

XIV THE TRIUMPH OF THE WHIGS

Whether or no we believe that the Reformation really reformed, there can be little doubt that the Restoration did not really restore. Charles II. was never in the old sense a King; he was a Leader of the Opposition to his own Ministers. Because he was a clever politician he kept his official post, and because his brother and successor was an incredibly stupid politician, he lost it; but the throne was already only one of the official posts. In some ways, indeed, Charles II. was fitted for the more modern world then beginning; he was rather an eighteenth-century than a seventeenth-century man. He was as witty as a character in a comedy; and it was already the comedy of Sheridan and not of Shakespeare. He was more modern yet when he enjoyed the pure experimentalism of the Royal Society, and bent eagerly over the toys that were to grow into the terrible engines of science. He and his brother, however, had two links with what was in England the losing side; and by the strain on these their dynastic cause was lost. The first, which lessened in its practical pressure as time passed, was, of course, the hatred felt for their religion. The second, which grew as it neared the next century, was their tie with the French Monarchy. We will deal with the religious quarrel before passing on to a much more irreligious age; but the truth about it is tangled and far from easy to trace.

The Tudors had begun to persecute the old religion before they had ceased to belong to it. That is one of the transitional complexities that can only be conveyed by such contradictions. A person of the type and time of Elizabeth would feel fundamentally, and even fiercely, that priests should be celibate, while racking and rending anybody caught talking to the only celibate priests. This mystery, which may be very variously explained, covered the Church of England, and in a great degree the people of England. Whether it be called the Catholic continuity of Anglicanism or merely the slow extirpation of Catholicism, there can be no doubt that a parson like Herrick, for instance, as late as the Civil War, was stuffed with "superstitions" which were Catholic in the extreme sense we should now call Continental. Yet many similar parsons had already a parallel and opposite passion, and thought of Continental Catholicism not even as the errant Church of Christ, but as the consistent Church of Antichrist. It is, therefore, very hard now to guess the proportion of Protestantism; but there is no doubt about its presence, especially its presence in centres of importance like London. By the time of Charles II., after the purge of the Puritan Terror, it had become something at least more inherent and human than the mere exclusiveness of Calvinist creeds or the craft of Tudor nobles. The Monmouth rebellion showed that it had a popular, though an insufficiently popular, backing. The "No Popery" force became the crowd if it never became the people. It was, perhaps, increasingly an urban

crowd, and was subject to those epidemics of detailed delusion with which sensational journalism plays on the urban crowds of to-day. One of these scares and scoops (not to add the less technical name of lies) was the Popish Plot, a storm weathered warily by Charles II. Another was the Tale of the Warming Pan, or the bogus heir to the throne, a storm that finally swept away James II.

The last blow, however, could hardly have fallen but for one of those illogical but almost lovable localisms to which the English temperament is prone. The debate about the Church of England, then and now, differs from most debates in one vital point. It is not a debate about what an institution ought to do, or whether that institution ought to alter, but about what that institution actually is. One party, then as now, only cared for it because it was Catholic, and the other only cared for it because it was Protestant. Now, something had certainly happened to the English quite inconceivable to the Scotch or the Irish. Masses of common people loved the Church of England without having even decided what it was. It had a hold different indeed from that of the mediæval Church, but also very different from the barren prestige of gentility which clung to it in the succeeding century. Macaulay, with a widely different purpose in mind, devotes some pages to proving that an Anglican clergyman was socially a mere upper servant in the seventeenth century. He is probably right; but he does not guess that this was but the degenerate continuity of the more democratic priesthood of the Middle Ages. A priest was not treated as a gentleman; but a peasant was treated as a priest. And in England then, as in Europe now, many entertained the fancy that priesthood was a higher thing than gentility. In short, the national church was then at least really national, in a fashion that was emotionally vivid though intellectually vague. When, therefore, James II. seemed to menace this practising communion, he aroused something at least more popular than the mere priggishness of the Whig lords. To this must be added a fact generally forgotten. I mean the fact that the influence then called Popish was then in a real sense regarded as revolutionary. The Jesuit seemed to the English not merely a conspirator but a sort of anarchist. There is something appalling about abstract speculations to many Englishmen; and the abstract speculations of Jesuits like Suarez dealt with extreme democracy and things undreamed of here. The last Stuart proposals for toleration seemed thus to many as vast and empty as atheism. The only seventeenth-century Englishmen who had something of this transcendental abstraction were the Quakers; and the cosy English compromise shuddered when the two things shook hands. For it was something much more than a Stuart intrigue which made these philosophical extremes meet, merely because they were philosophical; and which brought the weary but humorous mind of Charles II. into alliance with the subtle and detached spirit of William Penn.

Much of England, then, was really alarmed at the Stuart scheme of toleration,

sincere or insincere, because it seemed theoretical and therefore fanciful. It was in advance of its age or (to use a more intelligent language) too thin and ethereal for its atmosphere. And to this affection for the actual in the English moderates must be added (in what proportion we know not) a persecuting hatred of Popery almost maniacal but quite sincere. The State had long, as we have seen, been turned to an engine of torture against priests and the friends of priests. Men talk of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; but the English persecutors never had so tolerant an edict to revoke. But at least by this time the English, like the French, persecutors were oppressing a minority. Unfortunately there was another province of government in which they were still more madly persecuting the majority. For it was here that came to its climax and took on its terrific character that lingering crime that was called the government of Ireland. It would take too long to detail the close network of unnatural laws by which that country was covered till towards the end of the eighteenth century; it is enough to say here that the whole attitude to the Irish was tragically typified, and tied up with our expulsion of the Stuarts, in one of those acts that are remembered for ever. James II., fleeing from the opinion of London, perhaps of England, eventually found refuge in Ireland, which took arms in his favour. The Prince of Orange, whom the aristocracy had summoned to the throne, landed in that country with an English and Dutch army, won the Battle of the Boyne, but saw his army successfully arrested before Limerick by the military genius of Patrick Sarsfield. The check was so complete that peace could only be restored by promising complete religious liberty to the Irish, in return for the surrender of Limerick. The new English Government occupied the town and immediately broke the promise. It is not a matter on which there is much more to be said. It was a tragic necessity that the Irish should remember it; but it was far more tragic that the English forgot it. For he who has forgotten his sin is repeating it incessantly for ever.

But here again the Stuart position was much more vulnerable on the side of secular policy, and especially of foreign policy. The aristocrats to whom power passed finally at the Revolution were already ceasing to have any supernatural faith in Protestantism as against Catholicism; but they had a very natural faith in England as against France; and even, in a certain sense, in English institutions as against French institutions. And just as these men, the most unmediæval of mankind, could yet boast about some mediæval liberties, Magna Carta, the Parliament and the Jury, so they could appeal to a true mediæval legend in the matter of a war with France. A typical eighteenth-century oligarch like Horace Walpole could complain that the cicerone in an old church troubled him with traces of an irrelevant person named St. Somebody, when he was looking for the remains of John of Gaunt. He could say it with all the naïveté of scepticism, and never dream how far away from John of Gaunt he was really wandering in saying so. But though their notion of mediæval history was a mere masquerade ball, it

was one in which men fighting the French could still, in an ornamental way, put on the armour of the Black Prince or the crown of Henry of Monmouth. In this matter, in short, it is probable enough that the aristocrats were popular as patriots will always be popular. It is true that the last Stuarts were themselves far from unpatriotic; and James II. in particular may well be called the founder of the British Navy. But their sympathies were with France, among other foreign countries; they took refuge in France, the elder before and the younger after his period of rule; and France aided the later Jacobite efforts to restore their line. And for the new England, especially the new English nobility, France was the enemy.

The transformation through which the external relations of England passed at the end of the seventeenth century is symbolized by two very separate and definite steps; the first the accession of a Dutch king and the second the accession of a German king. In the first were present all the features that can partially make an unnatural thing natural. In the second we have the condition in which even those effecting it can hardly call it natural, but only call it necessary. William of Orange was like a gun dragged into the breach of a wall; a foreign gun indeed, and one fired in a quarrel more foreign than English, but still a quarrel in which the English, and especially the English aristocrats, could play a great part. George of Hanover was simply something stuffed into a hole in the wall by English aristocrats, who practically admitted that they were simply stopping it with rubbish. In many ways William, cynical as he was, carried on the legend of the greater and grimmer Puritanism. He was in private conviction a Calvinist; and nobody knew or cared what George was except that he was not a Catholic. He was at home the partly republican magistrate of what had once been a purely republican experiment, and among the cleaner if colder ideals of the seventeenth century. George was when he was at home pretty much what the King of the Cannibal Islands was when he was at home--a savage personal ruler scarcely logical enough to be called a despot. William was a man of acute if narrow intelligence; George was a man of no intelligence. Above all, touching the immediate effect produced, William was married to a Stuart, and ascended the throne hand-in-hand with a Stuart; he was a familiar figure, and already a part of our royal family. With George there entered England something that had scarcely been seen there before; something hardly mentioned in mediæval or Renaissance writing, except as one mentions a Hottentot--the barbarian from beyond the Rhine.

The reign of Queen Anne, which covers the period between these two foreign kings, is therefore the true time of transition. It is the bridge between the time when the aristocrats were at least weak enough to call in a strong man to help them, and the time when they were strong enough deliberately to call in a weak man who would allow them to help themselves. To symbolize is always to simplify, and to simplify too much; but the whole may be well symbolized as the

struggle of two great figures, both gentlemen and men of genius, both courageous and clear about their own aims, and in everything else a violent contrast at every point. One of them was Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke; the other was John Churchill, the famous and infamous Duke of Marlborough. The story of Churchill is primarily the story of the Revolution and how it succeeded; the story of Bolingbroke is the story of the Counter-Revolution and how it failed.

Churchill is a type of the extraordinary time in this, that he combines the presence of glory with the absence of honour. When the new aristocracy had become normal to the nation, in the next few generations, it produced personal types not only of aristocracy but of chivalry. The Revolution reduced us to a country wholly governed by gentlemen; the popular universities and schools of the Middle Ages, like their guilds and abbeys, had been seized and turned into what they are--factories of gentlemen, when they are not merely factories of snobs. It is hard now to realize that what we call the Public Schools were once undoubtedly public. By the Revolution they were already becoming as private as they are now. But at least in the eighteenth century there were great gentlemen in the generous, perhaps too generous, sense now given to the title. Types not merely honest, but rash and romantic in their honesty, remain in the record with the names of Nelson or of Fox. We have already seen that the later reformers defaced from fanaticism the churches which the first reformers had defaced simply from avarice. Rather in the same way the eighteenth-century Whigs often praised, in a spirit of pure magnanimity, what the seventeenth-century Whigs had done in a spirit of pure meanness. How mean was that meanness can only be estimated by realizing that a great military hero had not even the ordinary military virtues of loyalty to his flag or obedience to his superior officers, that he picked his way through campaigns that have made him immortal with the watchful spirit of a thieving camp-follower. When William landed at Torbay on the invitation of the other Whig nobles, Churchill, as if to add something ideal to his imitation of Iscariot, went to James with wanton professions of love and loyalty, went forth in arms as if to defend the country from invasion, and then calmly handed the army over to the invader. To the finish of this work of art but few could aspire, but in their degree all the politicians of the Revolution were upon this ethical pattern. While they surrounded the throne of James, there was scarcely one of them who was not in correspondence with William. When they afterwards surrounded the throne of William, there was not one of them who was not still in correspondence with James. It was such men who defeated Irish Jacobitism by the treason of Limerick; it was such men who defeated Scotch Jacobitism by the treason of Glencoe.

Thus the strange yet splendid story of eighteenth-century England is one of greatness founded on smallness, a pyramid standing on a point. Or, to vary the metaphor, the new mercantile oligarchy might be symbolized even in the

externals of its great sister, the mercantile oligarchy of Venice. The solidity was all in the superstructure; the fluctuation had been all in the foundations. The great temple of Chatham and Warren Hastings was reared in its origins on things as unstable as water and as fugitive as foam. It is only a fancy, of course, to connect the unstable element with something restless and even shifty in the lords of the sea. But there was certainly in the genesis, if not in the later generations of our mercantile aristocracy, a thing only too mercantile; something which had also been urged against a yet older example of that polity, something called Punica fides. The great Royalist Strafford, going disillusioned to death, had said, "Put not your trust in princes." The great Royalist Bolingbroke may well be said to have retorted, "And least of all in merchant princes."

Bolingbroke stands for a whole body of conviction which bulked very big in English history, but which with the recent winding of the course of history has gone out of sight. Yet without grasping it we cannot understand our past, nor, I will add, our future. Curiously enough, the best English books of the eighteenth century are crammed with it, yet modern culture cannot see it when it is there. Dr. Johnson is full of it; it is what he meant when he denounced minority rule in Ireland, as well as when he said that the devil was the first Whig. Goldsmith is full of it; it is the whole point of that fine poem "The Deserted Village," and is set out theoretically with great lucidity and spirit in "The Vicar of Wakefield." Swift is full of it; and found in it an intellectual brotherhood-in-arms with Bolingbroke himself. In the time of Queen Anne it was probably the opinion of the majority of people in England. But it was not only in Ireland that the minority had begun to rule.

This conviction, as brilliantly expounded by Bolingbroke, had many aspects; perhaps the most practical was the point that one of the virtues of a despot is distance. It is "the little tyrant of the fields" that poisons human life. The thesis involved the truism that a good king is not only a good thing, but perhaps the best thing. But it also involved the paradox that even a bad king is a good king, for his oppression weakens the nobility and relieves the pressure on the populace. If he is a tyrant he chiefly tortures the torturers; and though Nero's murder of his own mother was hardly perhaps a gain to his soul, it was no great loss to his empire. Bolingbroke had thus a wholly rationalistic theory of Jacobitism. He was, in other respects, a fine and typical eighteenth-century intellect, a free-thinking Deist, a clear and classic writer of English. But he was also a man of adventurous spirit and splendid political courage, and he made one last throw for the Stuarts. It was defeated by the great Whig nobles who formed the committee of the new régime of the gentry. And considering who it was who defeated it, it is almost unnecessary to say that it was defeated by a trick.

The small German prince ascended the throne, or rather was hoisted into it like a

dummy, and the great English Royalist went into exile. Twenty years afterwards he reappears and reasserts his living and logical faith in a popular monarchy. But it is typical of the whole detachment and distinction of his mind that for this abstract ideal he was willing to strengthen the heir of the king whom he had tried to exclude. He was always a Royalist, but never a Jacobite. What he cared for was not a royal family, but a royal office. He celebrated it in his great book "The Patriot King," written in exile; and when he thought that George's great-grandson was enough of a patriot, he only wished that he might be more of a king. He made in his old age yet another attempt, with such unpromising instruments as George III. and Lord Bute; and when these broke in his hand he died with all the dignity of the *sed victa Catoni*. The great commercial aristocracy grew on to its full stature. But if we wish to realize the good and ill of its growth, there is no better summary than this section from the first to the last of the foiled coups d'état of Bolingbroke. In the first his policy made peace with France, and broke the connection with Austria. In the second his policy again made peace with France, and broke the connection with Prussia. For in that interval the seed of the money-lending squires of Brandenburg had waxed mighty, and had already become that prodigy which has become so enormous a problem in Europe. By the end of this epoch Chatham, who incarnated and even created, at least in a representative sense, all that we call the British Empire, was at the height of his own and his country's glory. He summarized the new England of the Revolution in everything, especially in everything in which that movement seems to many to be intrinsically contradictory and yet was most corporately consistent. Thus he was a Whig, and even in some ways what we should call a Liberal, like his son after him; but he was also an Imperialist and what we should call a Jingo; and the Whig party was consistently the Jingo party. He was an aristocrat, in the sense that all our public men were then aristocrats; but he was very emphatically what may be called a commercialist--one might almost say Carthaginian. In this connection he has the characteristic which perhaps humanized but was not allowed to hamper the aristocratic plan; I mean that he could use the middle classes. It was a young soldier of middle rank, James Wolfe, who fell gloriously driving the French out of Quebec; it was a young clerk of the East India Company, Robert Clive, who threw open to the English the golden gates of India. But it was precisely one of the strong points of this eighteenth-century aristocracy that it wielded without friction the wealthier bourgeoisie; it was not there that the social cleavage was to come. He was an eloquent parliamentary orator, and though Parliament was as narrow as a senate, it was one of great senators. The very word recalls the roll of those noble Roman phrases they often used, which we are right in calling classic, but wrong in calling cold. In some ways nothing could be further from all this fine if florid scholarship, all this princely and patrician geniality, all this air of freedom and adventure on the sea, than the little inland state of the stingy drill-sergeants of Potsdam, hammering mere savages into mere soldiers. And yet the great chief of these was in some

ways like a shadow of Chatham flung across the world--the sort of shadow that is at once an enlargement and a caricature. The English lords, whose paganism was ennobled by patriotism, saw here something drawn out long and thin out of their own theories. What was paganism in Chatham was atheism in Frederick the Great. And what was in the first patriotism was in the second something with no name but Prussianism. The cannibal theory of a commonwealth, that it can of its nature eat other commonwealths, had entered Christendom. Its autocracy and our own aristocracy drew indirectly nearer together, and seemed for a time to be wedded; but not before the great Bolingbroke had made a dying gesture, as if to forbid the bans.