CHAPTER XXIII

GREAT BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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SOURCE READINGS: ADAMS and STEPHENS, Select Documents, Nos. 259–76 (The Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867; Disestablishment of the Irish Church, etc.); COLBY, Selections from the Sources, Nos. 112–17.

Great Britain at the close of the Napoleonic wars.

AT the beginning of the nineteenth century the government of Great Britain was still legally vested in king, Lords, and Commons, but the really decisive influence had shifted, as we have seen, to the third partner, for the Commons not only voted supplies and made laws, but also controlled the ministry and the administration. The eighteenth century, which had created this Parliamentary government, witnessed also the successful transformation of England into the greatest commercial and colonial power of the world. India and America had been won from France; and though this advantage was in part offset by the revolt of the American colonies,

the long wars with the French republic and Napoleon had made clear to all eyes that England was without an equal upon the seas. For almost a quarter of a century (1793–1815) the old rivals, France and England, waged a bitter and engrossing strife; and when Napoleon was at last overthrown, England, like the states of the Continent, heaved a sigh of relief. The next years are marked by weariness and reaction. But they are also characterized by signs of a gathering reform movement, which was set on abolishing the accumulated abuses in state and society.

The conservatism of England.

These abuses were so patent and unreasonable that it is not credible that they would have been maintained against popular protest for even a day, if the storms of the French Revolution had not created among the English governing classes a general distrust against innovations of any sort. The maintenance of existing institutions became their creed as it was that of Metternich. Now this prevailing conservatism was championed by the Tory party, which having conducted the government during the war, harvested the prestige associated with its successful termination. The Tory party, therefore, continued in power after the war and, following along established lines, set its teeth so vehemently against reform that Castlereagh, the minister for foreign affairs, even went the length of hitching England to the chariot of the Holy Alliance. But this unnatural condition could not last. A group of young Tories were more amenable to progress; and when in 1822, on the death of Castlereagh, their leader, Canning, assumed the foreign portfolio, England took her first timid steps on the road to improvement. Canning courageously broke with the Holy Alliance. He protected Portugal against an absolutist restoration, joined the United States in recognizing the independence of the South American republics, and helped prepare the liberation of Greece. A new breath of life was carried into domestic

The Canningites.

affairs too; but Canning died in 1827, before very much had been done in this field.

Religious freedom, 1828–29.

Nevertheless, owing largely to the impulse given by Canning, a series of acts were passed in 1828 and 1829 which are a noble beginning of British reform legislation in the nineteenth century. They affected the status of Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics. The freedom of worship granted to the former in 1689 had been since extended to the latter also, but both groups were, chiefly by the Test Act of 1673, excluded from holding public office. In 1828 the Test Act was repealed, and in consequence the Dissenters were put on an equality with Anglicans and made eligible to all posts in the gift of the state. So abiding, however, was the prejudice against the Roman Catholics that certain regulations excluding them from both Houses of Parliament were kept in force. Under the lash of this injustice a passionate Irishman, Daniel O'Connell, started a campaign which took such an ominous form among his countrymen that the government became alarmed, and passed (1829) the Emancipation Bill, at last flinging wide the doors of Parliament to the Catholic subjects of the crown and restoring them to their full civil rights.

The need of Parliamentary reform.

Hardly had these measures of religious toleration been carried when an agitation was started in favor of the reform of Parliament itself. The House of Commons, indeed, invited severe criticism. It was of feudal origin, and showed its derivation in that it represented not the nation, but certain privileged bodies. These were of two kinds, the counties and the boroughs. The *counties* elected 186 members on an ungenerous franchise system, but were hardly open to criticism compared with the boroughs, which were a perfect sink of corruption. The *boroughs* elected 467 members by methods so various as to defy description. Suffice it that borough members were ordinarily elected by the

town corporations; that is, by privileged bodies, composed in some cases of no more than a handful of individuals. In one class of boroughs a rich man, usually a nobleman, had acquired the right of naming the two members of the borough. They represented in Parliament nothing but himself. Such a borough was derisively called a pocket-borough, and the whole system, as is plain without additional details, was rotten to the core. However, as a further feature, filling the cup of injustice to the brim, we may note an antiquated system of distribution of seats. The change in the conditions of population produced by the development of manufactures in the north of England was disregarded, and not only did Leeds, Birmingham, and other important new towns remain unrepresented, but the whole kingdom of Scotland had no more than 45 members against the 44 of the backward county of Cornwall.

The Reform Act of 1832.

The Whig party, which championed the reform of Parliament, soon won such favor that it was able to put an end to the long Tory rule. In 1830 the duke of Wellington, who had become the head of the Tories and prime minister soon after the death of Canning, was obliged to resign because he declared himself satisfied with Parliamentary representation as it was, and in the general elections of 1831, the Whigs for the first time in half a century carried a majority of seats. Their leader, Earl Grey, now brought forward a Reform Bill which, after meeting with violent opposition in the House of Lords, was at last (1832) accepted by both houses. The new law achieved two results: (1) By suppression of the rotten boroughs 143 seats were set free for distribution among the towns and counties which were not sufficiently represented; and (2) by a more uniform and more liberal electoral franchise[1] 200,000 additional subjects were conceded the

[1] In the counties, copyholders and leaseholders of lands worth £10 a year were admitted to vote; also tenants-at-will of lands worth £50. In the boroughs, householders (whether as owners or tenants) of houses worth £10 a year were given the same privilege.

right to vote. Although this was not pure democracy, with its corollary of universal suffrage, the House of Commons was henceforth far more representative of the nation, and better prepared in consequence to consider measures demanded by the public welfare.

Emergence of the workingman as a political factor.

The Reform Act of 1832 marks the beginning of the legislation by which aristocratic England was gradually democratized. The Whigs, reorganized as the Liberal party, undertook, with proper safeguards against precipitancy, to favor this process; while the Tories, known henceforth as Conservatives, continued, in the main, to oppose change, but wisely accepted every reform as soon as it had become law. Both parties continued to represent largely the ancient aristocracy of the soil and the newer aristocracy of wealth. But the Liberals showed the effect of modern thought by attempting to secure contact with the masses. And that brings us to a matter of the greatest possible importance. Through the discoveries of science and the development of machinery, English industry had been tremendously stimulated. The presence of coal and iron in the northern and western counties had occasioned the almost magical growth of new towns composed largely of laborers, who, for the present, had few rights and were mercilessly exploited by the great manufacturers. With the steady growth of their numbers they would inevitably develop a sense of power, sure to take the form of a regular programme of political and economic rights. The wild agitation known as the Chartist movement, the first invasion into politics of the new industrial class, apprised the governing group that the workingmen must henceforth be reckoned with. The Chartist movement (1837–48), so called from the popular petition proclaimed as the People's Charter, aimed chiefly at universal suffrage; and although it failed at the first onset to attain its object, it taught the masses to organize and rally around the new ideal of democratic justice.

Repeal of the Corn Laws.

The steady pressure of an increasingly enlightened press and public accounts for the succeeding reforms. Let us first look at the measures adopted in connection with trade. England had thus far discouraged importation by a protective system, the chief feature of which was a high duty upon corn or grain. The people who profited by this policy were the great landholders, while the measure weighed heavily upon the workingmen, who had to pay an inordinately high price for bread. Two intelligent employers of labor, Richard Cobden and John Bright, undertook a campaign to instruct public opinion, and in 1846 had the satisfaction of convincing the ministry and Parliament of the wisdom of repealing the Corn Laws. With agricultural products made free, there seemed no good reason for maintaining the tariff upon manufactured articles. England adopted the policy of free trade, to which, in spite of sporadic opposition, she has been steadily loyal for over half a century. The missing revenue, without which the state could not live, was replaced by an income tax.

Free trade.

Democratization of Parliament by the Acts of 1867 and 1884.

The continued agitation in favor of a wider suffrage led, in the course of the century, to two acts supplementary to the reform of 1832. In 1867 the Conservative ministry of Disraeli succeeded in getting a measure passed, the chief feature of which was the lowering of the property qualification for the franchise; and in 1884 the Liberal ministry of Gladstone carried a bill admitting still further classes to the right to vote, and remedying some inequalities of representation. The English electoral system still shows some anomalies, and the very poor, the have-nothings, cannot exercise the franchise, but the right to vote is now so generally extended that the House of Commons is fairly representative of English public opinion, and constitutes almost, if not quite, a democratic body in the fullest sense of the term.

Other reforms. A great many other nineteenth century reforms, covering almost the whole field of social organization, can be done but scant justice here. By an extensive factory legislation Parliament has attempted to protect children, women, and, finally, the workingmen themselves, against the ruthless exploitation of the employers. A series of administrative bills has gradually taken the local government out of the hands of the aristocracy and given it to councils elected by the people. At the same time the whole civil service has been committed to a paid body of officials with permanent tenure, in consequence of which a change of ministry in our day affects only the heads of departments and can no longer shake the public order.

Ireland. The most important domestic question of the century remains to be considered: its name is Ireland. With the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 a beginning had been made toward redressing the heaped-up wrongs of centuries. But the English prejudice against the Irish was strong and persistent. O'Connell, the Irish leader, inclined to the view that the British Parliament would never do justice to his country, and presently began to agitate for the repeal of the Act of Union (1801) by which Ireland had lost its legislative independence. This may fairly be called the beginning of the Home Rule movement. With such a policy no English party would sympathize; but when in 1845 the Irish potato-crop failed and a terrible famine ensued, Parliament felt obliged to do something to alleviate the inhuman conditions upon the lesser island. Thus a turning-point was reached, and a policy of legislative enactments inaugurated which gives proof of an honorable desire to remove some of the most crying grievances. In 1869 the Anglican Church, which since the days of Elizabeth had been also the national Church of Ireland, was disestablished. Although the Church of an alien people, it was possessed not only of millions of

pounds worth of buildings and lands, but also drew part of its revenues, in the form of tithes, from the Irish Catholics. Now only did Ireland achieve real religious equality. The ministry which disestablished the Episcopal Church was presided over by the Liberal leader, Gladstone. With an appetite whetted by success, Gladstone now ventured to attack the far more complicated land question. The soil of Ireland was generally owned by English absentee landlords and cultivated by Irish tenants for a payment of rent. The law, having been made by the conqueror, was very unfair to the peasants, who lived in revolting squalor, at the mercy of their masters. A series of Land Acts, passed, some by the Liberals and some by the Conservatives, and inspired by the idea of affording protection against landlord cruelties, has culminated in the creation of a state fund from which the peasant may borrow money on easy terms for the purchase of his farm. Doubtless, the moral and economic conditions of the island have much improved, but one matter remains where it was: the Irish persistently demand Home Rule; that is, they desire a law authorizing them to govern themselves in all matters strictly local. Gladstone finally incorporated this demand in his Liberal programme; but although on one occasion (1892) a Home Rule Bill passed the Commons, the Lords promptly rejected it, and Gladstone let the issue drop. Ireland and her Parliamentary representatives still bend all their energies upon this supreme demand.

The Irish land question.

Home Rule.

Let us turn our glance from these domestic affairs to the wonderful expansion of the British Empire over all known lands and seas. The colonial leadership won in the eighteenth century has been confirmed by a thousand bonds of commerce and civilization. The vast lands over which waves the British flag fall into two main groups. Regions like Canada, Australia, and South Africa, which have been settled largely from Britain, are granted a very substantial

The expansion of England.

self-government, while provinces like India or the colonies of Central Africa, where natives predominate, are made directly dependent on the central government, which secures its hold by a British administration and a British army of occupation. These latter, in distinction from the self-governing colonies, are called crown colonies. During the last generation much enthusiasm has been aroused in connection with a movement which purposes to bind the self-governing colonies more closely to the mother country by allowing them to send representatives to a central British Parliament. The movement is known as Imperial Federation, but though toasted on all patriotic occasions, has thus far been unable to surmount the practical difficulties in the way.

Imperial Federation.

Naturally, these world-wide colonial interests have brought many cares and not infrequently have led to colonial wars. The most important take us to India and South Africa. In 1857 the Sepoys, who are the native soldiery of India, commanded by English officers, mutinied, and before they could be put down the cruel deeds of the natives had almost been outdone by the victors. Thereupon Parliament was aroused to revise the whole relations of the home country to its colony. The charter of the East India Company, a private association of merchants, in whose hands the administration of the great dependency had rested since its conquest, was revoked (1858), and the control, including the management of army, navy, justice, and administration, was transferred to the crown and its officials.

The Indian mutiny, 1857.

Conquest of the two Boer republics.

The South African troubles had their origin in the existence in the midst of British territory of two small republics, the Transvaal and Orange Free State, inhabited by Dutch immigrants, called Boers. The Boers naturally enough desired to preserve their independence, while the British were anxious to bring them within the pale of their influence. Quarrels followed, attended by rash and unjust acts on both

sides, with the unhappy issue of a fierce and prolonged war (1899–1902). The small Boer forces, after heroic resistance under skilful leaders, were at last scattered and broken, and the two states annexed by the British crown.

British foreign policy.

The British foreign policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been determined by the circumstance that England is the greatest commercial and colonial power in the world. Although with her splendid start and untiring energy she has left every other European state far behind, she is quick to take alarm at the rise of a possible rival. Owing largely to the struggles of the past, she was inclined, during the decades immediately following the fall of Napoleon, to keep a sharp lookout toward France; but on discovering that France was occupied with other matters, she presently turned her attention to Russia. The great Slav power was pushing her interests chiefly in the direction of Constantinople and central and eastern Asia. This action England tried to check with varying success, going so far on one occasion as to declare war. When in 1853 the Czar's forces invaded Turkey, England made an alliance with Napoleon III. and hurried troops to the Black Sea. The ensuing campaign is known as the Crimean War. The capture of Sebastopol inclined Russia to ask for peace, the terms of which were drawn up at Paris (1856). Although the advantages attained by France and Great Britain were not very striking, the main end of the war, the preservation of the Ottoman empire, was unquestionably secured. Once again, in 1878, when Russia, in another war with Turkey, was about to crush the Sultan, Britain interfered and saved the Mohammedan state (Congress of Berlin, 1878).

War with Russia, 1854–56.

Great Britain and Russia in Asia.

While these conflicts illustrate the rivalry between Great Britain and Russia at Constantinople, their competition has been no less keen in Asia. Diplomatic incidents, more or less grave, have been frequent. A welcome event from the

British point of view was the recent rise of Japan. England immediately supported this Oriental power, which, driven to desperation by persistent Russian encroachments, was at length, in 1904, emboldened to declare war. Japan's great victories on land and sea enabled her to acquire a paramount position in Korea and in the Yellow Sea. These advantages were secured by the treaty of peace signed at Portsmouth (U. S.) in August, 1905. Even before the war was concluded riots had taken place in Russia, which have since culminated in a great revolutionary movement. For the present the Russian Government is occupied with domestic affairs, and can exercise no pressure upon English interests either in Asia or elsewhere. Plainly the turmoil in Russia redounds to the decided advantage of Britain. By the eliminating process of time one after another of England's potential rivals in world empire have been stricken from the list, until in the year in which this chapter is written (1906) there remains only Germany. This vigorous and youthful empire has lately girded its loins to share in the partition of the world, with the result that English public opinion has transferred its wakeful jealousy from St. Petersburg to Berlin. The foreign policy of Great Britain is for the moment guided chiefly with reference to the growth and expansion of Germany.

The sovereign reigns but does not govern.

The predominance of Parliament, achieved in the seventeenth century, has not been questioned by the later sovereigns, who have rested content with their honorary headship of the nation and the indefinable political influence commanded by it. The long reign (1837–1901) of Queen Victoria, a conspicuous lover of peace, came to an end amidst universal signs of sorrow. She was succeeded by Edward VII., her oldest son by her marriage with Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg.

CHAPTER XXIV

RUSSIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY; THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE BALKAN QUESTION

REFERENCES: FYFFE, Modern Europe (*passim;* see Index); PHILLIPS, Modern Europe, pp. 491–523; SEIGNOBOS, Europe Since 1815, Chapters XIX.–XXI.; ANDREWS, Modern Europe, Vol. II., Chapter XIII.; RAMBAUD, History of Russia, Vol. III.; KENNAN, Siberia and the Exile System; MILYOUKOV, Russia and Its Crisis (a searching analysis of present Russian conditions); KOVALEVSKY, Russian Political Institutions.

Czar Alexander and Poland.

THE part which Russia played in the overthrow of Napoleon made Czar Alexander I. a conspicuous figure in Europe after 1815. The Congress of Vienna confirmed him in the possession of Poland, which he ruled as king, on the basis of a granted constitution, as long as he lived. We have seen how under his successor, Nicholas I., the Poles revolted (1830) and had to pay for their audacity with the loss of their constitution and their independence.

Russia, a heterogeneous state.

The Poles, however, were not the only foreign people united with Russia under the sceptre of the Czar. The grand-duchy of Finland was inhabited by Finns intersprinkled with Swedes, while in the Baltic provinces were settled Letts and Esths, who tilled the soil for an upper crust of German landlords. Finland and the Baltic provinces, Russian only in name, had preserved a measure of provincial self-government. That was not the case with the various Slav tribes—White Russians in the west, Little Russians in