence prolonged through the reforming era (1866-71), she should exhibit in *Middlemarch*, her most elaborate and splendid performance, a much warmer sympathy with science than with religion. In the novels of her successor, Mr. Thomas Hardy, whose literary career begins at this same time, the repudiation of any interest outside humanity has always been more conclusive, and latterly has been more outspoken. And the same may be said of Mr. George Meredith, whose fame first spread beyond a narrow circle of admirers in the early 'seventies.

Darwin, in his *Origin of Species*, had not expressly gone into the question of man's derivation; and, although there could be no serious doubt about the inclusion of our race under the general



law of evolution by natural selection, it remained open to those who dreaded the great discoverer's authority to contend that he had left the matter undecided. By publishing *The Descent of Man* in 1871, the master closed that door of escape, and definitely placed himself by the side of his German disciple Haeckel. Nor were the English Darwinians at any pains to conceal what they regarded as the inconsistency of the new theory with the old beliefs. While carefully repudiating philosophical materialism, they taught something no less hostile to the idea that the world had been created, or was governed, by a superhuman intelligence and will. In his Presidential Address to the British Association (1874) Professor Tyndall, speaking for the physicists, announces that "we claim and we shall wrest from theology the entire domain of cosmological theory." He "discerns in matter the promise and potency of all terrestrial life." At the same meeting Huxley explained that our so-called voluntary movements are simply processes in the mechanism of the nervous system, connected by an unbroken continuity with the great series of causes and effects composing the sum of existence.

Such a conclusion was already implicit in the law of universal causation which Mill, thirty years earlier, had made the very foundation of inductive logic. But Mill failed to grasp the implications of his own philosophy. Dying at Avignon in 1873, he left behind him three unpublished Essays on Religion, which appeared in the following year. One of these deals with theism. All the usual arguments of natural theology for the existence of a God are passed in review and rejected, with the



single exception of the argument from design, and that only retains a provisional value, subject to the verdict of science on the soundness of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Supposing the origin of species by natural selection, or any other natural law, to be confirmed, theism would be lost. In the absence of such confirmation, the argument from design is allowed to possess a certain value, but only to the extent of creating a presumption that organised beings are the work of an intelligent Being whose power is limited by external conditions. Mill seems to have known very little about the facts of organic evolution, and to have forgotten Hume's destructive criticism of teleology as a basis for theism. A young Darwinian biologist, G. J. Romanes, who had gone very thoroughly into the subject before Mill's book appeared, exposed the fallacy of the great logician in a most convincing way ; and, although himself reconverted to theism at a later period, he seems to have derived his faith from emotional rather than from scientific considerations.

Meanwhile another representative of the new generation who, had he lived, would probably have taken the highest place among England's scientific thinkers, Professor W. K. Clifford, pointed out, in a celebrated lecture on *Body and Mind* (1874), that the intimate connection between mental function and nervous structure suggests a necessary dependence of consciousness on certain material combinations. And a brain of such dimensions as to support the mind of God is not found to exist. Clifford himself was not a materialist, but an idealist ; that is to say, he looked on



material phenomena as merely the way in which the minds that form the ultimate elements of existence impress themselves on one another. What distinguished him from the theologians was that, instead of starting with an infinite intelligence and will, he assumes, to begin with, an enormous number of monads, each possessing an infinitesimal share of sensibility and volition, out of which animal and human minds have been built up by a slow process of compounding and recombining, the resulting units being broken up at death and never afterwards reconstituted.

While theologians were kept on the alert by attacks proceeding from men of the highest scientific reputation on the very foundation of their beliefs, their historical pretensions were challenged by a massive work on *Supernatural Religion* (1874), having for its object to show that the miraculous narratives of the New Testament are so late, so ill-attested, and so self-contradictory as not to merit belief. It was written by a retired Indian official, the late Mr. Walter Cassels, who, however, did not acknowledge himself as the author until many years later. Appearing without any adventitious authority, the book nevertheless at once riveted public attention, and, in spite of its high price, passed through several editions in a few years, successfully braving an elaborate attack from Dr. Lightfoot, the most learned of Anglican divines. As is usual in such literature, the method followed by the orthodox apologist was to fasten exclusively on minor slips and side issues, overlooking the main stress of the rationalist argument.



Criticism of a more ephemeral character, but distinguished in many instances by intellectual merits of a high order, abounded in the lighter literature of the period. Such an onslaught on the popular theology, so ably conducted and marked by such passionate hostility, had never been known before among the higher classes of English society, and has not since been repeated. We have to seek for the explanation of so remarkable a phenomenon in the circumstances of the time. To begin with, the leaders of religious opinion were themselves largely responsible for the quarrel. They had attacked the new scientific theory of evolution and its representatives, as they had formerly attacked the truths of geology, with ignorant misrepresentation and venomous persistence. Even well on in the 'seventies we have it on contemporary evidence that "the rank and file of the Anglican clergy were intensely obscurantist," and that the pulpits rang with declamations against modern science.<sup>1</sup>

Science was perhaps big enough to take care of herself; but her votaries wished knowledge to be diffused as well as increased—more especially as diffusion would make for further increase. They were all for popular education; and here the clergy offered a much more formidable resistance than that opposed to their views about man's place in nature. While still himself a clergyman, J. R. Green, the celebrated historian of the English people, declared that "the clergy knew that a thoroughly educated people, and that people without any uneducated class, would be the ruin of

<sup>1</sup> John Morley, *Struggle for National Education*, p. 61; *On Compromise*, p. 53.



their Establishment. And so they fight every point, but with them it is a fight for life." These words were written before the passing of the Education Act. Clerical influence made the new system far less efficient than it ought to have been by associating it with an increased endowment of denominational teaching. Meanwhile—so at least Green thought—"every day made it more impossible to conciliate the Church of Dogma with the Church of Science." He welcomes the Liberal defeat at the General Election of 1874 as likely to hasten on Disestablishment. State support to a Ritualist Church means "paying money to make England papist."<sup>1</sup>

*Pari passu* with the new sacerdotal movement, the Romanism which Green and many others looked on as its inevitable terminus was every year assuming a more ominous aspect. We have seen to what dangerous principles the acceptance of Papal infallibility was expected to pledge every consistent Catholic believer. And quite apart from doctrinal implications, the Papacy as a political institution did not commend itself to English Liberalism. Pius IX. actively and openly opposed the unification of Italy. He was universally believed to be counter-working the establishment of a Republic in France. And the formation of a powerful Catholic Opposition in the new German Parliament convinced such good judges as the founders of German unity that the Pope was its deadly enemy. Now, all three causes were supported by the Liberal party in England, to which

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of J. R. Green*, pp. 171-72, 292, 378.



English rationalists, almost without exception, belonged, so that every motive of interest and sympathy impelled them to make war on a system which could be most effectually destroyed by showing that its fundamental assumptions were untrue.

Disraeli had no sympathy with science, and rationalism he thoroughly detested. But, both as a Jew and a Tory, he also hated the Roman Church; and his most entertaining, if not his most brilliant novel, *Lothair* (1870), is directed against Rome's supposed machinations for alluring rich young men into her fold. As Prime Minister, a cardinal principle of his policy was, apparently, to avoid what he considered the mistakes of his predecessor. Now, the overthrow of the Irish Church was, in his opinion, the removal of an important bulwark against Rome. To check Romanising practices within the Anglican Church would have the contrary effect. Probably for this reason Disraeli, though personally not approving of it, gave his support and sympathy to one of the earliest measures of his Administration, the Public Worship Regulation Bill, describing it as a Bill "to put down Ritualism"—a phrase which sent back a large body of High Church support to his rival Gladstone.<sup>1</sup>

More success attended the Tory Government in such of their measures as were designed for the benefit of the working classes; but it must not be forgotten that these were the direct fruit of the

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Kebbel, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xv., p. 112.



extended suffrage Toryism had so long resisted. As it was, the Trade Unions had some difficulty in holding the Tories to their electioneering pledges. A Commission appointed to consider their grievances only led to "a perfunctory investigation and an inconclusive report." Then, as the result of increased agitation, "the Home Secretary introduced a Bill for altering respectively the civil and criminal law. As amended in Committee by the efforts of A. J. Mundella and others, these measures resulted in Acts which completely satisfied the Trade Union demands. The Criminal Law Amendment Act was repealed." By another Act "definite and reasonable limits were set to the application of the law of conspiracy to trade disputes." A third Act transformed the relation between capitalist and labourer from that between master and servant to that of employer and employee, making them "two equal parties to a civil contract." "Imprisonment for breach of contract was abolished, peaceful picketing permitted, violence and intimidation dealt with as part of the general criminal Code."<sup>1</sup>

To Mundella, the Radical member for Sheffield, also belongs the credit of a new Factory Act, still further reducing the hours of labour for women and children, and indirectly for men, passed in 1874 by the Conservative Home Secretary. This, together with the Factories and Workshops Act of 1878—a measure for consolidating and simplifying the whole mass of legislation on the subject—has given occasion to the unwarrantable boast that the Conservatives are the best friends of the working man.

<sup>1</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 274-75.



What this friendship really amounts to was shown by a remarkable incident in the Session of 1875, which also illustrates a discreditable habit observed among English politicians of yielding to violence what they will not yield to justice. Samuel Plimsoll, a Nonconformist philanthropist who first entered Parliament in 1868, and was re-elected in 1874, had for some years been devoting himself to schemes for protecting the sailors employed on board merchant ships against the murderous greed of the shipowners. He discovered that it was a common practice to send out unseaworthy vessels insured beyond the value of their cargo with a view to making a profitable speculation in the highly probable event of their going down with all hands on board. According to Plimsoll, rotten old craft were bought up by regular "ship-knackers" for this nefarious purpose. Aided in his campaign by large contributions from the Trade Unions, he introduced more than one Bill for the protection of the unfortunate sailors by a system of official inspection. On his failing to pass a measure for the purpose, popular agitation compelled the Conservative Government to take it up in 1875; but towards the close of the Session they withdrew their Bill. Plimsoll thereupon made a violent scene in the House, shaking his fist in the face of the Ministers, and calling the shipowning members, to whose hostility he attributed the defeat of his efforts, "you villains." Disraeli, with great tact and good temper, let down the exasperated enthusiast as gently as in the circumstances was possible. A temporary Act was at once passed, and something in the way of permanent legislation



was effected the year after, but only, as would seem, with the result that "the evils both of overloading and of unseaworthiness were aggravated by this well-meant attempt to check them."<sup>1</sup> It does not appear that the method of making owners penally responsible for the loss of life, if any, due to their calculated negligence has been tried.

To restore Army purchase outright was beyond the power of the Tory Government. But they brought back the principle in an underhand way by a Bill enabling poor officers who exchanged into regiments ordered to India to accept a sum of money from those whose places they took, and who were willing to hire substitutes—for that was what the arrangement really meant—that they might be relieved from the obligation of serving their country in that disagreeable manner.

Among the provisions of Forster's Education Act which gave offence to Nonconformists the Twenty-fifth Section, although not the most important, was the one particularly singled out for attack. It "enabled School Boards to pay the school-pence of the children of the indigent parents at whatever school, denominational or otherwise, the indigent parent might select."<sup>2</sup> In 1876 the obnoxious clause was repealed; but, as the new Act merely transferred the payment of school-pence from the School Board to the Guardians, the grievance of those who objected to being taxed for a religious education of which they did not approve remained the same, and was even aggravated

<sup>1</sup> *Social England*, vol. vi., p. 615.

<sup>2</sup> Morley, *Struggle for National Education*, p. 8.