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"Gladstone and Disraeli"

PROFESSOR HUTTON.*

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—Just a word of apology to the returned men who have come here altogether under false pretences, to see Colonel Purney, and who must be bitterly disappointed. I can only say that other people besides the returned men suffer when anything like this happens; and the speaker suffers, probably, most of all.

Now, what do Canadian business men care about two English statesmen a pretty long time ago defunct? I think, in my notice of things, I have noticed that business men do not care much for any statesman; certainly, academic people do not, least of all when those statesmen belong to a comparatively distant past. Thus, I think the ordinary business man says about those statesmen what one of the two statesmen—the witty one—said about protection, "They are not only dead, but damned."

Yet, as an Englishman, and a middle-class Englishman, brought up in that middle-class atmosphere in which a very large number of people used to worship Mr. Gladstone and idolize him, and think very poorly indeed of Mr. Disraeli; as such an Englishman myself, I am very much interested in those two men; and, also, from the many associations and memories connected with the politics of those two men; and also, last of all, on account of the very curious circumstances which attach themselves to Mr. Disraeli's popularity. Perhaps most people are interested in the men because they are absolutely opposite types; and the study of opposite types is always interesting, not to say enchanting.

The English middle class, I say, was brought up to idolize Mr. Gladstone. I think it was a very good thing for us to have somebody to idolize, but it was a very bad thing for Mr. Gladstone. Of course it turned his head. In later life all

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sorts of flattery was poured upon him and his family. A certain relative of mine, a kind-hearted man, on meeting Mrs. Gladstone said, "I feel, Mrs. Gladstone, now that I have met Mr. Gladstone, that I will gladly say my *nunc dimittis*." And the old lady (she was an estimable old lady, but not especially educated) said, "Mr. Blank is such a dear old gentleman. He says that now since he has met Mr. Gladstone he is willing to say his *dunc nimittis*." Well, that was the sort of atmosphere in which many of us were brought up. And then there comes that other point, the very piquant circumstances attaching to the other man's personality, Disraeli's.

Now most Englishmen, I think, do not care about Jews. Frankly, I have a prejudice myself against them. And yet here was a man who certainly was a Jew in origin beyond any doubt—his name of course gave him away—whatever he was after about ten or twelve years of age. Here was a man who was certainly a Jew by origin and yet became extremely popular; and, frankly, I say, as I get older, looms larger and larger as compared with Mr. Gladstone in my mind. I know he was a Jew and I am not sure that he was ever a very convinced Christian. There was a story told of him at school which is rather good and characteristic. He was a child of 15 attending a private school, and the Anglican church they attended was a long way off; and by the time they got back dinner was cold, so Disraeli said that it might be as well if they all became Unitarians "for the duration of the term." Now, that is characteristic enough of the man. And it doesn't prove he was a Jew, you say? But it doesn't suggest he took things very seriously. And that is another reason why I find him very attractive.

Now why does he attract so much? I suppose if I say that I am attracted to Lord Beaconsfield because he was not a humbug, many of you would shout, "That is just what he was, the man was a humbug, an unmitigated humbug. Why, once he went to the country in an election with the platform of merely this, 'I appeal to the sublime instincts of an ancient people.' Now, that strikes me as magnificent humbug." I know that. I know that he was an unmitigated humbug, but the point is I like the man because he was so frankly and avowedly and confessedly a humbug. There was really no humbug about his humbug. He frankly said politics was humbug and he was a humbug in politics.

Gladstone was not a humbug of the open kind. He was a humbug of the dangerous kind who imposes first of all on himself; and, as his friends said, could make his friends believe almost everything he wanted them to believe, and could make himself believe absolutely everything he wanted to believe. He was a man, I would judge, who never meditated on that text, "We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." That appears to me to be the real difference between the two men, the one was a confirmed, an avowed,—and honest, therefore,—humbug; and the other was one of those hypocrites who deceive even themselves. Why, he took advantage of the scandal about Parnell's private life when it came before the public, he took advantage of those scandals and took advantage of the honest dissenters' consciences, which were aroused; although he knew perfectly, he must have known, perfectly well all the time he was dealing with Parnell, that the scandals were so, although they had not been published. Very mean, I think you will agree, and very political in the worst sense.

One other illustration. The Conservative Government was making war in South Africa when he was in Opposition. He took that unscrupulous view that the only duty of an Opposition is to oppose, so he announced himself as against the war. He came into power, and then you heard no more against the war, and the war went on. But then came the battle of Majuba, and the British were defeated, and it became awkward and difficult to continue the war, and then he dropped the war. And, worst of all, when he dropped the war he said he dropped it out of magnanimity. Now, that seems to me to be humbug—"magnanimity!" He dropped the war, of course, out of prudence. "Magnanimity," he called it. Magnanimity is a private virtue, and any statesman who dispenses it at the expense of his country is giving away what is not his to give. You can make allowances for the change in his view point, and his giving up the war after defeat; but to turn a corner and call it "magnanimity," gentlemen, is the merest humbug, and all the worse because it deceived the principal himself.

Now, that is the kind of contrast I find between the two men. I do not think that there is anything beyond those two things, perhaps, which I could select and bring before you to illustrate what I mean; but I think those two things are sufficient to make you understand what I mean when I say one of these men was more dangerous than a frank humbug; he deceived even himself; worst of all, after those victories of political intrigue and political sleight of hand and political dexterity, the old man would come home and write magazine articles on "The Sense of Sin." Now, gentlemen, that is too

bad, it is rather terrible. His sense of sin should have been much more conspicuous in his political career than in magazine articles.

Now, the other man was unscrupulous; but he did not talk about "The Sense of Sin." He never spoke about it. He was a cynic, but I suppose cynicism means a sense of sin. That is the feeling, gentlemen, I have. I hope I am not very unnecessarily squeamish, but I have the feeling that it is too bad when a very astute statesman, who has been successful in some astute tricks of statesmanship, writes about "The Sense of Sin."

Now, there is a second difference between the two men which appeals to me, but of course there is no comparison whatever here. Lord Beaconsfield has every advantage, and the other man is terribly at a loss. Lord Beaconsfield gloated over his humbug, revelled in it, enjoyed it,—from a sense of humor. He was a humorous humbug and a humorous cynic. Take the following magnificent story: he was talking to the most venerable of ladies and making of her august body an experiment of the depth and length and breadth of human vanity. And he said to her, according to the story, something like this, "O madam, as I grow old and the world falls away from me I find that only three books interest me, only three books can I read—the Bible, Shakespeare, and your 'Journey in the Highlands!'" Now, gentlemen, that is delicious. It was an experiment in humor and an experiment in flattery. When speaking to the ordinary man he administered flattery (he said) with a spoon; when speaking to royalty, with a ladle.

But whoever heard of humor in Gladstone? Why, the same venerable lady has objected to Gladstone's lack of humor in words which, whether they were consciously humorous from her lips or unconsciously humorous, at any rate deserve to be recorded for their humor. "Mr. Gladstone," she complained, "always talks to me as if I were a public meeting." Now, gentlemen, what can be worse, his using not the flow of intimate conversation between friend and friend, the bonhommie and kindness of conversation and reply; but, even when talking to a poor old lady, to create the stilted, artificial, conventional atmosphere of a public meeting, or of a Canadian Club. Who can forgive Mr. Gladstone for such a method of talking to a queen, and who can wonder that the queen preferred the old Jew with all his gross flattery to this man who talked at her as if she were a public meeting.

There is another famous story to illustrate his lack of humor.

There was a dinner at the Royal Academy, and Lord Beaconsfield was there and had to make a speech. Before the dinner was over, talking to those around him, including the poet Browning, he said, "What strikes me is the poverty of imagination in the paintings." He got up later and made his speech and said, "What struck me most was the quality of imagination in the paintings." Browning was very much surprised, and Browning went afterwards and said, "I do not understand you, sir. You told us that the imagination was lacking, and then you told us of the wealth of imagination displayed. Lord Beaconsfield replied, "Ah, Mr. Browning, you poets are so literal!"

And that is not the end of the story. Then, according to the story, there was a breakfast party; and this story was told by Browning in the presence of Mr. Gladstone, as indicating Mr. Disraeli's wit and unscrupulousness. Browning laughed very heartily. Gladstone said, "You call that amusing? I call it devilish."

Then there is another point. I like Disraeli because he was fond, like a good Conservative, of puncturing the fashionable bubbles of the day. He found people rebelling against the creeds and the thirty-nine articles. Dean Stanley was saying at a table, sitting next to Disraeli, that he had suffered forty stripes save one, and he went on to discourse on the monstrosity of creeds and conventions, and so on. And the old man said slowly, four words. It seemed to settle the whole case, "No dogma," he said, "no Dean."

Take another case. The people were beginning in those days (they have said it a great deal since) to disbelieve in the personality of the devil. "There is no argument," said Lord Beaconsfield, "against the personality of the devil which does not apply with equal force to the personality of God."

And another people were beginning in those days—they have done it a great deal more since—to talk Darwinism. "The question," said Lord Beaconsfield, "is, is man an ape or an angel? I am on the side of the angels." How can you put it better? His philosophy told him that this was a case where you must take sides and his instinct told him to take the right side. Some people call it flippancy; I call it philosophy.

I like the old Jew's personal character. Carlyle said that a man's religion was the chief thing about him. Well, I should say that the next thing about him is his domestic life. Now, I like what I read of Disraeli's domestic life. He seems to have made his wife something of a cynic. Or perhaps she

made him a cynic. But she passed a judgment which is worth quoting. Gentlemen of the Canadian Club, if I were to say to you to-day now, that the verdict of posterity and history was going to be pronounced on each one of us in this room in two minutes; and that it was the verdict of each man's wife, what a scare there would be in this room! How we should shrivel and shrink away; a little while and we should be all under the table or out of the door. But this is the astonishing verdict which Mrs. Disraeli pronounced upon her husband—so cynical about husbands in general, but so magnificent a testimony to her own particular husband. "Oh," she said, "Dizzy is so kind; he is more like a friend than a husband." My fellow husbands, take that to heart.

Now do not misunderstand me. I do not mean for a moment that Gladstone was not a kind husband. Do not believe any of those silly stories of his private life which we used to hear in England from stupid people. Fools always tell lies like that about prominent men: and there is not a word of truth in them in this case—not a word, pure rank nonsense. I don't mean he was not kind, only I don't think there was any tribute paid to him quite so beautiful as that which was paid by Mrs. Disraeli. The only thing I have heard of Mrs. Gladstone having to say of him, in his old age at any rate, was not quite flattering. She used to say before dinner, I am told, "Don't contradict Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone must not be contradicted." The old gentleman had got to that condition from the idolatry of the middle classes that he could not bear to be contradicted even at his own table, where the rest of us are contradicted daily; and some of us are contradicted gayly.

There is still another point in the difference of these two types in their attitude towards Ireland. Disraeli was a thinker, a dreamer, and student of philosophy, a very silent man who used to spend hours without opening his lips. But, with all that, he was a man familiar with life broadly, familiar with the insoluble problems of the world, and with the insoluble problem of all insoluble problems of life itself; and so he said little or nothing about this insoluble problem of Ireland, I take it, just because it was too insoluble. There was a time when Sir Robert Peel proposed to make a grant to Maynooth College for bettering the lot of the students. It was not at all a luxurious place to live in; very much the opposite; and he made a grant to help the situation. Lord Beaconsfield said, "The Honorable Gentleman is convulsing the nation and threatening society, in order that the students at Maynooth may sleep three in a bed instead of four."

Now, look on the other hand on Mr. Gladstone. He had worked for thirty years conscientiously, generously, liberally, to benefit Ireland; and little good had resulted; and continual disorder had followed. And then, suddenly, he threw all the results of the past to the wind and threw up the sponge. Because he had not been able in thirty years to alter the results of centuries of trouble and anarchy, the old man became discouraged and threw it up; because he had not been able in one generation to reconcile the most logical, self-conscious, self-centered, contentious, critical, censorious, and singular people on the face of the earth. He gave way to a set of politicians who represented the spirit of compromise, the compromise of people like our own, who love compromise, hate logic and are quite illogical; a compromise born of the British character, offered to a race who are nothing if not logical and uncompromising. What could you hope from that compromise of a Home Rule which surrenders what the Unionists want, unity, and yet does not give what the logical Irishman wants, nationality? What can you hope from a half-way British-model compromise like that offered to a logical people? And yet, he threw up the work of a lifetime to offer that British compromise to people who did not want compromise and had no compromise in their blood.

That seems to me to be the difference between those two types. I do not think he ever seems to have realized that thirty years is nothing in the life of a nation, that you could not hope to alter the results of a nation's past in thirty years. But he did hope it. He surrendered to those Nationalists, who did not seem even then to be whole-hearted in their enthusiasm for compromise, and who did not represent their people. And to-day we have a lot of loose talk about the analogy between Canada and Ireland, and Australia and Ireland, and South Africa and Ireland, all that loose talk about analogies which is the very curse of politics because it is so loose. Where is the analogy between Canada and Ireland? This is a separate country, held to the Empire by sentiment and sentiment alone. And Australia equally, though divided by geography, is bonded by sentiment—and the same with South Africa in a less degree.

But in Ireland it is exactly the opposite. There is a country with no sentiment for England, for Scotland—only bitter hostility; and yet, which geography has united with the Mother

country. How can men talk as if there were any analogy between Canada, or Australia, or South Africa, and Ireland—when they see those unfortunate two islands, Great Britain and Ireland, so close together that they must go together, yet so incompatible that they cannot. And all this time, mark you, I am not saying anything about Ulster in Ireland, about the point of Ireland not being one country at all, but two.

There is another point which interests me rather. Nothing is more certain than that the strength of the Liberal party has been in domestic politics, and the weakness of the Conservative Party has been in domestic politics. The strength of the Conservative Party has always been in foreign politics because it was led by men who have been diplomatists and who understand foreign politics. The whole strength of the Conservative Party has been that it knew foreign politics; and the whole weakness of the Liberal Party has been that it did not. And, as a great Greek orator said, "You cannot expect Democracy to succeed in foreign politics." In spite of that rule, I think Mr. Gladstone did better than Lord Beaconsfield sometimes in foreign politics,—in spite of Majuba and South Africa. He took an attitude towards the Turks which we can sympathize with. We all thought with Lord Salisbury that Beaconsfield made a mistake in Berlin, that he was humbugged there, that he had been twisted around Bismarck's fingers, and that he put his money on the wrong horse.

I go on to note that Mr. Gladstone read and wrote tedious books, books which nobody need read; and from the good books he read, he did not find anything to support his arguments. And he studied tedious questions which had no mortal interest or importance to this world. The other man was a real thinker. The other man lives still in what he wrote and said,—in masterpieces of literature. He had a real imagination, a sense of words, and sense of literature; and I think we can pardon much in a statesman who can give us literature.

Gladstone never gave anyone literature. Not a word, not a sentence, will be quoted twenty years hence. Disraeli was human, and the other man only popular. It has been said of Gladstone by a good judge, Bagehot, that he had a second-class mind with first-class energy. I take it that that is a good definition. He had a second-class mind which moved about in an atmosphere second-class, derived from second-class of history, an atmosphere made up of sixteenth century Catholicism. His magazine articles may still be very popular on all sorts of subjects which appeal to the half-educated or

to the uneducated man, to people who have not had time to keep up with the age. Those things may be still very popular with the mass of people long after they have ceased to give or interpret the spirit of the age. And that is what happened, I think.

But I think "the old Jew" was interested in every subject which interests, in all ages, the human mind. I think his interests were as big as the thoughts which inspired his ancestor Job away back in Asia Minor. I think his interests were just as large and far-reaching as the interests which will interest the new-born child to-day when he has attained a little more manhood. I think that the old man was interested in every human speculation, whilst the other man was interested in the popular cries and catch words and cat calls of the day. There is a vast gulf between the popular and the human. Popular thoughts are thoughts about things which are transient; but human thought is about things which are eternal, about the problems which are the same yesterday and to-day and forever, which continue while the sun and moon endure, the problems over which old age still lingers, and to which the unborn child will still be turning twenty years hence.