

PORTRAIT OF A LIBERAL

FEW words are more ambiguous than 'liberalism.' Liberals of the Manchester school invoked liberalism in their efforts to liberate economic activity from state control, whereas modern liberals are even more anxious than Socialists to extend the sphere of the state's activities. When Lord Shaftesbury, the Conservative, introduced the Factory Acts to liberate small children from the tyranny of the machines, John Bright and Cobden protested in the name of liberalism against any attempt to fetter the economic activities of the factory owners. Towards the end of the century, Mr. Lloyd George, in the name of Liberalism, imposed compulsory insurance on the nation.

My father's Liberalism was derived not from Manchester, but from Nazareth. He was one of the last survivors of those Victorians who were Christian Liberals as opposed to secular Liberals. The Liberalism of the convinced Christian must always be qualified by the conclusions which he draws from the great premise that man is made in the image of God, and therefore has rights which no dictator and no democratic majority can over-ride. Secular Liberalism, on the other hand, with its deification of the 'General Will,' inevitably leads to the servile state. If man is nothing more than first cousin to the chimpanzee there is no reason why a dictator or a dictatorial majority should not put him behind bars. It is only man's supernatural estate which alone guarantees his personal dignity and his inalienable rights.

The Renaissance, like Liberalism, had two aspects, Christian and secular, for the Church which saved the classic learning during the dark ages was the patron of the great revival of classic learning. Secular Liberalism had its roots not in the Christian but in the Pagan Renaissance, which denied, if only by implication, the supernatural values and accepted as its only criterion the truncated and impoverished humanism which ignores all values save those of this

world. Pagan humanism promised emancipation from divine authority, but condemned its dupes to inevitable tyranny, for man is only free within the framework of an authority which guarantees his rights because it respects his nature. The Byzantine Church of Tsarist Russia had its origin in the Greek schism which revolted against the authority of Rome. German Lutheranism represented a yet further stage in the deification of private judgment. The flight from authority has led neither Russia nor Germany to the land of liberty. No tyranny of the dark ages was more ruthless and more satanic than those which are to-day crushing out the last remnants of liberty from the countries in which Hitler and Stalin rule. The pact between these dictators should have surprised nobody, for there is an identity of aim in the Russian and Prussian forms of that anti-Christ'ian Socialism which is the final end of secular Liberalism.

Freedom survives in England because we are still a Christian country with an instinctive, rather than a conscious, conviction that authority is derived from above, and that man has rights of which no democratic majority may deprive him. The fact that the Church of England is established and that England is legally a Christian country is a protection, none the less potent because unrecognised, against the tyranny of secularism.

Secular Liberalism was born on the shores of Lake Geneva in the salons of Madame Necker and Madame de Stael. Its basic doctrine was defined in the proposition: 'It is contrary to the natural, innate and inalienable right and liberty and dignity of man to subject himself to an authority the root, rule and measure and sanction of which is not in himself.'

In England, classic land of compromise, secular Liberalism masked its hostility to religion, as such, and allied itself with Dissenters in an attack upon the Church Schools, and in a successful campaign for the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland and Wales. The alliance between the

Liberals who rejected all religious belief and the Liberals who rejected the doctrine of the Established Church resulted in the gradual secularisation of public life, a process which is fortunately not yet completed. A Methodist, whose work as a historian had earned him the respect of scholars, once remarked to me sadly: 'When I was a young man, I believed that it was vitally important to protect Methodist children from the infection of Anglican doctrines, but to-day I'd rather that my children were educated by a convinced Anglo-Catholic than by the sort of nominal Christian who only believes in the values of this world.'

My father disliked the bitterness of extreme Dissenters. When the Liberal Party decided to disestablish the Welsh Church he formed a committee to mitigate the severity of the disendowment proposals, and, thanks to his efforts, the Welsh Church received more generous treatment than at one time seemed probable. He could work up no enthusiasm against the payment of Church Rates which helped to finance Anglican instruction in Church Schools. I remember his returning one evening from a meeting of Dissenters pledged to 'Passive Resistance.' Passive Resisters refused to pay Church Rates, with the result that property to the value of the rates was sold at public auction and bought back by the owners. 'A cheap form of martyrdom,' said my father, 'but the dear brethren to-night talked as if they were bracing themselves to enter the amphitheatre. We sang hymns like Christians in the Catacombs, and asked the Almighty to strengthen us as if we were facing the Stake.' My father had sulkily agreed to join the movement, and so he refused to pay the Church Rates.

A few days later I met a policeman just as I was leaving the house. He smiled sheepishly, for it was embarrassing to distrain on the property of a J.P. 'You see, Sir,' he began . . . I cut short his explanations. He looked relieved. 'Well, Sir, seeing as you understand what I'm here for, what about that bike? It looks new.'

'It is new,' I said, 'and it's not only new but mine.'

'Oh well, you can buy it back in a day or two.'

'I shan't buy it back, because I am not going to part with it,' I replied. 'It's my father, not I, who is the candidate for the amphitheatre. I'm a loyal Anglican. The church I stay away from is the church you're so kindly assisting at this moment. We're on the same side.'

The policeman looked depressed. I escorted him into the house and offered him an engraving of Cologne signed by the Burgomeisters, whose tour of England had been arranged by my father. 'Cologne,' said the policeman. 'That's where the scent comes from. That picture wouldn't fetch ten bob.' I offered him John Wesley's *Journal* in six volumes. 'People haven't time for that sort of heavy stuff nowadays.' And then I had an inspiration. My father possessed a beautiful pair of field glasses with Zeiss lenses. 'That's more like it,' said the policeman.

A few hours later my father returned.

'A policeman called to-day.'

A faint look of distaste passed over my father's face.

'He wanted my bike.'

'Oh, well, I'll buy it back for you in a day or two,' said my father.

'So he said, but he was wrong. It's your Zeiss glasses that you'll buy back in a day or two.'

My father shot out of his seat.

'My glasses! How monstrous! You should have given him anything but those.'

'That's why I gave them. I thought you'd like a slight whiff of the amphitheatre.'

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The word 'Liberalism' has been the greatest asset to the Liberal party, for the word implies that a love of liberty is the distinguishing characteristic of Liberals. If this were so we should all be Liberals, for we all love our own liberty. Milton was a Liberal of this school. He did not write against marriage until his own marriage was a failure,

or protest against the licensing of books until his own tracts had been condemned as immoral. And he did not refuse the post of Censor when it was offered him, for that post carried a handsome salary. The French Liberals, who sowed the seeds of the French Revolution, wished to be liberated from the authority of the Church and the King, and hoped to transfer the privileges of the nobility to themselves, but they had no intention of liberating the proletariat from the authority of the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie. Bright and Cobden wished to liberate their party from the authority of the House of Lords, but they opposed the liberation of small children from the tyranny of the factories. Whig aristocrats sympathised with every revolution abroad and successfully prevented revolution at home.

Liberalism, however, would never have captured the allegiance of good men had it been nothing more than selfishness disguised by a thin veneer of hypocrisy. English Liberals have always included among their leaders men who believed not only in liberating themselves but also in liberating those with whose religious or political views they disagreed.

British Liberalism, at its best, reflected the characteristic English virtues, tolerance, a sense of fair play and the conviction that differences should be settled by free discussion rather than by force. Liberalism prevented the secession of Canada and might have prevented the virtual secession of Eire, had Home Rule been granted when Gladstone proposed it. The noblest flower of Liberalism was the Christian peace which brought the disastrous South African War to its end.

Liberalism, like charity, should begin at home, and my father made a real, if only a partially successful effort not to interfere too much with his unruly family. But by temperament he was an authoritarian. Nothing could have been less democratic than my father's attitude towards the Directors of Companies of which he was the Chairman. He could never distinguish between a public company and

a family concern, or realise that directors were elected, at least in theory, to represent the views of share-holders rather than to support the chairman against their better judgment. If directors opposed him, as they sometimes did, he was genuinely grieved and perplexed, but never vindictive. He was a benevolent dictator and retained the affectionate loyalty even of those who, like my Uncle Holdsworth or the oldest member of the firm, Mr. Elkington, must often have found him exasperating.

Like all Liberals, he was a great believer in international co-operation and friendship. He organised municipal parties in Germany and parties of German Burgomeisters to England. He was knighted for his services to Anglo-German friendship, though it is, of course, only too patent that the German desire for British friendship in 1913 was inspired by the same motives as in 1939, a desire for our neutrality until all possible allies had been disposed of. The ineffectiveness of Liberal internationalism is due, among other things, to the fact that English Liberals instinctively think of foreigners as members of inferior races who are fortunate in having the sympathetic interest of English Liberals and who would be wise to accept their leadership in the campaign for a united Europe.

Few men had travelled more than my father, and few men could have been less interested in the countries through which he travelled. America was an exception, but then the Americans spoke English and were thereby promoted into a class of honorary Englishmen. My father was delighted by the signal honour, conferred on few Englishmen, of election as an honorary member of the Mother Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa fraternity, a fraternity which elects those who achieve outstanding academic distinctions in American universities. He had a vague feeling of affinity with the Germans and an ingrained distrust of the French. He liked the Swiss, but he seldom returned from abroad without murmuring, 'There's no country like England and no people like the English.' He had a gift

for languages and mastered enough Greek in a few weeks to pass his university examinations in that language, and he read the Greek Testament as easily as the Authorised Version, but he was so little interested in foreigners, whose political and ecclesiastical co-operation he desired, that he never bothered to master enough French or German to ask his way to the station. I have only heard him use one French phrase which contained four French words. Sugar disagreed with him, and I have often heard him ask for '*cacao, pas de chocolat,*' but he always got chocolate.

Friendship between nations cannot be manufactured by societies or by men who believe in internationalism as an ideal, but who remain obstinately national in their own personal outlook. It is difficult to feel any genuine affection for foreigners unless you live among them, learn their language and take the trouble to understand their cultural background.

*L'amore di qualunque cosa è figliuola d'essa cognizione.
L'amore.—è tanto piu fervente quando la cognizione è
più certa.*

International friendship cannot be mass produced by ideologists of the Left 'who are so occupied with the rights of man that they have completely forgotten his nature.' Burke's famous comment on the English sympathisers with the French Jacobins explains, among other things, the failure of the League of Nations.

My father's Liberalism was, in the main, ideological but his Christianity had its roots in experience. His internationalism was 'progressive,' but his views on wealth, and its dangers, were reactionary, for they were derived through John Wesley from the mediaeval scholastics. Most Christians abandon as insoluble the problem of applying the Christian teaching on wealth. Wesley's difficulty was not to discover the solution to this problem, but to believe that a problem existed. 'Where is the difficulty?' he said. 'Provide yourself and your dependants with simple food

and plain raiment and give away the rest.' As a young man he discovered that he could live on £28 a year. When his income rose to £400 (thanks to the sale of his books), he still lived on £28 and gave away the rest. 'He who has enough to satisfy his wants,' wrote a mediaeval theologian, 'and nevertheless labours to acquire riches, either in order to obtain a higher social position, or that subsequently he may have enough to live without labour, or that his sons may become men of wealth and importance—all such are puffed up by a damnable avarice, sensuality, and pride.'

Liberalism arose, as that distinguished Socialist, Professor Laski, insists, as the result of a widespread desire to liberate the rich from the restrictions which the mediaeval church imposed upon money making. 'Whereas in the Middle Ages the idea of acquiring wealth was limited by a body of moral rules imposed under the sanction of religious authority, after 1,500 years those rules, and the institutions, habits and ideas to which they had given birth, were no longer deemed adequate. They were felt as a constraint. They were evaded, criticised, abandoned, because it was felt that they interfered with the exploitation of the means of production. New conceptions were needed to legitimize the new potentialities of wealth that men had discovered little by little in preceding ages. The Liberal doctrine is the philosophic justification of the new practices.'¹

Professor R. H. Tawney, in his brilliant book, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, which can be bought for sixpence in the Pelican Series, describes the gradual transformation of the mediaeval doctrine that the acquisition of

¹ I have quoted this passage from the *Rise of European Liberalism* in my book, *Communism and Socialism* (p. 36), in the introduction to which I have tried to summarise the mediaeval attitude to money making. For a fuller treatment of John Wesley's attitude I may refer the reader to my life of John Wesley, pp. 340 *et. seq.*

wealth was a drudgery or temptation, into the dogma that the acquisition of wealth was a moral duty. My father had a genius for making money which was only equalled by his talent for losing it and for giving it away. In his rare moments of prosperity he was always ill at ease, but at his best in the more congenial climate of financial stringency. As a young man he had founded a successful business and abandoned it for the Mission Field. He quarrelled with Methodism because he maintained that Methodist Missionaries would be more effective if their standard of living were more in accordance with those among whom they worked. He founded the Free Church Touring Guild and the Church Travellers' Club, and limited their profits by restrictions which he himself insisted on imposing. The bulk of the profits had to be given away to charities nominated by him. Had he been commercially minded he could have obtained the necessary ecclesiastical backing for about twenty per cent. of the sums which he disbursed in charity. Hundreds of poor parsons received free holidays, and many good causes in which he was interested benefited by this arrangement. As he retained complete control over the distribution of charities, he could have re-invested these in the business and distributed the income on the capital thus invested. I urged this course, for though I was in sympathy with his policy, I believed that it would be better to provide rather fewer parsons with free holidays than to imperil a business which was a source of income to so many good works, but it was impossible to control my father when there was money to give away. 'Money never stays with me,' wrote John Wesley, 'it would burn if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way to my heart.' Those words might have been inscribed on my father's tomb. He and my mother occupied four rooms in the Albany Hotel, Hastings, which the company owned. He never wished for a car or a big house or any of the outward and visible signs of success. 'If only people,' he often said, 'would realise how much fun they

can get by giving money away they wouldn't buy cars.' My mother shared his bizarre views. Had she taken the vow of poverty which is binding on members of religious orders, her life would have been no different. She worked in an East End parish, and as an old lady of seventy she would take buses from her work to the station before facing the long journey down to the South Coast, to save the taxi fare for her charities.

During the post-war boom the business began to make money, and my father, an incurable optimist, promptly began to dispose of a non-existent fortune. He limited his own income by deed to £500 a year, over and above his expenses at the Albany, and after allotting shares which he believed would provide reasonable incomes for his children, appointed a fund to administer the income from his shares for charity. A pessimist has been defined as a man who has lived with an optimist, hence my lack of interest either in the 'Trust' or in my own hypothetical share in this legacy, for I never believed that these shares would pay a dividend—nor did they. 'Fairy Gold' was the family term for the incomes which we were to draw from a non-existent fund. I wish that my father could have foreseen the embarrassing consequences of his action, for he was represented both in the British and the American press as a philanthropist who had distributed millions in charity, with the unhappy result that he was bombarded by appeals from all over the world. This legend was revived at the time of his death, and most people assumed that a man who had given away millions must have left some thousands to his family, whereas beyond a small annuity to his widow he left nothing, for the shares in the family business had passed, long before his death, to the new owners. I have no regrets, but though I have no ambitions to be wealthy, I cannot afford the expensive luxury of being considered rich.

On one occasion when my father was addressing a group of young Methodists, he quoted Wesley's famous will: 'I left no money to anyone because I have none.'

'I wonder what you'll leave,' interjected a sardonic sceptic.

'Wait and see,' replied my father cheerfully. But God took him literally, and his will might have been modelled on John Wesley's.

He was a member of the Shadow Cabinet of the Liberal Party and a vice-president of the Liberal League, but his relations with the Liberal Party were strained by their attitude to the Spanish War, and severed by their attack on the Munich Agreement.

My father, though he remained a Methodist lay preacher, had been confirmed in the Church of England, and had a great sympathy with the Anglo-Catholics. He claimed to be a member of the Catholic Church. 'You tell me you are a Catholic,' I said to him in the early days of the Spanish War, 'and you resent the intolerance of those who maintain that Catholicism is confined to Catholics in communion with Rome, but I hope you aren't one of those who concentrate on the currants in the Catholic cake, who use our prayers, borrow our ritual and ask the intercession of our saints, but refuse to share in our sufferings. The Church in Spain has fallen among thieves. Are you going to pass by on the other side? On your theory it is *your* priests who are being murdered and *your* churches which are being burnt. What are you going to do about it?'

He said nothing for a few minutes, but he thought a lot.

'You're right. My spiritual life has been fed by the great saints of Spain, by St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and St. Ignatius. They have helped me and I must help the Spanish Church.'

My father had been in Spain during the election of the 'Popular Front' and had seen something of the methods *which were employed to give the so-called 'legal Government'* its majority, but he was uninterested in the political

issue. He was too well informed to believe that Fascism and Democracy were fighting for control, for he knew that Communism had killed democracy in Spain, as in Russia, and that the only effective choice was between an authoritarian government which would protect and an authoritarian government which would persecute Christianity. He was one of the few Protestants who championed the Nationalists, and though he was an old man of seventy-seven when the war started, there was no sign of flagging energy in the vigour with which he conducted his campaign. He even succeeded in carrying an amendment to a vote of sympathy for the persecuted Protestants in Germany at the Annual Methodist Conference, with the result that a somewhat embarrassed conference expressed their sympathy with the persecuted Christians in Russia, Germany and Spain.

He did not resign from the Liberal Party until their attitude to Munich convinced him that there was no room in that party for a Liberal who still believed in 'peace, retrenchment and reform.' He disliked their militancy and their sympathy for Soviet Russia, and their refusal to condemn atrocities in Spain far more terrible than the persecution of the Armenians, which provoked the fiery rhetoric of Mr. Gladstone. It is never easy for a man to separate himself from his political associates, and it is particularly difficult for an old man to break life-long ties. Moral courage is as rare as physical courage is common. It is difficult for men to resist the dictatorship of mental fashion, and to maintain that objectivity in moral judgments which refuses to condone in one's political allies the crimes which one condemns in one's political opponents. My father could never understand the selective indignation of the divines who were so moved by the sufferings of Niemöller, the Protestant pastor in Germany, and so indifferent to the agony of the Catholic martyrs in Republican Spain. He moved a great deal in academic circles, but his immense respect for scholars and scholarship was slightly under-

mined by his belated discovery that intellectuals are no less affected by mental fashions than other people, and that there is little foundation for the self-portrait of the intellectual as the fearless and independent champion of free thought. Throughout the ages the intellectuals have, with few exceptions, adjusted themselves to the views of those who were in power. The creative genius in revolt against his mental environment is the exception. Shakespeare was careful to placate Queen Elizabeth. Intellectuals are monarchists in epochs of absolute monarchy, Nazis in Germany, Communists in Soviet Russia, and democrats in England and America. In Soviet Russia and in Nazi Germany it was only men of strong religious faith, such as the martyred priests in Russia, Cardinal Faulhaber and the Lutheran pastor Niemöller in Germany, who refused to bend to the storm. Where Demos is king our writers and poets pose as champions of democracy and our artists sign manifestos in suppose of those who in Spain have destroyed priceless works of art. 'Pose' is the operative word for the true artist only asks one thing from a regime—to be let alone.

My father was never happier than when he was part of a minority. He enjoyed a fight and he never refused an appeal for help. Of many tributes to him, the one I liked the best was the tribute paid to him on the occasion of his knighthood by that great Victorian journalist, W. T. Stead:

'I shall fail signally in the duty which I owe to an old friend and to the world at large if I do not pay my tribute to his services to humanity which have given him a well-merited place in the roll of knighthood. He is one of those men for whom a knighthood is the most appropriate of all honours, for he is a knightly soul, constantly riding out on some perilous quest, from which he emerges time after time, bruised and battered and wounded sore, but never daunted or disheartened.'

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