THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

MEMOIR

OF

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On the morning of Tuesday, April 19, 1881, came to an end one of the most extraordinary careers recorded in our political annals.

It is hard to say what makes a great man, as conceptions of greatness differ so widely when gauged by individual ideas. Lord Beaconsfield's own definition was, 'one who affects the mind of his generation; whether he be a monk in his cloister agitating Christendom, or a monarch crossing the Granicus and giving a new character to the Pagan world.' The definition has the disadvantage of being somewhat vague, for there are moral influences, indirect as well as direct, by which every veteran politician of commanding position must obviously have acted on the mind of his nation. But whether the late Premier may fairly be called great or not—achieving pre-eminence in political life in the face of exceptional obstacles, is the infallible test of a remarkable man.

The career of a statesman who was emphatically a partisan can scarcely be dispassionately criticised when he has just departed. His character, as well as his conduct, his actions, in their motives as in their consequences, will be considered more or less leniently or harshly according to the bias of those who judge them. It was Lord Beaconsfield's fortune to lay himself more open to unfavourable construction than most of his contemporaries, even in an age when charges of inconsistency have been bandied freely and plausibly among the most eminent of our statesmen. It must be remembered,

however, that in the most generous concessions of the Conservative leader to Liberal pressure, he invariably asserted his consistency; appealing, in proof of the harmony of his convictions, to writings that embodied the professions and indicated the progress of his political faith. How far he did justice to himself or received hard measure at the hands of others we shall inquire later. At least, there can be no question about the force of character and brilliancy of talent which assured him a lasting triumph over obstacles that are matters of history; which placed him in a position to defy, if not to overcome, prejudices of inborn feeling; which assured him in his leadership of a party who regarded him distrustfully till he dazzled them with his latest triumphs, and yet followed him docilely if doubtingly to divisions the most eventful.

Lord Beaconsfield was of alien, although not obscure, extraction; he came of the separate people which, since it has been scattered from a land of its own, has been persecuted or ostracised by Christian intolerance. His family was ancient. Allied, it is said, with that old Hebrew aristocracy of Spain which embraced individuals of the stamp of his own Sidonias, it traced its descent through merchant princes of Venice to a stem that had been transplanted from the East in very early days. But, like other privileges, such claims of blood came under the head of Jewish disabilities, and did less than nothing to help him in the struggle towards a position that seemed practically beyond his dreams. Now that he has pioneered the way for his people, blunting in fifty years of hard fighting the prejudices that at every step opposed themselves to his own advance towards power; now that Jews sit as matter of right among the representatives of the country, legislating for interests in which they have a common concern with their fellows—it is difficult to measure the distance that then divided the young aspirant from the Premiership of England.

Nor was his birth his only obstacle. His training had been directed to less splendid destinies. It is true that by literature his father and grandfather had made their names known far beyond literary circles, and, as events showed, the subject of our notice inherited their cultivated tastes with more than their literary talents. But his father, who intended him for a Government office, only gave him a private education, and articled him early to an attorney by way of preliminary preparation. Born in 1805, he was sent into a

solicitor's chambers when those who became his contemporaries in public life were matriculating at the Universities. In place of being educated, he very much educated himself, although it may be questioned whether what must have been a loss to many did not in the end prove a gain to him. The irresistible bent of his inclinations soon burst the bonds of circumstances; the consciousness that it must rest with himself to create his future hardened him into a man while most men are still boys. He not only knew his value, and perhaps overrated it, but he had the happy faculty of impressing a sense of it on others. The art of making himself indispensable was the secret of his successful life. Imperturbable self-sufficiency, founded on a profound consciousness of equality or superiority, was the talisman by which an able man might force the doors that were held against him. The tactics which gave 'Vivian Grey' a fabulous supremacy with mythical celerity became, when gradually modified by sense and experience, precisely those with which Disraeli anticipated the lofty patronage of Whig leaders, and asserted himself later with his colleagues of the Tory aristocracy. The clever book gained its author the ear of the novel-reading public, and attracted the attention of society.

In 1827 he made a classical tour in Italy and Greece; in 1830 a religious pilgrimage to Syria and the Holy Land, where he found the colouring for the Oriental fancies that inspired his fantastic romance of 'Alroy.' Then, also, he travelled through the sacred scenes which he revisited afterwards with 'Tancred' and 'Lothair.' He came back to England to find the country in the vortex of the Reform agitation. While the old landmarks were being swept away before the rising flood of democratic feeling, when his ambition was catching fire at the prevailing excitement, one has only to read 'Coningsby' to realise the eagerness with which he panted to make his way into the arena. He set himself with characteristic determination to enter public life, and few men, starting from nothing to win everything, have met with more discouragement at the outset.

His first attempt was on the Buckinghamshire borough of High Wycombe, and the names of his sponsors are vouchers sufficient for the principles on which he stood. Joseph Hume and Daniel O'Connell promised and vowed on his behalf; yet a Whig held his ground against the Radical, and the name and interest of the Hon. Charles Grey carried the election against Disraeli. Sent back to private life

during the eventful year of the Reform Bill, he occupied his leisure and energy in the production of 'Contarini Fleming,' pronounced by Heine one of the most original of works. 'Contarini Fleming' was followed speedily by 'Alroy,' and by 'What is He?' an answer to a question asked half-contemptuously in political clubs, and in which, appearing as a political pamphleteer, he gave evidence of those unrivalled powers of sarcasm which did him and his party such excellent service. Next his versatile talents turned themselves to poetry, and the 'Revolutionary Epic' was, perhaps, the only failure he never tried to redeem. In 1836 he reappeared on the hustings at High Wycombe, with no better fortune than before, and in the following year, standing for Taunton as a Conservative, was defeated by Mr. Labouchere.

When he alluded later to the easy politics of his early years, he dismissed them lightly as the wild oats of his political life. Yet the author of 'Coningsby' and 'Sybil' had all along enunciated ideas of his own as to the natural alliance of Toryism with democratic progress. In his 'Vindication of the English Constitution,' published in 1831, and dedicated to Lord Lyndhurst, he struck the keynote to the explanations he afterwards consistently offered of all his apparent inconsistencies. In that *brochure* he boldly averred that since 1831 the political power of the Tories had only 'been maintained by a series of democratic measures of the greatest importance and most comprehensive character.' Compelled to accept a Reform Bill, they insisted forthwith upon widely extending its operation. They rescued the freemen of England from threatened political annihilation, and they organised societies throughout the country for the general promotion of registration,—'three great democratic movements quite in keeping with the original and genuine character of Toryism.'

But the plain comment on such rhetorical subtleties is that, in detaching words from the ideas popularly attached to them, they must strike at the very roots of the system of government by party; that their logical results must be party struggles for place on identical principles, and that in voting Liberal measures the practice of professing Conservatism may keep pace with the proposals of Radical reformers. That the practical deductions which come naturally from such assertions may prove dangerous was demonstrated in the history of Mr. Disraeli's own Reform Bill, when the unexpected

flexibility of the Government of the minority carried the moderate men of the majority much further than they intended. That, some years after the passing of the Bill, the Conservatives secured a brilliant electioneering victory, proves nothing in favour of its author's principles, whatever it may say for his tactics. Granting that the measure was wise in itself, yet, coming from the Conservatives when it did, it strained and discredited our Parliamentary system. Granted that the Conservative leader had shrewdly foreseen that the new distribution of forces might prove a positive gain to his friends on their next appeal to the country, that is but the argument of an electioneering agent, unworthy to weigh with a patriot or statesman.

But Mr. Disraeli's was just the mind to let itself be persuaded by some ingenious sophistry of its own, when yielding conviction to it would serve to forward his views. Whether in action or in speech, a paradox had always a charm for him. A consummate and versatile tactician, he was quick to see his party's advantage in some sudden evolution of surprise, as he was skilful to recommend the startling move to the consciences of his followers. But, however his ingenuity might contrive to reconcile the apprehensions of Toryism with the encroachments of democracy, he was sufficiently consistent through life in his dislike and denunciations of the Whig oligarchy. Political convictions apart, it was natural enough that an ambitious and unfriended young politician should feel little attraction towards the exclusive caste which regarded Government posts as its inalienable birthright—as so many close seats transmitted by descent. In the 'Letters of Runnymede,' which made a considerable sensation at the time, he passed the leaders of the Whig party in fierce and unflattering review.

It was in 1837 that he took his seat in the House of Commons. Instead of studying to conciliate prejudice, he set himself to provoke and defy it. Chalon and Maclise have preserved that striking exterior, strongly suggestive of foreign blood and foreign taste, that St. Stephen's has since had time to familiarise itself with. The matter of his speech seemed almost as affected as its manner to an audience accustomed to the severe simplicity and unimpassioned delivery of model English orators. It was in the debate on the Irish election petitions that the member for Maidstone rose to break down in his famous maiden speech. He followed the Irish Liberator,

his former patron, now his bitter personal enemy. The scandal of their recent quarrel, an encounter of shillelaghs rather than a passage of rapiers, was still fresh in every one's recollection; and, as was generally the case with those who fell foul of O'Connell, the Irishman had had the last word, and left his adversary the ridicule. The Tory candidate for Taunton had gone out of his way to make a violent attack on the Agitator in an election speech. The latter had retorted with that bitter surmise as to his assailant's descent from the impenitent thief, and, for once, Disraeli's usually impassive nature had been stung into madness. Disraeli had vowed revenge 'when they should meet at Philippi,' and now the meeting had come, and with it his opportunity. When O'Connell resumed his seat, it was the new member who caught the Speaker's eye.

The story of his failure has been often told. In spite of the habitual consideration of the House for a novice, the orator's style and manner were irresistible. Smiles broke into laughter, and at last the oration came to a premature standstill amid shouts of merriment—so far as it went, an almost unparalleled episode; but the peroration of that maiden failure was the most remarkable of the many telling perorations delivered by the speaker, for it contained the secret as well as the promise of his long series of triumphs. 'I am not at all surprised at the reception I have experienced. I have begun several times many things, and I have often succeeded at last. I shall sit down now; but the time will come when you will hear me.' To think this and say it next day would have been nothing. To say so, not so much in the petulance of temper as with the calm earnestness of conviction, at a moment when most men would have been crushed helplessly under a load of ridicule, and stung beyond power of reflection by the disappointment of cherished hopes, gave evidence of unexampled strength of will and presence of mind, and of the overweening self-confidence it went so far to justify. As it did not crush him, it is probable that first mishap helped him. The House was disposed to listen with interest and even favour to a man who showed he had reason for his audacious defiance of its judgment.

During the next few years Mr. Disraeli spoke at intervals, and was listened to with growing attention as he learnt to tone down his style and gestures in deference to the feelings of his critics. But he kept himself before the public rather as a writer than a speaker, and

added more to his literary than his political reputation. It was then he wrote some of his most successful fictions, till at last in his 'Coningsby,' a political novel of the day, he embodied the doctrines of a new school of political thought. In it he criticised the great party leaders, and with brilliant epigram, metaphor, and antithesis, delineated their party strategy from his own sarcastic point of view. Rigby, Tadpole, and Taper were recognised everywhere as telling portraits, and few but those supposed to have stood for them were prepared to set them down as caricatures. If in other sketches the resemblance to individuals was occasionally vague, there could be no question of their being vivid reproductions of representative types. In Lord Henry Sydney, Buckhurst, Milbank, the group of rising talent and advanced thought which clustered round Coningsby, men might study the 'Young England' party with whom the clever author acted. One of the band, at least, has since sat more than once in the same Cabinet with his leader.

It is worth while reverting to 'Coningsby,' because in the guise of fiction it gave deliberate expression to opinions; and this is the definition by the future Conservative leader of the Conservatism of Sir Robert Peel:—

'Conservatism was an attempt to carry on affairs by substituting the fulfilment of the duties of office for the performance of the functions of government, and to maintain the negative system by the mere influence of property, reputable private conduct, and what are called Government connections. Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from Principle, disavows Progress; having rejected all respect for antiquity, it offers no redress for the present, and makes no preparation for the future. It is obvious that for a time, under favourable circumstances, such a confederation might succeed; but it is equally clear that on the arrival of one of those critical conjunctures that will periodically occur in all States, and which such an impassioned system is even calculated ultimately to create, all power of resistance will be wanting; the barren curse of political infidelity will paralyse all action; and the Conservative Constitution will be discovered to be a *caput mortuum*.'

'Sybil,' which followed 'Coningsby' in 1845, is one of the most characteristic, and also one of the most important of his works, inasmuch as it throws a strong light on his thoughts and unbiassed opinions on social and political questions. In the language of Egremont, who

is a second Coningsby, we may find the explanation of much that must otherwise seem inconsistent in the writer's political life; and may learn that what appeared tergiversation in his conduct was often but the realisation of old and fixed ideas. His 'Sybil,' as he tells us himself, had been suggested by the recent Chartist agitation; and as a novel on the condition of the people, may rank with the best by Kingsley. Reading it by the light of subsequent events, it is strange to see how lucidly he indicates the benefits of co-operation; and how decidedly he at the same time sets down his foot on any of these socialistic proclivities which might interfere with family life.

The attacks which Disraeli, as a member of the 'Young England' party, made on the Premier commenced in 1844, the year in which 'Coningsby' made its appearance. It must be confessed that the ground he then took up was more in harmony with the language of his novel than with the positions towards which he executed his daring strategical movement—when he made himself the mouthpiece of the Protectionist malcontents. In 1844 he attacked the Premier rather for illiberality in commercial and religious matters than for over-advanced ideas on those questions; and it is difficult to believe that, had his choice been unbiassed, his intellect would not have enlisted him as an advocate of Free Trade. Undoubtedly both his feelings and his personal circumstances disinclined him to anything like bigotry. Twice he came to what might have been a turning-point in his career, indicating to him, perhaps, a shorter cut to a more solidly established eminence than he even attained in 1874. Twice, certainly, the fortunes of a great party depended on the attitude of this comparatively obscure member of the House. The first time was when Sir Robert Peel succeeded to power in 1841; the second in 1846, when Disraeli went into systematic opposition to the Minister.

On the first occasion the option did not rest with him, and it is doubtful whether the Premier ever seriously entertained the idea of offering the member for Shrewsbury—Disraeli had exchanged Maidstone for Shrewsbury in 1841—a position he might not unreasonably have aspired to. Had Disraeli been given some minor post in the Ministry, his action must have been fettered by party ties; gratified ambition and the responsibilities of office might have conspired with his natural leanings to make the Thersites of Protection the Ulysses of Free Trade. But Peel had no presentiments,

and few sympathies with his future enemy. There was little in common between the grave sense and cumbersome fluency of the one, and the subtle speculation and volatile brilliancy of the other. Peel probably undervalued talents so antithetical to his own, for there can be no doubt he, of all men, would have shrunk from the wearing struggle before him could he have foreseen the danger he provoked. It was the intense conscientiousness of Peel that gave the sting to his enemy's attacks. No man was more sensitive on the point of public as of personal honour; and whatever the pressure which had modified his convictions, he knew he had come into power the pledged champion of Protection. To be presented or misrepresented to men whom it had been his pride to lead, to whose opinion he was still keenly susceptible, as an unscrupulous renegade and the organiser of 'the organised hypocrisy,' was unspeakably bitter to him. He might retort, or repeat explanations, but reiterated charges were addressed to ears ever ready to receive them —to the men who had seen their trusted leader pass over to the enemy at the critical moment of the campaign. Disraeli had chosen his points of attack with that instinctive judgment which made his enmity so damaging; yet the audacity which singled out for unremitting hostility the Minister 'who played on the House like an old fiddle,' although characteristic enough, was, perhaps, more apparent than real. Addressing himself on plausible grounds to passions fiercely excited, to principles unexpectedly scandalised, and prejudices rudely ruffled, to a party smarting from the sense of having been hoodwinked and betrayed, he awoke the enthusiastic sympathy that ensured success to his philippics, and he bid for the support of a formidable following.

We have said the fate of a party twice depended on his attitude. The second time was when Sir Robert formally intimated his conversion and the impending doom of the Corn Laws. Party ties were dissolved, the Premier's change of views and schemes offered high precedent for the imitation of humbler men, and Disraeli stood less committed than most. The ground he had taken hitherto was one on which he was as little as possible committed, or embarrassed, and any one of three paths lay open to him. He had often held language that might be construed into leaning towards free trade in corn and liberty in religion, and he might have easily waived unimportant differences and tendered his support to Peel. But such

welcome as he might reasonably look for was hardly likely to tempt him to the sacrifice of more ambitious hopes. At best, he must have been content to remain the lieutenant of a man whose nature had little in common with his own; while in choosing differently he might aspire to lead either a Whig or Tory Opposition. His avowed democratic inclinations might, with slight violence, have softened into decorous Liberalism, and he would have had to step little out of his way to attach himself to the Whigs. But, putting principle out of the question, his objections to that course sprang from feeling as much as calculation. Detestation of the Whigs appears to have been among the most deeply rooted of his sentiments, and the Reform Bill of 1867 was only the last of a long series of deadly moves directed to the discomfiture of his natural enemies. As matter of calculation he saw their front rank formed of men of high Parliamentary reputation, although the party might be weak in rank and file. Before pitting himself against their great opponents, he must force his way to the front through a line of dangerous rivals, leaving himself exposed to side shafts from a party whose notorious vice was jealousy of stranger talent. Casting in his lot with the Protectionists, pre-eminence was assured him at once. They were a scattered mob, hesitating between desperate and timid counsels; but they offered the nucleus of a formidable force to a leader who knew how to rally them. They had position, consideration, and wealth, and at their back was an amount of feeling in the country inadequately represented even by their considerable numbers. They were struggling silently with the bitter indignation that sought an utterance. Hope for the moment was gone, but, as Disraeli has told us himself in his Memoir of Lord George Bentinck, their longing was for vengeance. That vengeance he could offer them and count on their gratitude. Their support would be given as a matter of course to the man who made himself necessary to them, and their instrument must inevitably become their leader. The story of an express bargain between him and his future supporters—a compact that he should attack while they should applaud—is improbable, if not incredible. From the moment he made his decision the arrangement was natural and necessary; the success of his studied sarcasms was assured, and when the orator shaped the feelings of his faction into winged words, each man who sat behind cheered his own sentiments to the echo.

It is still a question whether Conservatives or Liberals have most cause to be grateful to him for his choice of sides. It is certain that, at a critical moment, he saved his party from dissolution, and commenced the training that carried it through some fruitless victories to a very substantial one. It is equally certain that he acquired that undemonstrative but irresistible influence which completed its liberal education with a measure so democratic that Conservatism seemingly had little left to preserve, at least according to its old notions, whoever might be the constitutional advisers of the Crown. The Moltke of his party, his prompt facility of resource and rare talent of strategical combination, were speedily recognised by the chiefs he acted with and the leader they followed. To him must be ascribed the tactics which, on the theory that young whelps need to be blooded, won the Treasury benches for the 'large-acred squires and men of metal' to whom place was comparatively indifferent; and his must be the credit of the measures that kept them there, very often to the scandal of their constituents. Thus the first speech the member for Shrewsbury launched at Peel's reconstructed Cabinet of December 1845 marked an epoch in our political history.

One of the most graphic and characteristic chapters in the 'Political Biography' is that in which the writer describes the opening of the debate on the Corn Laws, with the speech in which the Minister announced his intentions. The matter-of-fact trivialities by which Peel made his approaches to the crushing climax embodying what half his hearers regarded as their sentence of ruin—his leading up to the duties on corn through soap and candles, by boot-fronts and shoe leather—the emphatic pathos of his declaration, 'I believe it is impossible to over-estimate the importance of promoting the fattening of cattle'—all lent themselves to Mr. Disraeli's happiest vein of irony. But in his narrative of the events, in which he might say '*Pars magna fui*,' the violent language of his philippics as the Protectionist champion finds no echo. His own reorganisation of his party with his displays in the House; his energy, his eloquence, and their pregnant results, are either passed over in silence or subordinated almost unfairly. His book is a frank and generous tribute to the merits of his self-sacrificing friend and colleague. The vindication of the tactics he directed demanded the impeachment of Peel, and we have no leisure now to analyse the justice of his indictments; but he closes with a graceful tribute to that statesman's memory.

Shiel said, with some justice, that the sudden death of Sir Robert left Disraeli in the position of an anatomist whose subject has been snatched away. Politically, it was true; morally, it gives a false impression of his character. Doubtless Disraeli lost a convenient object which was always there to suggest an effective piece of declamation; he missed the ladder by which he had mounted to the place he filled. But he left his party enmities behind him at St. Stephen's; he exchanged thrusts of debate as matters of course, like the gladiator who carouses in friendship with his fellows while in training for the deadly combat, and goes back from the arena, should he survive, to pledge them amicably in the wineshop. Few men, it must be confessed, have dealt more freely in exchanges of personalities, and yet we only recall two instances where he showed any sign of soreness on the morrow. The one was when he challenged Mr. Maurice O'Connell for the savage sarcasm of O'Connell the elder; the other when he wreaked old wrongs, in 'Lothair,' on the head of 'the Oxford Professor.' On the other hand, not a few can vouch for the cordiality with which he used to grasp the hands of his opponents in many a fierce faction fight when they met after the recess on the eve of fresh combats. Be it to his credit or the reverse, we must record our opinion that, amid all the virulence of his attacks on Peel, few men in the House were likely to construe more leniently the Premier's conduct: he fiercely assailed the politician without a shade of malice towards the man.

We have remarked that, like a man of spirit and shrewdness, in his writings as in his speeches, Disraeli boldly prided himself on his Jewish descent and the glories of his race. Jews rich in gifts as in gold are the mythical heroes of the Utopias in his fictions. But the most eloquent defence of his people against the prejudices of Christendom is to be found in that chapter of the 'Political Biography' which precedes the explanation of Lord George Bentinck's conduct with respect to the Jewish disabilities. In ingenious arguments, more sophistical than satisfactory, he seeks to demonstrate that these prejudices are neither historically true nor dogmatically sound, and urges characteristically that we owe the Jews a large debt of gratitude for becoming the instruments to carry out the great doctrine of the Atonement. That he felt more than natural sympathy, that he took a genuine pride in his people, there can be no doubt whatever, and as little that he had no bigoted prejudice against religious emancipa-

tion in the abstract. Yet, when Lord George Bentinck resigned the leadership of his party rather than countenance its intolerance on the question of Jewish disabilities, Mr. Disraeli took a different view of his duty. He must have sacrificed his personal feelings to his ideas of the exigencies of party when he consented to replace his friend in the command of men who had spoken so bitterly of the Jewish nation.

In 1847 Mr. Disraeli had obtained the seat for Buckinghamshire he retained till his elevation to the peerage. It was in 1849 he succeeded his friend Lord George Bentinck in the leadership of the country party. In 1852 his genius for opposition had succeeded in landing that party in power, and the Chancellorship of the Exchequer was the post assigned in the Derby Cabinet to one whose reputation nevertheless was still rather brilliant than solid. In July of that year, his speech at Aylesbury had committed him to 'new principles and new policies.' As Chancellor of the Exchequer he set himself to redeem his pledges in a Budget that satisfied neither friends nor enemies. It was rejected with the 'new-fangled' novelties it contained, although the speech in which it was introduced and defended showed unmistakably the attention its author had bestowed on financial questions since he had held a responsible position. The faults and merits of the Budget were at least distinctively his own; had he studied more the feelings and opinions of his party in its composition, its reception even on the part of his enemies might have been different. For it contained a series of startling surprises, and Englishmen are slow to be surprised out of old habits of transacting money matters. The Ministry of the minority was outvoted, but February 1858 saw it again in power.

On the former occasion the Government had been professedly provisional, avowedly sacrificing itself to patriotism when public affairs seemed at a dead-lock. In 1858 the Conservatives had modified their action to accord with the only principles which promised them a lease of power. The feeling of the nation had pronounced in favour of a measure of reform, as it had been loudly expressed before for an abolition of the protective duties. As it chanced, the Conservative leaders for the time had no strong motive for resisting the popular feeling. They had few scruples to overcome. Lord Derby had been a Liberal. Mr. Disraeli, as we know, had always preached the union of Toryism with Democracy, declaring that the soundest

basis of the former was on substantial concessions to the latter. It was a question between power on sufferance and abdication indefinitely. The choice was soon made where feelings argued plausibly in favour of expediency. But it was the most transparent of fallacies to assert that Conservative measures could only be carried by a Conservative Ministry when that Ministry took office to do the work the more moderate of its political opponents shrank from. When Lord Derby—or rather Mr. Disraeli—declared for Reform, the leverage in favour of a subversive measure became irresistible; for, once assured that the cause was prejudged, no man cared to damage himself by futile opposition to the claims of the inevitable constituencies. Even Liberals felt that the impulse came from the wrong side—that the bit had slipped out and was doing the work of the spurs. When Disraeli declared for Reform, he challenged the other party to enlarge their views and increase their offers. When he tendered a £10 county franchise, Liberals were bound to outbid him. When the Conservatives comprehended disfranchisement in their measure, the Whigs could not possibly omit the schedules. The Bill of 1859 doomed Conservatism and condemned the Whigs. Execution on one or the other might be deferred, but it could not ultimately be evaded.

Mr. Disraeli had a theory of his own as to the conditions under which Reform might be safely conceded,—a pet recipe for perfecting his favourite idea of a Democratic Conservatism. He was disposed to the amplest concession so long as the equilibrium between county and town could be preserved. His Bill of 1859 would have added materially to the registration rolls, but it attempted guarantees by which town votes should be polled only for town members. His 'fancy franchises' were designed to enlist impecunious intelligence on the side of property. The practical objection to them was that they embarrassed general rules with invidious exceptions, for results totally inadequate to their intention. He did not oppose the second reading of the rejected Reform Bill of 1860, but Mr. Gladstone's measure of 1866 was introduced under better auspices and threatened to be more formidable. As it struck at what Mr. Disraeli regarded as the essential Conservative element in Reform, and threatened to swamp the county constituencies in the rising tide of urban voters, he would naturally have opposed it, independently of party considerations. Whether the Cave of Adullam would have filled as it

did had its occupants foreseen the coming events that were beginning to cast their shadows; whether the refinements of reasoning that satisfied Mr. Disraeli would have convinced the logical judgment and secured to the Conservative cause the incisive eloquence of Mr. Lowe, is another question.

Next year Lord Derby took his leap in the dark, and there can be little doubt as to who had the chief share in urging him to it. It is certain Mr. Disraeli's enemies might have addressed to him the taunts he had himself levelled at the illustrious convert to Free Trade, and taxed him with running away with the Liberals' clothes while the wearers were bathing. It is not so sure he would have ventured to maintain that this fourth great democratic movement, the one of which he was the promoter, and which gave us virtual household suffrage, was altogether in keeping with the original and genuine character of Toryism. It might be so, but if it were, after all Mr. Disraeli had done to teach his party they still remained hopelessly confused between old words and their new meanings. The memory of these events is still so recent that it is superfluous to dwell on them, or to recall the details of a campaign when the army were kept to their colours while made to manœuvre in the dark; where the officers had their instructions in cipher, or made solemn terms with the enemy only to have them disavowed. Never did the Conservative chief show such consummate strategy or so amazing a versatility of resource as in this appropriate crowning of a career whose triumphs were won by science against numbers. He took his orders from his adversaries with perfect taste, temper, and dignity, and gained one battle for himself while winning another for them. It was a triumph of the Conservative party and of the Liberal principles.

The resignation of the Disraeli Cabinet at the close of 1868 gave him the opportunity of paying a graceful tribute to one to whom he owed a debt of gratitude he was never slow to acknowledge. We did not interrupt our notice of his political career to mention his marriage, which took place in 1839. Mrs. Disraeli was the wealthy widow of Mr. Wyndham Lewis, his former colleague in the representation of Maidstone; and to the fortune she brought him, and the influence she exercised on his character and career, he was in no small measure indebted for his brilliant success. The glorification of the strength of woman's influence in 'Lothair' embodied the fortunate experiences of the author, and the promise of conjugal

sympathy in the union between Corisande and the hero had, notwithstanding a considerable disparity of years, been fully realised by Disraeli in his long wedded life. He could not yet spare himself from the House where he had so long played a leading part, but the honours offered the retiring Minister were accepted for his wife, and Mrs. Disraeli was raised to the peerage by the style of Viscountess Beaconsfield.

In the meantime the next trick in the great game fell to Mr. Gladstone. If he did not trump Mr. Disraeli, he followed suit with Disestablishment, rallying his party to the cry of justice to Ireland. The powerful majority of his rival, acting together generally with extraordinary harmony, gave Mr. Disraeli little opportunity for anything else than his familiar attitude of patient observation. He was forced to content himself with manœuvring for some insignificant concessions, until the blundering and the menacing activity of his opponents gave him an opening for the display of his special abilities. He had been chary of his words before, and now that he lifted his voice in grave warnings, he contributed greatly to the increasing unpopularity of the Ministry and to the growing uneasiness as to what they might do next.

A Government inclined to hurry too fast and too far, which had begun to live by the excitement of harassing and sensational measures, could scarcely have found a more formidable critic. Mr. Disraeli pounced upon the weak points of schemes that had gained on Mr. Gladstone's convictions after his ardent fancy had fallen in love with them at first sight. The epigrams and sarcasms he had always at command must often have done useful service afterwards, although at the time they seemed merely the fireworks of debate. The definition of the Irish Disestablishment as 'legalised confiscation and consecrated sacrilege' was remembered at the ensuing elections when the friends of Church and property wanted a telling cry. Sarcastic sneers like that at the 'sweet simplicity' of Mr Lowe's transformed Budget of 1871 passed current among many people as certificates to the shortcomings, if not the incapacity, of prominent Liberals. Next year opportunities were multiplied for the stinging censor of the Government as champion alternately of the spirit and letter of the Constitution. The Collier appointment was followed by the Ewelme Rectory case, and then the 'Government began to live in a perpetual blaze of apology.'

The session of 1873 may be said to have been a decisive one, although the dissolution was deferred to the following spring. Certainly it illustrated in striking contrast the characters of the chiefs of the opposing parties. Mr. Gladstone had proposed to complete a triad of measures for Ireland with his University Bill. Considering that it dealt with those religious questions which ruffle the susceptibilities of the least excitable politicians and on which the various sections of his majority were almost irreconcilably divided, it was a delicate measure to carry at best. Playing into his opponents' hands, and doing the last thing Mr. Disraeli would ever have dreamt of doing, he declared that a settlement of the question was vital to the honour and existence of the Government, that he was resolved to stand or fall by the Bill. Then the Conservative leader felt assured of winning his waiting game. He had only to persist in his habitual tactics, to give his enemies rope, and let them trip each other up. The Bill was a marvel of ingenuity and a startling illustration of its author's want of political tact. At first sight and in theory it seemed plausible; practically, it was impossible to please alike the Liberal Protestants and the Irish Catholics. Beaten by a narrow majority, Mr. Gladstone resigned, and expressed characteristic resentment at Mr. Disraeli declining to accept the responsibilities of office as the logical consequences of his victory.

Mr. Disraeli saw things were working in his favour, and that this last defeat of the once-powerful Government on a vital question must precipitate the process of disintegration. He had no idea of being hurried to the country by way of softening the catastrophe the Liberal leader had provoked. With quiet irony he enunciated his views on the Constitutional point. Neither Constitutional doctrine nor Parliamentary etiquette compelled him to take office on the strength of an accidental majority due to the casual desertion of the Irish Roman Catholic irregulars from the ranks of the enemy. But he urged his most unanswerable argument in turning to his own purpose the taunts that had often been addressed to him. He had had some personal experience of government by minority, and it had convinced him 'that such an experiment weakened authority and destroyed public confidence.' His arguments against the alternative of a dissolution were, possibly, sound, as they were certainly specious. His speech was a forcible exposition of constitutional principles founded upon long experience, and with his conduct it

formed an admirable commentary on his philosophy of Parliamentary tactics. In declining to have his hand forced, in restraining the impatience of his jubilant friends, he showed his customary political prescience.

The tide of public opinion had fairly turned, and through the recess of 1873 it ran steadily against Ministers. But one marked exception there was, and if a Liberal won the seat at Bath, it was partly owing to an indiscretion of Mr. Disraeli. He addressed the famous 'Bath Letter' to Lord Grey de Wilton, in which, strange to say, he appeared to crowd blunder on blunder, line after line, making the communication as much a mistake in point of policy as of taste. He gave the Conservative candidate a strong certificate to character, put impolitic pressure on the judgment of the enlightened electors of Bath, and denounced the Ministers and their course of 'blundering and plundering' in language rather befitting a reckless Old Bailey counsel than the responsible chief of a great party at a critical turn of its fortunes. If the letter proved anything more than the truth that the most astute and self-controlled of men are liable to indiscreet impulses, it showed that Mr. Disraeli was more able in Parliament than out of it, and understood the feelings of parties in the House better than the temper of the country.

But Liberal victories like Taunton and Bath had come to be regarded rather as accidents than otherwise, so universal and radical had been the change since Mr. Gladstone had entered on his Irish campaign in 1868 with his commanding majority. The returning a Conservative at Stroud in place of a distinguished member of the Liberal Government was the straw that broke the camel's back and wore out the waning patience of the Minister. In 1874 Mr. Gladstone surprised the country with the Greenwich letter, announcing a dissolution for no obvious or immediate reason. Impulsively he put his fate to the test, and yet at the same time, with what had the semblance of a short-sighted piece of astuteness, he tendered the electors a bribe in the shape of a promised remission of the income-tax. The answer of the country was unmistakable. It seemed to vindicate the shrewdness with which Mr. Disraeli had suspected the results of a household suffrage. No longer the Minister of a minority existing by sufferance, he found himself with a compact working majority of over fifty, and for the first time had the free control of his actions. With characteristic imperturbability, he declined to be hurried.

He protested against the theory that a new Ministry, surprised into the acceptance of office, is bound to be provided with 'a cut and dry policy;' and he practically assumed that his mandate from the country meant the cessation of the 'meddling and harassing,' of the 'blundering and plundering,' he had so consistently denounced, and which had wearied even restless spirits into a longing for repose.

As it happened, besides, domestic measures were subsequently thrown into abeyance by the state of affairs in Europe and Asia. The Prime Minister found himself face to face with the troubles that were to reopen the Eastern question and shake the Ottoman Empire to its foundations. The position of England was difficult and embarrassing in view of events that must nearly affect her. Her navy was formidable, though the late Mr. Ward Hunt on his accession to office had talked of a 'phantom fleet;' but the army, distributed all over the world, had sunk into relative insignificance when compared with the gigantic armaments of Continental Powers. Moreover, while the Gladstone Ministry was busy with home reforms, England had been steadily losing influence abroad, if not deliberately effacing herself. Nothing could show more unpleasantly the slight regard in which she was held than the independent action of the 'Three Emperors,' when their Chancellors decided on the terms of the Berlin Memorandum, merely telegraphing to the Western Powers for their approval.

But Mr. Disraeli had determined from the first that England should play a part that became her, and not only speak, but be respectfully listened to. That he made mistakes when each step was beset with embarrassments can scarcely be denied; that he was less successful than he might have been, is only saying that he was the constitutional chief of a divided Cabinet, and that he had inherited from his predecessors a legacy of difficulties. But we believe that impartial historians will give him credit for having been guided by a noble and far-sighted patriotism, and will make large allowance for the untoward circumstances which compelled him to alter or modify his plans. The line he took or desired to take was merely a return to traditions which had made the greatness or assured the safety of the Empire in times of general convulsion. But a long continuance of tranquillity and prosperity had wrought unhappy changes in the national feeling. Responsible politicians carried their advocacy of non-intervention to a point at which prudence

became cowardice and folly; while a noisy sect of popular orators clamoured for peace at any price. Action that would have appeared inevitable to a Chatham or a Pitt was denounced as a flashy display of 'Imperialism.' As the impression had been spreading on the Continent that nothing short of actual invasion would force England to fight, language of the kind was as dangerous as it was unseasonable. And the impression received some official confirmation when a member of the Cabinet, in a most critical moment, declared that England would never be guilty of another Crimean war.

It is probable that the increasing indignation at the pretensions of Russia might have sufficiently strengthened the hands of the Minister to enable him to override such opposition. As events proved subsequently, he had touched the pulse of the nation and knew how it was beating. But then occurred those 'Bulgarian atrocities,' which brought philanthropy into conflict with patriotism and evoked an outburst of generous indignation. Horrible as they were, they were exaggerated by sensational writers, and the nation was misinformed as to their origin. Lord Beaconsfield's sagacity saved him from the trap which a Russian envoy was believed to have prepared with cold-blooded astuteness. From the first he never doubted of the truth that the rising that was so savagely suppressed had been provoked by foreign agents. It was a deplorable accident, but it ought not to outweigh the considerations which had hitherto governed our policy in the East. The truth was, that while a great body of Englishmen had their minds full of the misdeeds of the Turks, Lord Beaconsfield kept his eye on the Cabinet of St. Petersburg. The excesses of some bands of savage irregulars were no sufficient reason for sacrificing the interests we had hitherto defended. We had never fought for Turkish misgovernment, but for the barriers that were opposed to the ambition of Russia. Yet Turkey's attitude of stolid resistance made it as difficult to help as it was impossible to sympathise with her. She did her best to put those who would have befriended her in the wrong when she rejected the concessions that Europe recommended, and Lord Beaconsfield had to do the best he could in difficult and most embarrassing circumstances.

His last utterances in the House of Commons were in August 1875, when he was questioned upon Eastern affairs immediately before the close of the Session. Next day came the announcement of his acceptance of the peerage, which he had declined for himself

when his wife was ennobled. We may regret that the Lower House lost a leader so admirably fitted to deal with the Obstructionists. But no doubt he felt that his party could spare him, since his leadership had given them a commanding majority, and he had well earned comparative repose in the calmer atmosphere of the Lords. There the brilliant debater and orator chiefly distinguished himself by his reticence, and even his enemies must admit the dignified self-control which submitted in silence to misconstruction, and was content to wait for justification by results. Not only had he to face the legitimate criticism of fair opponents who differed from his measures, but he was fiercely attacked in the press and on the platform with a rancour embittered by perverted philanthropy. His motives were misconstrued as facts were frequently misrepresented; and even Mr. Gladstone deigned to indulge in language which is happily exceptional in recent political warfare. Very few men could have been capable of such admirable self-restraint, and it was especially remarkable in a character like Lord Beaconsfield's. For his political credit was as the breath of his nostrils to him, and the verdict of his countrymen could hardly have been flattering had he died while his policy seemed a humiliating failure.

Yet all the time his increasing popularity showed even the worldly wisdom of the course he had pursued. The answer he had waited for came as the revised terms of the Treaty of Berlin, and these were received no doubt with exaggerated enthusiasm. But meantime the Russians had declared war, and, after many checks and much humiliating discomfiture, were threatening Erzeroum and advancing on Constantinople. Whether Lord Beaconsfield, if he had been in the position of a Bismarck, would have boldly taken the bull by the horns and openly sided with the Turks, is a question. Had he done so, it is probable the Russians would have drawn back; it is certain that with English generalship on the Danube the Turks would have anticipated the invasion of Roumania and changed the whole course of the war. But, in fact, considering the excitement of the country over the Bulgarian massacres and the feelings of certain influential members of his Ministry, he had no choice in the matter. As it was, much of his apparent vacillation was doubtless due to the presence of Lord Derby in the Cabinet. When Lords Derby and Carnarvon seceded later, he paid a touching tribute to the necessity which compelled him to break with the son and political heir of his

former friend and patron. The presence of the English fleet in the Bosphorus which followed the secession of the dissenting statesmen went far to impose moderation on the Russians. It was a sign that England was ready to act, and the vote of the six millions for military preparations showed that it was at least possible that we might repeat the 'guilt and folly' of the Crimean war. The bringing a contingent of the Indian army to Malta was a characteristic but far more questionable piece of policy; and it was promptly answered by the counterstroke which involved us in hostilities with Afghanistan. But in the meantime it had sensibly lowered the tone of the Russian press, and we heard no more of privateering cruisers to be fitted out in American ports.

From the time the British squadron passed the Dardanelles, Lord Beaconsfield was forced forward into the proud position of champion of neutral Europe and the rights of nations. The independent foreign press unanimously approved his conduct; and though they may have written with some selfish *arrière-pensée*, yet they must have expressed the dispassionate judgment of Europe. It was owing in great measure to our vigilant watching of the negotiations that the exorbitant pretensions of the Treaty of San Stefano were submitted to revision in the Congress of Berlin. Lord Beaconsfield decided to represent the country in person, with Lord Salisbury for his colleague, and we may suppose that nothing flattered him more in his long career than the cordiality of his reception by the admiring Germans. His task at Berlin would have been greatly simplified had their Chancellor sympathised with the popular feeling. But the understanding of the Emperors still subsisted, and no Continental Power had personal reasons for setting limits to the acquisitions of Russia in Asia. As Lord Beaconsfield reminded the House of Lords when defending the terms of the treaty, he had a delicate game to play with indifferent cards. Russia having lavished blood and treasure, had a right to claim the fruits of her victories; while England had chosen to confine herself to despatch-writing. He hinted at the understanding between the three Emperors, and maintained that, all things considered, we had good reason to be satisfied.

It is, perhaps, too soon even now to judge of the treaty by its results, and unquestionably it would have been more dignified to have gone to Congress with hands unfettered by secret engagements. But, on the whole, Lord Beaconsfield was justified in the memorable

boast that the Plenipotentiaries had brought back 'peace with honour.' The treaty restored to Turkey much valuable territory; did its best towards securing the independence of the detached provinces, and offered the Porte one more opportunity of saving what remained to it by urgent reforms. The most effective clause was that which, by bringing Austria into Bosnia and Herzegovina, opposed a counterpoise to Russian aggression beyond the Balkans. The private convention with the Porte was of more doubtful advantage, and gave some handle to those who declared that it was intended as a salve to English vanity. As for the acquisition of Cyprus, it is difficult not to associate it with a passage in 'Tancred,' and, at all events, the coincidence is curious. The passage runs thus:—'The English want Cyprus, and they will take it as compensation. . . . The English will not do the business of the Turks again for nothing.'

It might have been well for Lord Beaconsfield—as many people are of opinion that it might have been well for England and the world—had he made his appeal to the constituencies in the triumph of the return from Berlin. It is at least probable that he would have been sent back to power with an undiminished majority, and had the opportunity of shaping out the plans he had conceived and of continuing the alliances he had commenced. As it was, he was over-persuaded to delay, and we know how disastrous the delay proved to the Conservatives. We do not care to go back upon events which are fresh in the recollection of everybody; nor need we do more than make passing allusion to the Afghan and Zulu wars. The one was the legacy of our antagonism to Russia in the East; the other was imposed on a reluctant Government by the precipitate decision of a strong-willed subordinate. After the return from Berlin, the head of the Ministry, though never shrinking from responsibility for the policy he originated and directed, left its defence chiefly to the heads of the Indian and Colonial Departments. Since then, indeed, he has seldom spoken. But he was moved for once from his usual apparent indifference to personal attacks by the fiery oratory of Mr. Gladstone, when that right hon. gentleman brought his damaging indictments against ministers in his famous Midlothian progress. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding some discontent with the Afghan and South African imbroglios, and some disappointment with the slow settlement of Eastern affairs, the Con-

servative prospects seemed satisfactory in the beginning of 1880, as the Parliamentary strength of the party was unbroken.

Few but those who are wise after the event had any suspicion of the surprise that was being prepared by the constituencies in answer to the appeal to them in the spring of the year. That it was a shock and bitter grief to Lord Beaconsfield, in more ways than one, we have no reason to doubt. It not only broke up the great majority that had rewarded him for the patient labours of many years; it not only condemned him to absolute impotence, while he saw the reversal of the plans he had most deeply at heart; but it must have shown him that he had been deluding himself when he cherished the belief that lowering the franchise might not be necessarily opposed either to Conservatism or to the permanent interests of the country. Moreover, the revolution wrought by the elections demonstrated to foreign States that henceforward their understandings with England might be altered at any moment by the caprice of a popular vote following on some party division.

But Lord Beaconsfield, when he resigned, carried into his retirement the respect and admiration of the most honourable of his political opponents; nor can we do better than quote the graceful expressions of Lord Hartington, in one of the happiest passages of his speeches in North-East Lancashire:—

'It may be said that Lord Beaconsfield is ambitious. I should like to know what man who has attained the position which he has attained in the political life of his country is not actuated by feelings of ambition. No one certainly can attribute any mean or unworthy feelings to Lord Beaconsfield. We disagree with his politics, but we must admire the genius and talent which the man has shown under the disadvantages he has laboured under. I firmly believe that Lord Beaconsfield has had in view what he believes to be the greatness of his country and the power of the Sovereign whom he serves.'

And we may add that few statesmen ever deserved more generous consideration at the hands of their opponents, since he never embarrassed them by even the shadow of factious opposition when he felt the dignity or interests of the country to be at stake. A party leader before everything, on critical national questions he invariably rose superior to party; and we may remember on a recent occasion, when he spoke and voted in the Lords against Mr. Gladstone's Irish

Disturbance Bill, that the patriotism of his action was fully vindicated by the rejection of the measure by the Liberal peers.

Had he never turned to politics, Lord Beaconsfield must have made himself a brilliant reputation as a literary man. But, in truth, he was a born politician; his most vigorous fictions took the shape of political manifestoes; his women inspire his heroes to public careers and feats of oratory, and dismiss them from sighing at their feet to save their country and do battle with the dragon of faction. He went further than Mr. Trollope, and not only held a Parliamentary career to be the necessary culmination of a distinguished Englishman's life, but the only life worth living. All his 'men' were men of thought or speculation, of action or the capability of action. Like Vivian Grey, having nothing else to look to, they made their ambitions their professions, set their feet on the ladder before they had well left school, with their eyes riveted on the highest rung, and studied every human being they came across as possible foothold. Or like Coningsby, sustained by powerful connections and hedging on influential friendships, they afforded themselves the luxury of abnegation; when, sacrificing wealth and commonplace prospects to independence, they found themselves rewarded with the possession of one and the other. Like the Young Duke, they vindicated their manhood by an heroic effort when they seemed hopelessly succumbing to temptations, tore themselves from the arms of sirens, and left the gaming-table to shake the Senate. We might multiply parallel instances down to Lothair, who, having been well-nigh persuaded to discredit his Church by a perversion that must necessarily be of baleful example, redeems the passing weakness by consecrating his life and fortune to her support.

The inevitable result of the tone and spirit of the novels was to limit their popularity to a certain class. They were no mere stories of fashionable life, stories which none read more greedily than those hopelessly beneath the charmed circles. They identified themselves only with the feelings and instincts of the high-born, the intellectual, and the ambitious, yet even by these they were severely criticised. They were too didactic for the many,—expatiating on topics in which the masses do not care to be instructed; they were too speculative for the sagely practical; the tenets they advocated were too advanced alike for the quiet-going Whigs and for the Conservatives, who thought traditionary thoughts and inherited family opinions.

As pictures of society the earlier novels were cleverly painted by a brilliant young artist drawing freely on his imagination, although we see the colouring gradually sober down, until at last in 'Lothair' and 'Endymion' there came compositions from the life. Yet from the first there was the originality, lightness, and sparkle which will carry off any quantity of improbability, or even absurdity, with a good deal of mysticism or dulness to boot.

Few writers have succeeded better in hitting off a character in an epigram or in making a speaking likeness of a caricature. Lord Beaconsfield was fond of seeking his models in well-known men, reproducing them with a realism which was sometimes repugnant alike to art and to good taste. We have alluded to the political portraits in 'Coningsby,' and there could be still less mistake about the Byron and Shelley of 'Venetia.' In 'Lothair' his more cultivated judgment dealt in compositions rather than photographs, and, with a single exception, the characters were representative men more than the men themselves. In 'Lothair,' too, there was little or nothing of the satirist who relies on human weakness for his strongest effects. Rather you had the genial philosopher, who took for granted the evil of the world and its countless follies, but who had come to see there was good in everything and in most people, and had learnt to take more pleasure in seeing things on their sunny side.

Lord Beaconsfield was less an orator than a debater, and his reputation as a speaker will diminish as death thins away the men who listened to him and saw him in action. Notwithstanding his lucidity of statement, brilliance of fancy, and marvellous command of language, his set speeches are comparative failures. Sarcasm and irony were his natural weapons; he never showed to more advantage than when forced to betake himself to them in repelling a sudden attack. He had the presence of mind that is seldom taken at a disadvantage, great quickness of perception, a natural gift of detecting the flaws in his adversaries' armour; while few men knew better the weak points in his own or how best to cover them. With his imperturbable coolness of manner he could fight out a desperate campaign in a pasteboard visor, while to friends and foes he contrived it should show like tempered steel. It had been his fate in the early part of his career to combat from a false position as well against as in favour of the great measures of his time. He advocated Protection when he had been to a certain extent compromised against it

by his own admissions. He opposed Reform although he often avowed his sympathies with democratic progress; he had to champion it afterwards amid apologetic appeals to the opinions of his supporters. In Ireland he had to defend a Church doomed beforehand, which he had himself pronounced and doubtless believed an anomaly. Until the time arrived when he became the exponent of a definite foreign policy, in which he was himself the chief actor until his last accession to power, we can scarcely recall a single great occasion on which he could have thrown himself, without *arrière-pensée*, and in the fulness of conviction, into anything that rose above the nature of a party speech. If earnestness is the soul of oratory, it would be strange indeed if we could bestow higher praise than brilliancy on most of the speeches of Mr. Disraeli. His character and special gifts plunged him into battle and cabal; his talents in council and skirmish would have rusted in peace, and were fatal to the dignity of repose.

The political character of few men has been more harshly attacked, and few statesmen ever addressed their protestations of patriotism and principle to more distrustful ears. If we grant some justice in the common sentiment, we must recollect that there is much extenuation for the relaxation of political morality when authority was so often detached from responsibility. What power he exercised was during the greater part of his career in Opposition, and then it was chiefly critical or obstructive. While on the Treasury benches he had long to accept his impulse from Liberal opponents, or conciliate the opposition of extreme Radicals. At length a time arrived when he could actually direct the national policy. With a powerful Parliamentary majority, and the absolute confidence of his Sovereign, he may be almost said to have swayed for a time the councils of Europe. It is by his use of that ascendancy that posterity will chiefly judge him. Undoubtedly since then he has held a very different place in the public estimation. In his last Ministry the world recognised a resolute and consistent fulfilment of purposes deliberately formed and matured. It may be said of him, inverting the words of Tacitus, *Omnium consensu incapax imperii nisi imperâsset.*

Whatever may be the estimate of his public policy, in his personal career he has left an example of successful industry and determination that should encourage every one who looks to work and progress as the rule and end of life. He has left his mark and set his name

on great public measures, and now that he is gone and they have passed into history, we can judge more charitably of motives to which his enemies frequently did grave injustice. We repeat again, what we said before, that often where we believe him to have been mistaken and ill-advised, often when he changed his ground with a celerity unusual even in these days of rapid conversions, a subtle power of self-deception was at work that kept his acts and conscience in honest harmony. We say so of those long and arduous labours as an English party-leader by which he gradually converted a dismayed and disorganised mob into a successful army. His foreign policy needs no excuse of the kind. That policy was a consistent effort directed towards definite ends, and having for its object the maintenance and augmentation of the Empire. It avoided even the appearance of weakness, and deliberately preferred the risk of war to making the most trivial concessions if they could be represented as involving national humiliation.

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