

BOOK REVIEW.

"CONSERVATISM."*

AN APPEAL TO JUSTICE.

"There is but one thing needed in this world, but that is indispensable—Justice, Justice—in the name of Heaven give us Justice!"—*Thomas Carlyle.*

Lord Hugh Cecil has apparently been reading over some old volumes of THE ANTI-JACOBIN, and thereupon has been prompted to write a book on "Conservatism," in which, as might have been expected, modern Conservatism is "viewed as a force called into activity by the French Revolution, and operating against the tendencies that that Revolution set up" (p. 244). Its appearance, just when the old Conservative Party has managed officially to absorb its political ally of the past quarter of a century, Liberal Unionism, is timely. For its object is to explain to the uninitiated what modern Conservatism really is, the elementary sources whence it has been derived, the forces upon which it relies for its continued existence, as well as the political philosophy and principles in accordance with which its future policy should necessarily be shaped. Its manifest aim is to strengthen the waning faith in the future of Conservatism as a political force, and to rally to its standard any who may be wavering in their adherence to Liberalism. We may say at once that we hope many more similar books will be written and published. For we are convinced that its perusal is likely to make, not Conservatives, but earnest Progressives of such of its readers as are capable of reasoning, and whose minds have been influenced by the tendencies set up by the great French Revolution, by the tendencies which ever since its time have shaped the political and social evolution of the whole of Western Europe, as well as of all countries in contact therewith.

We will admit, however, that if Conservatism really were what Lord Hugh Cecil in some of the more detached paragraphs of his book describes it as being, every thoughtful man would necessarily be an ardent Conservative. But Conservatism being what the same authority in other pages of the same book shows it to be, it is easy to understand why intellectual Conservatives should to-day be so scarce, and to be found mainly, if not solely, amongst those classes who are the beneficiaries of the social privileges which Conservatism exists to defend, to maintain, and, if possible, extend.

Thus, our author, after pointing out that the three component elements of Conservatism are "distrust of the unknown and the love of the familiar," "the reverence for authority," and a something which "for want of a better name has been called Imperialism," informs his readers (p. 246) that:—

These three elements work together in animating Conservative policy, and form a political creed constructive, balanced and prudent, drawing its inspiration from the elevating sentiments of patriotic enthusiasm and religious faith; tender to the sufferings of humanity, but *scrupulous to the obligations of justice*; sobering activity by a prudent veneration for experience, and securing the efficiency of progress by basing it on what time has tried and tradition has cemented.

Whilst on another page (p. 196), after informing us that "there is no antithesis between Conservatism and Socialism or even between Conservatism and Liberalism"; that "subject to the counsels of prudence and to a preference for what exists and has been tried over the unknown, Conservatives have no difficulty in welcoming the social activity of the State"—our author seriously asks his readers to believe that—"The point which principally distinguishes their attitude from that of other political parties is a *rigorous adherence to justice.*"

If, instead of "scrupulous to the obligations of justice," in the one paragraph, and "a rigorous adherence to justice" in the other, Lord Hugh Cecil had substituted a *blind disregard of the claims and obligations of justice*, we should have entirely agreed with him. Of course, it all depends

upon the exact meaning given to this—the most solemn, sacred, uplifting and inspiring word in the English language.

As Lord Hugh Cecil himself emphasises (p. 73)—"Political principles must conform to some standard of right and wrong"; and, as he says, much confusion and obscurity is caused by those writers who presume "to assume an ethical standpoint" without making clear what "ethical standard they accept, to what moral law they make appeal." This is just the unpardonable sin of which he is guilty, the direct cause of the vagueness, obscurity and confusion of his own work. Though he presumes to adopt an ethical standpoint, posing, indeed, as an ethical, or moral, as well as a political teacher, he nowhere makes it clear to what moral law he makes appeal, or to what ethical standard political institutions, as well as political principles, should in his view be made to conform.

At the time when mankind first commenced to seek some ethical or moral basis on which to build up their social and political life, many, many centuries ago, "the Father of Modern Philosophy," Aristotle, made sufficiently clear the ethical standard and moral law to which those dissatisfied with established custom, with mere use and wont, should make appeal. "Justice," he taught his disciples, "is the social virtue; for it is the rule of the social state, and the very criterion of what is right." Furthermore he insisted that—"All persons ought to follow what is right and not what is established." Moreover, as a recent commentator on the ethical standard and moral law inculcated in the Old and the New Testament did well to remind us—"The conception of Justice as the foundation of all law, divine and human, pervades all the teaching of the law and the prophets." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and its Justice, and all else shall be added unto you," is a definite commandment, a definite moral law, a Christian revelation of far more direct bearing on the problems of modern politics than "the counsels of patience" and "emphatic teaching of the blessedness of poverty" to which Lord Hugh refers so approvingly—a moral law which no Christian writer can afford to ignore without leaving doubts both as to his piety and his sincerity.

Every Progressive or Liberal political writer, influenced not so much by the tendencies set up by the French Revolution, as by the teachings of the Old and the New Testament, from John Locke to John Ruskin and Henry George, have accepted Justice as the moral law to which political principles and institutions should be made to conform. They realised, as we to-day realise even more distinctly, that in framing a social policy man's choice is limited between recognising, respecting and enforcing the equal claims of all to life, and all that this involves, which is Justice; and recognising, respecting and enforcing the special claims of some, which is Injustice, Licence or Privilege. As Lord Hugh well says—"Injustice consists in the infliction of undeserved injury or the withholding of a benefit rightfully belonging." However long the injury may have been inflicted, or the benefit or right withheld, it still remains an injustice. Time cannot convert a wrong into a right, injustice into justice. To slightly alter one of our author's sentences (p. 165)—"No man can get a license to injure another" because he has been permitted to do so for a long period of time. For example, no man or class of men can get a licence to injure the rest of their fellow-citizens by withholding from them their equal rights to the use of the earth and to share in the bounties and blessings of Nature, a fundamental "benefit rightfully belonging." Though the living beneficiaries of any such established injustice may be the most ignorant, innocent, as well as the most deserving and philanthropic, class in the community, to remedy any such injustice, "with as little shock to existing interests as may be," to use Herbert Spencer's words, cannot with truth be stigmatised as unjust, even though such a high authority on religion, ethics and politics as Lord Hugh Cecil would fain have us believe so (pp. 165-166). *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum* ("Let justice be done, though the heavens should fall.") For it is only by obedience to the dictates of justice that we can hope to remove the causes of the poverty and destitution, with their attendant train of misery, vice and crime, which all thoughtful and ethical-minded men, including Lord Hugh Cecil (p. 184), avow to desire to see removed. As he well says (p. 94)—"You cannot pluck figs from thistles. The many excellent teachers of religion who criticise the state of society, who lament the condition

*"CONSERVATISM." By Lord Hugh Cecil, M.A., M.P. Home University Library. Publishers, Williams & Norgate, London. Price, 1s. net, cloth; 2s. 6d. net, leather gilt.

of the people, are thus like those who should visit a thistle field, seeking in vain for figs and crying out at its prickly barrenness."

Modern Conservatism, however, is little likely to be strengthened by Lord Hugh's special pleading. There was a time when Conservatives, honestly believing that "Reform spelt Revolution," would themselves have scornfully repudiated and refuted his specious sophistries. They would not have stooped to such dissimulation, to adopt the mask of social reform, or to have whiningly suggested that, after all, to use our author's words (p. 195) there is "no antithesis between Conservatism and Socialism, or even between Conservatism and Liberalism," save that the former is much more virtuous, much more regardful of the demands of justice. They stood boldly in the open, avowing the belief that the stability and well-being of the nation depended upon the maintenance and continuance of the established privilege of the few. Even their opponents could respect such men. To-day all this is changed. Conservatives are eagerly seizing the mask of Liberalism, of Jacobinism; they are all advocates of change, all eager for social reform, for preference, of course, for Tariff Reform—which they know full well would intensify existing social evils, but would strengthen and extend the privileges and advantages already secured to a few favoured individuals—but also of any other which does not threaten the continuance of established injustice.

Lord Hugh Cecil, we must say, wears his mask of social reform somewhat clumsily; he has evidently not yet grown used to it; he does not seem to have any suspicion how much of his real visage it leaves uncovered, how much of his real thoughts it leaves revealed. What are his avowed reasons for desiring reform? Simply because, as he says (p. 64)—"it is an indispensable part of the effective resistance to Jacobinism that there should be moderate reform on Conservative lines." In other words, for mere party purposes. He is astute enough to realise the danger of Conservatism (p. 117) "sinking into a mere factious variation of Liberalism, supporting the claims of another set of politicians, but propounding measures not distinguished by any pervading principle." But he is still more alive to the greater danger of Conservatism revealing itself as "standing only for the defence of those who are well off, without any sincere endeavour to consider the interests of the whole people, or any higher object than the triumph of the sagacious selfishness of the prosperous." "Conservatism," he elsewhere tells us (p. 158), "ought not to be, and at its best is not, the cause of rich people"; but he thinks "it ought to be the cause of the defence of property against unjust treatment." And what our author thinks would be unjust may be gathered from his unsupported contention (p. 150) that—"All property *appears* to have an equal claim on the respect of the State, and neither in taxation or in other acts of the State can distinctions be fairly drawn between one *class* of property and another." Instead of class our author uses the word "owner"; but this is evidently a slip; for no one to-day proposes to draw a distinction between one owner and another; the distinction is made always between one class of property and another, or one class of income and another, according to its genesis and its character.

The position and repute of its author justifies us in having devoted so much of our space to the consideration of his book, the nature of which we think now to have sufficiently indicated. We know Lord Hugh Cecil only through his speeches and actions in Parliament, where his apparent sincerity is such as almost to make even his disingenuousness convincing. He may be one of the best of men, animated by the best intentions. But the root cause of his peculiar attitude towards the problems of modern politics is that indicated by John Ruskin in *UNTO THIS LAST*, where he warns us that:—

The mistake of the best men through generation after generation, has been that great one of thinking to help the poor by almsgiving, and by preaching of patience or of hope, and by every other means emollient or consolatory, except the one thing which God orders for them, justice.

—L. H. B.

Slowly but continuously humanity moves towards the realisation of the dreams of its wisest men.—ANATOLE FRANCE.

HERE AND THERE.

The Spanish Single Tax League have published a syllabus of "The Science of Political Economy," by Henry George, in Spanish. The translator is Antonio Albendin, the Secretary of the Spanish League. The price of the book, printed in bold, clear type, is one peseta (9½d.), and those of our readers who would like to procure a copy should apply to the Secretary of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, 11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.

There are many ways of working for a cause, and we are continually receiving evidence of the many different ways our enthusiastic supporters employ to help on the movement. The following note from a Yorkshire supporter to the Secretary of the Yorkshire Land Values League is interesting:—

"I have spent a very pleasant afternoon. I took my cycle and went among the farmers and cottages around Bell Hagg and Rivelin Valley and then over the hill, and distributed about 50 circulars, and had chats with the farmers and men, and have got several interested in the scheme. I only wish I had the points more at my finger tips, but time will tell. I keep reading *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* and your circulars and hope to make a better success soon."

Will Atkinson, of Seattle, Wash., U.S.A., sends us a selection of poems on the Single Tax, from a booklet he is publishing entitled *ANTI-POVERTY SONGS*, the price of which is ten cents (5d.) per copy, with considerable reduction for larger quantities. The verses are first-class and we hope from time to time, as space permits, to publish some of them. Anyone desiring a copy should send to Will Atkinson, P.O. Box 746, Seattle, Wash., U.S.A.

Under the title "Wealth and the Worker," the Carlisle League of Young Liberals have published in pamphlet form, Mr. R. L. Outhwaite's speech on Land Reform and Labour Unrest, delivered in the Queen's Hall, Carlisle, on 15th April. Copies of the pamphlet, which is attractively prepared and printed in large clear type, can be had from the offices of the United Committee, price one penny, by post three-halfpence.

At a meeting of the East Riding (Yorks) County Council on 6th May, Colonel Saltmarshe drew attention to a pamphlet on land values which he had received enclosed with his copy of the minutes of the Education Committee. He would like to know how a political pamphlet came to be enclosed with the Council minutes, and whether the cost of it was included in the £600 mentioned in the Finance Committee's minutes for stationery?

Subsequent inquiry by a representative of the *HULL DAILY NEWS* elicited the fact that a copy of the pamphlet for each member of the Council was received at the County Hall. To have re-addressed them would have meant the addition of a halfpenny stamp, so the officials who were sending out the minutes of the Education Committee slipped the pamphlet into the envelopes. The pamphlet was entitled "Form IV.; What Next?" and published by the United Committee of the Taxation of Land Values, and apparently sent out by the Yorkshire Land Values League at Leeds.

On his way to this country from America on board the "Mauretania," Mr. Joseph Fels addressed a big meeting on 27th April in the dining saloon of the liner on "Getting Rich Without Working." Here is a copy of the card of invitation issued:—

R.M.S. "MAURETANIA."

MR. JOSEPH FELS,

More or less known as a Land and Taxation Reformer on both Continents, will address a Meeting on the subject:

"Getting Rich Without Working"

in the Dining Saloon to-day (Saturday) at 3.30 o'clock. Questions and discussion upon the Henry George Movement will be invited by the speaker.