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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Carl W. Condit
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requirements for the degree of

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by

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Preface

Other and more competent people have written of Walter Bagehot's life and character, and some have considered his more strictly literary works. If a man, however, had to his credit only a character and a handful of essays about books, he would be of little interest to the generations after his death. The personality of our subject was unquestionably fascinating, and his critical pieces are not to be overlooked; but he had far more than this to offer the world. He was at home in many fields - business, politics, economics, science, and history - , and, what is more remarkable, he gave his fellow men solid and lasting contributions in several of them. The present work, then, is largely concerned with what Bagehot accomplished in the world of thought, with his place in the main stream of ideas, leaving to others his character and the events of his existence. Far from being a technical treatise on economic and sociological questions - although of course it must deal with them - , it is to be hoped that the following dissertation will be a comprehensive and philosophical survey of his achievements in many fields. Books are significant, after all, when they are related to the social context out of which they have come; the author's aim here is to do precisely that with the books of a man who covered a wide range of learning and lived a rich and understanding life.

18 February 1941

Chapter I

Life and Education

A man who distinguishes himself in several avenues of thought and activity rarely fails to excite admiration or interest. If he earns this distinction in an age when a strict specialization of intelligence and skill is forced upon us by the quantity and complexity of social phenomena, he becomes doubly admirable. In the twentieth century such men are virtually unknown, and in the later nineteenth century, from which our era of science and industry springs, such a "Renaissance man", at home in the whole province of human learning, becomes increasingly an anachronism. Yet two important figures in the Victorian period are distinguished for their catholicity of knowledge: the first, Herbert Spencer, managed to review everything that had significance in human and natural philosophy, from the commonplaces of empirical science to the ambitious conclusions of metaphysics; the other, Walter Bagehot, covered almost everything but philosophy. A banker by trade, he yet found success in the avocation of literary criticism; the editor of an influential financial journal, he belonged as much among statesmen and their works as among business men and the pursuits of trade. He knew history and biography, law, religion, and ethics; he learned biology late in life, and acquired a taste for music. In addition to all this, he was active in society.

maintaining many friendships, adding witty and sparkling conversation to many gatherings. But he was far from a dilettante, for he earned an important contemporary reputation as critic and analyst of political and economic institutions, as a delightful biographical essayist, and as a sociologist. This reputation has for the most part been neglected, both in the schools and among professional historians of thought, yet it has suffered no appreciable decline. A respectable contemporary political thinker, writing in an even more respectable encyclopedia, has characterized him as "one of the few first-rate minds in social science"¹; an eminent British economist of our own day has praised him for pioneer contributions to the theory of credit and its uses.² So he has been commended not only for his catholicity, but even more for the solid worth of his works. He was a man who occupied a considerable place in the main stream of ideas, and in the world of literature as well.

The family into which Walter Bagehot was born, on February 3, 1826, had lived since 1747 in Langport, on the River Parrett near Glastonbury. His father was a partner since 1825 in Stuckey's Bank, an old and respected institution whose senior partner was related by marriage to the Bagehots. Both families and most of the closer relatives dwelt in the

1. Lerner, Max: "Bagehot", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 1, p. 385.

2. Keynes, J. M.: "The Works of Walter Bagehot", Economic Journal, XXV (Sept. 1915), pp. 369-75.

town, where they enjoyed an eminence resulting from an obvious superiority of material possessions, and from a less obtrusive but nevertheless real superiority of mind and character. The family seems to have been of the retired and dignified variety, cultivated, perhaps "intellectual" in a bookish sort of way. The elder Bagehot, besides being a shrewd business man, almost exclusively devoted to the tasks of managing a bank, was a good Unitarian and a mild Whig. His personality was marked by tenacity of will, steadfastness, if not profundity, of purpose, and by deep and warm affections. On the other hand, Mrs. Bagehot was apparently the complement of her husband. A pretty and always popular woman, she was unflinchingly charming and vivacious, infusing a sense of life and activity into all who met her; further, she enjoyed the gift of a sense of humor, along with considerable curiosity about things of the mind. Her spontaneity of nature seems to have been inherited by young Bagehot, and strengthened by his impressionable contact with her. Yet this brightest ornament of the family came to be its tragedy when, in Bagehot's youth, she became permanently insane, probably as the result of the death of two sons, and increased by fears induced by the mental weakness of a third, all by a former marriage. In this trial Walter, despite his keen love of society, willingly shared the burden placed on the family, isolated now because of his mother's loss of reason. There was apparently no permanent effect on him, although, later, doubts of his own rea-

son left him in temporary fits of melancholy. At first, however, life at home was fairly bright; and there can be no question of Bagehot's real affection for his mother: his letters are warm and lively, given frequently to humorous odds and ends of gossip, often to the pursuit of intellectual pleasures.

Thomas Bagehot, Walter's father, was a valuable force in the boy's early education, providing him with the possible training. A sensible and vigorous man, alert to the political and religious issues of the day, awake to the broader aspects of humanity, his logical and concrete, if unsubtle and practical, mind early impressed his son. Through his father's devotion to business, the boy acquired a taste for facts and an impatience with all a priori thinking. Moreover, the elder man read widely and retentively in English history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and obviously instilled in Walter an interest which grew throughout his life. And as a lover of nature and an amateur in water colors, Thomas Bagehot aroused his son's taste for beauty, not only in painting, but in poetry and nature. The boy's formal education began at Mr. Queckett's Langport Grammar School, where Bagehot's life-long love of the essay was apparently born. The subject matter of these first literary efforts suggests that he was a prodigy: his studies in Latin and history stimulated works on King Alfred, the battles of Mantinea and Marathon, on St. Augustine, Caesar, and Socrates. The piece on St. Augustine has become celebrated because of his letter on the subject to his mother, with its accidentally

ironic opening sentence: "I will now attempt the life of Augustine of Hippo. This bulwark of orthodoxy was born at Tagaste, a town in Africa."³

In August, 1839, Bagehot entered Bristol College, where he stayed until 1842. The presence of several sciences in its course of study indicates that it was reasonably progressive, not a common characteristic among secondary schools of the time. His mind matured rapidly, at least in the sphere of academic pursuits. The classics, mathematics, German, and Hebrew were balanced by numerous lectures in natural philosophy, chemistry, and zoology; the particular emphasis, of course, being on the classical languages and mathematics. More than two hundred letters to his parents attest to a wide and active curiosity, a passion for diligent work in school and after hours; he excelled in his studies, and in his spare time read the historians Robertson and Hume, and in literature, among others, Goldsmith, Byron, and Johnson. His comments in letters are interesting, curiously mature for a boy of fifteen: he praises Dr. Johnson for "consecrating poetry to the reprehension of vice"; regrets Byron's being driven from his native land; characterizes Lady Byron as an "'orrid 'un". The language for the most part is ornate and bookish.⁴ In another letter

3. November 25, 1838 (aetat.12); quoted by Mrs. Barrington in the Life of Walter Bagehot, The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot (hereinafter referred to as Works) edited by Mrs. Russell Barrington, London, 1915, vol.X, p.83.

4. Unpublished letters quoted in Irvine, William, Walter Bagehot, N. Y. and London, 1939, p.12.

the ambitious youth remarks philosophically on being driven to play ball when he wanted to study mathematics: "It is not at all a pleasant thing to be on bad terms with one's school-fellows."⁵ But Walter was not a timid "grind"; he got along with his fellows. Advice from his father was concerned chiefly with the maintenance of integrity, high ethical standards, and the value of a broad education which would encourage the equal growth of all aspects of the personality. Contact with men of science, especially the ethnologist Prichard, further stimulated his congenital taste for facts; yet his piety and religious convictions remained unchanged. There is little doubt, as Professor Irvine has said, that "Bagehot was exposed to nothing in vain".⁶

The Unitarian Thomas Bagehot objected to the doctrinal tests required for entrance into Oxford and Cambridge; consequently, his son was sent to the newly founded University College of London, which he entered in October, 1842. But there were advantages here which neither Oxford nor Cambridge could offer. In fact, one is tempted to say that University College was at that time superior at least to Oxford, and the equal of Cambridge. At any rate, in London Bagehot could enjoy a broad and liberal curriculum, contact with competent professors, and with a big city, for, like Dr. Johnson, he was made to flourish in metropolitan surroundings. As he said of Shakes-

5. Ibid., p.13.

6. Ibid., p.15.

pears, he had an "experiencing nature", for his life was a constant expansion of all the faculties. He enjoyed the society of the city because it could teach him much, and further, he had the courage, alertness, and the resourcefulness to play an important part in the great drama of urban affairs. But he maintained within himself a quiet detachment, an ability for cool and objective self-analysis even under emotional stress, as, for example, his love letters so admirably show. His real friends were few, but he was the sort of man who is happy in society, whether there are emotional connections with it or not. People were good in the measure that they were instructive to him, that is, in the measure that what they had to offer became a conscious part of his rational self. To live in the mind makes all living an exciting adventure; no man is lonely who understands the world about him.

At London University Bagehot's field of study was extraordinarily broad: Latin, Greek, logic, psychology, mathematics, etymology (presumably classical), moral and political philosophy, physiology, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. In addition, he read diligently in politics, economics, literature, and the higher branches of mathematics, as "exercises for the head". Energy, good memory, and sound training in his early years prevented him from getting merely a smattering of everything, solid learning in nothing; he got, in the best sense of the term, a broad and liberal education. He wrote much in letters to his parents or his teachers, all of whom

seem to have impressed him in one way or another, and all of whom "educated" him.⁷ But the chief pleasure of education to Bagehot came with the impact of ideas, and with the thrill of discovering new facts and opinions, new ways of thought. To be a conscious part of the stream of phenomena, to feel, through understanding, the give and take of ideas - that was true adventure of the spirit. He had read much at home; now in the city he wanted to talk about what he knew, to air in his own words his own enthusiasms. He was the typical undergraduate with curiosity and gusto. Vigor of thought and argumentative power made him an iconoclast, delighting to attack the accepted and to denounce pretensions. His closest friend during his university days and perhaps for the rest of his life, Richard Holt Hutton, remarked that iconoclasm was Bagehot's *ὕψις* : he had, indeed, a passionate impatience with dullness and ignorance.

Hutton has told us that Bagehot's characteristics in college and the experiences which college stimulated remained with him into maturity. His love of political debate, evidenced by the two friends' frequent excursions to hear Cobden and Bright on the Corn Laws, became a lifelong taste for the personalities and abilities of men of government. A voracious reading of Macaulay, along with the interest in politics around him, helped to give him a true historical sense, that

7. See Irvine, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

is, a true appreciation of the values of history and historical conditions. His theology by this time had become a kind of orthodox Unitarianism, but still unorthodox to the upholders of the true faith. His iconoclastic temperament gave him an obvious superciliousness, a variety of intellectual arrogance which resulted from an honest scorn of prejudice and ineffectual thought. His detachment left him untouched by any feelings of sympathy where rational considerations were involved; consequently, his criticism remained positive, never apologetic or complacent. But there was no malice in him; he had a good-humored way of accepting and enjoying the ridiculous in life. To indulge the delight of exposing the dull and hypocritical he devised a Socratic method of conversation by which he forced people into making foolish admissions that he later might catch them up and point out their folly. He frequently adopted a cynically tolerant view of the weaknesses and imbecilities of the human mind solely to outrage the respectable.⁸

Along with all this, Bagehot was beginning to develop a philosophic attitude toward men and phenomena; one finds an increasing tendency to attempt the drawing of just conclusions from the body of facts at hand. Learning to him was never a matter of the bare accumulation of information; a well-stocked memory was far from his only virtue. Mutton tells us that

8. See Mutton, R. H., "Memoir" (of Bagehot), Works, I, pp. 5-10.

he had nothing of cold scientific curiosity. His intellectual convictions were always excited and backed up by a warmth of feeling and a quick sympathy for whatever caught his interest. He was a Somersetshire man with a richness of nature and a love of the external "glow" of life. Perhaps the warm coloring of landscapes in southern England left a permanent mark on his temperament.⁹ Surely it was a philosophic imagination and a feeling for the adventure in learning that prompted the shrewd and somewhat amazing letter to his mother on Carlyle, written during his second year at University College. Carlyle "thinks that it would be an advantage", he writes, "if the highest minds in every generation were engaged in the actual direction of state power. But I cannot see why the highest intellects should not be employed rather in communicating new truth to mankind,...and labouring to instruct the mass of population in old and valuable knowledge. This is...a far higher way of influencing the happiness of the world, than the application of physical force to protect men's lives and properties. ...The influence exercised by the finest minds over their fellow men by persuasion and conviction (is confounded) with the Government by laws and acts of Parliament. The two things seem very distinct....Dr. Arnold's theory that Government ought to be sovereign over human life (is) grounded on nothing else but the assumption that the Government by argument and the Govern-

9. Ibid., pp.10-11.

ment by force must necessarily be the same."¹⁰ This is the first expression of Bagehot's liberalism, of his attitude toward government in general and toward the men who make it; and, also, the first indication of a thorough antipathy to Carlyle's ungenerous ignorance of practical politics and the rudiments of social justice. The important thing, however, is that it is the letter of one who had already become a stimulating thinker.

After graduating from University College with the M.A. degree in 1848, Bagehot began the study of law, although nothing in his interests and characteristics up to that time indicated a taste for the legal profession. But his mother's insanity told heavily on him, and he sacrificed a possible career at the bar that he might return to Langport to help care for her. This seems to have been the most melancholy period of his life: hard study had taken toll of his health; fear of insanity in himself aggravated already sensitive nerves; and finally, inability to reach a decision about a future career, added to a transient feeling of loneliness in the city, further darkened his mind. Eventually his health and nerves broke, and he returned to Langport in the summer of 1848. This unhappy experience gave him an understanding of and sympathy for the sensitive and delicate spirit, as the essays on Clough and Marley Coleridge reveal. One could hardly explain them in any other way.

10. Quoted by Mrs. Barrington, op. cit., Works, X, pp. 123-24

inasmuch as they are the products of a man who loved the world of politics, business, and science. But Langport and home did little for him. The fear of insanity apparently passed, but anxiety about a career and discouragement because of a conviction that he could accomplish nothing in any particular field deepened his melancholy. He was disappointed over his first professional literary efforts, the essays on currency and John Stuart Mill, although the Prospective Review had readily published them; and neither the law nor his father's banking business seemed to offer any agreeable opportunities. Unable to revive his spirits at home, he decided to try a familiar cure - a trip to Paris and the Continent. He arrived at the French capital on the eve of Louis Napoleon's audacious and unscrupulous coup d'etat. The youthful cynic, the undergraduate iconoclast, found himself at home in the world he loved! To the respectable Unitarian review, the Inquirer, went the record of his observation of Napoleon III's plot, the brilliant, flippant, cynical Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, designed to outrage and calculated to make for himself plenty of notoriety. The average Englishman thought the Emperor a Machiavelli in practice, a monster incited by the Catholic Church, the Anti-Christ incarnate. Bagehot defended both on the ground that the French were not "stupid" enough for free government and so needed a strong authority to keep them in line. The melancholia evaporated: all he needed was a little notoriety, of which he found at home as much as

an apprentice idol-smasher could want.

Louis Napoleon's capture of the French state introduced Bagehot to a rewarding career in business and journalism, and eventually in the social sciences. He gave up the law, deciding at last to enter his father's banking establishment; but at the moment he felt that literary life was not for him: he had little taste for quiet seclusion, needing, rather, the excitement of the worldly drama. He wrote to his friend Nutton that a position in the world was necessary to a career of comfort in England, and banking seemed to offer the best opportunity to gain this end.¹¹ But the jaunty, careless, intellectual, devil-may-care Bagehot proved a disappointment to his conscientious father, who made business his religion, both his temple and his ritual. Banking was "doing sums", and Walter refused to study its minute and innumerable details. There was nothing here of "bigger meanings". Like so many adventurous spirits, he soon discovered that the romance of activity in an industrial society is a fraud. Such learning imprisons the mind; the activity involved becomes a dull routine. Actually Bagehot found no difficulty in acquiring a banker's knowledge, but contact with things financial was for him a sterile experience; he grew cynical about worldly success, and could not take seriously the task of making money. His success with the Letters on the Coup d'Etat and a taste for essays, going back to the day when he called St. Augustine the "bulwark of ortho-

11. Quoted in Irvine, op. cit., p.45.

doxy", led him to periodical writing.

The great bulk of the literary, biographical, historical, and religious pieces were written during the years from 1852 to 1858, from the time of his entrance into business to the date of his marriage. These works were mostly printed in the Prospective and National Reviews, the first a somewhat narrow and sectarian Unitarian journal founded by James Martineau, the other an outgrowth of this short-lived periodical. The essays were later collected and republished in a volume entitled Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen. Mutton states that it was poorly received, although a few discriminating thinkers praised the contents. One of them was Matthew Arnold, who wrote to the editors of the National Review that "Shelley" and a few other articles showed, "not talent only, but a concern for the simple truth which is rare in English literature".¹² In the main, however, the little book fared badly with the literate public, both during Bagehot's life and up to the present time. Although some of these works find their way into the anthologies, they are, for the most part, unjustifiably ignored by the critics and pedagogues. But the literary pieces have given their author a reputation among contemporary Aristotelians, particularly the late Irving Babbitt, and the biographical essays certainly rank with the best of their kind. During the rest of his life, though, he

12. Quoted by Irvine, op. cit., p. 51; for a summary of contents and dates of original publication of essays in the Estimates see Mrs. Barrington, op. cit., Works, ch. viii and ix, passim.

devoted his abilities to economics, politics, and sociology, and it is in these fields that one discovers his true greatness.

In 1856, Richard Mutton, Bagehot's friend since university days and now editor of the Economist, suggested that he become a contributor to that influential journal of finance. Bagehot accepted the offer, and began his connection with the paper in February, 1857, contributing at first a weekly letter signed "A Banker". The Economist was born in 1843 as the financial organ of the new liberal regime. It was founded by James Wilson, afterwards member of the House of Commons, Financial Secretary of the Treasury, and Chancellor of the Indian Exchequer, a man who was immensely learned in both the theory and the practice of banking and taxation. In the course of time the Economist absorbed three other papers, the Bankers' Gazette, the Commercial Times, and the Railway Monitor, and soon came to be the leading publication on its subject in Europe, with also a respectable reputation in America, which it maintains to this day. It covered the whole field of finance, public and private, and assembled weekly in its pages reports on the markets and the state of trade all over the world. As a contributor, then, Bagehot found a ready-made fame among powerful and important men, who, in turn, quickly learned to heed his advice. His reputation soon became extraordinary; men in high places sought his opinion and usually followed it; both Lombard Street and Downing Street paid close attention to

what he had to say. His abilities were not unrewarded. Wilson resigned in 1859 to go to India; Mutton moved up to part ownership, and Bagehot succeeded him as editor. He made the journal even more an organ of the new economy and the new politics, but his attitude always remained judicious and impartial. There can be little doubt that he was thoroughly at home in this new task: a position of authority among the mighty was something he enjoyed. Like Henry Adams, if he could not hold political power, he wanted at least to "give orders" through the medium of accepted advice.

Acquaintance with James Wilson brought Bagehot a wife as well as a reputation in the world of government and money. He met Eliza Wilson, daughter of this eminent and respectable public servant, at their home in Claverton. He was immediately struck by her charm and loveliness, in spite of his predilections for bachelorhood and a prejudice against girls in general. The engagement resulted in many letters on Bagehot's part, most of them published recently under the forbidding title, The Love Letters of Walter Bagehot, although one wonders why such personal revelations are not left in decent obscurity. There is much talk of the binding of souls for eternity, of the "awfulness" of their feelings, of the boldness of professions of love (this especially from Eliza). He revolutionizes her mind. She is glamorous and beautiful to him, and "inaccessible" (sic). And he appreciated the fact that, as a good Victorian woman, she is all obedience. But the let-

ters are redeemed by a sense of humor and by good-natured jests in affection. She is afraid that he is too clever and learned for her poor mind; he that he is not clever enough. He is haunted by the fear of offending; gradually he grows more assured, and finally feels free to joke.¹³ They both survived, however, and were married in April, 1858. The most illuminating of the love letters as a revelation of his character is concerned with his taste for a position of authority in society. "I am afraid", he writes, "I covet 'power', influence over people's wills, faculties and conduct more in proportion than I can quite defend....Until I knew you it was ...the strongest feeling I had ever known."¹⁴ Professor Irvine's comment, although it may imply too much, is highly suggestive. He tells us that a steady pleasure in the exercise of power explains Bagehot's choice of the mild and adulatory Mutton for a friend; his habit of Socratic questioning for purposes of ridicule; his preference for the active life; his attempts at a public career; the gusto of his critical writing, and his enthusiastic though cynical defence of Louis Napoleon. Again this pleasure appears in his choice of a wife: under her aloof and dignified exterior Eliza Wilson was soft and yielding, with a congenital taste for obedience.¹⁵ Unlike Henry Adams, Bagehot was not a disappointed searcher

13. See Irvine, op. cit., pp.53-61.

14. Bagehot: Love Letters, etc., London, 1933, p.45; quoted in Irvine, op. cit., p.56.

15. Irvine, op. cit., pp.56-57.

after power.

His marriage to a daughter of the Hon. James Wilson introduced him to the holders of power in London society. He and his wife lived in London on terms of friendship with the statesmen, authors, and businessmen who fill the pages of his literary and biographical essays; his "experiencing nature", added to a faculty for observation and statement, gave vitality to these and to longer works, to studies in politics and economics which, as products of book-learning alone, would have been tedious. But he wrote of men and things, and good writing, like great philosophy, comes from life, not from books. In the inner circle of politics and finance the brilliant editor of the Economist could be himself: he was at home wherever thought and action combined to make great conversation - not the flippant repartee of the drawing room, but the talk of solid and accomplished men. He was, as Mrs. Barrington observed, "a literary lion in the world of political magnates".¹⁶ In James Wilson, however, Bagehot seemed to find the most to interest him, and the older man's influence on him was considerable. His father-in-law was an optimistic and complacent Victorian who probably never faced a real problem, personal or practical; a "conservative liberal", he was steady and solid, remote from heresies and close to the accepted prejudices. His assumptions were few and apparent, his logic simple and decisive; he was the upholder of a tradition

16. Op. cit., Works, X, p. 272.

in political business rather than a statesman. Surely not a man to excite one's curiosity, yet he was, like Sir George Cornwall Lewis, an excellent example of what Professor Irvine regards as Bagehot's favorite theory, "that truth is very dull and best discovered by very dull people".¹⁷ We are at liberty to think, however, that Bagehot was too philosophical to take literally this bit of cynicism. James Wilson made it possible for him to live in the center of the political world, which he found of immense value in what he called a "political country". And the truths of politics and science were not at all dull to him, for if they were, he could hardly have written so persuasively about them. What men like Wilson taught was nourishing and, ipso facto, highly agreeable food to Bagehot's restless and lively mind. If James Wilson had lived longer (the Indian climate and Exchequer soon killed him), his son-in-law might have been more of a politician and less of a writer - to the considerable detriment of contemporary thought. The old fellow, after all, was a living embodiment of good sense, and "no virtue", according to Mrs. Barrington, "appealed to Bagehot more than did good sense".¹⁸

Association with men of public affairs through his father-in-law and a position as analyst of politics and finance on the Economist apparently incited its editor to attempt

17. Irvine, op. cit., p. 64.

18. Mrs. Barrington, op. cit., Works, X, p. 272.

a political career. Eminent statesmen, particularly Sir Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India, Gladstone, and Sir Stafford Northcote in the Treasury, knew him and admired him, and may have suggested his seeking election. In May, 1865, Bagehot stood as member of Commons for Manchester, was quickly defeated, tried twice again to persuade the electorate of his virtues, and failed twice. He learned that reputation among politicians is not quite the same as reputation with the people at large; moreover, he was a poor public speaker and far too scrupulous about getting votes. He himself felt that his position was too vague, too little understood by a popular majority. In addition, he was too clever and original, and by temperament ^{an} aristocrat, that is, one who prefers his own principles to a compromise with the electorate. Finally, he probably found more disadvantages than advantages in the life of a Commoner, as well as he could judge from the outside. He was fundamentally the spectator and critic within the world; his activity was to review at first hand the activity of others.

The five years following the attempt at a political career, 1865 to 1870, were the busiest of Bagehot's life, and there was little time for polite writing. Mutton revived the Spectator with Meredith Townsend, thus making necessary his resignation from the Economist, which had resulted in Bagehot's becoming both editor and director in 1861. By 1863 he was a kind of assistant editor on the National Review, and

soon sole editor, following the resignation of the Oxford don and great sociologist Charles Henry Pearson over a quarrel about theological articles. The National lasted scarcely more than a year; after its decease there was a momentary breathing spell before a whirlwind of activity. The American Civil War demanded a weekly article on the subject for the Economist, and the possibility of England's being involved increased the tension and responsibility that falls on the editor of an important paper during a crisis. The financial panic of 1866 made matters worse. The banking career expanded; he became vice-chairman of the central house at Langport and manager of the London branch. Essays on monetary matters in the Economist made him an unofficial financial adviser to the government, subject to call at any time. The Bank Notes Issue Bill was proposed in Commons by Gladstone, who immediately sought Bagehot's advice. He wrote exhaustively on the subject for his periodical and eventually came to be a kind of liaison officer between the bankers and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the midst of this ceaseless round of activity appeared the earlier portions of the first of his long works, The English Constitution, the initial chapter of which was published in the spring of 1865 in the Fortnightly Review, then edited by George Henry Lewes. Within the next year and a half this was completed, having appeared chapter by chapter in the fortnightly. In February, 1867, John Morley came to the editorship of this influential periodical and scarcely settled behind his

desk before besought Bagehot for more contributions. Banker, editor, adviser, critic, host, and husband though he was, the diligent chief of the Economist complied with one of the few great treatises in historical sociology of the post-Darwinian era, Physics and Politics, completed within the next two years. Yet after hours this man who belonged to so much of the world found plenty of time for his family and his birthplace: he maintained an interest in local affairs at Lanfport; he kept a big house with his wife and her mother and sisters on Belgrave Street in London, where gatherings of all varieties flourished; and he was a kind and ready counsellor for his family, who interrupted him at any time. Above all this, the range and depth of his curiosity constantly increased; tenacious of old interests, he was eagerly receptive of new, diligently studying biology for Physics and Politics, geology for the sake of curiosity. Late in life he acquired a taste for music and a very real interest in William Morris and his school of architects, draftsmen, and interior decorators. But the pressure of such an existence began to tell, and with the death of his mother in 1870 Bagehot's health showed alarming signs of giving way.

The first indications of failing strength, however, were temporary, and he continued his work on the Economist, faced now with the reporting and interpretation of the state of France during the Prussian War and during the two years following defeat and the establishment of the French Republic. In addition

there were many contributions to the Fortnightly, Contemporary, and Saturday Reviews. Except for a new preface to the second edition of The English Constitution in 1872, the longer works in the final years of his life were devoted exclusively to economics. Though frequently ill during the early 1870's, he completed Lombard Street, his classic on English banking, and began the Economic Studies, a work which was never completed. During 1876 and 1877 he wrote many articles for the Economist on the depreciation of silver and the exchanges with India, all eventually collected and published under the title The Depreciation of Silver. A brief excursion to Paris with his wife in the fall of 1874 interrupted his activities, which were never to be resumed in full. Once more the government, this time in the person of Sir Stafford Northcote, asked for his advice in financial matters, more particularly to give evidence before the parliamentary Committee on Banks of Issue. The respectable Athenaeum Club of London finally recognized him: he was elected a member in April, 1875, "for eminence in science, literature, the arts, and for public service". The statement is as bare as an epitaph, yet when taken literally - as it can be - there is not a finer tribute. In the remaining two years of his life, editorial duties, Economist articles, and the composition of Economic Studies occupied his time. There was a great deal of praise, most of it justifiable, for Lombard Street and the Studies, but the length of time he required for composition

and extensive revision indicated his failing powers. Bagehot was known and respected in his own country, on the Continent, and in the United States by the handful of intelligent and important people interested in the world he knew and described so well. Perhaps he had fulfilled his capacity for achievement, in spite of the brevity of his life. He died on March 23, 1877, at the age of fifty-one.¹⁹ His old age would have been interesting, but on the other hand, it seems almost appropriate that he died young. Professor Irvine feels that a short career is almost inevitable for one with his "youthful daring,...love of vivid life, and hatred of weakness".²⁰ Bagehot's mind developed early, and early or late, there is no question that it developed fully. In a sense he was a man who enjoyed the idea of things rather than the thing itself: his practical success in banking hardly obscures the fact that it was a half-hearted career, and aside from this he lived a life of the mind in the very midst of business and politics. One could scarcely imagine a better personal development for a man of the modern age than this. A sure sense

19. The definitive biography of Bagehot is Mrs. Barrington's, vol.X of the Works; for a livelier though much shorter account, see Irvine, op. cit., pp. 1-83, which the foregoing summary follows for the most part. Matton's two "Memoirs" are the characterizations of a close friend: Works, I, pp. 1-46, 47-54 (the second was reprinted from the Dictionary of National Biography). Interesting studies of personality based on published writings are Wilson, Woodrow: "A Literary Politician", Atlantic Monthly, LXXVI (Nov.1895), pp. 668-80, and "A Wit and a Seer", loc. cit., LXXVII (Oct.1898), pp. 527-40.

20. Op. cit., p. 83.

of reality and a practical sagacity increased the value of everything he did, whether the criticism of Clough's poetry or the analysis of a new financial bill. Every aspect of thought and activity upon which he touched was enriched by his meeting it with an attitude drawn from a knowledge of a wholly different aspect. Thus he considered literature from the viewpoint of a successful man of the world, who could get things done, and he felt that a great man of letters should be, as well, a man of practical affairs. He was interested in the fact that Shakespeare was not only a good poet, but also a playwright who made the theatre pay. Because of his breadth of personality, one idea frequently called forth his mind its opposite or its complement; he felt as much what was not there as what was. Like all true catholic spirits, his intellectual process was almost constantly an attempt to build the fragments of other men's thoughts into the whole scheme of thought, that is, he had to present the full picture of life rather than emphasize any one part of it. His philistinism is a healthy antidote for the academic intellectualism of those who, like Arnold, found their answers in books. For Bagehot's philistinism, after all, grew out of his sense of reality, or rather, out of his sense for the positive facts of experience. Ideas must be inspired by contact with actuality; there must be an interest in the world, otherwise an interest in books will be sterile. But he was not dead to illusions and ideals; he continued always to believe in a

Christian God, and to be attracted by the beauties of natural phenomena. He had a natural affinity for good subjects; he wrote as he thought and felt, as he would have talked. "The only chance in literature, as in life, is to be yourself", he once wrote to Mutton.²¹ To be himself was to find for all phenomena a rational sanction. He had a well-developed ethical idealism, but it was far from the type that finds the world perpetually bad because it finds only the gap between the real and the ideal. Of the ideals more honestly called prejudices Bagehot had none: his wealth of original thought was unhampered by fashionable dogma or orthodox opinion.

The "completeness" of Walter Bagehot has been excellently summarized by Woodrow Wilson. "What delights us most in his literary essays", he wrote, "is their broad practical sagacity, so uniquely married...with pure taste and the style of a rapid artist in words. What makes his financial and political writings whole and sound is the scope of his mind outside finance and politics, the validity of his observations all around the circle of thought and affairs. There is constant balance, there is just perspective everywhere. He was the better critic for being the competent man of business and a trusted financial authority. He was the more sure-footed in his political judgments because of his play of mind in other spheres of activity."²² But there were shortcomings that

21. Mrs. Barrington, *op. cit.*, *Works*, X, p. 20.

22. "A Literary Politician", *loc. cit.*, p. 673.

left Bagehot incomplete at critical times. He had catholicity of knowledge, a freshness of viewpoint, a sense of humor, and he had one of the cardinal requirements of a philosopher; nevertheless, he remained forever the analyst and explainer and interpreter. The deeper implications of phenomena and his own conclusions about them seemed always to escape him. "The man is a conservative", wrote Wilson, "it is only his wit that is radical."²³ Like Lord Macaulay, he was a Whig of 1832, and he never got beyond this position; further, he never got beyond the political economy of the classical school. It was not a matter of his trying to fit contemporary facts into a priori notions; it was a congenital inability to understand the true significance of things, particularly the fact that the play of social forces constantly and inevitably gives rise to new and broader and more complex phenomena. Even in his truly great work, Physics and Politics, he failed to see the implication of his discoveries to humanity at large. He had none of the greatness of Hobhouse, who, in the course of studying the history of social organizations, came to conclusions of lasting benefit to mankind. He was far below Marx, who looked with the same observing and critical eye at economic institutions, but who found out in addition what those institutions meant to man. For one so thoroughly at home in the give and take of social existence, Bagehot was singularly unaware of the actual nature of the forces at play in civiliza-

23. "A Wit and a Seer", loc. cit., p. 538.

tion. He saw with much wisdom that modern men try to do too much, measuring their achievements by quantity instead of quality; that the practical energy of western peoples is far in advance of their abilities to control that energy. Yet when he sought to propose a remedy, he returned to the ineffectual Clough, who never accomplished anything: "the old thought retain, and yet consider it again". In other words, action ought to wait until principles are verified; but Bagehot did not fully realize that principles can scarcely be verified in any other way save by action. Clough's incapacity for discovering the truth suggested to him the skepticism that prevents dogma and unthinking action; when he came, however, to consider how thought and action might be better joined, he missed the mark. The test of a truth, after all, as Justice Holmes once said, is its ability to get itself accepted in the competition of the marketplace. Many of Bagehot's truths were too superficial to survive much of this competition. Aside from Physics and Politics, we are not likely to learn many new things from his writings. We know Darwin as a scientist and Marx and Hobhouse as political philosophers; Bagehot remains a "Victorian" essayist and sociologist.

Chapter II
Literary Theory

1.

Crane Brinton best explained the fundamental characteristic of Bagehot's writings when he stated that "through all his work there run certain leading ideas, which take on the rich colors of circumstances, and appear and re-appear clothed in different guises of fact".¹ This is particularly true of the literary pieces: a rapid reading is sufficient to reveal that they are concrete illustrations in detail of a collection of opinions about the place and value of literature, which, when grouped together, form a coherent and fairly complete literary doctrine. Bagehot approached any book with the question, what has it got to teach? We read books to learn about men and phenomena, and if we do not learn about them, we are dilettantes, idly wasting our time. To him any piece of literature too fine to come down into the public square and proclaim its merits was not worth the effort, for writing or for reading. If a book did not teach about men and their ways directly, he went to it for a revelation of the spirit behind it. And perhaps in the last analysis it is always the personality, as far as pure literature was concerned, that interested him. In the matter of literary doctrine he was an Aristotelian, although his application of the master's theory would frequently out-

1. "Bagehot", English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1933, p. 180.

rage the more respectable members of the brotherhood. His central philosophy was coherent and intelligible enough, but when he applied it to concrete works, his logic was often indefensible, the result, as we shall notice later, of a lack of interest in and understanding of the history of literary philosophies and forms. He had a tendency to confuse romanticism with classicism, although, according to his statements of general characteristics, he was perfectly able to separate and identify them. We must remember, however, that criticism was an avocation to Bagehot, a pursuit for holidays and after hours. His approach to the favorite disputes in the realm of letters was far from humble: he was bold and jesting, eloquent and serious, breezy and cynical, by turns. He considered literature from the standpoint of the historian and economist, often adopting the philistine position for his own amusement and the edification of those who were in danger of taking Arnold too seriously. There is little organization in the separate essays, less research; they are good conversation rather than anything else. His liking for any body of writing was the outgrowth of a "vivid understanding" of the personality behind it.²

Bagehot's adaptation of the Poetics is in considerable part Arnold's, although the hand of Coleridge is now and then discernible; in fact, his approach to literature was often

2. Irvine, op. cit., p. 86. The following review of Bagehot's critical theory is partly based on Prof. Irvine's organization of it.

impressionistic, even suggesting at times Anatole France's vague heresy about the adventures of a sensitive soul among the works of genius. But literature to Bagehot was fundamentally a record of life, and to be regarded as such. Poetry, ideally conceived, should deal with profound actions, and through them, teach and elevate the spirit. Pleasure is not an end of the poetic art, but it is a necessary condition of it. Romanticists like Byron all but destroyed this fundamental characteristic by playing up sensation, with the result that people forgot that poetry "is a teaching thing, deep and wise".³ The exceptional and the ugly and the sensational, then, are to be used only to recall perfection and beauty; and it follows, of course, that these latter qualities are typical. Art is employed to emphasize the typical: the picturesque is that part of the aspects of a scene which seems to suggest to us the ideal summation of all aspects, and the picturesque in literature - the "literesque" - is that which "delineates the type of each sort, the ideal of each variety, the central, the marking trait of each permutation".⁴ Bagehot continues to follow Aristotle: the great artist is concerned with reality, because his "business is with types, and types are mirrored in reality".⁵ Outward nature, of course, is imperfect; the artist deals with imperfect nature, but his art makes it perfect. Now

3. "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry", Works, IV, p. 268.

4. Ibid., p. 273.

5. Ibid., p. 289.

since the artist himself is a natural phenomenon, the poet or painter who expresses himself sets forth that part of him which is typical of the characters of others. The value of literature, then, is that it brings us into contact either with the true nature of phenomena or with genius; and the greatest genius, that is, the one who is most representative of humanity, is the Greek ideal of character, the restrained, the noble, and the symmetrical. The greatest art is the pure, the perfection of which is "to embody typical conceptions in the choicest, fewest accidents, to embody them so that each of these accidents may produce its full effect, and so to embody them without effort".⁶ In other words, great art presents universal truth in circumstances of solemnity and grandeur.

Besides pure art, there are two other major varieties of aesthetic technique by which the typical may be presented: the ornate, or romantic, and the grotesque, which Bagehot characterizes as medieval. The ornate is opposed to pure art in that it embodies the typical in its perfection and fullness, by the accumulation and aggregation of details, or "accidents", as our neo-Aristotelian would say. The chief defect of ornate art is that in it the typical lacks simplicity; it has about it suggestions of everything else, wanting definition and central emphasis. Ornate art is best employed in romantic delineation: it offers illusion and shadow rather than the thing

6. Ibid., p. 289.

itself, but it makes the imperfect good by the addition of imagination and fancy. Ornate and pure art present types in a form as perfect as they are capable of mastering. Grotesque art, on the other hand, deals only with accidents and difficulties, that is, with the type struggling to become perfect, but by accident happening to be something odd and abnormal. Below the level of the grotesque is "light literature", the unimportant scribblings of men competent in technique, but shallow in knowledge and judgment. Light literature is pretty and immoral; great literature is beautiful and dignified, and its aim is essentially moral: it teaches with a view toward establishing rules of conduct. We notice here, however, that Bagehot went beyond the Aristotelian aesthetics to make a case for forms of art other than the classical. It seemed to have been one of his ambitions to find a rational justification for everything.

Since the grotesque in art was seldom to his taste, his tendency was to reduce the fundamental varieties of literary technique to the two divisions, pure and ornate, or classical and romantic. His distinction here is that of Coleridge: classical art is a product of imagination; romantic is a product of fancy. Imagination is simple and clear, an ideal rendering of reality which is penetrating because it is unadorned, unencumbered by details of fact. Thus imagination is an ideal conception of reality, and in execution it is a bare delineation of great objects and distinct impulses. It is, in

short, a bare simplicity of technique presenting a purity of conception of ideas and characters. Fancy, on the other hand, is the basis of adornment, the free play of imagination on details unconnected with reality, or unnecessary to a true delineation of reality. Actually Bagehot suggests that fancy does not offer a conception of reality, but is rather that portion of the mind which, in art, devises ornament for the sake of ornament, whether it touches life or not. But an artist may be both imaginative and fanciful: his central conception may be an imaginative rendering of some portion of reality which is understood in its ideal or typical terms; his treatment, however, may be fanciful, that is, he may present it through the medium of ornament and detail, which is, of course, the way it is presented in external nature.⁷

Bagehot's theory goes on to distinguish, descriptively and qualitatively, between the various forms of poetry and fiction. Again he follows Arnold pretty closely, especially in his hierarchy of poetic forms. Epic poetry is the highest category, dealing with what all men want to hear, the exploits of their ancestors. In the epic character is character per se, character in repose, so to speak, which is the conception nearest the ideal or true reality. Such poetry is definitely the product of a heroic age.⁸ Tragedy follows, coming

7. See "Percy Bysshe Shelley", Works, II, pp. 255-60, and "Milton", ibid., III, p. 205.

8. See "Hartley Coleridge," ibid., I, pp. 205-7.

when the heroic age is over, but while men still worship the heroes, trying to bring them to life by making them speak. We enjoy tragedy for the reasons set forth in the Poetics, because we are purged by pity and fear and hence elevated; but we enjoy it only when we see it related to common life - we want our feet on the ground before the soul soars into the clouds.⁹ Finally, there is lyric poetry, which comes with the refinements of civilization, and which treats of a single feeling at a time. But this feeling must be universal: the lyric poet may describe one aspect of himself, as he usually does, but only as he thinks himself representative of human nature.¹⁰ Bagehot goes on to divide lyric poetry into the human and abstract varieties: the first dealing with actuality; the second with imaginative or romantic concepts which excite great emotions in the one who holds them, usually the poet. There is a further dichotomy between lyrics of the world and not of the world, or lyrics dealing with the external facts of social intercourse and those dealing with the fundamental essence of which all phenomena partake. Poetry of the world tends to celebrate the superficial aspects, "social gaiety", the light expression of light emotions; it is the common medium of the present age, which has much time for amusement but an incapacity to get beneath the complex surface to the ultimate realities

9. See "Milton", ibid., III, pp. 190-91, and "Hartley Coleridge", ibid., I, p. 205.

10. See "Hartley Coleridge", ibid., I, pp. 205-6, and "Sterne and Thackeray", ibid., IV, p. 207.

of human nature, the primitive impulses and emotions of men.¹¹ It is, in the end, a good-humored acceptance of the ephemerality of life and the necessity of death.

In discussing the art of fiction, Bagehot carried out his fundamental doctrine, and again exhibited his curious preoccupation with dichotomies.¹² Fiction may be divided into the sentimental, which is concerned with love, and the ubiquitous, which treats of all aspects of life. The basic factor, however, is truth of characterization, to the question of which he addresses himself as a true Aristotelian: the primary fact is the dualism in human nature, the struggle between man's moral aspirations and his natural, or rather, physical desires. Characters like Pickwick and Falstaff, then, since they are not morally responsible, are merely "vivified accidents", not real beings.¹³ But Bagehot is quick to see that virtue forever triumphing over temptation is an inferior subject for art, besides being very dull; for moral characteristics are not the whole of human nature, and to think them so is to be grossly sentimental.¹⁴ Character, of course, is always more important than plot because it includes the "active"

11. "Béranger", *ibid.*, III, pp. 1-7, 38-39.

12. This characteristic amounted almost to a psychological morbidity: he finds two kinds of history, the universal, treating broad patterns of growth, and the particular, covering in detail only one institution ("Gibbon", *ibid.*, II, pp. 163-64); two varieties of biography, the exhaustive and the selective ("Milton", *ibid.*, III, pp. 177-78); and two kinds of genius, regular and irregular ("Dickens", *ibid.*, IV, p. 75).

13. See "Dickens", *ibid.*, III, pp. 86-94.

14. See "Wordsworth", *ibid.*, IV, p. 241.

element, usually expressed through plot, and the "meditative" element, expressed only through itself; although he seems to feel, with Aristotle, that action is organic, beginning within the character and evolving outwardly. Style and plot are important, but truth must come before both. In the structure of a novel he looked mainly for order and progression, "making the appropriate thought follow the appropriate thought...; preparing the mind for what is to come, and then letting it come"¹⁵ Obviously he could not approve wholeheartedly of Dickens and Thackeray on this point, and he vigorously denounced the fatuous Sterne.

2.

The foregoing summary of critical doctrine indicates that Bagehot was one of the judicial fraternity, the respectable followers of Aristotle who have never looked far beyond the Sage of Stagira. But the Victorian essayist was not one to make a faith of criticism; he felt that it was a necessary and tedious evil of relatively little importance. A man of action and of the world at large, he had a healthy philistinism which prompted him to look down on "mere literature". He recognized the difference, however, between what Dr. Johnson would have called "book answering" and a critical judgment of great works; in fact, in the years up to his marriage he probably took the

15. "Sterne and Thackeray", ibid., IV, p. 241.

dull business of literary criticism pretty seriously; he may have talked now and then of describing literature in terms of its effect on the individual, but in the main he was interested in what it had to teach about men and the world in which they live. Further, he was considerably bothered by the "bad taste" that preferred the emotional and "sordid" Browning to the classic delights of Wordsworth, and he felt that something ought to and could be done about it by mastering sound principles of art.¹⁶ Always, however, he was interested in the personality of the man behind the book, and he never approached it without adding to that personality something of his own.

This actual approach to books themselves is, of course, much more fascinating than the theory on which it was based. Bagehot came to books with much the same lively, vigorous, and "experiencing" nature with which Hazlitt met them; indeed, in style and temperament he owed a great deal to the older critic.¹⁷ Where Hazlitt was passionate and lyrically eloquent, however, Bagehot was logical and exact, interested in rules and principles which the subject at hand might illustrate, or in the type of which that subject was a manifestation. His gusto - though real - was moderate, subtle, flexible, and adaptive, vigorous in the biographical and literary essays, dignified

16. See "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning", ibid., IV, pp. 307, 308, 314.

17. Professor Irvine has an excellent and complete survey of Bagehot's debt to Hazlitt. See op. cit., ch. viii. The bulk of the quotations in Bagehot's essays is from Hazlitt and Wordsworth.

and "scientific" in the economic and political works. It never led him to exaggeration simply to maintain an ecstasy or the sense of power that comes with eloquent writing. His was the passion of thought rather than feeling, an intellectual brilliance rather than an emotional exaltation. In Bagehot there was no lyric spirit, and consequently his gusto appears best in "passages of psychological analysis, of paradox and epigram, of humor and anecdote", that is wherever the mind played freely on the facts of experience.¹⁸ The critical essays are lively reading, full of wit and humor, cynical and respectful by turns, and highly conversational in tone. But this easy-going attitude toward careful writing - however pleasant - is sometimes carried to an extreme; as a result, the style is abrupt and spasmodic, revealing here and there quick flashes of insight and humor. The light-hearted banter is often forced or over-refined, and the criticism misses the mark; at the same time, though, there is usually lucid vision, "shrewd and curious knowledge of the world", as Hutton said, "and sober judgment combined with dashing humor".¹⁹ The redeeming factor is Bagehot's sympathy for a kind of double life, that of the imaginative student and the prosperous banker, combining a taste for high imagination and for a clear insight into the practical world.

18. Irvine, op. cit., p. 153.

19. "Memoir", Works, I, pp. 31, 32.

But a lack of curiosity about the history of ideas and the historical significance of literary forms and attitudes weakened the application of Bagehot's theory. Although widely read in literature, he knew and cared little about the trends of literary evolution. When he approaches Milton and Shakespeare, therefore, he indulges in many tiresome platitudes, as though no one ever discovered their greatness before him. On Wordsworth he is worse, for here there is no sound penetration of character as in the other two: he says that Wordsworth's faith is the religion of nature, which he seems to think is completely admirable. Wordsworth's poetry he regards as the Bible of intellectuals, and always describes it in vague terms of respect and enthusiasm. His analysis of other romantic poets as individuals is sound, but his treatment of the whole movement and of its most celebrated spirit is badly off the mark. The most curious error, however, is the offering of Wordsworth and Shelley as examples of the classic in literature for reasons which plainly make them romantic. If we follow the plan in "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning", we find that Wordsworth becomes the archetype of the pure in English letters, and that he is praised in strictly classical terms; Tennyson is the "ornate" artist, that is, one who accumulates around an idea everything that can be said about it, which is obviously an inferior device; and Browning is an example of the artist who looks to the grotesque to illustrate the typical by contrast. But the classicist who liked the romantic

Wordsworth for classical reasons had no taste for Browning. "Caliban" he condemned as an "accident trying to become typical"; it is a revelation of the ugly for its own sake, a deliberate playing up of the detestable and deformed. Browning was a materialist and a realist in the matter-of-fact sense, with no belief in ideals, and hence blind to the true or the typical. Now the criticism loses all semblance of intelligence: Bagehot tells us that the poet's predilection for the grotesque came from his fondness for the Middle Ages. According to the critic's formula, however, the great monologues would be the most grotesque, yet they are concerned primarily with the Renaissance! But the whole matter can be disposed of easily: the simple truth is that the moral aspirations of mankind conflict with natural lusts, but that that is far from being the only fundamental quality of human nature; in fact, there are many wise and learned men who are pretty sure that such a conflict is not even fundamental. The Aristotelian approach to literature, consequently, is limited, and whatever does not fit the pattern is, ipso facto, inferior stuff. This is at the bottom of the foolishness about Browning and the confusion between romanticism and classicism. Temperamentally, Bagehot liked Wordsworth, disliked Browning; so he got the former into the fold, but left the latter out.

He does a far better job with an individual author treated in terms of himself. He presents Shelley as the man of impulse, in whom the emotion of the moment comes to dominate the charac-

ter to the exclusion of everything else. Shelley had no solid basis in the world of reality, and as a result, his poems, like their author, are full of evanescent dreams, vague, uncontrolled passions, and wild fancies. The dismal and sentimental record of his love affairs attests to his lack of moral discipline; a haphazard and shallow education left him without any intellectual discipline and without any solid knowledge, either of books or of men. The dreams are lovely, the accompanying poetry makes pretty music, but the ideas collapse as soon as they come into contact with the world. His mind was pale and abstract, self-absorbed, self-enclosed, insensitive to the rich fabric of phenomena; his art was a perfect technique with no content beneath it.²⁰ The delineation of the sensitive and pathetic Hartley Coleridge is somewhat similar. He, too, was always a child, caring little for the world, living in dreams, which supplied most of the content of his poetry. But these dreams were not the philosopher's vision of his metaphysical father: the world had simply disappeared for him, if it had ever existed, and there was nothing to take its place or to support his will. Bagehot sums up young Coleridge's moral digressions in a shrewd bit of psychological insight. "In estimating (such) men," he writes, "we must take into account this peculiar difficulty - this dreamy unbelief - this daily skepticism - this haunting unreality - and imagine that some may

20. "Percy Bysshe Shelley", Works, II, pp. 215-63.

not be quite responsible either for what they do, or for what they do not - because they are bewildered and deluded, and perplexed, and want the faculty as much to comprehend their difficulty as to subdue it."²¹ And this character, Bagehot feels, is perfectly and with extreme sensitiveness revealed in his poetry. Other delicate souls are treated with the same tolerant but exacting analysis: Cowper's quick and somewhat childish responsiveness to rural life, his ability to find complete happiness in the "passing of a tranquil hour", his morbid despair and his insanity; Clough's passion to see the invisible world, and his melancholy over the inability to see it and over the suggestions that perhaps it did not exist; and Beranger's delicate touch in delineating an equally delicate taste for the surface refinements of life, his delight - like Horace's - in idly watching the glitter of the world, caring little about the permanent characteristics underneath it.²²

In "Shakespeare - the Man" and "Milton" Bagehot had two subjects made to his hand: in a sense the essays are biographical rather than literary studies, but they are characterizations based on the published writings of both poets. In fact, in "Shakespeare - the Man" he states categorically that it is possible to know an author from his works. The essay on the dramatist begins with much platitudinous material on Shakes-

21. "Hartley Coleridge", *ibid.*, I, p. 201; essay, pp. 187-216.

22. "William Cowper", *ibid.*, II, pp. 1-50; "Mr. Clough's Poems", *ibid.*, IV, pp. 113-34; "Beranger", *ibid.*, III, pp. 1-36.

peare's breadth, his immense knowledge of life around him, his sensibility to beauty and tragedy, besides his taste for the vulgar crowd and its ways, his sense of humor, and his ability to make the drama pay. This last and what Bagehot calls the poet's "experiencing nature", that is, his ability to feel and to render ideal all phenomena, are the characteristics which seem to appeal most to the critic. The mind and temperament of the poet form the burden of the rest of the essay, and here the viewpoint is original, and the conclusions are decidedly fresh. He begins with Shakespeare's political views. He was, Bagehot thinks, essentially conservative, believing above all things in the English Constitution; he saw the evils in a hereditary monarchy, but he was an unqualified foe of democracy, or mob rule, as Coriolanus proves. A strong loyalty to the traditional political institutions of England was the primary characteristic of his politics. He seems to have preferred a temperate government by a personal nobility, having no faith in the middle class as intelligent governors. As for the poet's learning, the essayist tells us nothing new when he says that Shakespeare had done a great deal of reading; but the plays are made of life, which suggests to the critic that Shakespeare was a "natural reader: when a book was dull, he put it down; when it looked fascinating, he took it up, and the consequence is, that he remembered and mastered what he read".²³ The interesting view expressed in connection with the poet's knowledge of life

23. "Shakespeare - the Man", ibid., I, p. 256; essay, pp. 218-61.

is the assertion that he had a congenital taste for evil in man: Bagehot claims that Measure for Measure was written con amore, that Angelo was created out of the pleasure of an "expansive" man in watching the criminal impulses of others. The religion of Shakespeare suggested by the critic has much of Aristotle in it: because the dramatist saw so great a breadth of life, the conclusion is that he could put it together as a whole; ergo, that he saw the essential unity and the final plan, the movement toward ultimate perfection of God. His plays, then, teach religion through their profound revelation of God's works, especially man. But to offset this respectable piety there is the worldly Shakespeare, rich, shrewd, successful, all-embracing, the leading citizen of the town come back from London with a fortune.

The essay on Milton is much the same as the "Shakespeare": a collection of miscellaneous remarks on the poet's works and character, with those on his character superior to the others. Milton's was the ascetic type of goodness, according to Bagehot, with all the defects of a "fugitive and cloister'd virtue"; thus his writings, poetry and prose, have no "animal life", only soul and spirit. But his peculiar type of asceticism was the asceticism of books; consequently, he accumulated an immense quantity of literary learning, but in contrast with Shakespeare, he had no knowledge of life as it is lived here below, and no sense of humor. He had seen much of the world, but the

Puritan's "warning instinct" prevented him from appreciating and understanding it. This isolated introspection led him to idealize party feeling until the Royalists became a symbol of all that is bad, the Parliamentarians of all that is just. The Miltonic imagination saw in Charles I a kind of Satan, endowed with all crimes. Milton's poetry is a combination of the ancient, or pure style and the modern, or ornate and romantic; it is Milton's personal austerity clothed in a rich abundance of illustration drawn from formal learning. Yet his idealism is sound, and Bagehot cites Eve in Paradise Lost as the best example; her characterization is "one of the most wonderful efforts of the human imagination".²⁴ Other criticisms, however, are not so strictly a panegyric. He offers the usual remarks on the dramatic interest of Satan; he realizes that the theme of Paradise Lost is unfortunately a "political transaction", with God arguing like a good Commoner; he points out the error of expecting sympathy for angels who are perfect, hence lifeless and dull; he makes Adam little better, with his tiresome sermons on God's ways, and God himself represent not a natural but an arbitrary morality, which renders the whole problem artificial. Yet Bagehot claims to recognize here the fundamental facts of human nature.

The critic's theory of fiction must be drawn from only three rather brief essays, on Scott, Dickens, and on Sterne

24. "Milton", ibid., III, p. 217; essay, pp. 177-221.

and Thackeray. Scott, he thinks, is, for the most part, a sentimental novelist interested primarily in a love story, but he reveals something of the older "ubiquitous" form in his careful delineation of Scotland and its people. He paints panoramic scenes on a broad canvas, which provides a background for action. His imagination was best suited to the describing of great political events, which he looked at with a sensible, middle-class mind. This common sense, at home in and understanding the usual and the regular, Bagehot admires most in Scott. Since poetic justice reveals this quality, it is morally defensible, even edifying: rewards and punishments are apportioned as in life, where good generally flourishes and evil generally does not. In this way Scott proves what Bagehot firmly believes, that there is a fundamental moral law underlying all life: "Most people who ought to succeed, do; most people who do fail, ought to fail....These general results are the consequences of certain principles which work half unseen, and which are effectual in the main, though thwarted here and there."²⁵ Much of the rest is obvious stuff: Scott's romanticism, his inability to depict women, and his heroes who are externalized moral characteristics. Bagehot's attitude toward Dickens hardly maintains this even tenor. He thinks of Dickens as the "irregular" type of genius, which lacks simplicity, and in which certain qualities dominate all others, peaks of great power standing out from a tangle of images and fancies. He is

25. "The Waverley Novels", ibid., III, pp. 55-56; essay, pp. 37-72.

the "ubiquitous" novelist who tries to describe the whole of society, yet all his pictures are somehow incomplete. Unlike Scott, he has no practical sagacity to give unity and fullness to his pictures, and no ability to describe deeper thoughts and impulses. His characters are incomplete, then, because they are described only in the business of acquiring material comforts; each character is the idealization of a trade, and hence a distortion or caricature. His immense power of observation in detail hardly offsets the "immorality" of all his portrayals. His humor is equally immoral, or perhaps we should say "unmoral": he "vivifies" external traits into people, then puts these personified characteristics into human situations, with the result that he presents us with accidents begetting more accidents, which is funny but not true. Bagehot is even more annoyed by the lack of coherence and progression in Dickens' plots, and by the novelist's fondness for criminals and poor people - obviously bad subject matter for fiction. As a portrayer of the vulgar he is preeminent; it is unfortunate that his genius so often itself to the sentimental and distorted.²⁶

The treatment of Sterne in "Sterne and Thackeray" again betrays Bagehot's Victorian morality. He begins by stating categorically that Sterne was a great novelist, but one wonders how he could ever have regarded him as such. In place of

26. "Charles Dickens", *ibid.*, III, pp. 73-107.

a conscience, the creator of Uncle Toby had only a sentimental taste; he lived on a level of pure feeling; if he ever had an idea, it is not discoverable in his works. His incoherence became almost imbecilic. But his worst defect, according to the critic, is his indecency, which is played up for its own sake, not because it was a true quality of the society he described. Curiously enough, however, Sterne's indecency is the only reason for his being read today: far from being a great novelist, he was a sentimental fraud. The important point, however, is that Bagehot was horrified at indecency of any kind, and consequently Tristram Shandy was unforgivable. In addition, he condemns the society which applauded him, pagan though he was. His love letters are pathologically ridiculous. The Sentimental Journey indicates an improvement in morality, but that is all. The question still remains, why Bagehot, or anyone else, ever thought him a great writer. The interesting aspect of the essay is the resemblance that the critic finds between Sterne and Thackeray: the latter was also a sensitive character, possessing a "woman's mind", responding to and remembering the visible picture of life around him, but unable to be philosophical about it. In another sense, however, he was the reverse of Sterne: an irritable sensibility being the basis of his artistic character. Where Sterne saw pretty things, Thackeray saw only imperfections and hypocrisies. His novels are pained records of snobbishness, selfishness, ill-feelings,

and bad humor. He was always outraged, always worried about what the footmen might think of the lord. Like Swift, he was skeptical of the value of sympathy for the world, which to a rational view was thoroughly bad.²⁷ Thackeray's most obvious merit is his finesse of literary expression, which never varies through all his novels. His pictures are half-cynical, half-true, betraying an amused contempt for the show of society, which always forms his subject matter. No one cares what becomes of his characters; we simply like to look at them. "Thackeray is like the edited and illustrated edition of a great dinner....(His) favorite art is a sort of annotated picture."²⁸

Bagehot's Aristotelianism made him an exacting critic, but one feels that he was much more intelligent in what he did not like than in what he did. When he thinks of Dickens as the irregular and unmoral genius, he is plainly implying that the regular and the moral is considerably superior; yet Dickens in his sphere is just as good as Plato or Socrates in his. Shakespeare Bagehot regards as an irregular genius, but still his characters are moral, with the exception of Falstaff. The thoroughly sound demand that a book teach something is behind the merciless dissection of Sterne and Shelley, although at least their books teach us about their authors. The chief difficulty with the attitude of neo-Aristotelian critics like

27. "Sterne and Thackeray", ibid., IV, pp. 229-66.

28. "The Adventures of Philip on his Way through the World" (review), ibid., IX, pp. 284-85; essay, pp. 282-86.

Walter Bagehot is not their requirement that literature teach, but the fact that they refuse to accept so much of what it can teach. No one will quarrel with the view that Sterne has little to contribute to humankind; few will agree, however, that the so-called unmoral and "grotesque" characters in Dickens, Browning's monologues, and Shakespeare's comedies are bad mistakes, "accidents", as Bagehot called them. Surely they enrich man's view of himself, and thus adequately fulfill the didactic requirement of art. Only a hopeless romantic goes to Wordsworth and Shelley for information about life; at the same time, only one with a narrow and dogmatic conception of the truth thinks character true only when it illustrates an a priori notion about the struggle between man's moral and physical natures. It is always necessary to ask of a book, what does it have to teach? But when we ask it, we must be prepared to accept what it offers. "The subtlety of nature", wrote Lord Bacon, "is greater by many times than the subtlety of argument."

The unhappy dilemma in which the Aristotelian critic eventually finds himself usually grows out of his insistence that art, especially literary, ought to teach us about the moral nature of man, regardless of just what that moral nature might be - although, of course, the true Aristotelian always knows what it is. We are probably nearer the truth if we regard as the first requisite of an artistic work the amount of pleasure

which it affords, still demanding, however, that that pleasure confer some lasting benefit to understanding, or, in the usual phrase, that it be profitable. But there is another, and hardly less important factor, namely, that a work of art is the fruit of a certain impulse in the artist, and to him that impulse is good simply because it exists and can realize itself in creation. Between the artist's viewpoint and the initial reaction of him who enjoys the work of art, we may be able to formulate a doctrine which is a little more catholic in what it accepts, and less ready to reject on the basis of an a priori dogma. The aim of a poem, or novel, or painting, or any other aesthetic work, ought in general to be the recording of truths about men and phenomena, on the assumption that a cultivated mind can find its highest pleasure as well as its most lasting profit in the play of truth; further, a work of art ought to fulfill the spiritual impulse or ambition which has prompted the artist to create it. In this connection, we may ask the question, what cultural elements or forces find their expression in artistic activity, and how many of the forces that enter into civilized life participate in it? A really great art, after all, is one which allows the maximum participation of human endeavor in creative effort. Art, as Santayana has taught, is a harmonizing medium, like reason; it is a spiritual phenomenon which enables the tangential impulses of life to converse harmoniously and easily at the table of

reason. And as such, it ought to be wide and flexible enough so that the elements of life may find their just expression in it.

In this way we approach the utilitarian function of art as well as its aesthetic and moral requirements (the ethical, of course, may be thought of as part of the utilitarian). From the artist's standpoint there is no division between use and beauty, for created beauty is at once useful and aesthetically satisfying; indeed, we are at liberty to say that there is a causal connection between the two. If we take the doctrine formulated here in its broadest sense, and follow it to its ultimate conclusion, we find that art is not a matter, say, of particular moral concepts in tragedy or of certain demands of technique in music; it is vastly more than these, for at bottom it is a fundamental characteristic in human nature which demands a particular type of expression. An example of the technological arts like a bridge or a locomotive is ultimately no different from Chartres Cathedral or Paradise Regained. It may be argued that the ambition and the faculty which created Chartres Cathedral are noble and edifying, while the locomotive takes form out of a very sordid passion; but it can with equal justice be argued that the profit motive behind the one is little different from the attempt to get into heaven which inspired the other. Actually both are expressions of the same deep-rooted quality in man, that impulse, arising perhaps from

his rational faculties, which makes him want to create out of nature a world in which the harmonizing influences of spirit have brought some order and intelligibility. All art, in the end, may be thought of as the attempt on the part of man to deny the ephemerality of his existence by physically or ideally reshaping the materials of his life. These questions, it is true, pass far beyond the scope and evidences of Bagehot's aesthetic philosophy, but at least they are parts of an attempt to define more accurately the cardinal tenets on which such philosophies must rest. And since he looked at art from the vantage point of a special doctrine, extremely wide in its implications, and since that doctrine is responsible for the reputation he now enjoys among certain students of letters, it is only just that we criticize it on the basis of a re-definition.

Chapter III

Biographical and Historical Essays

1.

In works in which it was Bagehot's aim primarily to estimate a character, he followed the method of Macaulay: he was really writing from the fund of his knowledge, and attempting the complete analysis of the man before him rather than a review of his accomplishments. Macaulay's plan in the essays is well known: given a new edition of Boswell for review, let us say, he emerges with a comprehensive characterization of Dr. Johnson; or starting with Sir Basil Montagu's edition of Bacon's works, he ends with a full-grown survey of Bacon the man and the times in which he lived. So with Bagehot: a new edition of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire prompts a survey of the life and character of the author; the publication of Macaulay's History of England leads to an analysis of the man with numerous digressions in the manner of the historian himself. The essay on Viscount Bolingbroke is perhaps the best example, for here much of the background against which Henry St. John moved is surveyed as well as the character of the man himself. For the most part the strictly biographical essays are narratives, frequently humorous, in which the character is developed dramatically. Characterizations in the critical essays, on the other hand, are descriptions of type, usually paradoxical, in which the character is used as

an illustration. Thus in "Milton" Bagehot begins with a discussion of the two types of moral goodness, the sensuous and the ascetic; the latter is described at length, and Milton becomes an illustration of it. In "Charles Dickens" the division is between regular and irregular genius, the work and character of Dickens being offered as a type of the latter. Plainly, the method employed in "Macaulay," "Gibbon", "Bolingbroke", and the rest is much superior; these are studies of men rather than of previously conceived types. We shall see, however, that Bagehot made use of the "typical" device frequently in the essays on contemporary statesmen. The fact that his nature led him always to see the general in the particular does not invalidate the material presented in the character analyses; what he does is simply to select those traits which indicate the typical nature of the subject in any one division. If anything, his logic was faulty, resulting in deduction of type from fragmentary particulars. But as we have said, the best biographical pieces are straightforward narratives through which the character unfolds itself dramatically, as it would in any good tale.

The excellence of these essays came from their author's genius for writing history as though it were a personal experience, the result, probably, of his ability to assume many points of view.¹ For example, at the beginning of "Gibbon" we

1. See Irvine, op. cit., pp. 165-66.

are introduced to the state of financial transactions around the rise and collapse of the old South Sea Company, as if they were commonplace facts of everyday experience.² Everywhere we have the feeling of the well known, the personally felt and understood; we have the sense of approaching something familiar, as the things which touch us personally are familiar, yet never the dull nor the routine. The color and vigor in the biographical essays come from the ability to transmit to others what the author himself has felt. And since he was at home in so many aspects of thought and activity, he was at home in virtually the whole of the social context of the man under discussion. In these works we are permitted to go behind the scenes to see the private characters of men as they were involved in the give and take of events. The best and most surprising example is "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu", in which Bagehot conjures up a living personality from half-forgotten gossip and dead letters. But he is not emotional, never sensational; in fact, he frequently sacrifices feeling and sympathy, a more subjective understanding, for an excessively rational attitude. The essays reveal an uncompromising and objective surgeon dissecting without regard for suffering. We have seen this before, when we noted his fondness for drawing out the foolish and stupid in people by means of a Socratic sort of conversation, only to turn their follies back

2. "Edward Gibbon", Works, II, pp. 127-29.

at them, to expose at their expense their shortcomings. Although he might lack sympathy, however, he did not lack feeling: thought aroused in him an emotional response; what he really despised was "irrational emotion", feeling existing simply for its own sake. Being morally strong, he could never pity moral weakness; as a critic and an analyst, there was nothing of the emotionally lyric in him: his "lyric delight", like Santayana's, was the play of truth.³ His humor, consequently, was never boisterous or farcical, rarely emotional, seldom the outgrowth of a subjective and personal sympathy. It was a kind of ironic contempt for the dull and the stupid, to whom he always felt vastly superior, for which reason he never laughed at himself. He could never have reached the Chaucerian level, for he never saw the fundamental ridiculousness common to all, himself included. There is much genuine comedy, however, in the biographical essays, as we shall see.

Bagehot's stylistic master in these was chiefly Macaulay, who probably aided him in clarity, certainly stimulated his use of balance, antithesis, and series. The style is spare in imagery, rich in epigram and paradox, too frequently devoted to exaggerated similes. The best epigrams are in the character sketches, where they are more just and better-humored than in the literary pieces, and where their over-abundance is redeemed

3. See Irvine, op. cit., pp. 174-75.

by some subtlety and humor, by satire stated and irony implied. Generalities abound here as elsewhere; the best are those drawn from actual experience or thorough knowledge. But the phraseology is seldom pleasing in a melodic way: there are harsh alliterations and much repetition; the vices of rapid conversation are revealed in the vague clichés, a careless redundancy that runs into a kind of talkiness. He over-writes in an anxiety to be understood, as though he were dealing with esoteric and complex matters.⁴ Evidences of mechanical and stylistic errors appear now and then, suggesting that composition was rapid and that the writing must have been thoroughly bad before the printer got hold of it.⁵

The simplest way, however, to discover Bagehot's technique in biography and characterization is to examine the essays themselves. The best are those in which the character is developed dramatically by exhibiting it through action in the course of the narrative, and we may begin with these, of which there are three - "Gibbon", "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu", and "Bolingbroke", written over a period of several years and coming fairly early in his literary career.⁶ The essay on

4. For a full discussion of Bagehot's style, see Irvine, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-88.

5. Forrest Morgan's preface to the first American edition of Bagehot's works, published by the Travelers' Insurance Company, Hartford, Conn., 1889, begins with an interesting and acrimonious account of the bad mechanics of his style. Apparently faulty grammar, construction, punctuation, and syntax, in addition to misquotation, were the rule. See Morgan's Preface, *Works*, I, pp. 55-58.

6. 1856, 1862, and 1863 respectively.

Gibbon, though prompted by a new edition of his Roman Empire, was also suggested by Bagehot's feeling that there was a need to delineate him in plain language, rather than in the pompous style of the Memoirs. It begins with the historian's grandfather and his bad luck in the South Sea venture. We are in London in the days of George I with one who apparently knows well its characteristics. Gibbon's life is traced rapidly from the time of his birth to the end of the Oxford fiasco, the result of his conversion to the Catholic faith after reading theological works of a skeptical nature! Up to that time he knew no real intellectual discipline. Sent to Lausanne by relatives, he broke completely with his old life; and it was here, Bagehot feels, that his mind and character first began to mature. The evolution was rapid: "He left his own country a hot-brained and ill-taught youth, willing to sacrifice friends and expectations for a superstitious and half-known creed; he returned a cold and accomplished man, master of many accurate ideas, little likely to hazard any coin for any faith: already...inclined in secret to a cautious skepticism; placing...upon a system the frigid prudence and unventuring incredulity congenial to his character".⁷ The best touch, for humor, is the picture of Gibbon the lover, who preferred a good income to a clever wife. In France he got over the two emotional experiences of his life, love and religion; he returned to England with a lofty disdain for both. Into the De-

7. "Gibbon", Works, II, p. 148.

cline and Fall went all the industry, the cold rationalism, the lack of human feeling which was Edward Gibbon: it is small wonder that as a portrayer of human nature he was poor, as a chronicler of the pageantry of civilization, unsurpassed. After the publication of the history he returned to Lausanne eminently self-satisfied, to live quietly and above all cheaply. The last ridiculous element in the life of this pompous dwarf who dealt with empires and mocked an ancient faith was the terror inspired by the French Revolution; for Gibbon thought himself the kind of statesman who would lose his head in a popular rebellion. The essay is almost a short story: every phase of the historian's life points to one end, that he was a satisfied, complacent, comfortable man whom Bagehot sums up so perfectly in a phrase - he had a "wise preference of permanent money to transitory sentiment".⁸ One suspects that the essayist admired him for this.

"Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" again begins with a broad and lively picture of the world of politics and play in which the central character moved: London society in the days of the Kit Kat Club and the Spectator. "The high intellectual world of England", Bagehot writes, "has never been so compact, so visible..., so enjoyable as it was in her (Lady Mary's) time."⁹ From this background she emerges, a woman of beauty and wit and intelligence; she had much to give and there was much to

8. Ibid., II, p. 148; essay, pp. 127-77.

9. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu", ibid., IV, p. 58.

receive, yet she passed her life in exile. Her vanity was redeemed by curiosity; she read widely and was reasonably learned in the tongues. Her intellectual guide was Wortley, a friend of Swift and Addison, whom she eventually. The record of their extraordinary courtship and the dismal anticlimax of marriage is one of the liveliest and most humorous parts of Bagehot's writings. He characterizes Wortley as "a slow man, with a taste for quick companions"; he was rich and handsome, and the possessor of a faculty for abominable writing.¹⁰ His money and his aspect very likely appealed to Lady Mary, who was sensitive to both. She began to write to his sister, who shortly died; without further delay, she wrote to Wortley himself, asking him in the first letter to marry her. The cautious Wortley hesitated because of her wit and beauty and, above all, her love for pleasure; further, Addison had warned him that such a woman might fall in love again. Finally he proposed, expecting to marry her post haste, but trouble once more developed: Lady Mary and her prospective husband decided not to settle the estate on their future children; Lady Mary's father, the material-minded Lord Dorchester, thought otherwise. He cared nothing about his daughter, but he held to primogeniture for his male grandchildren. The intended marriage was called off.

The romance reached the climax of emotional excitement when Wortley and his fiancee eloped. No comedy could be more ridiculous than the contrast between the period of engagement

10. Ibid., IV, p. 61.

and the aftermath of marriage. As a lover Wortley was a clod: timorous, dull, slow-witted, and insensitive, he failed to see that his pleasure-loving wife wanted endless attentions and flattery. The romance dissolved in an almost outrageous scene of domestic boredom. And so she was forced to find life outside her house. At home in the fashionable, witty, learned political world, she kept company with the best, and her qualifications rendered her immensely popular. She made a host of enemies by her unscrupulous talk; she acquired an army of friends by unscrupulous flirtation. But this superficial world soon tired her as much as did her husband; she fled to the Continent to find surcease from boredom. Wortley was appointed ambassador to Constantinople; his wife took a second chance and went with him. The situation was no better and for the second time she exiled herself. Her final return to England after an absence of many years discovered to her that she had become little more than a name, the label attached to a vague legend, to which the real person seemed ridiculous by comparison. The beautiful and aggressive Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, brilliant and exciting, she who proposed her own marriage, the friend of statesmen and authors, died neglected and forgotten - the reductio ad absurdum of her own existence.¹¹

Bagehot's love of the eighteenth century and his thorough

11. Ibid., IV, pp. 57-87.

knowledge of its life and culture exhibited themselves for a third time in "Bolingbroke as a Statesman". Political history in England during the Wars of the Spanish Succession and the League of Augsburg, up to the disgraceful treaty of Utrecht in 1713 - Bolingbroke's crowning achievement - is summarized dramatically and concisely. As a historian Bagehot probably would have been poor; as a historical essayist, working in the medium so congenial to him, he may have rivaled Macaulay, at least in excitement of presentation. But once more he is concerned with character as it evolves in the context of situations; and here the aim is to present a romantic and mercurial fellow whose most important efforts in politics resulted only in evils; the most conspicuous and influential of English statesmen one moment, an exile and a wanderer the next. He is proof, the essayist claims, that brilliant statesmanship is compatible with brilliant license. The characterization of Bolingbroke's father is superb: "He was a rake of the Restoration....He had learned all the evils which he could learn....He dawdled on at the coffee-houses far into George II's time, a monument of extinct profligacy, and a spectacle and a wonder to a graver generation."¹² The son learned his habits of rioting and lust at an early age. He married at twenty-two and gave his wife nothing but unhappiness and a little glory when he was a great figure in the political world;

12. "Bolingbroke as Statesman", ibid., IV, pp. 137-38.

for marriage never stopped his progress as a rake. With a good record at Eton and Oxford behind him, he entered the Commons at twenty-eight. A considerable quantity of information, a shrewd intelligence, and a commanding presence soon earned him an enviable reputation as an orator. On the Succession he was a Whig; in religion he scoffed at all forms of historical Christianity, and so feared neither Popery nor Dissent. The former he "thought...more gentlemanly than Presbyterian, and not more absurd than Anglicanism".¹³ But the vacillating Bolingbroke soon turned against the Hanoverians and the war, thus becoming an advocate of the vague notions and old prejudices of the Tories. When they were turned out, he went with them; when they were returned, he came back as Secretary of State. With the shameful peace his unpopularity reached a high point. Bagehot digresses here to give an able portrait of the dull but skilful Harley, from whom Bolingbroke separated after Utrecht. He was furious at being created only a viscount when Harley was made Earl of Oxford. He devoted himself to violent and illegal schemes. The fury of the Whigs brought an accusation of treason; he fled to France, where he fell in with the Jacobites, whom he thought ignoramuses. Calumny was heaped on him after his death for the Patriot King, which taught George III every evil he employed. Three years of unwise power; thirty-five years of exile, regret, and oblivion - such was the career of Henry St. John, Viscount

13. Ibid., IV, p. 145; essay, pp. 135-75.

Bolingbroke.

Bagehot's essay, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", perhaps falls in a class by itself: its discussion of the Whig character makes it partly what we have called a study in type; on the other hand, the treatment of the reviewers themselves is characterization of a strictly expository variety. As such, it is one of his best performances; its chief merit is seen when we set it beside an essay like the "Shelley", for the two together reveal the breadth of his imagination and understanding. He was as much at home among unworldly and sentimental spirits like the poet as he was among the practical and hard-headed men of the market-place. At bottom, the "Edinburgh Reviewers" is a panegyric to those who fought for freedom and justice in an age of bondage and intolerance. They were not great men of letters, but they were men whom the world cannot do without. Their influential periodical marked "the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons".¹⁴ The essay begins with a preliminary historical sketch in the manner of Macaulay on English conservatism in the days of Lord Eldon. A great study of the new and rising liberalism, of the revitalized Whigs, follows: "They were men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy skepti-

14. "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", ibid., II, p. 56.

oism; with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved."¹⁵ Their ἦθος was moral; their special characteristics firmness of will, tolerance, and unselfishness. Bagehot few more eloquent passages; one would search long for a better summary of the facts. And one realizes here how strong was his affinity for men of business and common sense, for the great world of public experience, which is vastly more exciting than any other realm.

Such affinity is at the heart of his liberalism, and it is best expressed in this essay. Liberalism, he writes, is "the spirit of the world. It represents its genial enjoyment, its wise sense, its steady judgment, its preference of the near to the far, of the seen to the unseen; it represents, too, its shrinking from difficult dogma, from stern statement, from imperious superstition. What health is to the animal, Liberalism is to the polity. It is a principle of fermenting enjoyment, ...happy in its mind, easy in its place, glad to behold the sun."¹⁶ One can hardly escape the Victorian complacency here, the secure sense that the world is somehow on the right track. In contrast to this, however, he immediately offers an interpretation of mysticism, which he also thinks is "true".

15. Ibid., II, p. 62.

16. Ibid., II, p. 80.

As we infer mind behind the face of man, he thinks, so we instinctively infer mind behind the face of nature. This inference, the intuitive apprehension of eternal truths, is the religion of nature, or the imagination. Thus, in the space of a single essay, Bagehot can present fully two antithetical characters, the mystic Wordsworth and his lifelong enemy Francis Lord Jeffrey. The other two great reviewers in the Edinburgh's infancy, Francis Horner and Sydney Smith, are treated with same sympathetic yet critical understanding. Horner may be summed up in Bagehot's pronouncement that he was an ideal Whig, a man who inspired confidence, who radiated integrity, honor, and justice, who, in short, suggested an ability to get things done; Smith is characterized as the typical "after-dinner writer", extremely facile, bold but not sharp, the epitome of ^{the} broad laughing spirit of liberalism. A little biographical material gives these portrayals a touch of the dramatic.¹⁷

The essay on Henry Crabb Robinson is a study based on personal acquaintance, and a revelation, in a rather acid humor, of the author's taste for the curiosities, the "grotesques", among men. He knew "old Crabb" in his university days, when he sat at his table during the celebrated "literary" breakfasts that made the old fellow a trial to the students and an outrage to the more dignified authorities. Bagehot does not at-

17. Ibid., II, pp. 51-88.

tempt to spare him. A peculiar, ugly, and highly unorthodox man, he had read all the famous authors and had known most of them personally. He seemed to have been formed for one end: to be a bachelor "memoir writer" and a host at literary breakfasts. He was a master of anecdote, with a great memory for everything but names, without which the tales must have seemed a little flat; he was particularly interested in literature, but his critical ability was negligible. Bagehot used to tell Hutton that it was well to eat heartily before attending one of "old Crabb's" breakfasts: talk there was in abundance, but one never got to the rolls and marmalade. But Robinson had one admirable virtue: he was an "amateur" in life, one who never distinguished himself along any one line of activity, but who was accomplished in many lines. A multi-sided personality like his critic, he was probably above working hard at any one pursuit to earn a dubious and ephemeral fame. He was marked by a "buoyant sagacity..., a wise and careless kindness".¹⁸

Of the biographical essays which are studies in type, as we have chosen to call them, "William Pitt" is the best. The familiar feature by which we identify Bagehot's writings of this kind appears again: there are, he begins, two kinds of statesmen, the dictator with absolute power, who is called in to save the state in a crisis, and the administrator, who is there to get the business done, to reform with foresight. The

18. "Henry Crabb Robinson", *ibid.*, V, p. 62; essay, pp. 49-62.

dictator must be a man of commanding character and original intellect; the administrator must have the capacity and imagination to handle the details of an immensely complex business - both varieties are rare. Pitt was the typical administrator, representing the very top of political capacity, but he had as well the commanding temperament of the dictator. His was the "self-relying" nature, and he possessed a genuine interest in great subjects. The background of Pitt's career is sketched with the author's usual insight and vigor: it is the age of Burke and the Rockingham Whigs, of George III and his hated minister Grenville, of the docile Lord North and the brilliant but ill-used Fox, ancient and bitter enemies. Pitt's career is swiftly traced through this drama of scandalous corruption and lofty eloquence, and his achievements in economic legislation and reform are emphasized. From this context the character of the man emerges. Bagehot feels that as a great administrator he "applied his whole power to the accomplishment of important but practicable schemes", never stopping with only the immediate problem at hand.¹⁹ He was the antithesis of Burke and his passionate vision of profound truths. In addition to his oratorical genius, he had what every administrator must have, a love of detail and a capacity for unremitting labor. He exhibited the "influence of commanding character with the characteristic limitations of even the best administrative intellect"²⁰

19. "William Pitt", ibid., IV, p. 32.

20. Ibid., IV, p. 38; essay, pp. 1-38.

Bagehot treats Macaulay as the typical historian, whose character was dull, because, like all historians, he was insensitive to the drama of life about him. He had an "inexperiencing nature", lacking any susceptibility to the world he lived in. He learned everything from books; the only reason that his historical works are not dull is that he could make academic knowledge seem as though it had been experienced. He never grew: he started high and ended there, on the same level; he was always the man of '32, the year which, to him, saw the last improvement in political technique. Twenty years in the midst of significant social, political, and economic changes taught him nothing. His constant application to books, however, made him seem omniscient. "Such a man would naturally think literature more instructive than life"; but this, Bagehot warns, is not true: "any mind can learn from books; it takes a keener sensibility, a sharper intelligence to learn from life."²¹ Macaulay thought that the great dead were the true friends. But they are dead, Bagehot insists, and we grow tired of their books; we require to live, act, love, and hate; we must have stronger ties and warmer hopes. To interest posterity one must give a living picture of a living age, which the historian could not do. He was all mind, no feeling, and hence unable to appreciate and to catch the exciting and dramatic events of man's social existence. Here Bagehot adopts a typically Macaulayan device with marked success: to prove the in-

21. "Thomas Babington Macaulay", ibid., IX, pp. 7-10.

adequacy, in this context, of the historian's treatment of Cavalier and Puritan he offers an excellent one of his own. He could be even more successful than the master at his own tricks. Macaulay was the best man to describe the period of his magnum opus, however, because he had a taste for hard-headed and practical men. His history is a masterpiece because he did have the imagination to experience a whole age, to see and comprehend its political transactions, which are the intelligible descriptions of society. As a statesman, he had a genius for setting forth, exhaustively and with perfect clarity, all the principles or facts pertaining to an issue. He was best at explaining half-known concepts, or at infusing new life into old ones become platitudinous. But, as in his histories, he was fitted only for great occasions; he was insensible to the finer moral shades of politics, and details always escaped him.²²

The essay on Bishop Joseph Butler presents another type, that of the devotee of supernatural religion. The ever-present dichotomy is first offered: there are two varieties of faith, natural and supernatural, the former finding God in the aspect of phenomena about us, the latter in the so-called unseen world, or really, in the depths of the individual conscience. Bagehot borrows a theory from Matthew Arnold: natural religion is Greek, supernatural Hebrew. Bishop Butler's religion, thoroughly Old Testament, was born of a sense of humiliation and sin,

22. Ibid., II, pp. 89-126; "Lord Macaulay", ibid., IX, pp. 7-10.

of the fear of God and the realization of human degradation. As a philosophic defender of the faith, the Bishop was concerned with the first principles of theology and religion; in him "all was grave, serious, and essential; nothing else would be characteristic of him".²³ His aim was to meet the skeptics like Hobbes and Locke on their own ground, and to this end he attempted to bring moral idealism down to earth. For the most part, Bagehot's discussion of Butler is a lengthy and surprisingly dull theological disquisition in which the mind and character of the man are revealed as they touch on the questions involved. It is, then, a personal revelation as much as a study of another's character, and as such will be more extensively considered when we come to treat Bagehot's religion. Actually "Bishop Butler" is something of an anomaly in the bulk of his writings: it is interesting for the indication that he could discuss complex matters of faith as though he had much solid learning in theology, yet it is doubtful whether he had. What it illustrates, perhaps, is the fact that one who has mastered many fields comes to have an intuitive intelligence in the face of others properly outside the scope of his learning. In other words, Bagehot could intelligently comprehend the principles of theology bearing on Bishop Butler's philosophy because he was used to the intelligent mastery of so many other things. Broad and solid learning gives

23. "Bishop Butler", ibid., I, p. 283.

one a kind of common sense which leaves nothing totally strange, and further, it enables one to pick up, almost unconsciously, an intelligent understanding of a field of thought without strictly addressing himself to that branch of learning. We might characterize "Bishop Butler" as an exhibition of critical knowledge, through the substance of which we periodically see illuminating flashes of character.²⁴

2.

In this review of the major biographical essays of Bagehot, we have so far seen that he had many of the faculties of the creative literary artist.²⁵ We discovered that through the medium of a person's published writings - or letters and old wives' tales, as in the case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu - he was able to recreate a character, to set it forth dramatically and with a highly vivifying humor. Walter Bagehot, of course, was not the uncompromising realist that the modern biographer is, but on the other hand, he had much of the ironic realization that there is tinsel as well as bronze in any whole man. His aim was neither to commemorate nor to applaud, but simply to bring alive. In biography he followed the same precept that he laid down for himself in criticism: "The business of a critic is criticism;...it is not his business to be thankful;...he must attempt an estimate rather than a eulogy."²⁶

24. Ibid., I, pp. 262-310.

25. Later and less important biographical studies are "Adam Smith as a Person", ibid., VII, pp. 1-32, and "What Lord Lyndhurst Really Was", ibid., IV, pp. 181-86.

26. "Macaulay", ibid., II, p. 89.

The other writings which properly belong under the head of biographical essays are the character studies, many of them biographies as well, of contemporary statesmen and men of affairs, drawn either from first-hand acquaintance, or at least from the indirect contact which always occurs among men of business. In these pieces Bagehot recreated a personality in much the same way as he did in those of a historical nature: he saw it through the medium of activity, the context of social and institutional phenomena that surrounds every human being. But in this case, he was a part of that context, with the result that the sketches of contemporary figures take on the fresh quality of the morning's news, a quality which has, for the most part, withstood the passage of time. Moreover, these works were done largely for the Economist, a news periodical as much as anything else, or for the reviews that had become so numerous in England. We shall find again that the two fundamental attitudes are the same: seeing in the particular individual an illustration of the general type, or seeing him dramatically as an individual.

Among these character studies of contemporary figures in politics a few are of a historical nature, particularly the pieces on Lord Althorp and Lord Brougham.²⁷ Of these two, "Lord Brougham" is by far the better, and again it is a case of Bagehot's seeing the general in the specific, Brougham being for him the typical agitator for reform. The plan of the

27. The essay on Brougham was done at a fairly early date, 1857; that on Althorp was one of the last reviews Bagehot wrote, done in 1877.

essay follows the usual pattern: the opening is a long and lively survey of the economic state of England following the peace that concluded the Napoleonic War in 1815. As an exposition of institutions it has not the appeal that the description of London in the days of Addison has, but for history which is economic analysis, it is one of the best things Bagehot did. A review of Lord Brougham's accomplishments follows, of his positive achievements in politics, law, taxation, and trade, and some critical analysis of their value. The bulk of the work, however, is concerned with the character of the successful and militant reformer. He was a successful agitator, Bagehot thinks, because he had no thinking intellect, no faculty for deliberation and philosophic calm. Insensitive to others and unconscious of himself, he never felt any skepticism about the correctness of his opinions. Harsh nerves, a ready tongue for sarcasm and vituperation, an impulsive aggressiveness that never rested, made him an attacker who could neither withdraw nor be static; he had to push ahead along lines suggested by the thought of someone else. He was an expert at constant publicity, with a talent for "conspicuous labor". His "mischievous excitability" became proverbial; he enjoyed a demonic reputation, but "a little of the demon", Bagehot tells us, "is excellent for an agitator".²⁸ The man's writings, of course, are hastily disposed of. One would never call him a great statesman, perhaps not even a great reformer: but once

28. "Lord Brougham", Works, II, p. 307.

again Bagehot has delineated a personality which he had admired. He was a man who could get the job done, whose "easy anger" was as necessary as his versatility and energy.

Two digressions in "Lord Brougham" make the essay interesting for reasons other than the treatment of its subject. One is an exposition of the conviction that the growing liberalism of the public mind in the years just before 1832 was the only force capable of sweeping away the "feudal constitution" to prepare for industrial and political progress; the other is a melancholy recognition of how little progress there really is in the growth of material achievement. The advancement in technology and the mechanical arts which characterized the nineteenth century, Bagehot thought, had no power to make us better men, for such things do not touch the spirit and never reach the moral being. The accumulation of scientific fact is useless in the end: we understand no more of the fundamental nature of phenomena about us; further, it is impossible to keep all the details in mind, with the result that we possess only a stock of dead learning. There is the suggestion here that universality of understanding was a conscious attribute of Bagehot's mind. He follows Hazlitt in the conviction that useful knowledge is not knowledge of useful things. The great scientists know the joy of discovery, that adventure of the spirit which is perhaps man's highest pleasure; but those who follow them have only the conclusions of their discoveries.

most of which tell them little about the life they must live. This attitude must be considered more extensively when we turn to Bagehot's politics; it is interesting to note it here, however, because it provides an excellent illustration of the restlessness and breadth of his intellect. An essay purporting to deal with Brougham's character covers, actually, an economic and political analysis of a particular period in English history, a discussion of the qualifications of the typical agitator, and a philosophic approach to certain basic aspects of the author's century. Bagehot could never really be dull, save perhaps when dealing with theology.²⁹

The essay "Lord Althorp and the Reform Act of 1832", although written twenty years after that on Lord Brougham, is in a sense a continuation of the earlier piece. Althorp had an important influence on the celebrated Reform Bill, which Bagehot, like Macaulay, felt to be the last word in political progress; and to treat of the statesman inevitably required further historical analysis. The same general plan is followed: first, the sketch of the predominant political and social attitudes of the early nineteenth century; second, the characteristics which Althorp possessed as a typical reform leader, that is, energy, will to fight, and a crude common sense; third, a biographical sketch of the man; and finally, a critical consideration of the Reform Bill and its aftermath. The

29. "Lord Brougham", *ibid.*, II, pp. 285-325; "The Death of Lord Brougham", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 50-54.

central idea of the essay, however, is the theory that a failure on the part of nations in the years before 1832 to comprehend the great institutions which they had built up was a common calamity of the time; and Althorp was a typical embodiment of this shortcoming. In addition to his incapacity for business in the ordinary sense, he was also incapable of looking at political institutions historically and philosophically. Such men are necessary to reform but they are dangerous as well. The essayist ends on the same note: that the characteristic defects of reforms and reformers must not be overlooked; that the Bill of 1832 and all subsequent reforms of the franchise are heading toward a dangerous extreme, democracy, and away from Burke's respectable view of the necessity for preserving political reforms and social traditions. Bagehot cherished this attitude all his life, and it colored everything - often to its detriment - that he wrote on politics.³⁰

The most illuminating of these studies of contemporary statesmen are those which support their author's contention that "the truth is dull and best discovered by dull men". The successful politician in a government like that of England is one who in his ideas is a perfect representative of popular opinion, but who is also possessed of the capacity for understanding and, if necessary, performing the many tasks which a representative government must daily face. "A constitu-

³⁰. "Lord Althorp and the Reform Act of 1832", ibid., VII, pp. 37-72.

tional statesman is in general", Bagehot wrote, "a man of common opinions and uncommon abilities....(He) is the one who most felicitously expresses the creed of the moment, who administers it, who embodies it in laws and institutions,...who induces the average man to think, 'I could not have done it any better if I had had time myself.'³¹ This is another result of that "tyranny of the commonplace" which accompanies civilization; it is the tyranny of public opinion, the standardization which marks modern society, the need for being "safe" in one's opinions for fear of the social punishment which falls on those who disagree. The statesman with original and radical viewpoints, however beneficial their application might be to society, is damned as a heretic, not only against the constitution, but against God as well. But this does not mean to say that the man who survives in politics is an inferior fellow: statesmen deal with facts, not with philosophies, and a just comprehension of the facts is the cardinal requirement of the lawmaker. Bagehot offers Sir Robert Peel as a case in point: he was a first-rate man with a second-rate creed.³² In thought he was a follower, changing as British

31. "The Character of Sir Robert Peel", *ibid.*, II, p. 181.

32. Americans may notice how well this characterization fits, for example, President Franklin Roosevelt: few men have had his genius for expressing the ambitions and the needs, the predicaments and the aspirations of inarticulate common men, for voicing, in short, commonplace opinion; yet one cannot deny his amazing capacity for getting the job done, for meeting problems as they arise - a thoroughly uncommon trait. Philosophic action may dispense with philosophy.

opinion changed, from conservative to liberal; his was not an original mind; it was, nevertheless, highly sensitive to ideas around it. But the rise of industrialism brought to the top men with a "business" attitude, men who wished to see government administered in the way they hoped to administer their factories and banks, that is, with efficiency and profit. Practical men, expert in practical matters, were required. Against this background of the description of government and society at the time of the Reform Bill, Bagehot projects the character and achievements of Sir Robert Peel, a man faced with the enormous task of handling the details of a modern political organization and, consequently, lacking time for opinions. The essay, as far as Peel's character is concerned, may be summed up in the author's concluding view: incapable of being a creative lawgiver, without the constructive mind of the true reformer, he showed his real genius in his ability for settling how a thing was to be done. Like other comparable works, the present one is a study in history, in character, and in political forms.³³

In "Mr. Gladstone" the aim is the same as that in "The Character of Peel", that is, to explain a long public career in the light of a man's character and the circumstances he faces in society and government. Gladstone began with and retained the eager industry and the tireless capacity for work

33. "The Character of Sir Robert Peel", ibid., II, pp. 178-214.

of a good Lancashire merchant. He was fortunately able to rise above an Oxford education, which Bagehot thinks is admirable for producing competent pedants, but not statesmen. He came to the Commons with inexhaustible energy, brilliance, learning, and originality, but in the face of the demands of popular government he had to drop the last characteristic. As an orator Gladstone had an "advocate's eloquence", based on data furnished by his audience and on the facts of current business and politics. Bagehot believes that he gave the feeling of truth: "He has...a real faith in the higher parts of human nature; he believes that there is such a thing as truth; he has the soul of a martyr, with the intellect of the advocate."³⁴ And along with the logic and wit and the "oratorical impulse", he had Peel's love for immense labor: he knew how a thing was to be done, and he got it done. Nevertheless, Gladstone had quickly to learn that his knowledge and vehemence in debate, his erratic vacillation from one extreme to another, his tendency to run an idea to its ultimate conclusions - that such faculties were out of place in the English government of his day; for the constitutional statesman must follow public opinion and become an advocate of his colleagues, his party, and its policy. It is unfortunate that individual effort in modern society must be synthesized with organization, and that organization frequently ends in regimentation, but

34. "Mr. Gladstone", ibid., III, p. 284.

such, nevertheless, is life in party government. In the matter of specific attainments, Bagehot felt that Gladstone had to learn to be a constructive lawmaker, to put aside cherished schemes in the face of reality, and to avoid long and bewildering opposition. "Mr. Gladstone" takes us into the center of political activity, personally acquaints us with one of its biggest men, and ends with a shrewd analysis of statesmanship in an age of empire, economic and political. Its merit rests, of course, on the fact that Bagehot knew Gladstone personally, knew the world of affairs about him, but saw always the human character in the midst of that world.³⁵

We have already mentioned the admiration that Bagehot felt for his father-in-law, James Wilson, member of Commons and Chancellor of the Indian Exchequer; the essay on him indicates how very strong was his affinity for this thoroughly solid and prosaic man.³⁶ One is always surprised at this characteristic: the common sense of a Locke or a Macaulay is considerably different from that of a successful middle class merchant and public servant. Yet at the risk of being platitudinous, one must admit that society is safe when the majority of its members are men like James Wilson, whose narrow but practical sense perfectly enables them to take care of the

35. "Mr. Gladstone", *ibid.*, III, pp. 272-301; for short detailed articles on particular policies see the ff.: "Mr. Gladstone on Home Rule for Ireland", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 89-91; "Mr. Gladstone and the People", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 92-96; "Mr. Gladstone on Ritualism", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 142-146; "Mr. Gladstone's Resignation", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 152-55.

36. See *supra*, ch. 1.

practical necessities of life. A completely safe society, however, would be intolerably dull, and its truth dull; consequently, such men as Wilson and Sir George Cornwall Lewis perhaps serve best when they make it possible for the Shakespeares and Newtons to exist. But a realistic intelligence is a priceless thing: Bagehot knew perfectly well that society can dispense now and then with a poet or an astronomer, but it cannot do without the men who help to keep its machinery running. Such a man was the Rt. Hon. James Wilson: in fifty-five years of life he went from a hatter's business in a small Scotch town to the Council Board of the Indian government. He made and lost a fortune before he took to politics, where energy, business ability, and self-command stood him well. Moreover, he had a taste for learned conversation, with the imagination and wit to realize that affairs of government and political economy are lively and interesting things to intelligent people. Courage, independence, and an imperturbable optimism saw him through every difficulty. He was a man of accomplishments, and the world was willing to pay him for what he could do. The Economist and the Indian income tax, both still in existence today, are the best tributes to his abilities. Bagehot traces briefly and comprehensively his career in business and government, discusses his numerous pamphlets on financial questions, and concludes with applause which is not all the result of a sense of decorum on the part of a dutiful son-in-law. Conscientious,

with a single-minded rectitude, never in doubt as to what to do nor hesitant about doing it, personally shy and not given to expressing his feelings, yet encouraging and cooperative, James Wilson, Bagehot feels sure, was a great administrator and a great financier, a Victorian gentleman of the business world.³⁷

Sir George Cornwall Lewis, aside from his breadth of learning in things outside of business, was another statesman of the same variety, and Bagehot can find nothing in him to criticize adversely. A plain, prosaic, unpretentious man, with a love of truth and a congenital ability for handling large and difficult problems in finance, he was at the same time a scholar who wrote several good books in history and science while literally submerged in cabinet work. He was the essence of simplicity, a man who always took the plain and obvious view of a thing, always got at the heart of it through any number of superficial complications. In politics Lewis had a taste for fact and an instinct for inductive logic. Cabinet business was his forte, and he distinguished himself as Home Secretary, Secretary of the Treasury, and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Like James Wilson, Sir George was unemotional, a man seemingly devoid of feeling - or if he had any feelings, unable to express them. His virtues were those of the mind: he was another good example of the literate English statesman who regards an education as the ground-work for learning and who discharges

37. "Memoir of the Rt. Hon. James Wilson", ibid., III, pp. 302-48.

business duties quietly and expertly. Sir George was another in the English line of statesmen like Hampden and Pym, or further back, Glanvil and Bracton, that is, one of those loyal, courageous, and intelligent men who are moderate and many-sided, and able to attack any matter at hand and see it through. All rely on them, and they never fail.³⁸

Bagehot's fondness for the solid and efficient man, whose conduct is predictable and who always does what he has before him to do, naturally made him distrust the excitable and vacillating Disraeli and the devil-may-care Palmerston, and just as naturally prompted him to applaud the moderate and capable Prince Albert.³⁹ The presence of worldly sagacity in its profoundest variety, added to deep moral characteristics, produced his unqualifying admiration of Abraham Lincoln. Disraeli, he thought, was great in letters and in debate, but poor in the fundamental qualifications of statesmanship. As a political free-lance he was a genius; as a leader of the Opposition and a leader of a minority Ministry he was good; but as a majority leader he was very poor. Bagehot's longest Economist article on Disraeli is a fairly comprehensive characterization, and again the method of the longer essays is repeated; the aim is to relate the man's political achievements to his personal character. Certain characteristics of the statesman are apparent: he exhibited tenacity of purpose and flexibility of

38. "Sir George Cornwall Lewis", ibid., IV, pp. 187-224; "The Tribute at Hereford to Sir G.C. Lewis", ibid., IV, pp. 225-28.

39. The essays on Palmerston and the Prince are illuminating but very short: see "The Prince Consort", ibid., IV, pp. 39-40; "Lord Palmerston", ibid., IV, pp. 329-33; "The Prince Consort and Lord Palmerston", ibid., IX, pp. 212-17.

intellect; he was a man of audacity and strength, with a genius for turning his errors into material success. His two principal gifts were a sensitive if unoriginal imagination, and an unparalleled dexterity for working up impressions into material for personal attacks. But he had an unforgivable shortcoming for Bagehot: his political imagination was "romantic", unattached to the real phenomena of life. His was a literary, rather than a political genius. His attempts at originality, of course, are condemned.⁴⁰ Disraeli succeeded because he observed all classes of men, and he had learned how to concentrate his observant faculty through years of listening in Parliament. His mind was quick, original, and keen, but not profound. What is just as important, however, is the fact that Beaconsfield gained some of his ends through fraud and deceit, but Bagehot, always a cynic in politics, could not condemn him on moral grounds. Fraud helped Disraeli because fraud succeeds "only when disguised in great qualities and helped on by fine talents".⁴¹ The conclusion, then, is that fraud in convenient places added to singular ability brought Lord Beaconsfield his success.

The Economist article on Lincoln is surprising: everyone in England despised him when he was elected to the Presidency in 1860; a few grudgingly admitted at the close of the Civil War that he had done a good job. But Bagehot's praise is unreserved, in spite of the fact that at the beginning of the

40. "Mr. Disraeli", ibid., IX, pp.1-6; see also "Mr. Disraeli as Member of the House of Commons", ibid., VII, pp.33-36.

41. "Why Mr. Disraeli Has Succeeded", ibid., IX, pp.46-47; article, pp.46-49.

War he had condemned both the Republican presidential candidate and the American method of choosing him; he seems to have regarded the once obscure Illinois legislator as the compendium of all statesmanlike virtues. Lincoln's death, he writes, came when the world was most in need of his peculiar greatness. He was called to the White House in the face of national disaster; he was granted, through respectable constitutional law, unlimited authority, which he used for civil liberty and justice. He brought the issue to a successful conclusion by the exercise of virtues which were never before combined so perfectly in one man: patience, sagacity, honesty, sympathy, courage, and a moderation which enabled him to obtain cooperation in the face of the most vicious and extreme of factional antagonism. His extraordinary moral authority gave rise to a kind of popular faith, which lifted the moral tone of the whole nation. In Lincoln the United States secured statesmanship in her hour of need which only Italy found in a like distress during Bagehot's life, in the characters of Mazzini and Count Cavour. But for another reason the Civil War President seemed a singular personality: he was among the few men in whom power and responsibility widen, deepen, and elevate the mind. In other words, the more representative of the nation did he have to become, the more receptive to the feelings and needs of all men did he grow. It is an eloquent tribute from an Englishman who lived among the holders of power, and a tribute, as well, to the realistic justice and intelligent tolerance which

Bagehot exhibited as editor of an important financial journal.⁴²

Among the many other statesmen and administrators of whom Bagehot wrote for various periodicals, chiefly the Economist, perhaps the most interesting from the standpoint of his treatment of them were the men of power in foreign countries, especially the leaders of Italy's struggle for freedom, Cavour and Mazzini, Louis Napoleon, always a provocative and enigmatic figure to the English, and Cardinal Antonelli, a Papal Secretary of State who was indirectly instrumental in reviving much of the old "anti-Popery" prejudice in England. These brief essays, all done for the Economist, are revelations of their author's personality as much as they are of their subjects. For Count Cavour Bagehot held a complete admiration, largely because his liberalism was so close to the best English variety, according to our essayist, that of Burke and the Whig philosophers. Cavour lived in England for many years up to the age of thirty-two, and it was in England, Bagehot feels, that he learned all his soundest political principles: free trade, the separation of church and state, religious tolerance, and constitutional monarchy controlled by a natural aristocracy.⁴³ Mazzini could not claim so much of his sympathy. The Italian patriot was a fanatic idealist in his libertarianism, never recognizing the demands of realpolitik, never realizing that government means com-

42. "The Assassination of Mr. Lincoln", ibid., IX, pp. 28-32.

43. "The Death of Count Cavour", ibid., IX, pp. 11-15.

promise and inconsistency, the adoption of laws and administrative methods which insure the best though imperfect operation of ideals. We have a good essay here on the need for a somewhat cynical realism in statecraft; Mazzini's passion for democracy, however, would have been enough to arouse Bagehot's antagonism.⁴⁴

Provincial prejudice against Louis Napoleon of France, or, for that matter, against anything French, a notorious English trait, was foreign to Bagehot. He knew and liked many aspects of French society and culture, and ever since the days of the outrageous Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, he had a secret fondness for praising Gallic characteristics wherever the respectable Briton damned them. But a sharp political intelligence was another factor in his flattering appraisal of Napoleon III. In the French emperor he saw many great qualities, particularly a shrewd insight into the real nature of socio-political phenomena. Bagehot claimed that Louis Napoleon was the first statesman in France to realize that the peasantry were the governing body, and that they would follow any leader, however dictatorial, who would govern in their interest; the first to see the value of free trade for his country; the first politician who had the genius to conciliate both the Papacy and the Republicans at the same time; and finally, the first to recognize that England was France's best ally. His worst fail-

44. "Mazzini", ibid., IX, pp. 97-100.

ing was a congenital inability to choose competent men as officers of government. It was ill health, however, that started Louis Napoleon on the road to failure in 1868; as a result, he took the field against Count von Moltke's troops in 1870 a beaten man, and he lost disastrously. Keen critical intelligence about things French was not a common characteristic among Victorians; Bagehot exhibited it in the article on Napoleon III, as he had twice before, in the Letters on the Coup d'Etat and the essay on Beranger.⁴⁵

Emancipation from provincialism was again revealed in the Economist on Cardinal Antonelli, Papal Secretary of State from 1860 to 1875. The Protestant Englishman thought of him as another Rodrigo Borgia, a Machiavellian rascal who was the epitome of evil and cunning. But Bagehot maintains that he was only following ancient and traditional, if not honorable, Church customs: growing rich from gifts received presumably for the welfare of the Church; the practice of nepotism; and the indulgence of luxurious and worldly tastes. The old Cardinal never questioned the spiritual claims of the Church; his ambition was to defend her by dividing her enemies, but he succeeded only in irritating them. Aside from the fact that Bagehot had some sympathy for Catholicism in his youth, there is chiefly in "Cardinal Antonelli" a revelation of his cynical tolerance for the worldly practices of the Church, not on the ground that

45. "The Emperor Napoleon", ibid., IX, pp. 101-04; see also infra, ch. iv, sec.2.

they are necessary evils which have to be put up with, but simply because they are not evils, and easily sanctioned by a secular and flexible morality. The only error of which Antonelli was guilty was that of deepening the Protestant belief in the unscrupulousness of ecclesiastical officers; whereas he was only following old Renaissance practices, morally refined, without realizing that the social fabric of the world had considerably changed, and was still changing.⁴⁶

3.

In our survey of the biographical writings and character studies of Walter Bagehot, we have noticed certain clear aspects of his personality coming to dominate the others. We have treated these shorter works topically rather than chronologically, yet we have discovered a developing attitude which, when we consider the element of time, we shall find to be approaching the point where it became the central fact about his intellectual characteristics. The majority of the literary essays were written before 1865; the biographical works were, with a few important exceptions, despatched by 1870. They reveal, more than anything else, a constantly growing sense of earthly realism in their author, especially in connection with the practical affairs of the practical, everyday world. His

46. "Cardinal Antonelli", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 218-21. Bagehot wrote about people all his life for a variety of periodicals. Most of the articles are very short, and, of those we have not mentioned, few tell us any more about his personality and mind; those omitted from discussion are the ff.: "Mr. Cobden", *ibid.*, IV, pp. 323-28; "The Earl of Clarendon", *ibid.*, V, pp. 88-92; "Mr. Grote" *ibid.*, V, pp. 93-98; "Mr. Lowe as Chancellor of the Exchequer", *ibid.*, V, pp. 111-15; "M. Guizot", *ibid.*, VI, pp. 238-42; "Prof. Cairnes", *ibid.*, VI, pp. 243-46; "Senior's Journals", *ibid.*, VII, pp. 298-310; "Lord Lawrence", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 55-59.

tastes departed increasingly from literature and came closer to the facts of which literature is made. At first he was interested, as far as biography and characterization were his concern, in the personalities and lives of people who left a published record of their achievements - Gibbon, Macaulay, and the first Edinburgh Reviewers; but Bagehot had a natural love of politics, that is, a love for the give and take of the real world as opposed to the realm of books and history, and he soon devoted his efforts to revealing the characters of men who were making political history around him. And it was always the character that fascinated him: government was a matter of men, he felt, and he wanted to find out what connections there were between the policies of the state and the personalities who made them. Consequently, the majority of the biographical essays, whether they dip into history or not, are concerned with the realm of politics; they are concerned with what is really in that realm, never with the theories and principles with which men periodically clothe their actions. Furthermore, Bagehot was not a political philosopher, and like Burke, suspected everyone who invented such a philosophy.

If there is any important error of general content in the biographical studies, it is Bagehot's tendency to overdo his discovering the typical in a given set of phenomena. As we have noticed, he regarded Pitt as the typical administrator, Lord Brougham as the ideal pattern of the agitator, and the first Edinburgh Reviewers as typical Whigs or Liberals. Now

this is nothing more than the human and quite logical habit of selecting one particular which embodies the maximum number of characteristics of all the particulars, and setting it forth as the best available illustration of the whole field. On this score we could hardly condemn him, for he was only attempting to clarify a picture by offering it first as a thing itself, second as an illustration of a preconceived notion about what it ought to illustrate. Our quarrel is with the fact that there was a preconceived notion. We discovered that a rigid adherence to a priori theory tended to invalidate much of Bagehot's literary criticism, on the perfectly plausible ground that some literary forms may not fit the theory, but are not, therefore, to be condemned. There must be, it is true, some standards for all the arts, but there can never be any dogmatic standards for statesmen, whose merits are tested only by the character of problems existing around them. Bagehot knew quite well that he was to be interpreted in the light of nineteenth century culture, and it would be absurd to bring the charge that Lord Brougham, let us say, is to be regarded as the typical agitator of the age of Pericles, Simon de Montfort, Colonel Hampden, or the Rockingham Whigs. The point is this: if there is such a thing as the typical agitator or the typical administrator - which there very likely is not - he is typical only for his own time and the peculiar set of conditions he has to face. This taste for making the facts fit an a priori theory led Bagehot astray several times, in literary

criticism, in biography, and in politics. He was too conscious of the facts in the case ever to depart seriously from a realistic understanding of things, but it is plain that his treatment of the truth often weakened the very end which he was trying to accomplish.

All this, we must admit, is more than offset by the merits of the biographical studies, which we have considered, and which are best demonstrated by the essays themselves. The most obvious attempt to make the facts fit the assumption is in the case of Macaulay, where the author insists that historians are dull and bookish men who never learn from life about them; ergo, since Macaulay was a historian, he must also have been dull and bookish. And the same for Gibbon. As for Brougham, Pitt, and the Edinburgh Reviewers, Bagehot's apriorism is pretty mild: he presents the facts first, then offers his conclusions about typical administrators, liberals, and the like. Peel is treated as the successful constitutional statesman, that is, as a man of "common opinions and uncommon abilities", but one could hardly quarrel with such a designation. That the written opinions of successful statesmen frequently come to occupy a place in the body of great literature - Pericles' funeral oration and Lincoln's second inaugural address, for examples - is only a further tribute to the accuracy of Bagehot's dictum; for they are great precisely because they do express the inexpressible feelings of a whole people. And from the practical

standpoint, we know that law, which the statesman helps to make, is only a codified record of common opinions about social conduct. Where the tendency to identify an individual with a type is most marked, as in the literary and earlier biographical essays, the approach is that of a man of letters; but the attitude shifts soon to that of a shrewd political analyst and eventually to that of a scientist. And it is this aspect of Bagehot's mind and temperament that we must next consider.

Chapter IV

The Politics of a Liberal Conservative

1.

Walter Bagehot was not a political philosopher in the sense that he tried to draw rational conclusions about society and government from his observation of social and political phenomena, and to fit them into a causal relationship which could serve to describe the general pattern of the state; but he approached all the aspects of government with a body of fundamental theory which in itself can be regarded as philosophical. He was not one to make comprehensive judgments which would organize, clarify, and explain the tangle of things for the use of mankind; he never really perceived the deep philosophic implications of much of what he wrote, or rather, he seemed unable to realize the true and profound significance of an institution or an act to the rest of humanity. He remained the critic, the analyst, and the interpreter to the end, except perhaps in Physics and Politics, in which he is the scientific observer of the growth of social organizations. Where a thing might lead, or what it might point to in the way of social change and the concomitant adaptations which any good government must make - these matters seem not to have impressed him. He followed Burke and the old Whig philosophers in his distrust of "systems", but he was either unaware of or refused to recognize the fact that Burke himself, as a political philosopher, was a "system-maker" in the best sense of the word.

The parallel between Bagehot and the eighteenth-century thinker goes further than the adoption of a single, if fundamental, set of convictions. The particular standpoint with regard to political institutions and policies from which the Victorian analyst examined the phenomena of his own day was that of Edmund Burke; he used no "system" in the sense that the Summa Theologica and The Leviathan are systems, but at least he formulated a complete, ideal structure representing the nature of government. Most philosophers are too taken by their own ideas ever to criticize them objectively, and Burke was sufficiently excited by his to miss the discovery that even his general principles were too narrow for the whole history of English political institutions. If he had stopped with the statement that one can never lay down a fixed principle about governmental policy, he would have been safe, but then he would not have been great; as it was, he proceeded to propose several principles, thus making it possible for us both to admire and criticize him. We ought for a brief space to review the ideas of the famous Whig before considering Bagehot's position.

Burke followed David Hume in holding that political methods are only conventions erected to solve problems in terms of themselves and as they arise. Immutable natural law as the embodiment of fixed natural rights is a pure fallacy; humanity is not natural, but human, or artificial, if we understand the word in the eighteenth-century sense; "art is man's

nature", as Burke himself said. Consequently, the whole vast body of traditions, faiths, art, cultural patterns and customs, political and social institutions, go to form "human nature", and society exists to preserve this unique and manifold substance. But since government, in turn, is a device for preserving society, then government must also maintain unbroken the whole fabric of social existence. The English Constitution is the central factor of the English state, the receptacle for the whole of the national culture, and it is, therefore, inviolable. The Constitution, as the expression of the state's continuity, is the best insurance for the maintenance of national life. It provides an organization, Parliament, which represents the needs and desires of society by allowing them literal expression, as it represents them by embodying their expression in law. But Parliament is representative of group interests, never of mere numerical majority. Parties within the national assembly are organizations by which men of like views can work together for the good of the whole people. Since government is not a reflection of the number of equal votes cast, it follows that abstract rights to which all men are equally entitled can never guide policy, even if such rights existed. Society is made up of ranks, separated by differences of wealth, custom, and intelligence, each of which imposes a certain social discipline, and all of which must function harmoniously among themselves. To maintain this harmony, both through a duration of time and in the face of any single dis-

turbing factor, is the task of government. Its existence is continuous; change must be evolution, as it is in society. Radicalism in political reform, then, is mad and tragic, for it is completely false. The state embodies everything. Since man in society is shaped to divine ends, the state is built up in accordance with the end toward which society strives, that is, the partaking of God's perfection. The state, then, is a moral institution based on the highest moral aspiration of which man is capable. There are several important inconsistencies, and the conception is decidedly romantic, but we will consider these matters when we turn to Bagehot's application of this ideal to particular political institutions. It is important to remember, however, that inasmuch as the above philosophy of the state is a variation on the Politics, he was an Aristotelian in this as well as in literary theory.

A brief review of Bagehot's political writings shows how extensive was his debt to Burke; although he seldom openly acknowledged it. If he said anything about the founder of modern conservatism, it was usually critical: he criticized him for his excesses, for his unrestrained Irish temperament, and for not being the great practical statesman that Pitt was. But the important thing is that Burke was a hero, and Bagehot could never indulge in hero-worship.¹ Moreover, Burke was clever, and the man whose usual taste was for dull fellows like Sir G. C. Lewis and James Wilson, had a natural distrust

1. See Irvine, op. cit., pp. 229-30.

of clever men. For the most part, however, he followed the philosopher in all save the theory of the divine end of the state. In this, his own secularism was much closer to the initial doctrine of empiricism in politics than the great Whig's view of moral aspirations could ever be. As always, the Victorian liberal kept his feet on the ground and brought his teacher down to earth, maintaining the attitude demanded by a searching, rationalistic analysis of the facts before him. We can accuse the founder of Bagehot's philosophy of being a system-maker, but not Bagehot himself. He simply took over the traditionalism of Burke as a basis for further criticism of the concrete phenomena of the political world. Because he looked realistically at specific things, one could hardly find a better example than the author of The English Constitution of the inadequacy of Burke's theories in the face of the rapidly changing social conditions of the nineteenth century. Like so many political thinkers in his time, Bagehot showed a surprising inability to sense the direction in which the economic and political winds were blowing, or if he did notice it, he seemed unable to adapt his viewpoint to the new problems which had arisen.

To imply that Burke or any of the Whig philosophers who followed him could sanction arbitrary acts on the part of the government because it represents the totality of society and is therefore logically an absolute sovereign - to imply this is grossly to misunderstand the principles of 1698, and more

than that, the political temperament of the English people. There were plenty of dogmatic Tories who could condone bald tyranny provided that it was decently clothed in constitutional rhetoric, but not even the most abject worshippers of the doctrine of the Revolution could abide arbitrary invasion of so-called rights at the expense of the citizens. Bagehot's liberalism was - as it should be - the test of institutions in terms of the rational consent of men; consequently, where the institution of government indulged in useless exploitation simply to maintain power, he was quick to condemn it. Like any good English gentleman, there was to him no point in tyranny for its own sake, particularly when someone suffers under it. His sanction of Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat was another matter, although, as we shall note later, it represents the same inconsistency that Burke so loftily overlooked. Bagehot's contempt for tyranny was exposed with considerable vehemence in a review of Governor Eyre's tenure in Jamaica. Eyre resorted to terrorism and cruelty to maintain what he pleased to call "law and order"; a just court impeached him, but the matter was kept alive when Carlyle and Ruskin, among others, helped to raise a fund to defend the man even in the face of his terrible record. A humanitarian liberalism forced Bagehot to deliver a ferocious denunciation of all who took Eyre's part, but especially of Carlyle. He pointed out the obvious fact, that literature has sunk to a low level when its chief apostles sanction barbarism. As a youth in school he had recognized Carlyle's

ungenerous ignorance of politics; years later the eminent hero-worshipper provided him with an opportunity to write an eloquent little testimony to his hatred of outright exploitation in the name of discipline.²

Although Bagehot's liberalism was primarily an idea, detached and objective, nevertheless a personal distrust of all concentrations of power colored most of his attitude toward governments. He feared democracy, or mob rule, as he thought of it, as much as he hated tyranny, and consequently the further reforms in the franchise which followed the major one of 1832 seemed plainly dangerous to him. The universal extension of the suffrage meant government by ignorance and poverty; this evolution toward complete representative democracy was based, he thought, on the fallacy that those less fit to govern have the right to take power away from those more fit. The true principle of the individual's right to exercise power is that "every person has a right to so much political power as he can exercise without impeding any person who would more fitly exercise that power".³ Authority belongs by right and in fact to the higher orders of society, that is, to men with education and the leisure to use it. But we have said that Bagehot followed Burke in the theory that government ought to represent all social forces; there seems to be an inconsistency, but the reconciliation is not difficult if we are prepared to

2. See "Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Eyre", Works, IX, pp. 42-45.

3. "Parliamentary Reform", ibid., III, p. 127.

accept the assumption that the best in a society represent the totality of its opinion. Of this he was sure: a naturally evolving society is soon governed by those who are superior in intellect as well as in station; the difficulty, however, is that the people at large have no impulse to elect them. The popular electorate vote for those who speak their own views, feelings, desires, and ambitions. The intelligently articulate must express these things because they alone can know the "common opinions" of men; the simplest way, then, to embody these opinions in the legislature is to have it represent directly the politically intelligent. But how are we to discover this group? Bagehot's answer is old and honorable, but subject to many doubts: in the end property is the best qualification because property-holders have been and are, by and large, the educated and sensible members of the community. To inherit property guarantees an education; to acquire it guarantees its concomitant abilities. Good government, it follows, represents the property-holders because they, in turn, represent the whole of society, directly or indirectly.⁴

As for the natural rights which are, supposedly, the foundation of democracy, and from which democracy follows as a logical corollary, Bagehot followed Burke implicitly in holding that they are a fiction. Nothing in politics is "natural" or fixed, that is, nothing is unchanging that touches human

4. See ibid., III, pp. 125-33.

beings. He insists on a reference to the facts at hand, stoutly attacks any talk of general principles. At one point he tells us plainly that Burke was the first successfully to show that a priori reasoning in politics is false, and of course, he implies that there can only be an empirical recognition of the phenomena of any situation to determine the course of government.⁵ We cannot depend on rights to suggest policy, because, as Aristotle long ago taught, rights are not inherent in man, but are granted to him by society, usually through the medium of government. But Bagehot was pretty sure that an advanced political society like that of England needed only a minimum of interference on the part of the state's agent. His conservatism was an outgrowth of a worship of the social fabric, which Burke regarded as sacred because of its divine end. There is, however, more of the rationalist in Bagehot: his conservatism is in part anti-intellectual, in part a conviction that thought, though weak in reforming society, is useful in combating radical fanaticism. He wanted, for the most part, to steer a safe middle course between the arbitrary rule of an aristocracy with nothing to do but impose its will on the rest of society, and the tyranny which follows placing power in the hands of the politically incompetent, that is, the proletariat. But as we began to show immediately above, Bagehot was libertarian as well as conservative. He believed in freedom of thought and freedom of speech, at least up to the point where

5. See the Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, Works, I, pp. 98, 107-108.

the airing of certain opinions is dangerous to the welfare of the group, which point is determined by the collective wisdom of that group; and of course, he had an almost religious faith in the virtues of a laissez-faire economy.⁶ Freedom of thought is necessary because truth can only be reached through a process of trial and error; the truth is not fixed and immutable, and man's ability to apprehend it is infinitely various and ever-changing. Like most nineteenth-century proponents of freedom of thought and speech, he got little beyond the position implied in Milton's Areopagitica.⁷

It is easy to discover now a connection between Bagehot's fondness for "dull" men in government and his distrust of system-making. The clever fellow, full of vague theories and exciting principles, and skilful with logic, is as dangerous in government as an ignoramus who follows only his prejudices. Parliamentary dullness is a good sign of health in the community: all sound business is dull because the transactions are familiar, the various departments are functioning harmoniously, and there are no difficulties or antagonisms to arouse the feelings of those involved. In periods of peace and happiness the community spirit is dormant; great political strife is a sign of trouble, anxiety, and conflict. The English Parliament is a debating society, endlessly discussing

6. For the latter point see especially "The Currency Monopoly", ibid., VIII, pp. 146, 147-48.

7. For an excellent discussion of Bagehot's "conservative libertarianism" see Brinton, op. cit., pp. 185-89, 196-98.

the "national sums" in public, busily manufacturing laws to fit commonplace problems. Parliament's task should be dull and routine business; in it eloquence gives way to minute exposition, and debate becomes agreement on understandable situations.⁸ It is impossible for England to use the dictatorial type of statesman, or the world conqueror, who must command to exist. The essence of English government, as of all English social existence, is discussion, explanation, compromise, quiet and rational controversy along legal lines. The primary condition of free government is persuasion of the average man; to this end a statesman must understand the details of average life, and he must never express the profound thoughts of genius to which the national mind could never catch up. The man in the street must be led; he can be led only by the things he understands; ergo, neither despotism nor genius has any place in English government.⁹ There is a further difference between the philosopher and the politician. Men never think if they can help it, most of them preferring to act, and the politician is no different from the rest of his fellows. His aim is to escape from the oppressive burden of thought and at the same time to avoid an indecorous rush of activity; he accomplishes both by the simple expedient of adhering to the "pomp of order", to a rigid, complicated, and largely irrational pattern of meeting and discharging the tasks before him.

8. "Dull Government", Works, IX, pp. 239-43.

9. "Average Government", ibid., IX, pp. 244-48.

Another device is to hold an opinion on all things, imposing on himself the requirement that he have an answer ready for all questions, thus freeing himself from the necessity of thinking of an answer to one. In conclusion, we find that further conditions of free government are continuous activity and elaborate ritual, both of which inspire confidence and a sense of security.¹⁰

Truth is not exciting and common sense is not clever as far as Bagehot is concerned. We might scoff at the cynicism which seems so apparent in the foregoing summary, but whether we intend to ridicule or applaud, we must look a little further into the foundation of this liking for a dull government as it checks over the "national sums" in moving from problem to problem, safe from the vague fancies of philosophers. This is Burke applied with a vengeance, but there is much good sense under it all. To begin with, Bagehot had no notions of suggesting that his variety of sound politics be used by every other state in the world: political devices must fit the national character; what is good for England may be absurd for America, and certainly it is absurd for France, as he himself was quick to point out. Free government, after all, demands unity and discipline on the part of society, and more than these, a quiet recognition that compromise is necessary at every turn, for if an idea is to work, the author must be willing to give a little that it may coincide with the ideas of others in the

10. "Thinking Government", ibid., IX, pp. 249-53.

competition of the marketplace. The Englishman has a peculiar genius for this sort of thing. In a shocking and celebrated passage of the Letters on the French Coup d'Etat Bagehot explained that free government survived in England because the Briton has a native talent for stupidity; like his governors, he is dull, busy getting the job done and never asking questions. Liberty requires a "stupid" and conscientious attention to the petty details of business and trade and raising a family. The Englishman is stolid, unemotional, and "anchored", and as a result, he wins the money and the empire while the clever Frenchman chops logic in his Chamber, unmindful that a scoundrel has just taken over the government in an effort to establish order.¹¹ Now of course anyone knows that the Englishman is just as clever in his way as the Frenchman in his (what better example could we find than Bagehot himself?), and that a really stupid people, in the orthodox sense of the word, would be incapable of anything but the goose-step. What Bagehot means, in his youthful flippancy, is simply this: the English people naturally practice forbearance and common sense, and devote themselves to maintaining and using a traditional morality. As Leslie Stephen once suggested, this stupidity is merely an outrageous term for a pragmatic temperament; it is "invaluable just so far as it involves a tacit demand that theories should be checked by plain practical application."¹²

11. Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, ibid., I, pp. 101-103, 106.*

12. Stephen, Sir L.: "Walter Bagehot", Studies of a Biographer, 4 vols., N. Y. and London, 1902, vol. III, p. 171.

In addition to his faculty for keeping both feet on earth and his mind on routine, the Englishman possesses another characteristic which fits him for free government. We have seen that Bagehot, like Burke, held that the politically intelligent are the best representatives of opinion as a whole, and that the politically intelligent are, for the most part, the aristocracy of wealth and industry - not, let us remember, the hereditary aristocracy. But the average man, the typical member of the middle and working classes, must be convinced that his opinions are being represented by the fellows who pay him, from whose ranks he periodically elects members to the House of Commons. He is thus convinced by the traditional organization of English society, and as a result, he exhibits a deference to the chosen few who lead the multitude to the end of its best interests. The blind worship of one class for its betters was of immense importance to Bagehot, and he believed that it ought to be maintained throughout all levels of society. The owners of the instruments of production, he realized, have more power than a dozen Houses of Lords. Through the second Reform Bill of 1867 the majority of the lower classes acquired more political power than their employers previously possessed; each however, exhibits a characteristic deference to the class immediately above it. So long as this situation obtains, Bagehot thought, the broadening of industrial wealth and political power would not be likely to result in the worst of all evils, "the supremacy of ignorance over instruc-

tion and of numbers over knowledge".¹³ So long as the intellectual aristocracy remains intellectual and governs as an aristocracy, the dangers of material "progress" and the extension of the franchise may be avoided. We return once more to Burke, whose theories came to form the beginning, middle, and end of Bagehot's philosophic attitude toward political institutions. He did not, like his master, regard the state as shaped to the divine end of society, which is to approach God; he did, nevertheless, feel that the state is determined in part by the end of social endeavor, indeed, his view was secular where Burke's was religious. As Aristotle believed, two thousand years before him, the end of society is to produce virtuous men. The state, though it may be libertarian, is the highest embodiment of this ambition. The state's efforts are directed only partly to the utilitarian demands of social business; they are aimed at moral discipline as well. Our task is now to determine how well this philosophy stood up in the face of the concrete realities of Bagehot's day.

2.

The theory of dullness did not coincide too well with the growing spirit of free inquiry, in Bagehot and in the England of his time, although it agreed with the antipathy of

13. The English Constitution, Works, V, p. 127; on deference see ibid., pp. 131-33.

both to system and dogma. In the political, economic, and sociological writings we see him coming more and more to adopt the scientific viewpoint and to reveal the scientist's objectivity and rationalism in his awareness of and sensitivity to facts. To determine this it is best to examine the major political writings in both topical and chronological order. Bagehot's liberalism, we have seen, was fundamentally a readiness to adapt his political viewpoint to the changing conditions of social evolution - much more ready, actually, than Burke's professed empiricism - so long as it did not have to countenance a universal extension of the franchise. Liberalism he had at one time regarded as the only intelligent attitude in modern society, and he held pretty consistently to this belief after he had granted himself the right to make his own definitions.¹⁴ In general he believed that the day of high-handed and arbitrary action on the part of government was over: modern society had become so complex that only patient discussion in Parliament could solve its many problems. We must not forget, however, that patient discussion in the legislative chambers is the reward only of a people fit for free government - that is, Englishmen. In the face of this, we may be shocked at Bagehot's first excursion into political writing, the Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, but on closer inspection we find it quite understandable, if subject to considerable question.

14. See the discussion of "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", supra, ch.iii, sec.1.

Young and inexperienced though he was, and writing in a flip-pant, cynical style designed primarily to exasperate the orthodox, he revealed an extraordinary measure of understanding of the French temperament and the recent events of French history.

Through the "bloodless revolution" of 1848 a reasonably strong government was established in France, the result largely of a coalition between Republicans and Rightists against the Socialists. The legislative power was lodged in a single assembly, the executive in a President elected for four years without possibility of re-election. There were reasonable hopes for peace and security, but they lasted only a short while. The constant struggle between the Right and the Left, within the Chamber and without, materially contributed to the complete ruin of trade, while an unwise tax on land alienated the peasants. In the election of December, 1848, a congeries of vague and conflicting hopes settled on Louis Napoleon, a Caesar who employed democratic language, who promised freedom of education, and to whom both the peasants and the middle class looked for order and some redress of their wrongs. He was elected by an overwhelming majority, but faced, as usual, a heterogeneous and strife-ridden assembly.

Louis' first task was the appeasement and reconciliation of hostile factions. He sent an expedition to Rome designed to re-establish the Pope after his exile by Garibaldi and Mazzini, thus gratifying the Catholics; he chose his first

ministers from among the moderate Republicans, thus reconciling the popular party to his regime. But the new President was a shrewd opportunist, and events began to play into his hands. Instead of preventing Austrian intervention in central Italy, General Oudinot, in command of the papal expedition, attacked the Roman Republic. This aroused the Republicans of the Mountain, who for their pains were disastrously defeated, and their leaders dispersed. Louis Napoleon had now only to get control of education. The shameful Falloux Law of 1850 was ostensibly designed to free it; in reality the statute handed it over to the Catholic Church, which move promptly and disastrously destroyed the intellectual emancipation won by the blood of the Revolution. With a solid majority, the President next attacked universal suffrage; he succeeded in depriving the working classes of the franchise by the domiciliary qualification, thus discharging the Socialists from power. The few remaining Republicans came next. By a Machiavellian plan of masterly cleverness, Louis exploited the antagonism between Republicans and Monarchists, and events again played into his hands. The final opportunity came when the Republicans of the Mountain refused the Chamber the right to call out the troops, which foolish act resulted in the disarming of the legislature. The President took advantage of this turn by immediately dissolving the assembly and restoring for a second time universal suffrage. The wisdom of going to

the people was apparent, for both the peasants and the middle class distrusted the Chamber. The arrest of the party leaders followed, and a final election conferred on Louis Napoleon dictatorial powers for ten years, which space of time he eventually extended to twenty. The Second Empire was established in December, 1851.

It was at this point that Bagehot entered the drama of intrigue and violence in France. The economic conditions of the country were miserable: all around him were the evidences of ruined trade, of financial and political insecurity. It was the perfect setting for the rise of a Caesar, and Bagehot was convinced that only a Caesar could help the situation. In a series of articles printed in the Inquirer during January and February, 1852, marked by a reckless cynicism and a breezy, devil-may-care kind of humor, he applauded Louis Napoleon's capture of the state, praised the Roman Catholic Church, condemned the free press in France, and denounced public education. He showed no sympathy for the great body of humanity, little care for the significance of their social problems. As a record of fact, the Letters on the Coup d'Etat are a fresh and stimulating account of a historical event, a masterpiece of provocative if hardly objective reporting of certain characteristics of the French press and French society. Philosophically considered, the Letters are an application to concrete problems of two basic tenets in Burke's doctrine: one, self-

preservation is the first law of societies, that is, the social fabric must at all costs be saved from destruction; and the other, government must be adapted to the national character. A logical corollary follows: if a tyrant, though unscrupulous, maintains political power, then the situation which aided his rise and helps to maintain his position must be thoroughly bad. This was partly the case with France in 1851, where radical idealists and brilliant logicians refused to admit that politics is a practical business best handled in a practical way. In short, they were the sort who talked instead of trying to get the job done.

Let us examine Bagehot's arguments in greater detail. The political and ethical justification of Louis Napoleon's despotic government rests on the fact that the French people looked for revolution in 1852, and feared the political extremes of socialism and Proudhon's "anarchy". The result was that they spent no money, and trade shortly reached a point of complete stagnation. But industry and commerce are necessary to the preservation of society: after all, they serve to keep people alive, and much must be sacrificed, particularly vague notions like liberty and equality, to preserve them. Louis thus saved France from insecurity, violence, and possibly famine. It is absurd to suppose that the English system of government is perfect and to be imitated everywhere; it is completely false to suppose that there are immutable rights of man,

everywhere the same, and to be respected in the same way by all governments. The elemental fact is the need for preserving society, that is, in this context, for preserving the economic organization of society, and if free government cannot do it, then dictatorship must. The experiment with free government in France was sixty years old when Bagehot wrote the Letters, and it had been a failure for most of that time. The obvious conclusion is that the French character is not adapted to a parliamentary political organization. That character is distinguished by "mobility", levity, and inconsistency, by a tendency to be absorbed in the existing emotion and the transient impulse. The French readily sacrifice old habits and traditions to present emergencies; their ideas and feelings are evanescent, their temperament sensitive and responsive. Absorbed by the surface of life, they are excellent in conversation, poor in hard thinking. All this one may see best in their literature. The French Chamber is comparable to a Commons of Disraelis. The legislature, the authors, the people, even the Church, exhibit this characteristic, "the same morbid appetite for exhaustive and original theories, the desire to teach rather than to learn".¹⁵ In politics every writer and every deputy has his theory, every theory its following, every following its disciples who found different theories; and they all conflict, all are blown by the winds of political passion. An executive of lasting strength and

15. Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, of 1851, Works, I, p.110.

independence, with a good constitution to guide him - and this is perfectly compatible with parliamentary and ministerial government - is the only solution. Louis Napoleon, his Corps Legislatif, and his Constitution provide the answer. The philosophy outlined here, with which few could quarrel, may be summed up in Bagehot's concluding sentence: "I have designed to prove to you that...only such a degree of liberty and democracy be granted to the French nation, as is consistent with the consolidated existence of the order and tranquility which are...essential to rational freedom and civilized society."¹⁶

All this is very admirable, and a candid intelligence must accept it; but we have of necessity to record the melancholy fact that Bagehot's thesis and Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat may not be the same thing. Under the Second Empire, through the efforts of Louis and his Corps, the French found security, but also injustice; they found prosperity, but they found it ephemeral; through the new strong government they were brought peace, but also disastrous defeat in war; through the new education they learned discipline, but also bigotry; in the end they got order, but tyranny with it. Clearly they sacrificed too much for industry and commerce and social unity. On the other hand, however, we have the tragic end of the Third Republic as another lesson: its unparalleled annihilation at the hands of the German armies in 1940. Bage-

16. Ibid., I, p. 128; Letters, pp. 77-137.

hot was partly right and partly wrong, and the fact that there was another side to Louis Napoleon's government prompted him to write an Economist article in 1865, following a second visit to Paris, in which he examined the less admirable aspects of the counter-revolt under the title "Caesarism as it Existed in 1865". Like Caesar, he wrote, Napoleon III is a democratic despot, a Benthamite tyrant who governs for the greatest good of the greatest number. Under his smoothly functioning bureaucracy French industry flourishes as never before, bringing wealth and material welfare to the citizens of the empire. But it has done nothing to refine or to cultivate the people: freedom of speech and thought are put down; the intelligence of the educated minority can never reach the popular level because the channels through which it could flow are closed. Government assumes its own perfection, and there is no discussion of its merits or defects. The worst misfortune, however, is the concentration of power in an industrial despotism, making corruption inevitable (it is curious that this is the only evil which Bagehot could foresee). Further, Louis Napoleon's dictatorship, like all of them, makes no provision for the future: the credit of the nation depends entirely on the soundness of the present government, which is Louis himself¹⁷. The French grew restless under this new regime, and eventually the fear of tyranny and injustice became as bad for the national welfare as the fear of insecurity before it.

17. "Caesarism as it Existed in 1865", Works, IV, pp. 316-22.

With both sides of the subject before us, we are in a better position to examine the application of Burke's doctrines to the history of the Second Empire. There is no question about the fact that society seeks always to preserve itself; and wherever there is a possibility of its being destroyed, or of losing its independent identity, it will turn to almost any device which promises hope of salvation. Since discipline and unity are necessary to the preservation of society, which in itself demands cooperation, these characteristics must be imposed from without if they do not exist within. If we assume that society provided the individual with what rights and benefits he possesses, it follows that the individual's welfare is not the primary concern where the welfare of the community is in question. To secure this well-being, men have devised several institutions, among them, government, which is an agent functioning in the name of state sovereignty, but is not necessarily sovereign itself. Now this is very different from the statement that society will, or must, sanction tyrannical exploitation to any length simply to save itself from the destructive forces of absolute insecurity. Questions regarding the extent and nature of the government's power may be reduced to two fundamental issues: first, what is the reason for governmental power? and second, will that power be used well or harmfully? The answer to the first is a pragmatic one: government exists as a measure to improve the happiness

of mankind. The second answer is involved in the first: if it is to benefit its citizens, then obviously the citizens are to determine whether they are being benefited or not. To say that the state represents society in its total moral aspiration to reach God, and is therefore inviolable, as is the social fabric - to say this is to be somewhat beside the point. The end of government is the happiness of the individual, that is, the release of the individual spirit so that it may enjoy, through understanding and control, the world around it. Government, therefore, imposes certain disciplines and allows certain freedoms, depending on the time, the nature of the people it governs, and the extent of danger to the state. Government - which is what Burke meant by the state - is far from inviolable: quite the opposite, it is subject to change without notice, for its existence depends on how well it satisfies the needs of the people. The question concerning Louis Napoleon's coup is not whether society is to be maintained at any cost, but whether Napoleon III's government is more or less of a benefit to the people than the government before it. It was not less, but it was plainly not more in the long run. Good government should represent the whole of society. If it does not, then God must wait: the organization of the state will have to be changed, and if necessary, radically changed.

 Holders of power are notoriously untrustworthy; consequently, if the government's power is to be useful, it must be subject to control. To choose between anarchy and tyranny is a

tragic dilemma, but the only way to prevent either is to see that the control of government is so complete that society can never go to an extreme in either direction. The French, by allowing Louis Napoleon to hold almost all political power, had well-nigh ended their means of insuring that the state act for their benefit; and what was much worse, they had played into the hands of an industrial despotism which, when allied with the government, produces the vicious extreme of materialistic tyranny which we find in Nazi Germany. If the government is not answerable to the people, however benevolent its intentions may be, it simply cannot govern in the popular interest. Questions of control and representation may be debated endlessly; they are details of practice, mechanical devices, which are the problems of practical state-makers. We are concerned here with the basic fact that government must be representative of all social forces in the ratio of their importance within the context of the group organization, and this is perhaps one of Burke's greatest contributions to political philosophy. Bagehot should have seen that the abrogation of all methods of social control destroys the possibility of the government's representative power in two ways: first, because it has no call to be sensitive to social needs; second, because there is nothing to prevent it from acting the way it pleases, which is usually toward self-aggrandizement. In England questions of control and representation were matters of serious interest to Bagehot; he was not a

romantic fellow like Edmund Burke, and he wanted to bring representation out of the clouds of sacred tradition down to the hard earth of parliamentary practice. This ought to be our next consideration.

The whole question of representation is carefully discussed in two long and detailed essays, "Parliamentary Reform" and "The History of the Unreformed Parliament, and its Lessons", both written at comparatively early dates, in 1859 and 1860 respectively. The two essays are remarkable for their careful conclusions, based on the examination of a mass of statistical data, most of it probably inhumanly dull. Bagehot apparently spared no effort in reviewing all the electoral returns he could get hold of, paying particularly close attention to the record from 1832 to 1857, that is, from the Reform Bill to the last year of available statistics. He begins by reviewing with approbation the beneficial legislation within this period. He feels that the great Reform, which initiated it, was valuable, not only because it made this legislation possible, but also because it transferred influence in the government from special classes to the general aggregate of intelligent people. The opening is good liberalism, but the leanings toward the doctrine of the old Rockingham Whigs soon become apparent. The constructive suggestions in the essay are thoroughly sound; it is when Bagehot begins to oppose the plain trend of English government in his day that his opinions are subject to criticism. His praise of

the Reform Bill of 1832 is offset by his condemnation of tendencies manifesting themselves in the Reform of 1867. There are two defects, he thinks, in Parliament's representation of national opinion: one, the preponderance of land-owning interests, the result of most county members being big land-holders; the other, the inadequate representation of the growing part of the national culture, that is, the industrial and commercial. This situation, as Burke taught him, undermines the first requisite of a good legislature, which is to be a true representative of all social opinion. By not expressing adequately the needs and desires of industrial England the capitalist classes hold a minimum of political power, wholly out of proportion to their economic power, while the laboring classes have no political power at all. More important still, the aristocracy of wealth cares little about a direct influence in the government, yet this is the class to which the poor look as superior guides.¹⁸

The problem of giving the laboring class adequate representation reduces itself to two aspects of a dilemma: either it must be given little influence in all constituencies, which makes the group a perpetual minority; or it must be given a large influence in a few constituencies, which lays the foundation for democracy. There follows a long and careful discussion of various plans proposed to remedy the situation, some of which are incontinently rejected, others considered at

18. See the discussion of "deference", supra, ch. iv, sec. 1.

length and in detail; but the conclusion is always the above dilemma, from which there seems to be no escape. Bagehot is sure that the working class must have some recognition, if only that it may resist oppression and have political voice for its particular opinions; on the other hand, he is equally sure that to extend the franchise to all members of that class is to invite the danger of placing political power below political capacity. The superiority in numbers of the working class means that its enfranchisement would practically result in the disfranchisement of its betters. But he finally suggests several devices, one or all of which might be employed to solve the problem: the establishment of suburban constituencies; a differentiation between local fixed property and non-local transferable property; the so-called "minority principle", by which the minority can elect a candidate under certain conditions depending on number of members of the constituency and number of votes per member;¹⁹ and the "cumulative vote", whereby the electors may give all votes to one candidate, rather than distribute them among several. We have here an example of the thoroughness with which Bagehot went about the business of considering representation; his conclusion, however, is little more than a repetition of the initial viewpoint - which may be good essay writing, but not good politics. But he was aware of one highly significant fact, namely, that the capitalist classes in England tend to side with the demo-

19. See "Parliamentary Reform", Works, III, pp. 138-41, 169-71.

ocratic elements because they have not political power commensurate with their wealth - a shrewd recognition of the fact that capitalism in its youth is compatible with democracy, in its maturity, as at present, antagonistic to it. At the end he summarizes the whole matter in a single sentence: The present need is "to enlarge the influence of the growing parts of the nation...; to augment the influence of the capitalist classes, but to withstand the pernicious theories which some of them for the moment advocate; to organize an expression for the desires of the lower orders, but to withstand even the commencement of a democratic revolution."²⁰

Before discussing the question critically we must review further aspects of Bagehot's theory of representation in "The History of the Unreformed Parliament". This essay is another example of its author's talent for history: it is a careful and detailed exposition of parliamentary representation in the eighteenth century, revealing, more than anything else, an intelligent use of the scanty statistics available and a broad and thorough acquaintance with the best quality of statesmanship at the time. It is a scientifically written history, in which no conclusions are drawn without an adequate review of whatever facts are on hand to support them. As to the justice of these conclusions, there is considerable question; but

20. Ibid., p.164; essay, pp.108-76. Bagehot's anti-democratic prejudice did not lead him to exclude woman suffrage from the final settlement. He offers cogent argument for its existence (largely, it is true, on the ground that he can find no argument against it) in an excellent little essay written for the Economist; see "The Suffrage for Women", ibid., IX, pp.67-70.

there can none as to the fact that every effort is made to have them empirically derived. One suspects, however, that Bagehot's predilection for government by and for the enlightened minority was frequently added to the material at hand to support an inference. He begins with a description of enfranchisement in the eighteenth century and of the method by which it worked, in the course of which he repeats his unshakable conviction that national opinion in England is the opinion of the best informed minority. The difficulties encountered in trying to establish a just qualification for the vote were numerous in the days of Walpole and Pitt, but they would not have been insurmountable had the Whig land-holders been willing to make any concessions. There is a careful consideration of the whole problem, concluding with the view that the final settlement, the granting of the suffrage to what amounted to the Whig "squirearchy", was as good as any other system and probably the best for the time if only because it gave the voting power to the most intelligent class of that time, that is, the higher gentry and the nobility. But Bagehot, let us remember, had no intention of suggesting that the franchise in the days of Pitt would have been suitable for the age of Gladstone, or even that of Lord Eldon. He had little more than contempt for the Tory regime of the forty years preceding the Reform Bill.

The method of suffrage employed in the eighteenth century, which Bagehot concludes was good, he tests by answering to his

own satisfaction the three basic questions concerning the adequacy of representation: first, did the old system represent the views of all classes? second, did it secure a strong administration? and third, did it provide capable statesmen? Bagehot's answer is affirmative in each case save the second. The old system gave expression to all classes that required expression, omitting the working class and the small tradesmen on the ground that they had no opinions to express! Further, any power of vote granted to these groups would have been bad because it would have laid the basis of corruption by enfranchising the corruptible. The quality of statesmanship in the eighteenth century, at least on the higher levels, was sound largely because the methods of free government tend inevitably to call out the potential greatness of anyone possessing it; on the lower levels, however, there were many second-rate men, the result of the closed borough, in which the members were slaves to the opinion of the proprietor. The question of strength of administration, of course, can be answered only in the negative, as anyone knows who recalls, for example, the struggle with the American colonies; and if it had not been for Pitt, George III would have stood an excellent chance of losing the rest of his empire. Corruption, according to Bagehot, was at the root of it: purchase of votes by ministers with the King's patronage led only to antagonism between Crown and Cabinet; strength of majority in Parliament was unstable because it depended entirely on how the minister's cause looked, and it usually looked doubtful. The whole thing can

be summed up with the statement that patronage, immense, all-pervading, and dishonest, sapped the strength of every branch of government. But still the system of representation was sound.²¹

Bagehot's opinion that the franchise in the eighteenth century was justly distributed because it allowed expression to all classes with something to express and because it provided a high calibre of statesmanship can hardly pass unchallenged. First of all, we can seriously doubt whether the classes represented always had an expressible opinion. Between Squire Western and the Tory Fox-hunter there was not very much of what we would call political intelligence; the truth is, in fact, that outside of London and Edinburgh, England and Scotland in the age of Swift and Johnson was not particularly literate, excepting, of course, diligent reading of Holy Writ. In addition to this, representation even up to the Reform Bill, in spite of the Constitution of 1688, was the fruit of a medieval reaction under Henry VI; it was a political device left unchanged for four hundred years, while the whole character of English social and economic institutions was transformed again and again. The inadequacy of representation in England, especially from 1750 to 1832, was extreme. The situation which had developed was typical of the aftermath of revolution or of radical change comparable to it in effect: the Constitution as it emerged in 1688 was regarded

²¹. "The History of the Unreformed Parliament, and Its Lessons", Works, III, pp. 222-71.

as the last word in political achievements, with the result that the liberal who helped to make it very soon became the conservative who worshipped it to the exclusion of all suggestions for reform. The eighteenth century, as historian George Macaulay Trevelyan has said, was simply a gloss or commentary on the principles of the "Glorious Revolution", which came to be the sacred and inviolable Decalogue of all political thinkers in the century following them. Yet under the surface of give and take in Parliament and Cabinet, immense and far-reaching changes were occurring in the economic organization of society. The so-called Industrial Revolution was beginning to transform the whole fabric of English social institutions, but the government, if it was aware of such changes, safely ignored them. The French Revolution brought a storm of reaction in England which served only to make matters worse. By ignorantly flying in the face of doctrines like the rights of man and the equalitarianism of the Revolution - romantic though they were - British statesmen were deliberately refusing to recognize the necessity of radical change in the machinery of government and representation. This stupid prejudice touched even the greatest, as Burke eloquently proves. Government is not a receptacle for vague traditions of romance and chivalry; it is a method for maintaining harmony among social forces, and as such, it is based on fact. To say that there was no need to give expression to the opinions of the working and industrial classes because they had no opinions to express

is to indulge in sophistry of the worst kind, to exhibit a scholasticism totally opposed to the doctrine that policy is determined by the situation of the moment. In this case Bagehot's anti-democratic prejudice was not much better than the bigotry of Lord Eldon and his kind. The simple fact is that government in the eighteenth century did not represent English society.

As for the fact that the period at least produced intelligent men to sit in the legislative and ministerial chambers, we can oppose or applaud it only by agreeing on what constitutes intelligent statesmanship. Bagehot apparently followed the precept of the Greek poet, οὐδεμίον πῶ, κυρὸν ἄγαθοι πόλιν ὠλεσα ἄνθρωποι, but the question is, what can a statesman do either positively to improve the policy of government or to administer that policy with justice and utility. Aside from the philosophic genius of Burke, the executive genius of Chatham, and the greatness of the ill-used Fox, the latter half of the eighteenth century in politics was certainly not an edifying period. There is no need here to review the faction and strife, the selfishness and chicanery and double-dealing which made the reign of George III a mockery of good government. The King devoted himself to maintaining a selfish autocracy; his ministers knew no loyalty but to private ambition; the men in Parliament knew none but to party, and party knew none but to gold. From the wooded hills at Fort Du Quesne to the swamps of the Ganges delta the octopus of corruption spread its tentacles. The in-

telligence of men like Pitt, Fox, and Burke was of the very highest order, yet with the exception of Pitt, none seemed able to accomplish the task of rendering government a benefit to its citizens instead of a burden; and to offset these three and very few others approaching them there were hosts of power-seekers like Pulteney and Carteret and Grenville, ministries and high party positions controlled by nonentities like North or by well-meaning but ineffective fellows like Rockingham, bureaus peopled by grafters and ignoramuses. We may hasten again to the conclusion: there was plainly something wrong with representation in the eighteenth century.

We are now in a position to consider Bagehot's doctrine of political representation in its entirety, and the obvious place to begin is where he himself does, that is, with the question, what is a government supposed to represent? He tells us that it should represent the opinions of society, and that it can best represent the whole social opinion by giving expression to that of the politically intelligent minority. The choice of the word opinion is a little misleading, but he doubtless meant what he said, inasmuch as it is opinion which finds its voice in the medium of parliamentary debate. The important thing, however, is what that opinion stands for, and we may say here that it stands for certain cultural forces in society manifesting themselves in industry, trade, finance, art, learning, and otherwise. Now according to Burke, and Bagehot of course agreed with him, good government gives political expression to all the interests or forces of society, and the

best way to insure this is to give a voice to the intelligent opinion in the social organization. This is unfortunately an oversimplification. It is impossible for even the most intelligent group in society to express the needs of all the groups and classes which make up a modern, complex state; furthermore, it is utterly absurd to suppose that the property-holder, for example, is identifiable with this intelligent group. We can see why this is, but we shall have to speak briefly and consequently in general terms.

Government represents the social forces (or interests, if we choose to use the term) in any territorial unity which we call the state. The state, then, is marked by a struggle for political, social, and economic power on the part of a number of groups within the society. One of these groups may become a dominating power, thus setting up a series of relationships in the state which stand until another group seizes power; but obviously, if this continued for very long, society would be exhausted by an anarchic struggle exhibiting itself in a parade of revolutions, for no one group will long tolerate the exploitation or even dominance of another. The task of a liberal government, consequently, is to "rationalize" this constant struggle, that is, to render it harmonious so that human energy flows along constructive channels. We can see this more clearly if we look at the group pattern of society, and we may take the present-day United States as an example. First there are broad horizontal divisions, reducible ultimately to three: the owners of the instruments of production; those

with wit enough to be paid for what they know, the bulk of the population, or middle class; and those who have nothing to sell save their ability to do physical work, that is, the laboring class. These horizontal divisions are broken by a great many vertical entities, of which we can name only a few: big industrial corporations, big utilities like the railroads and power companies, small independent producers, farmers, professional workers, banking and insurance institutions, churches, art and educational groups, government business ventures like the postal service and the T.V.A., labor unions, and many others. To represent the intelligent minority in any one of these vertical divisions, for example, property-holders, means little more than the representation of the prejudices and economic ambitions of that group. If they know anything about labor unions or the Tennessee Valley Authority, it takes the form of antagonistic prejudice or misunderstanding. They will demand a political settlement based on maintaining social relationships suitable to their desires and to their needs for keeping themselves in power. And the same for the members of any other group. It is the business of government to give adequate political expression to all these different components of the state in the measure of their relative importance, to the end that they may work smoothly together and maintain the dynamic harmony necessary to a living society. This explains the inconsistency in

Burke and the obsolescence of Bagehot's doctrine. Empirical and liberal government is fundamentally at odds with government of, for and by the so-called upper class.

3.

The application of Burke's philosophy to the groundwork of the whole English government in its nineteenth-century setting is the burden of Bagehot's long and elaborate treatise on the English Constitution, the first edition of which was published in 1867, a second during its author's life, in 1872. The English Constitution is the best known of his works, and with the exception of Physics and Politics, his greatest contribution to social theory. His examination of the Constitution is strictly scientific; consequently he sees it for what it is, a collection of principles the reverse of fact, an "organized hypocrisy" which has the immense value of inspiring loyalty because it is the political embodiment of ancient and honorable, if irrational, traditions. But the fundamental doctrine which provides a basis for observation is, unfortunately, not so scientific. It is Bagehot's variation on Edmund Burke: placing the vote in the hands of the multitude is dangerous because it is placing political power below the level of political capacity; a cabinet and parliamentary government whose chief officers and legislators are members of a natural aristocracy (as opposed to Burke's hereditary) is possible because "stupidity" enables the English people to be led, and "defer-

ence" prompts them to accept the leadership of their betters. In addition to the philosophic substructure, Bagehot took certain ideas about the Constitution from the writings of others, notably John de Lolme's Constitution of England and John Stuart Mill's Representative Government. We shall look further into this relationship when we come to the particular ideas which depend on it. The debt to Burke has become familiar enough by now, and we shall pursue it no further.

The introduction to The English Constitution (written for the second or 1872 edition) is concerned chiefly with the difficulties of treating a subject which is constantly changing and which changed considerably between 1865 and 1872 - largely because of the second Reform Bill of 1867; with a review of the evolution of English society during the past forty years, resulting in considerable changes to the Constitution; and finally, with the usual warning against democratic tendencies and dogmatic interpretations, summed up in the author's pronouncement, "I have for practical purposes no belief in unvarying rules".²² The rest of the introduction is devoted to a rapid survey of certain ideas elaborated in the body of the work, and to the condemnation of the primary characteristics of the French and American Constitutions.²³ And although irrelevant to the present problem, the financial policy of the American

22. The English Constitution, Works, V, p. 130.

23. Bagehot's congenital distaste for politics in the United States is considered in connection with the essay on the American Constitution; see infra, ch. iv, sec. 3.

government is briefly examined and loftily disposed of.²⁴

These prejudices against the United States continue throughout the second section, on the Cabinet, and appear sporadically in the following, but aside from this, the material from the beginning on is highly rewarding. Bagehot lines up the artillery and without more ado opens fire on the ancient errors that have accumulated in the Englishman's mind concerning his venerable Constitution. The worst of these errors are two, that every part of the Constitution represents real power, and that there is within it a series of devices known as "checks and balances", which prevent the usurpation of all power by any one department of government. Bagehot quickly points out the truth.

The English Constitution, like most of any importance, has two parts: one, the method of gaining authority; the other, the method of using it. Since every society has at bottom a majority of the ignorant and stupid, it is necessary to have in the charter of government elements of the mystic and the ideal which seem above the ephemerality of human affairs. To keep loyalty, then, a constitution must keep what is venerable because the old most easily excites reverence and obedience in common men. This is the "dignified" part of the machinery, and it provides the power which the "efficient" part uses. The dignified elements contain no real power; logically, they are meaningless, but they serve admirably to maintain social dis-

24. "Introduction", sec.1, Engl. Const., Works, V, pp.116-59.

cipline.²⁵ The important thing to practical government, however, is the effectiveness of the other half of the Constitution. The secret of that effectiveness is "the nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers".²⁶ The Cabinet provides the link; the Prime Minister is the real executive, chosen by Parliament, while the monarch is the head of the dignified or "unreal" part. In its origins the Cabinet belongs to the legislative branch, but in function it is part of the executive; thus a perfect unity of the three departments is secured, with responsibility centering in the Prime Minister. This contrasts sharply with the complete independence of the executive and legislature under the American presidential system. And the superiority of the English system is elaborated with a great deal of acumen in the rest of the section on the Cabinet.²⁷ The main argument is that in the English

25. The division into dignified and efficient parts comes from de Lolme, John Louis, The Const. of Eng., ed. by W.H. Hughes, London, 1834, pp.178,180,195; see also Irvine, op.cit., pp.251-52.

26. The Engl. Const., Works, V, p.166.

27. See the discussion of the essay, "The American Constitution", infra, ch.iv, sec.3. The fiction about checks and balances is actually based on a theoretical separation, each complete in its sphere, of Lords, Commons, and King. This is considerably beside the point: as Bagehot pointed out, the King has no real power, the Lords very little, and what they have is usually exercised on the side of the Commons. Nevertheless, the fiction as explained here persisted, largely because Locke had made an elaborate philosophic doctrine out of it. Montesquieu and the French rationalists, worshippers of Locke, took it over as a kind of divine pronouncement, beyond criticism. The makers of the American Constitution, who regarded Montesquieu as the final authority, re-adopted it and made it a real device to operate in a way that not even a theoretical separation of legislative and executive branches (i.e., Commons and Prime Minister) was ever intended to operate. Under the Constitution of U. S., there is an absolute independence of President, Court, and Congress, and a further separation of Congress and Cabinet, with the result that the action of government is impeded in a great variety of ways.

system there is a center of responsibility and a unity of action, while the choice of the most important officer (the Prime Minister) and his aids is a task of the legislature, that is, of a responsible body rather than an ignorant mob.²⁸

The Crown in a monarchical government serves the purpose of providing a symbol which the masses can understand; to them it is the essence of sovereignty, the ideal conception, always associated with a single person, which expressed the meaning of sovereignty. "Royalty", Bagehot tells us, "is a government in which the attention of a nation is concentrated on one person doing interesting actions. A Republic is a government in which that attention is divided between (sic) many, who are all doing uninteresting actions. Accordingly, so long as the human heart is strong and the human reason weak, royalty will be strong because it appeals to diffused feeling, and Republics weak because they appeal to the understanding."²⁹ With the rise of an English republic, of course, the Crown has lost more and more of its real power, until today it possesses practically none. Nevertheless, its usefulness as a symbolic point on which the popular imagination may focus is apparent:

28. "Cabinet", sec.ii, Engl. Const., Works, V, pp.159-82.

29. Engl. Const., ibid., V,p.186. The above is an exaggeration, but the element of truth may be proved by noting how the uneducated Englishman, when he complains about the government's policy, always speaks of the King; the intelligent Englishman denounces a fictitious entity called the "Government"; while the average American almost always blames the President. This phenomenon has helped to lead to the remark that England has a hereditary President, America an elective King.

it is an indefinable and rather mystic idea, the reality always aloof and retiring, calling upon a kind of religious devotion; it is the head of English morality, an embodiment of the domestic virtues projected on a plane of eternal justification. The Crown is a disguise which serves to give a show of permanence while the government behind it is changed, thus strengthening the political machine when its chief parts, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, are new and weak. The United States, according to Bagehot, can offer nothing comparable to it.³⁰ What real power the Monarch enjoyed in the period since the Revolution he briefly reviews, finding him valuable when intelligent and discerning because of his long experience in government and his disinterested attitude toward parties, and discovering him frequently of little use because of the variations in quality in successive generations and the possibility of bringing court intrigue into politics. Through his indirect control of foreign policy he can exercise wise power if he has wisdom.³¹ To talk too rationally about Monarchy would be to destroy the "magic" of the show - which would be disastrous to England, Bagehot feels.³²

The House of Lords is chiefly useful in the same way that

30. "Monarchy", Engl. Const., sec.iii, pt.1, ibid., V, pp. 182-99.

31. See in this case "The Prince Consort", ibid., IV, pp.39-40; "Lord Palmerston", ibid., IV, pp.329-33; "The Prince Consort and Lord Palmerston", ibid., IX, pp.212-17.

32. "Monarchy", sec.iii, pt.2, Engl. Const., ibid., V, pp.199-221.

the Crown is, that is, for maintaining deference and loyalty. The primary virtue of a hereditary nobility, though it be composed largely of the mentally torpid, as in England during and since Bagehot's day, is that it makes an excellent symbol of cultural superiority to which lesser folk always look up; further, a leisure class inheriting its wealth serves to mitigate the extreme worship of money and material success in an industrial society. Aside from this vague tribute, Bagehot can say little more that is good. The best cure for an admiration of the House of Lords, he tells us, is to look at it in action. Fortunately, the members have little real power; they are for the most part marked by political incompetence and irrational prejudices, characteristics of a secure land-holding class. What little value the upper House possesses lies with the fact that its legislators are usually above the pressure of party and of mercantile interests; consequently, whatever viewpoint they bring to legislation is at least an independent one. The most successful part of this discussion of the Lords is devoted to ridding minds of another old and curiously persistent error, to wit, that the Lords and Commons are equal and hence active parts of the supposed three-fold division within the government. The truth is that the Lords are subordinate to the Commoners, which is as it should be; the evil of two co-equal legislative assemblies is the danger of complete stoppage of legislation through the refusal of one or the other organization to concur. Again Bagehot offers the government at Wash-

ington as an example of ignorant error and democratic vice. His argument for the superiority of the English system, however, is decidedly thin: when the Lords refuse to concur, the King may create life peers who fall into the line of popular demand. Life peers, indeed, are a favorite with Bagehot: the whole chapter shows plainly how much more he thinks of them than of the hereditary variety.³³

With the exception of the portions devoted to the theory of checks and balances in the Constitution, the chapter on the House of Commons is the best in the whole work. He repeats here what he had already said in "Parliamentary Reform", that representation in the Commons is controlled too much by the static parts of society, agriculture and land-owning, too little by the dynamic or growing parts, industry and finance. This is its only defect, however; for the most part the Commons is the bulwark of free government and the active expression of popular will, and to prove this he offers a careful review of the functions, organization, and outlines of policy of the lower House. The summary of its functions is one of the best tributes to the shrewd political acumen of Bagehot which we have. In the first place, its main use is as an elective body choosing the Prime Minister; but it also has the power of dismissal, and consequently the relations between Commons and Minister are close and incessant. Second, the Commons serves to express, freely and accurately, the national mind. Third, it is an ex-

33. "The House of Lords", sec. iv, Engl. Const., ibid., V, pp. 221-51.

cellent teacher of politics to the nation as a whole, that is, it presents the people of the whole social group with a political picture of the needs, ambitions, and desires of all groups within it.³⁴ Fourth, the House of Commons informs the whole people of the grievances and problems of particular quarters or classes, thus preventing the extreme sectionalism which is often the curse of parliamentary government, and which, up until recently, was the most important and most difficult problem of American national legislation. Bagehot digresses here to emphasize in this context, as he does in other throughout the work, the slowness of the English mind in comprehending the new and unfamiliar. The last function of the Commons, curiously enough, is the legislative, which by position does not seem to him to be the most important.³⁵

From the general treatment of all functions Bagehot goes on to consider the results of the elective, especially the change of ministers. The discussion resolves itself largely into the question, whether change of ministry should also involve change of entire administrative personnel. The defects of fear of insecurity, the influx of inexperienced men, and the pernicious changes of policy which may result, he thinks are more than offset by the values of change: a rotation of ministers is essential in parliamentary government in order to follow and to respond to Commons through the incessant criticism

34. A great observation, but not original with Bagehot, who apparently got it from the younger Mill. See Mill, J.S., Representative Government, N.Y., 1882, pp. 115-19; also Irvine, op.cit., pp. 251-52.

35. "The House of Commons", sec.v, Engl.Const., Works.V. pp. 251-83

of minority interests, and with the new minister must come new men with fresh enthusiasms and renewed interests in the problems at hand; second, change is an inevitable characteristic of all elective governments, the evil effects of which are worse in the presidential system than in the ministerial (Civil Service in the United States took away away from Bagehot another opportunity to air his prejudices); third, it is a prerequisite of good administration because a fresh mind is not only corrective but animating. The problem of ministerial change, then, has been perfected in the English system, but nowhere else; nevertheless that system is not a model of administrative efficiency. Bagehot, who is writing an honest and searching analysis, does not hesitate to show why. His worst fear, however, is that of a bureaucracy, and this in spite of his preference for the practical and routine business mind. In a bureaucratic government, he thinks, both the citizens and the officers of the state come to feel that a complex organization of political machinery is an end in itself, and so tend to keep it long after it has ceased to provide useful functions; again, it soon evolves into "over-government" in quantity, with a horde of petty offices and officeholders which gradually come to include all aspects of social existence; and worst of all, a trained bureaucracy left to itself becomes technical, self-absorbed, self-multiplying - in a word, government by a host of "experts". The argument here, which we shall consider later, is three-fold: first, Bagehot is committed to non-interference,

political and economic, with the result that he distrusted the influence of government throughout a great part of private existence; second, he prefers government by philosophic, if practical and hard-headed, men; and third, although he may have implied the contrary many times, he does not think that government is mere "business", for it must discuss and teach as well as see to it that the job is done. In conclusion, then, the elective function of Commons should be used to supply a succession of administrators who are men of broad wisdom rather than of efficient skill, although these in turn would look chiefly for the latter quality in those beneath them.³⁶

Having reviewed in some detail the machinery of government and its uses, Bagehot then returns to consider at greater length the supposed checks and balances of the Constitution; but his conclusions remain unchanged, namely that they fortunately do not exist in the English Constitution, and do, much to its detriment, in the American. The division and separation of powers is based on a false doctrine; to attempt to give it a real operation only serves to impede the efficient action of government, sometimes to the point of disaster; the lack of an ultimate center of responsibility means that there is no office with a clear call to consider the national interests above anything else; and to sacrifice unity of action for the sake of liberty is to destroy the bulwark which protects it from its

36. "On Changes of Ministry", sec.vi, Engl.Const., ibid, V, pp. 283-314.

worst enemies, mob rule, anarchy, and group pressure, especially from minority economic interests.³⁷ Political machinery and the way it works, however, are surface details; fundamental to them is the institution of cabinet and parliamentary government, which, as Bagehot showed before, is useful only to that nation capable of having it, or in other words, disciplined enough to have it. English civilization has exhibited the characteristic curve of progress from a primitive to a civilized society, marked by the transition from monarchical through oligarchic to republican government.³⁸ It has acquired, consequently, the necessary prerequisites for elective government: mutual confidence of the electors, which arises from the civilized cooperation among and the understanding of the many different communities making up a modern nation; a calm national mind controlled by the presence of august institutions; and the kind of "popular rationality" necessary for choosing good rulers. And England in particular has acquired the prerequisites essential to cabinet government: a legislature competent to elect a sufficient administration; an "adapting" legislature, that is, one always busy adjusting law to the changing conditions of the social world; enough business to occupy the whole time of the legislature; and finally, education and little poverty so that a good law-making body may be elected, or

37. "Its Supposed Checks and Balances", sec.vii, Engl. Const., ibid., V, pp.314-39.

38. "Its History, and the Effects of that History.- Conclusion", sec.ix, Engl. Const., ibid., V, pp.352-66. The evolutionary pattern frequently does not follow this path, nor is it usually so clear; many political societies may be found which follow the curve from monarchy through democracy and oligarchy to tyranny

- as necessary in England, where poverty and stupidity are common - deference of the masses to superior social strata.³⁹

We can hardly consider critically the multiplicity of ideas and the broad philosophic groundwork which have gone into the making of The English Constitution until we examine further what Bagehot did not like in political charters, and what he did not like is contained for the most part in the American document. Six years before the first edition of his great treatise, at the beginning of the Civil War in the United States in 1861, he wrote the essay for the National Review, "The American Constitution at the Present Crisis". Aside from his attitude toward Lincoln, his position in this work, compounded of a prejudiced misunderstanding and a brilliant grasp of facts, never changed. The Civil War, he thinks, proved the fundamental weakness of the Constitution by loosing the destructive effects of Hamilton's monster, imperia in imperio. The basic cause of the War between the States is the fact that these political organizations within the nation are distinct entities, partly complete in themselves and partly subordinate members in the federal polity. Consequently, when differences between states and groups of states are extreme, as they were between North and South, there is no way of settling these differences because the head of the national government is elected by majorities in certain states on grounds which majorities in other states must reject. Extreme economic differences will

39. "The Prerequisites of Cabinet Government, and the Peculiar Form which they have Assumed in England", sec.viii, Engl. Const., ibid., V, pp. 339-52.

ultimately result in forceful resistance to measures proposed by the President but distasteful to those states which did not elect him. Bagehot proceeds quickly to what he regards the fundamental evil, the increasingly democratic complexion of American society and government.⁴⁰ In an effort to counteract rule by a mere numerical majority, and at the same time to curb the possibility of despotism from above while maintaining a property holders' government, the makers of the Constitution established system of checks and balances - "paper checks and constitutional stratagems".⁴¹ The evils of this we have already mentioned in connection with The English Constitution.

In spite of all its machinery to elect a good President, the United States gets bad executives, who are chosen for candidacy only on the basis of their potential popularity. They are safe so long as the people "have nothing against them". Worse than this, the United States can never have great statesmen in any administrative office because no one holding such an office can be a member of Congress; ergo, there can be no man, as in England, who is the accepted leader of the popular

40. Bagehot respected the conservative tradition of Washington and Chief Justice Marshall, thought the libertarianism of Jefferson false and dangerous. Amendments like the Bill of Rights, the direct election of the President, the granting of citizenship to former slaves, along with the establishment of Jacksonian democracy, turned a half-sympathy into a complete antipathy.

41. "The American Constitution", Works, III, p.371. For the origins of this phenomenon see supra, ch.iv, n.27.

assembly, since the assembly does not elect him. The difficulty reduces itself to this: the United States can never have a great President through democratic processes, and whatever Presidents the nation does get will be impeded and thwarted by a hostile Congress through the division and separation of powers. But power by nature tends to settle at some one point: if it settles in Congress, government will be a sectionalist anarchy; if it lodges itself in the Presidency, it will stay there at the expense of congressional authority.⁴² In America government is essentially rule by mob and faction, and that rule is split into three mutually distinct ways; the result is a situation of uneasy safety at best so long as times are quiet, but disastrous in the face of crisis.⁴³

In the critical discussion of the foregoing material, it may be wise to begin with particular details and progress from them to basic assumptions, noting first what is well known by this time, that the two works summarized in the foregoing pages form an empirical application of Burke's philosophy to the problems presented by the English and American Constitutions.⁴⁴ Let us dispose of the Civil War first. By putting a political

42. The unhappiest situation Bagehot little attention to, namely, that power had in his time centered and continued to stay in the Supreme Court, frequently resulting in a judge-made law which considered, after Marshall, the rights of property above the rights of humanity.

43. "The American Constitution at the Present Crisis", Works, III, pp. 349-84.

44. I use the word empirical to signify that, however Bagehot might have erred in conclusion or in assumption, he gathered evidence from an objective examination of facts.

and constitutional emphasis on this conflict, Bagehot failed to perceive its real significance. He recognized the economic differences between North and South, and the aggravation of this separation by negro slavery, but he insisted that conflict came because there was no method of settling these differences within political channels. In other words, clumsy constitutional machinery made inevitable a war which could have been prevented by peaceful arbitration in the popular assembly. Now this is very little different from saying that the English Constitution brought on the civil strife of 1642 and 1688, yet Bagehot was not prepared to admit any such thing. The American Civil War, as Mr. Charles Beard characterized it, was the second American Revolution, the inevitable consequence of obsolete political and economic institutions attempting to maintain themselves in a position of national power (although they themselves fitted only local conditions) in the face of new and growing institutions. To put it more concretely, the war was the outgrowth of a growing difference between the old feudal economy of the South, rigid, traditional, and suited only to certain types of agriculture, and the new industrial economy of the North. The simple truth is that the capitalist and industrial methods of exploiting the earth's wealth had come to supersede the ancient agricultural organization of lord, villein, and serf. This, of course, is an extreme oversimplification of a problem immensely complex and long in evolving, but at any rate it

contains an emphasis on its important causal characteristics. When the struggle for power among social groups reaches the point where one refuses to give in to another which is economically destined to survive and to expand, then conflict results. We call this forceful struggle a revolution, although we have confused the term with talk of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Bagehot, however, found democracy and a system of constitutional checks and balances at the root of the trouble; but if he had looked a little more closely at the Reform of 1832, he might have discovered that it too was the culmination of a revolutionary process which lacked only the superficial aperturances of revolt, that is, ideological radicalism and blood. The first sweeping parliamentary reform was the initial step in a series of reforms which had to come about because of the necessity for adapting the political organization of the state to its changing economic and cultural organization. The immediate question is then, why was there no war in the British commonwealth when there were disastrous wars in the United States and France? To answer this question we must examine in detail the history of the national temperaments and economic organizations of the three countries, which we can hardly do here; in the case of the English-speaking nations, however, we can labor an obvious fact by pointing out the immense geological, geographical, economic, and climatic differences between the British Isles and America. But we are concerned with what

we might call a constitutional interpretation of the problem; and even if the superiority of the English Constitution to the American were responsible for the fact that war appeared in the latter nation but not in the former, we can within the limits adopted by Bagehot point out several highly significant aspects of the change from a mercantile to an industrial society.

Legislation during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in England moved in a direction surprisingly parallel to that in the United States, with the result that the two forms of government drew ever more closely together. Now if there were enough intelligent people in England to recognize with Bagehot the virtues of their own Constitution, we might expect considerable hue and cry raised over its growing similarity to the American document. There was a good deal of alarm, of course, but only on the part of those who were committed to an older philosophy (that of the Whigs in 1832, in the case of Bagehot) and to a certain set of economic prejudices. No one can quarrel with the argument against the checks and balances which have had so pernicious an effect on the conduct of American government, and only unthinking recipients of party bounty still uphold the sacred dogma of states' rights; but the charge that the democratization of government is leading to ruin is subject to some question. Bagehot's central point is that democratic elections in America produce bad Presidents because a candidate is selected on the basis of "what can't be held against him".

But a brief examination of American history will prove that the situation is hardly so hopeless. Following the strong administrations of Washington and Jefferson, aside from the practical incompetence of Madison, great legal philosopher though he was, each crisis in the national evolution has brought forth the man - by the process of popular election, let us remember -: Jackson came with the bank and tariff quarrels and the dangerous potentialities of nullification; Lincoln with the Civil War, and Johnson, a much maligned man, with Reconstruction; Cleveland in the era of labor difficulties; Theodore Roosevelt at a period when it became necessary to initiate in practice the positive conception of the state; Wilson held office during the World War; and President Franklin Roosevelt during the great depression and the second World War; and in addition we can count at least four more Presidents who fall into the category of great statesmen. Nor were these men unknown and hence "lucky accidents". All of them had long and honorable careers, and they were publicly known or capable of being known because of their careers.⁴⁵

In many ways the English government drew closer, and is still drawing closer, to the American system. The Reform Bill of 1867 was followed by further extensions of the franchise,

45. The criticism can be made that a crisis begets a crisis; consequently, Madison, Buchanan, Grant, Taft, and Mr. Hoover may be cited to support Hagehot's thesis; but if we carry the argument to such a point, we will find that every human action is critical, and that every government is bad which cannot count on an endless succession of first-rate men. Unfortunately, human nature has not reached this stage of perfection.

until the suffrage was finally conferred on all citizens above a certain age. The most dangerous change that Bagehot feared has come to pass. The broadening of the franchise brought concomitant rise of party power, until party loyalty in England, as in the United States, grew to be the primary characteristic of the legislator. The presidential system inevitably results in immense party power, but it unhappily lacks a center of ultimate party responsibility. The President is expected, according to Bagehot, to follow the party doctrine as laid down in its platform; and if he diverges from it, he is impeded and often stopped by a hostile Congress, which, because of the theory of the separation of powers, believes its duty to be the weakening of the President's authority. Now as far as party rule is concerned, this is precisely where the position of the Prime Minister has been heading, but since the checks and balances of the English Constitution are not real, the Commons has evolved into a delegation elected to choose and support a Minister. And with a decline in the power of the lower House, there has come an increase in the power of the Cabinet, which in turn has resulted in the growth of bureaucracy. In the United States the same situation has grown up, but by a different process. Bureaucracy grew up first, and with it the power of the Cabinet; this, in turn, paralleled the increase of presidential authority (or rather, the increased use of presidential authority) at the expense of the congressional. Outside

the realms of both the executive and the legislature, the Supreme Court, through the unimpeded rise of judge-made law, came to be delegated with a curious but real and immense legislative authority.⁴⁶

Beyond the actual machinery of government, the political complexion of English society also drew closer to that of the United States. Economic changes we must neglect here; democratization has been mentioned; and we may point the growth of public education initiated by the Education Acts, the broadening tolerance of radical or unorthodox opinion in Parliament, and the increase of industrial regulation beginning with the Factory Acts. The scope of the present discussion limits the consideration of further details; certain major issues, however, must be more extensively examined. The growth of democracy - so alarming to Bagehot - is the most important one. A man like the author of The English Constitution, who is morally and intellectually strong, has little sympathy for those whose minds and characters are weak, and this impatience with ignorance lay at the bottom of his anti-democratic prejudice. But democracy does not require sympathy for stupidity any more than it means government by the stupid. In the discussion of representation we learned that Bagehot believed in granting some

46. The function of the Court is to review the constitutional right of Congress to make laws following the interest of the public policy, not to review the virtues of the laws themselves. The proper sphere of the Court is that which it now occupies, but came to occupy only during the second administration of President Franklin Roosevelt.

political voice to the laboring class, but never beyond the point where it might conflict in the slightest with government by the owners of the instruments of production. He was blind to two extremely important aspects of English life in his day: one, the miserable condition of the British factory worker; second, the fact that labor is a great and necessary social force entitled to full political representation if political democracy is to be more than a show surrounding economic tyranny. Where parliamentary representation is determined by the votes cast for representatives, there is only one answer to the problem, and that is the extension of the franchise to those who own no capital but their ability to do manual labor. Further, since election presupposes free choice, the majority of the voters will have to be followed rather than the minority, as public policy is above private, and national interest above sectional. Universal suffrage in itself will not insure representation of all group interests and social forces, but at least it will insure all of them a voice, which in turn insures expression of interests in the halls of legislation and administration.

The extension of the franchise means a multiplication of the duties and responsibilities of government, and an increased sensitivity to a greater variety of social pressures. Where popular feeling or mob emotion - whatever we choose to call it - has no political channel into which it can be directed, in other words, where the pressure cannot be expended politically,

there is no valve which can control it. In the English system of Bagehot's day, cabinet government with an unwritten Constitution was in reality helpless before popular forces. In the United States, on the other hand, there was a political outlet for these forces, as there is an even better one today, and thus there existed a device for disciplining them. Now a mere manufacture of law will not suffice to solve the problems which collective endeavor and ambition give rise to. The role of government in modern society, English, American, or any other, is an immense and far-reaching one. It is very much like carrying owls to Athens to talk about the multiplicity and complexity of modern society, but this fact, along with the sensitivity of free government to all phases of modern life, has resulted in a tremendous expansion of its administrative functions. In parliamentary government the center of executive authority is the Cabinet, and the huge edifice of committees, offices, bureaus, and departments which is built around the Cabinet has led us to call the modern state a bureaucracy. We frequently use the word in a derogatory sense, yet we realize the necessity of this gigantic institution. The classical libertarianism of Bagehot is essentially a negative conception of the state's sovereign authority; but the rise of industrialism, and with it the appearance of great tangential forces in society, has demanded a huge government to control, discipline, and harmonize these forces. Any citizen of the United States or England knows that the govern-

ment reaches into every village and farmhouse in the land, that it touches him at every turn and in a thousand different ways; it stands over him at birth waiting to record the facts, and it is present at his burial to see that he is properly shoveled into the earth. It is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Cry out against it as he may, he can do nothing about it; it is inevitable, existing by sheer necessity.

This immense growth of political organizations has resulted in a radical change in our philosophy of the state, away from the non-interference of Bagehot and the Utilitarians and the romantic libertarianism of the French rationalists. To the scientific liberal like Walter Bagehot, who thought that society, from its very nature, provided its own discipline, liberty was pretty much the right to do as one pleased; government became a kind of disinterested referee on the sidelines, there to prevent people from hurting one another in the pursuit of their various activities. Government exists, however, to represent forces and to harmonize them; it is a device for controlling human activity, and more than that, a positive cultural force, capable of teaching, guiding, and improving mankind. But it can do this only in a country whose citizens are used to free government, and who have been educated to the point of understanding rational control in terms of the whole society and its needs. Political liberalism, at bottom, is a method of testing institutions in terms of the rational

consent of man; it is neither complete tolerance nor absolute freedom, both of which are impossible in modern nations. Liberty today, then, may frequently mean restraint; it is the right of the individual will to express itself in consonance with the social will, the right of the individual spirit to grow in the context of minds and feelings and activities around it. To the end of releasing the individual spirit and allowing it to grow socially it may be necessary to impose absolute but rational restraint on the economic activities of man. We no longer feel that we can count on progress through natural and spontaneous evolution, nor on the disciplinary characteristics of the so-called "cultivated" or property-holding class in society. All men must now make a conscious effort, through the medium of government, toward control of the forces which they use and with which they must live. When liberty is no longer a negative thing, then sectionalism, as well as economic individualism, becomes an anachronism. And this fact, too, helps to explain the passage of power from a legislative to an administrative branch of government. Controlled power demands a center of responsibility, and there is no more natural center than the executive organization.

All of our foregoing charges against Bagehot can be summed up in the general indictment made once before, that he was no philosopher, and that for one of his shrewd analytical intelligence he was singularly blind to the broad social tendencies of

of his age and to the philosophic implications of much of the data which he observed. He was the critic and interpreter, the explainer who make things clear, but who could not put them in their whole setting. A brilliant and careful dissector, catholic in his interests and his learning, he possessed the cultivated mind in the sense that it was completely stocked with sound and well-assimilated knowledge of the world and of men, rather than the philosophic mind, which seeks to understand causes and predict effects. The English Constitution demonstrates his peculiar limitations and his peculiar talents. But like so many who are fascinated by and acquainted with the worldly phenomena around them, he had the tendency to feel that the world, change though it would, could hardly change for the better. Consequently, for all his professed attachment to the Liberal party, he was a thorough Conservative at heart. The lofty panegyric to liberalism in "The First Edinburgh Reviewers" does not stand as an accurate record of his convictions, and even his political affiliations were changing markedly toward the end of his life. Liberalism had weakened, he felt, and one suspects that this weakening could be accounted for by Bagehot on the ground that the task had been accomplished. On the other hand, however, the widening gulf between his attitude and the official doctrine of the Liberals may be simply a manifestation of his remarkably objective viewpoint and of his cynical and ironic temperament. One comes away from his writings with the sense that he could whitewash almost any-

thing, or that he could damn almost anything, as he pleased. Actually he was more concerned with finding and presenting facts, although it is true, as Mr. Crane Brinton wrote, that he used them to clothe and re-clothe a few basic ideas and one or two prejudices. We have seen this in all the writings considered to the present point, and we ought to notice it, along with the facts and ideas themselves, in the numerous short periodical articles on contemporary affairs.

4.

The articles written by Bagehot on politics, trade, and foreign affairs for the Economist and the Saturday Review might best be described by likening them to an editorial in the New York Nation or to one of the numerous syndicated "columns" which have come to take the place of the editor's comments in the daily press. They range from general and rather philosophic considerations of broad aspects of society to exact and realistic examinations of practical and specialized problems in government and business. The articles are important, of course, in the measure that they are not concerned with practical questions of only momentary interest. The breadth of consideration determines the extent to which they are revelations of Bagehot's mind; consequently, many of them can be entirely passed over as little more than the routine comments of a professional journalist on the topics of the day.⁴⁷ A discussion

47. Mrs. Barrington, in compiling her edition of Bagehot's writings, has naturally followed this precept, and hence has omitted the great bulk of the Economist articles as too ephemeral to be of interest to later readers. They may be found, of course, in any files of that periodical, from 1857 to 1877.

of the broader outlines of public and party policy in England obviously would be most illuminating, while a review of articles on affairs shows further the extent and thoroughness of their author's knowledge of politics. His attitude toward the nations on the Continent was happily free from the provincial prejudices that marked his criticism of politics and society in the United States. And party questions he considered with an admirable objectivity.

Cleavage between political parties grows less pronounced the greater the number of historical changes they survive without themselves radically reforming their respective policies. The history of parties almost always reveals this, for the simple reason that platforms, like governments, must change, and soon or late the progressive measure of one age becomes the reactionary prejudice of another. The old platitude that a conservative is one who worships a dead radical explains much. Such was the case of the Liberal and Conservative parties in England during Bagehot's life: a number of remarkable reversals in attitude are clearly observable in the middle fifty years of the nineteenth century, between his birth and his death. Many Liberals, like himself, had come to feel that the Reform Bill of 1832 had completed the job, and they were doubly sure when they saw that the second great reform in the franchise, that of 1867, was the work of the Conservatives under Disraeli. Radical changes in party philosophy were in

the air. The Liberals, committed to defending the growth of democracy and the rights of labor, found that they were moving ever closer to a policy of interference backed by a centralization of governmental power. The parallel evolution of the Democratic party in the United States is strikingly similar. No better illustration of profound change may be found, perhaps, than in Herbert Spencer's discovery that he was more closely allied with the Conservatives than with the Liberals. The optimistic determinism of the neo-Darwinian evolutionist had begun to give way to the school of Hobhouse, who saw the need for conscious intervention of the government as embodying the controlling impulses of the mind.

Bagehot's party affiliations are little less confusing: he was a Conservative alarmed over the proposals of Disraeli; a Liberal who thought that liberalism had lost its substance and its energy; an Englishman who thought the Scotch now and then exhibited a much sounder political acumen than his own countrymen. His sympathy with an intelligent conservative viewpoint became apparent very early, as we can discover from one of his first essays on party matters, an article for the Saturday Review entitled "Intellectual Conservatism".⁴⁸ The true conservative attitude toward the second Reform Bill is clearly foreshadowed, but the liberal distrust of reactionary Toryism is also present. Conservatism in England, he begins, grew out

48. S.R., 26 Apr., 1856.

of two clearly-defined attitudes: one, a cavalier loyalty which assumed that the King can do no wrong; the other, a passion for the status quo born of a fear that the privileged may lose their privileges. But there is a real need for an intelligent conservatism. His main point, curiously enough, is that the great work of the Liberal party has been completed: "that moral and intellectual state - that predominance of the politically intelligent - that gradual training of the politically unintelligent - that unity of order and freedom which it is the aim of Liberalism to produce, already exists".⁴⁹ Utopia, apparently, had come to pass; the only sensible thing to do, then, is to preserve its perfection by adopting a conservative attitude toward it. And that attitude may be regarded as one of the cardinal parts of Bagehot's creed: a thinking conservatism is familiarity with the moral grounds and political consequences of the existing state of things, a wise understanding of facts and their relation to national policies, a guardianship of these values and a recognition of the virtue of things so vigorously guarded.⁵⁰ He unhappily had to report, however, that this admirable conviction did not exist; one saw only the same stupid prejudices, the same assumption that privileges are the right of those who possess them.

The passage of the second Reform Bill in 1867 - which was

49. "Intellectual Conservatism", Works, IX, p. 258.

50. "Intellectual Conservatism", Works, IX, pp. 254-57.

plainly a Liberal measure, although engineered by Disraeli in an attempt to go over the heads of the electorate and win the support of the laboring classes - and the proposal of the Liberals immediately after it to broaden the franchise again did not improve Bagehot's opinion of his party. English liberalism, he wrote in 1869, is negative, flaccid, and nerveless, afraid of hard thinking along any one line because it is afraid of coming to a conclusion; it is fearful of obstacles, of logic, and of decision. In short, it is the party of temporizing and compromise, dreading "positive" government.⁵¹ Scotch liberalism, on the other hand, is vigorous in thought and quick in action: Scotchmen act in politics like strong men in business, trusting their principles and following them.⁵² Furthermore, the English Liberal party is not only weak within, but lacks adequate leadership, with the result that its members turn again for support to the old Whig aristocracy, a foolish move which they have made in every crisis.⁵³ The collapse of Gladstone's ministry in 1874, in addition to this weakness of the Liberal regime, manifested particularly in inability to propose new measures not put forth by the Conservatives and in their scanty support of the thoughtful, led Bage-

51. This should not be taken to mean that Bagehot believed in the positive interference of later liberalism. Laissez-faire always remained sacred to him.

52. "The Uses of Scotch Liberalism", Works, IX, pp.60-62. Economist, April 17, 1869.

53. "The Leadership of the Liberal Party", ibid., IX, pp. 156-59. Economist, February 6, 1875.

not to predict a long Conservative administration. This prediction, philosophically and factually defended, forms the burden of a remarkable essay, "The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England", which he never completed. The successive governments of Balfour and Salisbury proved the accuracy of his forecast. He opens his argument with the statement that since the Liberal party can neither propose new measures nor win support for them, and since the Conservative group have accepted most of the Liberal reforms of the past forty years, the very character of nineteenth-century England makes a long Conservative regime inevitable. To begin with, the settled complexion of Victorian society, added to more than half a century of peace and prosperity, makes for long tenures: the result has been forty-two years of Tory government, from 1790 to 1832, and an equal period of Liberal (originally Whig) dominance, from 1832 to 1874. Further, the English people are practical and deeply fond of the status quo; under the name of loyalty they cling to the usual, the traditional, and the understandable. But the best government, Bagehot thinks, is "Left Center": always moderate, yet always open to new ideas. The moderate Liberal government does not have the support of the two great motivating forces in politics: natural conservatism and the intense desire for innovation. The moderate Conservatives, consequently, are in a happy position: being allied with the natural conservatism of society, if they propose

change, it will be accepted by both halves - by the moderates because it is proposed by moderates, by the radicals because it proposes change.⁵⁴

Moderate conservatism, however, does not mean the existence of a purely "middle party", which is impossible because people would have no positive convictions to attach themselves to. In another brilliant analysis Bagehot indicated how the virtues of a middle government can be secured without the futility of a middle party. Parties stay in power by the simple device of avoiding extremes. It is never possible to satisfy everyone, but at the same time it is quite possible to avoid annoying everyone while satisfying the few who are particularly concerned with the problem of the moment. The Conservative party which governed England for thirty years following Bagehot's prediction was practically successful largely for the reason of its providing a middle government without itself being a meaningless middle party. The success of a political party depends, he clearly shows, on its ability to avoid extremes while at the same time granting the maximum satisfaction to the maximum number of social needs. This is a kind of fundamental tenet of party action; the problem, of course, is far more complex than such a statement suggests, but by it Bagehot definitely implied that neither extremists nor idealists can ever survive in the give and take of politics. The

54. "The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England", Works, VII, pp. 73-90.

need is for "common opinions and uncommon abilities".⁵⁵

The analyst of party government exhibited the same practical sagacity in foreign affairs that he did in domestic, and at least in matters involving Continental politics he showed an admirable lack of the one-sided provincialism which he himself knew to be the popular attitude toward international questions. Machiavelli felt that a republic was the safest form of government for the business of international politics because it was slower to reach a conclusion, and hence more deliberate in its choice and more steadfast in adhering to it. Bagehot, however, felt that one of the prices we must pay for free government is a stolid "inconvincibility" with regard to affairs beyond the national borders. True to his anti-democratic prejudice, he believed that the mass of people are concerned only with their own personal interests, blind, as a result, to the fact that there may be two or more sides to a question. To convince them that this is the case is to invite the accusation of invading their rights. He did not see, apparently, that nationalism is more responsible for provincialism than is democracy.⁵⁶ But he was very much alive to the imbecility of the extreme variety of nationalism, and he was among the few in England whose sense of security had not blinded them to the significance of many aspects of Bismark's gov-

⁵⁵. "Not a Middle Party but a Middle Government", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 126-30. Economist, January 17, 1874.

⁵⁶. "Inconvincible Governments", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 259-62. Saturday Review, June 21, 1856.

ernment. The Iron Chancellor's last speech was the rhetorical disguise of an attempt to put down the Roman Catholic Church as an alien "un-German" influence. Bagehot saw in this move another mark of a "narrow and imperious bigotry", an outgrowth of a "blind and frantic nationalism" which tolerates no creed conflicting with the new Germanism. If he had lived a little longer, the naval ambitions of Admiral von Tirpitz, added to the already celebrated military successes of Count von Moltke, might have revealed still more of the prelude to tragedy.⁵⁷

A host of other articles for the periodical press demonstrated the soundness of Bagehot's analytical faculties when applied to problems in the international sphere. Here his method of attack was again the empirical; his attempt was always to see the facts in a situation before he offered any suggestions for improving it. And he was singularly aloof from proposing solutions on the basis of pure national self-interest. There is no reference in any of his writings, direct or implied, to tell of his views on imperialism, but a few ideas scattered through the shorter articles suggest that he was not too much impressed by the "White Man's Burden". Once India was in the fold, he felt that England ought to make the best of it, as many of the economic works reveal; nevertheless, there is fairly clear evidence that he thought all the colonies something of a nuisance. We have already noticed the refusal

57. "Prince Bismarck's Last Speech", ibid., IX, pp. 160-65. Economist, March 27, 1875.

to accept the expansion of material as a mark of progress; and his friend Hutton tells us that "he would have been glad to find a fair excuse for giving up India, for throwing the colonies on their own resources, and for persuading the English people to accept deliberately the place of a fourth- or fifth-rate European power..., for he thought that such a course would result in generally raising the calibre of the national conscience and taste."⁵⁸ If the foregoing statement be an accurate one, then there is little question that Bagehot hoped for a reduction in the "quantity" of British civilization, that the quality might be more choice. One could wish this for any nation, but the difficulty lies with the fact that the cultural quality of some peoples is expressed in the extent of their power, material and political; there can be little doubt that this is true of the states of the English-speaking world. Bagehot's distaste for imperialism, however, helped considerably to increase the clarity and justice of his viewpoint toward activity in the international sphere, on the part both of England and of other nations, but it also increased the cynicism of that attitude. Politics among nations represents in its most unadorned and shameless aspect the struggle for power, but the power for which nations and individuals fight was an unrewarding thing to Bagehot.⁵⁹

⁵⁸. Hutton, *op. cit.*, Works, I, p. 38.

⁵⁹. The best revelations of Bagehot's acumen in foreign affairs are the ff. *Economist* articles: "Mr. Stanfield and Signor Mazzini", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 23-27 (March 26, 1864); "Are Alsace and Lorraine Worth Most to Germany or France?" *ibid.*, IX, pp. 71-75, (Sept. 24, 1870); "The Quarterly Review on the Lessons of the War" (Franco-Prussian), *ibid.*, IX, pp. 84-88 (Jan. 28, 1871); "What Should not be the Policy of England in the East" (particularly for the above discussion of England's role in foreign affairs), *ibid.*, IX, pp. 206-11 (Oct. 21, 1876); "The Declaration of Paris", *ibid.*, IX, pp. 228-31 (March 17, 1877).

With all his practical learning in politics, both foreign and domestic, and his broad if not always sound grasp of issues, one feels that the lack of Bagehot's presence in the House of Commons or in a Cabinet position was a real loss to English government during his time. We have already touched on his unsuccessful attempts to run for Parliament and on the probable reasons for his failure; nevertheless, with perseverance and enough of the proper backing from high places, he might have been successful.⁶⁰ The fact that men of his ability (the qualifying phrase is the author's) did not look more often toward a career in politics was a regrettable fact to him. He sincerely wanted to see men of sound business ability and worldly learning in Parliament and the Cabinet, and the fact that a decreasing number seemed interested in being in either place meant the presence in Commons of too many inexperienced men, in the Cabinet of far too many members of the aristocracy. There was an inescapable dilemma: unknown and unqualified men cannot secure votes, and experienced business men will not "go to school" again in politics.⁶¹ As for Bagehot himself, there is an abundance of evidence that he preferred to be on the sidelines devoting himself to criticism, analysis, and advice; he was a success in business, and he probably would have

60. See *supra*, ch.1.

61. "Politics as a Profession", *Works*, IX, pp.33-37 (*Economist*, June 17, 1865); see also Laski, H. J., "The Composition of the British Cabinet, 1801-1924", *Studies in Law and Politics*, New Haven, 1932.

been one in politics, but the very catholicity of his interests make him look for his happiness to the life of thought and discussion rather than that of active participation in the struggle for power. Knowledge for the task he had in abundance, and his medium of expression shows many characteristics of the persuasive faculties necessary to the successful politician. As far as he was concerned, however, the disadvantages of political life seemed to outweigh the advantages. His consideration of the deterring factors are, unfortunately, purely personal: one receives a small income which will hardly pay the costs of becoming popular, of living in London, and of keeping up with political society; there is little freedom and much work; and, perhaps most important, one must be a follower of public opinion. "There is plenty of originality in England", he wrote, "if it would pay to be original."⁶² Bagehot was paid, but not out of taxes.

62. "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Becoming a Member of Parliament", Works, IX, p.131.

Chapter V

Banking and Business Cycle Theory

1.

Dr. Johnson once said that "there are few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in getting money", and many a good Puritan in the seventeenth century would have readily agreed with him. Capitalism and industrialism, in fact, are peculiarly Protestant institutions. In England and the United States, during the past three centuries, more energy and ability have been devoted to the pursuits of finance and production than have ever been spent on the arts and sciences. Liberalism in religion and politics formed a perfect social and intellectual context for the expansion of economic activity, with the plain and universal result that industry is our art, as cathedral building was the art of thirteenth-century France and government the art of the Romans. Most of the creative impulses of man are today expressed through the manufacture and distribution of material commodities. It seems useless to labor so obvious a fact; but the immensity of its extent ought to be emphasized when we remember that in Bagehot's time so many first-rate minds were too preoccupied with academic cultural heritages to see in its proper perspective the new force which had entered society, while on the other hand, those who were most aware of it seemed also to have overlooked everything else. But not Bagehot: he was a man of letters, learned in literature and philosophy, but he was also a banker by trade,

happily sensitive to the fact that there are other varieties of intelligence than those in the schools. Getting money was not merely an innocent pursuit to him; it was fascinating and rich in exciting possibilities. The philistinism which led him to applaud Shakespeare because the dramatist made money as well as plays was a healthy and flexible attitude, one designed to afford intellectual room for all the aspects of the modern world in their proper proportion.

Bagehot's first published essay was concerned with money, and his last major work, the Economic Studies, was a book-length treatise on what was then called political economy.¹ During this interval of thirty years he never lost touch with the world of business; it may be said, in fact, that the active part of his life was absorbed by financial matters, in the trade of banking and in the editing of a periodical devoted to them. He not only liked the rulers of the realm of money, he also admired them, and his instinctive faculty for seeing things always in their human terms provided the primary value of his economic writings. They are redeemed from dullness by imagination and by an insight into the characters of the men who worked with money, and they are written in a bright and vigorous although "scientific" style; they are good, in short, because they are readable and because they contain contributions

1. The first publication was "The Currency Monopoly", printed in the Prospective Review in 1848; Economic Studies was published posthumously in 1879, unfinished at the time of Bagehot's death in 1877.

of the very highest order to economics. But in this field, as in all others, it was the human personality that he saw reflected in principles and phenomena and institutions. The entrepreneur was for him a kind of general of economic forces, a statesman of production and finance, one who regarded business as an art, and who followed his material ambitions not for the end of making money, but for the means which money provided toward the end of enjoying the active exercise of power. Perhaps his first statement on the matter sums up a life's attitude - for Bagehot's convictions changed surprisingly little. At the age of twenty-two years he wrote "Mankind are a race of beings wiser in action than in speech: the mass of energetic intelligence which is concentrated on the industrious occupations of practical life, though unrepresented in books and often undervalued by literary men, will generally keep mere instruments subservient to their ultimate ends."² And he could find a stimulant to a host of other interests in the realm of business: for him there was nothing dull in it, since a lively mind finds all human achievements exciting in their respective ways.³

2. "The Currency Monopoly", Works, VIII, p. 155.

3. Perhaps the best example is the essay "Boscastle", the content of which is hardly important enough to warrant comment in our text. It purports to be a brief monograph on some aspects of English trade in the days when most of it was sea-borne; actually it is a good-humored, charming, discursive little essay mostly concerned with the natural beauties, the geology, ethnology, history, and industry of Boscastle Creek harbor, North Cornwall. See Works, IV, pp. 334-39.

In economics Bagehot revealed the same temperament that he showed in politics: he was the analyst and the explainer rather than the philosopher, one who first presented facts and afterwards presented theories in detail. His contributions to the economic sciences are for the most part narrow and specialized, and as a result many have grown obsolete with the passage of years. A few, however, are of considerable importance, if only because they are pioneer attempts to discuss the causes of certain economic phenomena. If we are seeking for a general phrase with which to characterize him as an economist, we would have to say that he was a psychological interpreter of finance and credit, rather than a theorist or a philosopher of it. Moreover, many of his opinions seem superficial because of his limited viewpoint within the field itself: his thorough knowledge, after all, extended only to banking and the money exchange, which always led him to overlook the more complex and more important phenomena associated with production, distribution, and consumption. And once again we must make the charge that he was almost completely unaware of the ultimate significance of economic institutions in the whole social scheme, and of the tendencies and problems and achievements in society toward which such institutions were pointing. That peculiarly Victorian sense of lasting stability and perfectionism was pronounced in Bagehot, as we have noticed in the political writings, and as we shall notice again in the economic works. It is strange that all the problems, most of them

immense and of far-reaching consequences, which English industrialism presented in the latter half of the nineteenth century should have passed unnoticed by Englishmen capable of understanding them, yet should have provided a German with the material for the greatest work on political economy which that period produced. The fundamentals of the so-called classical school served very well for most Victorian theorizers, while it was left to the sharp observation and philosophic intelligence of Engels and Marx to see the real significance to mankind of laissez-faire capitalism.

In his unqualifying acceptance of the basis of English political economy, Bagehot appears in his most Victorian intellectual garb. He criticized the founders of the classical economic school in detail and often sharply, just as he had criticized Burke, but under it all he also accepted their viewpoint without any appreciable change. The center of his approach to all questions of finance and credit, of wages and production and distribution, was, of course, the doctrine of laissez-faire. In his first essay in this field, "The Currency Monopoly", he started with a panegyric to non-interference, qualifying it only to the extent that he thought the government ought to have a monopoly of the coinage.⁴ This conviction never varied: he repeats it in a number of ways throughout most of his economic writings. In connection with money, he echoes it at several places in Lombard Street, his treatise on English banking, for example,

4. "The Currency Monopoly", Works, VIII, pp. 146-47.

in the discussion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's relation to the money market, he writes: "Nothing can be truer in theory than the economical principle that banking is a trade and only a trade, and nothing can be more surely established by a larger experience than that a government which interferes with any trade injures that trade. The best thing undeniably that a Government can do with the Money Market is to let it take care of itself."⁵ The free flow of capital and labor, like the unimpeded working of a competitive trade, production, or service, is an end to be desired in itself, and an end which Bagehot confidently expected to come to pass. In the last year of his life he could still write "that the free movement of capital...within a nation, and a consequent strong tendency to an equality of profits there, are ideals daily becoming truer as competition increases and capital grows, that all the hindrances are gradually diminishing, all the incentives enhancing, and the instruments becoming keener, quicker, and more powerful"⁶ Utopia was plainly on the way, and he was convinced that we would one day see society reach the same perfection in international trade, which he regarded as the ultimate end of a laissez-faire economy.⁷

But no disciple of Adam Smith, however sure in his faith, thought that the ideal goal of competition had reached real perfection in all the avenues of economic activity. Classical

5. Lombard Street, ibid., VI, p. 70.

6. Economic Studies, ibid., VII, p.151.

7. Economic Studies, ibid., VII, pp. 151-55.

though he was in his political economy, monopoly was not always Bagehot's special devil. In his first published essay, "The Currency Monopoly", he defended the right of government to control the coinage absolutely (an obsolete issue today).⁸ What is rather amazing in this essay, however, is the basic assumption on which the currency monopoly is justified, that it is sound economics to bring within government control all possible causes of business "convulsions" (that is, the periodic prosperity-to-depression-to-prosperity cycle). At no other place in his writings does Bagehot suggest this heresy, in spite of the fact that he devoted the longest and most detailed chapter of Lombard Street to an examination of the business cycle. In the main, his attitude was that monopoly is either a necessary evil in a few cases or else the inevitable form which certain types of economic activity will take. In fact, he once went so far as to say that it is a natural tendency for the business enterprises, financial or productive, in any one community to move toward control by a few large organizations, the smaller being grouped around them like satellites, and depending on them for their existence. This is the situation, particularly, of English banking, where the Bank of England long ago became the central and controlling institution among all

8. "The Currency Monopoly", ibid., VIII, pp. 146-87.

the rest.⁹ He seemed to think, however, that the monopolistic growth of the Bank of England was largely a result of legislation which indirectly conferred on it ever-increasing powers. And he saw a plain danger in the dependency of a nation's credit on the solvency of a single firm.

As a banker, Bagehot regarded the investment, deposition, and circulation of money as the foundation of healthy trade in an industrial economy; indeed, this preoccupation with the medium of exchange often led to a superficiality in treating of the phenomena of commerce, if only because it is not the one important factor in the state of business. Since he believed, with the rest of the classical school, in freedom of trade and competition, and in the free transfer of capital and labor, the free circulation of money into the channels of investment as well as into the markets he regarded as prerequisite to a sound and dynamic economy. In general, then, he held - as do most orthodox businessmen today - to what economists call the anti-saving theory. Adherence to this faith in saving is at the bottom of virtually everything he wrote on political economy, either implied or directly stated, but nowhere is it better expressed than in the analysis of the business cycle which forms one of the chapters of Lombard Street. Here he touches on an

9. "The Monetary Crisis of 1857", *ibid.*, II, p.333. Bagehot seems to contradict himself in the same place, however, when he writes that this growth of English banking has been an unnatural one. The whole essay (pp.326-58) is an attempt to understand the causes of a panic which was virtually universal, but he considers only the money question.

important aspect of industrial economics, the influence of saving on investment, and thus eventually on production itself. Briefly his theory is this: the excess of private income over expenses is a saving to be deposited in an institution devised for handling money or directly turned over to a source of production; in either case, it is soon or late devoted to manufacture through being invested in the plant, equipment, and other properties of a firm organized for production. Investment, which is a kind of loan, may be accomplished in a variety of ways, which we need not enter into here; the important point is that it provides the capital necessary to the manufacture of goods. Obviously a manufacturer cannot get money unless he can tap the consumers' market, and he cannot do this until he has something to sell, but there will be nothing to sell until he can start manufacturing a product. The initial cost of manufacturing, then, is paid for out of the investor's funds. In the economy of the Victorian era this was justifiably regarded as a fundamental axiom.

2.

Now let us examine the superstructure of criticism and analysis which Bagehot erected on the philosophic abutments described in the foregoing section. All of importance that he had to say on the science of economics may be found in his three major works in that field, written late in his life; Lombard Street, published in 1873 after three years of composition, a

specialized treatise entitled The Depreciation of Silver, finished in 1877, the year of his death, and Economic Studies, published posthumously and in incomplete form in 1879.¹⁰ For forty-five years after the author's death, Lombard Street remained the classic on English banking, required reading for all those who aspired to sound learning in finance, academic or practical. A more critical attitude, however, has come to regard the treatise as an excellent examination of one aspect of banking, that is, the psychological significance of credit and its effect on business in general, and as a collection of shrewd prophecies along narrow lines, most of which have come to exist as fact. As a good humanist, Bagehot was interested primarily in men; as a successful banker, he was interested in money: the two aspects of his temperament make him a kind of psychologist of finance, and herein lies the strength of Lombard Street. Its weakness is superficiality, the result of trying to see the whole of an economy in terms of only two of its parts, the money market and the psychological significance of credit. Within the limits of this, as in other works, he is impeccable realist (as he himself announces in the introductory chapter of his book); it is the fundamental tenets of his philosophy and his conclusions which are subject to criticism.

10. Among the few earlier essays, three are monographs on special subjects, and need not be discussed here: "The Credit Mobilier and Banking Companies in France" (1857), Works, II, pp. 264-84; "The Monetary Crisis of 1857" (1858), ibid., II, pp. 326-58; and "A Universal Money" (1869), ibid., V, pp. 1-48. The early essay on John Stuart Mill will be considered later.

The introduction to Lombard Street is mainly a review of obvious facts: the concentration of wealth in the "Street"; its status as the center of trade; the delicacy, complexity, and flexibility of the English system of finance; and most important, the insistence that modern business is conducted on loans, which is, in a sense, a kind of raison d'etre of Bagehot's work on the subject. In the main, he thinks that the "Street" has been managed with discretion, although the democratization of commerce has resulted in the admittance of scoundrels to the circles of wealth, as political democracy attracts ignoramuses to government.¹¹ Here, and throughout the book, there are plenty of statistics to back every assertion. The second chapter marks the real beginning of the central thesis, namely, that the English banking organization as a whole, including bankers and bill-brokers, and hence industry as well, depends for its existence on the soundness of banking credit. All lesser banks in the Kingdom, however, are satellites to the Bank of England; consequently, the health of the whole commercial structure may be thought to depend on the solvency of a single institution. To maintain its solvency, and to be ready to meet any drain on its monetary resources, the Bank of England must keep an adequate reserve in bullion against its liabilities, which are largely, of course, the deposits it holds. The prevention of panic or of any prolonged run demands a big reserve, but the

11. Lombard Street, ch.i, Works, VI, pp.11-12.

desire for profits (derived from investments) moves the governors to keep a small reserve: a happy medium is the only solution to the dilemma. Bagehot reviews all the major forces which can result in a run on the Bank, and concludes that there are three factors necessary to the soundness of its position: one, a free and full replenishing of the reserve after any drain, and a free policy of lending, to any extent demanded, even during a panic; two, having only trained bankers on the governing board of the institution; and three, strengthening the outer banking machinery to reduce the strain on the central Bank.¹²

Following a brief history of banking as a separate institution, particularly in England¹³, Bagehot next considers the relationship between the Bank and the Exchequer office. Here again, the fundamental postulate of finance is the psychological one that credit is maintained by free lending, for then the borrowers think that there is plenty of reserve and hence no reason for fearing a loss of deposits. Ultimately, this means that the Bank of England must keep an adequate reserve for all exigencies, particularly because the government, through the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is the Bank's largest depositor. Although committed to non-interference, Bagehot had to confess that government regulation is necessary where the government's funds are at stake. Again the central problem is the maintenance of a large reserve when the stockholders' demand for big

12. Ibid., ch.ii, VI, pp.22-55.

13. Ibid., ch.iii, VI, pp.55-70.

profits requires a minimum reserve. The difficulty lies in the identity of the government with a single bank, which he regarded as an evil for several reasons: first, the Bank requires state assistance; second, being the center of a one-reserve system, it reduces available cash in the money market to a dangerously low point; third, the whole credit system depends on the wisdom of a single board of directors; and finally, directors try to keep the reserve small because the stockholders want a big dividend.¹⁴ Without considering the implications here of this extremely important problem, Bagehot hastens to the next question, which is the method by which the value of money is determined in Lombard Street. In a masterful analysis, as usual based on a forbidding array of statistical facts, he shows how the Bank of England, through the outer banks, fixes the monetary value of money in the same way that the value of any commodity is fixed, that is, primarily through supply and demand.¹⁵

The outstanding chapter of Lombard Street is the pioneer analysis of the business cycle in terms of the money market, rather naively entitled "Why Lombard Street is often very Dull, and Sometimes extremely Excited." The ultimate causal factor, Bagehot thinks, is the time element in an economy of divided production (that is, between consumers' and producers' goods); every producer hopes to sell without delay so as to keep men at work and profits expanding, or at least even; but sometimes he

14. Ibid., ch.iv, VI, pp.70-77.

15. Ibid., ch.v, VI, pp.77-82.

cannot sell immediately, in which case he reduces production, with the inevitable consequences. The consumer industries are affected first because they depend directly on the purchasing power of labor, which in turn affects the unstable credit system by reducing savings available for investment. A careful and reasonably complete analysis of the depression-prosperity cycle follows. In conclusion, however, Bagehot thinks that the whole matter may be reduced to the psychological sense of security induced by easy credit, and the sense of fear induced by the slightest rumor that money is hard to get or that the banks are running short of reserves. The proposed remedy he has mentioned before: when panic starts - even though its causes may be deep within the complex industrial machine - it is the plain duty of the banks to lend as freely and as rapidly as they can get rid of the money, and this ultimately means that the Bank of England must be ready to pour out funds on call.¹⁶ Since the first duty of the Bank is to maintain an adequate reserve, a discussion of how the Bank has acquired, retained, and administered this reserve logically follows.¹⁷ Once more the leading idea of a large reserve and the psychological value of free lending is set forth in a different garment of fact.

Bagehot does not get to the principles governing the Bank of England's reserve until he has disposed of the government of the Bank, the problems proposed by and the value of the new

16. Ibid., ch.vi, VI, pp.82-103.

17. Ibid., ch.vii, VI, pp. 103-30.

joint stock banks, the decline of private banking (as distinguished from corporate banking), and the business of bill brokerage.¹⁸ The chief factor in determining the all-important measure of the Bank's reserve is the quantity and nature of its liabilities. The most dangerous of these liabilities are the deposits of the outer banks, the result of the constant and often extreme fluctuations in demand on bank reserves, reflected immediately in the central organization because it is a "banker's bank", that is, the ultimate source of all bank deposits. The central reserve, consequently, cannot be fixed as a certain fraction of the total liabilities; its amount can be determined only by referring to general business conditions, to the credit standing of all outer banks, and to the public feeling as to the soundness of that credit. The only dogma that can be proposed is the the reserve must not be allowed to drop below what Bagehot imaginatively calls an "apprehension minimum", which he fixed at the time of writing at £10,000,000. In conclusion, there must be a fluctuating reserve, its quantity at any one moment determined by the above factors and by the interest rate as an index to the flow of money.¹⁹ Actually, Bagehot preferred the multi-reserve system, but he felt that the English organization had come to be a national habit, too firmly fixed in the popular character ever to be changed. Curiously enough, he felt that the American banking system had

18. Ibid., chs. viii, ix, x, xi, respectively, VI, pp. 130-83.

19. Ibid., ch. xiii, VI, pp. 183-99.

virtues, although he objected to it on the ground that it was a mixture of the multi-reserve and single fixed reserve plans.²⁰

If Lombard Street is the classic on English banking, then we readily see that much remains to be said; actually we come closer to its true value if we remember that it was originally intended by its author to be a kind of expanded pamphlet designed to knock a few new ideas into the heads of the city magnates. The real merit of the treatise lies not so much in its breadth of treatment of banking in an industrial commerce as it does in its psychological observations of men associated with the money markets. Outside this realm of the human personality, which Bagehot knew best of all, his conclusions, however sound within their limits, are superficial when we relate them to the whole field. The virtues and vices of the book are nowhere better illustrated than in the fundamental theories, the doctrine of reserve and the analysis of the business cycle. Modern economy is carried on largely by trust, and the whole credit structure does depend to a large extent on just what people think of the ability of banks to keep money circulating and to discharge their liabilities. But the complete business cycle is bafflingly complex, and completely beyond the banker's solution of free lending. The broad factors on which economists have agreed as affecting the business cycle may be

20. Ibid., ch.xiii, VI, pp.199-202. Lombard Street closes with a number of statistical appendices on prices, quantity of reserve, etc., most of the tables having been brought up to 1914 by Mrs. Barrington.

reduced to a minimum of nine: the effect of solar radiation on the weather, which in turn has an effect on crop production; psychological effects of dull and active trade (including the psychology of credit); the expansion of credit through checks and note issue; the relationship of saving and investment; the many interruptions and conflicts introduced by the production lag between producers' and consumers' goods; the disbursement of corporate income, for example, through taxes, expenses, wages, dividends, and in other ways; the strength and constancy of the profit-seeking motive; economic innovations, especially new inventions; and inequalities in the distribution of income. Of all these, we know that Bagehot considered only two; further, he seemed unaware of the periodic nature of the cycle, in spite of the fact that periodicity had been observed as early as 1833 by an Englishman, John Wade, who was hardly a trained economist.²¹

There are many obsolete problems set forth and diligently considered in Lombard Street, most of them relating to Sir Robert Peel's famous Bank Act of 1844, which required that the issue of Bank of England notes be based, beyond a certain minimum, on gold bullion. It was a rigid restriction, but the growth of check circulation brought a new and greater elasti-

21. If this Wade is remembered at all, it is because of a work chiefly devoted to a scandalous exposé of corruption in the Tory regime immediately preceding the Reform Bill of 1832. His revelations were immensely popular. For a brief critical treatment of Bagehot as an economist see Keynes, J.M., "The Works of Walter Bagehot", Economic Journal, XXV, (Sept. 1915), pp. 369-75.

city to money, thus making unnecessary the so-called fiduciary issue. This enormous growth of checking Bagehot did not foresee; yet the check has become a kind of universal currency, developed to the point where bank notes are as obsolete as metal coin for other than fractional sums. The vast internal commerce of the United States, for example, is for the most part carried on without a single coin or piece of legal tender changing hands: bank clearings in big cities may reach a hundred million dollars a week, but no one associated with the process ever sees a dime. The rise of checking in England came with the growth of the joint-stock bank, which was forbidden to issue notes. Bagehot shrewdly predicted the increase of this type of banking, although he did not accurately foresee the consequences: the growth of the joint-stock bank coupled with the fact that such banks issue most of the checks meant that power would be gradually shifted from the Bank of England to the outer banks, a power further increased by the Bank's tendency to force depositors in a crisis to borrow from the outer organizations to save itself from ruin. The two important financial changes in the generation or two following Bagehot's death he prophesied in Lombard Street: one, the reliance of the London money market and, in fact, the money markets of the world on the Bank of England as custodian of the world's gold reserve; the other, the growth of joint-stock banking after a gradual decline of private banking. The significant thing is

that the governors of the Bank of England helped to initiate these changes by following Bagehot's suggestions. He had managed to knock a few ideas into their heads!²²

From the broad concern with money in general to the special problem of silver in modern commerce was an easy transition, and after a three-year period spent in accumulating evidence, Bagehot turned to the difficulties provoked by the discovery of large quantities of silver in the United States and to the old question of bi-metallism. The Depreciation of Silver is a long pamphlet consisting of a preface, seventeen articles, and an appendix, written late in 1876 and published in the following year by the Economist office. That the work is far from an important contribution to the economic sciences is proved by the two-fold aim which prompted its writing: to prove that silver is in for a long depreciation in spite of momentary increases in its price, and that the demand for silver has been stimulated by its cheapness in America and England, with the result that the countries using it have carried off the available supply. At the time the book was written, silver was plentiful in India (as it still is to a reasonable degree), and most payments from the colony to the mother country were made in that metal; consequently, the problem of depreciation affected the commercial relations of India and Britain more deeply than anything else, thus making

22. See Withers, Hartley, Introduction to 1910 edition of Lombard Street, Works, VI, pp.1-8.

the Indian question predominant in the treatise. Aside from a brief discussion of bi-metallism, which still survives at least as an academic theory, The Depreciation of Silver is largely concerned with obsolete topics, most of them relatively unimportant in their own day; and in treatment it reveals none of the powers of its author.

The contemporary English authority on money, Mr. John M. Keynes, has said that the essays making up the work are neither good theory nor good fact.²³ Its theory, though broad and varied to fit a considerable number of detailed situations, is badly weakened by having to rest on the almost Platonic ideal of laissez-faire. The worst evil of silver depreciation for England was the decline in Indian internal commerce and ultimately Indian foreign trade, with a resultant decline of Indian revenues in the British national income. In the long run, Bagehot has nothing to offer as a remedy save faith in time and non-interference. The situation, he thinks, will cure itself by an increase of exports to India to offset the decrease of imports, and by a rise of prices in the colony as a result of the fall in the intrinsic value of its monetary medium; in short, the true solution lies with time and the natural workings of a free economy. In conclusion, he feels that no permanent change is necessary either in the Indian currency or in taxation.²⁴ Any pro-

23. Keynes, op.cit., p.372.

24. The Depreciation of Silver, Works, VI, pp.260-66, 283, 256.

posals to coin silver on a standard basis are incontinently rejected on the ground that adoption of the gold standard was a success, and England has no intention of dropping it. For the most part, the remainder of Silver is a series of reviews and rejections of schemes for mitigating the severity of the English-Indian trade situation, some of the discussion being completely ephemeral, such as the consideration of a plan offered by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce. And aside from an appendix of statistical information, one misses the customary arsenal of fact behind every conclusion and suggestion. Any review of the titles of the separate articles indicates that Bagehot was not concerned with actual phenomena nearly so much as he was concerned with what committees, officials, and commissions had to say about them. Those essays which treat of effects arising from the situation are projections into the future, and frequently reveal assumptions predicated on inadequate foundations.²⁵

25. The Depreciation of Silver is composed of the ff. articles: i, The Low Value of Silver and its Effect on India; ii, Remedies for the Fall of Silver; iii, Further Suggestions on the Fall of Silver; iv, Effects of the Resumption of Specie Payments in France on the Depreciation of Silver; v, Effects of the Depreciation of Silver on the Foreign, particularly Eastern, Trade of England; vi, The Extreme Fall of Silver and the Hasty Remedies Proposed; vii, The Report of the Committee on the Depreciation of Silver; viii, The Proposal of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce to Suspend the Coinage of Silver in India; ix, The Debate on the Indian Budget; x, The Different Effect on Trade of the Cheapening of the Precious Metals, and of the Depreciation of Inconvertible Paper; xi, The American Commission of the Currency; xii, The Permanent Effect of the Increase of "Council Bills" on the Flow of Silver to India and on the Indian Exchanges; xiii, The Effect of "Council Bills" on the Indian Exchanges;
(continued on next page)

3.

Even more so than Lombard Street, Bagehot's Economic Studies is a psychological as much as an economic analysis; in fact, it is for the major part an inquiry into the minds of men who study the science rather than into the science itself. This last work from his pen is the only fruit of an originally ambitious plan to write a history of English political economy in three volumes, one of which was to be composed of character and biographical studies of the great men of the field. As usual, Bagehot was more interested in the personalities of economists than in the outcome of their efforts. The design of the Economic Studies, as initially projected, must have been somewhat as follows: the first volume would have treated the science as a whole, its historical aspects and its aspect in his own day, particularly as to its "scientific" qualifications; the second would have been biographical; the third an attempt to found the science afresh on the basis of observed contemporary

xiv, Minute of the Indian Government on the Depreciation of Silver; xv, Proposed Remedy for the Depreciation of the Silver Coinage of India; xvi, The Transition State of the Silver Market; xvii, Bi-Metallism; an appendix presenting the evidence of the Committee on the Depreciation of Silver. Works, VI, pp. 255-352. There is clearly nothing of lasting interest here. The discussion of bi-metallism is largely a proof of the absurdity of the question. It means a changing currency standard and a futile attempt to fix an arbitrary ratio where no stable ratio ever existed before. Finally, he offers Gresham's venerable Law of Money as conclusive evidence that in any bi-metallic currency, the cheaper money will drive out the dearer. The only interesting part of the article is a statistical table showing the relative prices of gold and silver in England from 1526 to 1850. Within this period the ratio varied from 11.1:1 to 15.83:1. But history has not borne out Bagehot's thesis here: silver is used extensively as money without difficulty because of the increase in the quantity and flexibility of the tools of credit.

phenomena. This much we can gather from the introduction: at first he applauds existing English political economy, which he regards as the practical working out of the principles announced by Adam Smith in The Wealth of Nations; its study, however, is not strictly a science because economists have been too abstract, too little aware of the facts of business, which inherent weakness he proposes to remedy by first going back to an empirical basis, next adopting a new logic of inference. The unquestioning adherence to the so-called classical school of Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and J.S.Mill has resulted in the growth of a body of ideal theory unsupported by the real phenomena of economic activity - a tyranny which Bagehot plainly resented. His suggestion is that students begin the science anew, taking a few contemporary and common problems, for example, the cyclical variation in the state of trade, and seeing what sensible doctrine can be deduced from them. He proposes a logic which is obviously not inductive, for he denounced it as a useless tool in this type of science (he calls it "Baconian" logic); but neither is his variety deductive, although his description of it suggests that it is. He advocates the method of Lyell and Darwin, that is, the adoption of a single palpable cause to which as many phenomena are attached as can logically be ascribed to it. He failed to state, however, that the method by which this cause is reached is inductive, although the process following is one of deduction. In the introduction to the Economic Studies, then, we see that history suggests the defect,

while Bagehot proposes the remedy; and apparently this was to be the underlying scheme of the three-volume treatise.²⁶

In reviewing the Economic Studies, we may distort the author's rather incoherent organization in order to follow the emphasis he himself suggests. The history of political economy in his own country was to him largely a revelation of the personalities who had studied it and had helped to formulate its basic tenets. The character analyses of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo are done with the same shrewd and good-humored penetration that we find in the biographical essays, although here the prevalent tone is more grave, the style more suited to exact and scientific matters. For in the present work character is a secondary preoccupation and ideas are primary; in fact, we might even say that it is Bagehot's instinctive interest in personality which intrudes psychological considerations into philosophic and scientific discourse. Thus he begins with the fundamental assumptions of English political economy, all of them abstract and none of them particularly satisfactory to him; it is a science of tendencies, he thinks, dealing with principles not empirically established.²⁷ Adam Smith avoided this extreme by being "semi-concrete"; on the basis of a few observed phenomena, he founded the science of supposed universals called in the nineteenth century "political economy", and he gave mankind the practical doctrine of free trade. The discussion of Smith's

27. "The Preliminaries of Political Economy", Economic Studies, Works, VII, pp. 156-76.

The Wealth of Nations opens with a statement of the questions which the book attempts to answer, but of all of them, Bagehot considers only one, the determination of price, in connection with which he tells us that the founder of modern economics contributed a useful and important fact, universally applicable, that the exchangeable value of a commodity is directly proportioned to its cost of production. After an elaborate and accurate disquisition, including causes which Smith overlooked, Bagehot agrees in general with him: "All commodities will tend to be of the same exchangeable value, whose cost of production is identical,...and this cost of production is that which the capitalist expends, and the return for which he is willing to take the pains for expending it."²⁸

In one sense Smith's great contribution to thought was that which adds to the importance of so many scientists and philosophers: his ridding the world of a vast accumulation of ancient errors and absurd superstitions. He was a perfect clearer of the way, inaccurate in the assembly of fact and never anxious about details, but a cool and objective surveyor of as many phenomena as he could ideally comprehend. Educated in England, he knew and liked English things, and he acquired much first-hand knowledge of commerce as it was carried on in the world's leading commercial nation. A residence in France brought him in contact with French rationalism and with the doctrine of free

28. "Adam Smith and our Modern Economy", ibid, VII, p.197.

trade. But his native environment and inherited characteristics were his best assets: a member of a club of hard-headed Scotch merchants in Edinburgh, he acquired something of the business acumen of his fellow-countrymen; and being Scotch himself, he had a taste for abstract reasoning allied with a hard practical sagacity.²⁹

The inaccuracy of Smith became a major vice with the economists who followed in his footsteps, particularly noticeable in his immediate intellectual offspring, Robert Malthus. The celebrated Essay on Population Bagehot characterizes as a conclusive argument based on untrue facts. In support of this charge he employs a method common to him since the composition of Physics and Politics, that is, the return to the natural history of a social phenomenon to establish his view of its modern aspects. Such is the nature of his refutation of Malthus' theory of population, and his review of the theoretical and practical value of the whole canon of the economist's works, especially those dealing with the important doctrine of rent. He presents the character of Malthus as that of the popular expositor of utopias in the age of reaction against the French Revolution.³⁰ But the true founder of the abstract science of political economy was David Ricardo, a Jew who made a fortune on the Stock Exchange before he turned to the examination of the laws which made such a feat possible. From a literary standpoint,

29. Ibid., VII, pp.176-212; see also "The Centenary of The Wealth of Nations", Works, IX, pp.193-200.

30. "Malthus", Economic Studies, Works, VII, pp.212-26.

the study of the personality and qualifications of this interesting man is perhaps the best part of Economic Studies. Smith was a closet philosopher who tested assumptions by a homely and practical wisdom; Ricardo was a banker and a speculator - that is, an eminently worldly fellow in the realm of finance - who founded a philosophy of abstractions. This paradox is somewhat inexplicable to Bagehot, who eventually concludes that the precise calculations necessary on the Exchange, coupled with an intellectual affinity for James Mill and the Utilitarians, made Ricardo what he is known for in history. To a lover of fact and exactitude in speculation Mill's variety of system-making was peculiarly distasteful, and the author of Economic Studies took few pains to conceal his antagonism to the Benthamite school, which founded all political and economic institutions on a few a priori assumptions about human nature. With a few a priori axioms of his own and an empirical logic, Bagehot never hesitated to expose the fallacies of other philosophers.³¹

The remainder of Economic Studies is devoted to discussions of the necessity for and possibilities of practical realization of the transferability of capital and labor, the growth of capital, and the establishment of the cost of production. In the analysis of these four factors Bagehot follows his usual and certainly commendable method. Thus in the

31. "Ricardo", ibid., VII, pp. 226-35.

question of labor he begins by pointing out that the shifts in centers of active trade result in constant changes in the direction of flow of capital and, to a lesser extent, labor. Again the learning that went into Physics and Politics serves him well when next he traces the history of labor from its simplicity and rigidity in primitive societies to its complexity in the modern world, using in support an extraordinarily wide basis of fact, from the Bible, the records of ancient Hindu society, and studies of the American Indian, to current statistics of trade. He then considers the impediments to a free circulation of labor, and concludes with a presentation of the conditions necessary to its maximum mobility. But in the course of the argument the worshipper of laissez-faire must give a little ground to political interference; he realizes that an efficient external government is necessary to make the migration of labor safe and possible.

The treatment of the transferability of capital is in general the same, although here we see best Bagehot's attempts to make over English political economy from an abstract to an empirical basis by his frequent preoccupation with fresh definitions of the nature and uses of capital. There is an almost exclusive emphasis on this aspect of industry: aside from the nature and quantity of resources (which, curiously enough, Bagehot nowhere considers), the motivating forces in industry are capital and management. Hence the growth of capital is of great importance, and the greatest single factor which aids its in-

crease is, as we have noticed before, the saving and subsequent investment of a portion of private income. Again the discussion is erected on an empirical and historical foundation, embracing the history of capital, the prerequisites for its growth, and the forces operating against it. The chapter on cost of production follows the identical formula, but here the treatment is considerably more elaborate. There is a preliminary discussion of prices (that is, basically, costs), and of the fixed relation between price and cost. The burden of the chapter is the exposition and analysis in concrete terms of an initial abstract definition, which, if nothing else, reveals the care employed in formulating such definitions: "Cost of production", he writes, "in a mature state of industry and where there is a strict division of persons into capitalists, artisans, and laborers, is the cost at which it would 'pay' a capitalist to produce a given product, and the word 'pay' means that he must have his 'outlay', the money he has expended, returned to him, and that he must have, over and above, so much, by way of profit...as will induce him to make the production"³² Beyond this, Bagehot considers in terms of reality the factors entering into the cost of production, the importance of profit to cost, and the determination of the profit rate.

This attempt to make over the ruling philosophy of politi-

32. "Cost of Production", Economic Studies, Works, VII, p.256; the matters referred to above form the ff. chapters of Econ. Studies: "The Transferability of Labour", " of Capital", "The Growth of Capital", and "The Cost of Production", Works, VII, pp.109-27, 127-56, 235-54, 254-79, respectively.

cal economy at least suggests the extent of his dissent, which is further revealed in his attitude toward John Stuart Mill, the last of the great economists of the classical school - Smith, Malthus, James Mill, and Ricardo. The second essay from Bagehot's pen to reach publication, "The Principles of Political Economy", based on J.S. Mill's book of that title, and a late Economist article on the occasion of the philosopher's death, indicate no change of attitude in a lifetime of study.³³ In his major work on political economy Mill attempted to combine the methods of Smith, and Ricardo, that is, the inductive, based on observed phenomena, and the deductive, following hypothetical assumptions. In economics and logic, Bagehot admits that such was the younger Mill's greatness: he had extraordinary powers of integration, manifesting themselves in his ability to survey the whole literature of a subject and to correlate it with what he himself had observed. But this is the extent of his enthusiasm, for he sharply criticizes Mill in detail. In general he finds the Utilitarian wrong in his conclusions, but correct in his facts: he disagrees with his theory of wages and of the effect of machinery on the national economy; he quarrels with him for omitting the problem of the augmentation of capital; and he violently dissents from his views on the improvement of the laborer's position. This last is interesting as an

33. The first essay, written in 1848, was printed in the Prospective Review; the second, in the Economist for May 17, 1873.

early revelation of Bagehot's steadfast prejudice against democracy. He denounces Mill's position here on three grounds: first, his refusal to recognize the ignorance of the laboring classes; second, his inability to comprehend the dangers of democracy, manifested, of course, in his persistent advocacy of democratic heresies; and third, his ignorance of the moral issues involved (Bagehot had already found him weak in ethics). We have here the same attitude distinguishable in all the major works: the consistent opinion that the best we can do is to save the souls of working-men, with the naive unawareness that a hungry man cares little for his conscience or his wit.³⁴

4.

We must come to the same conclusion with respect to Bagehot's excursions into economics that we reached in reviewing the political and literary writings, that he was a sharp and intelligent critic with a particular genius for analysis and exposition, but that he was also a very unphilosophic one, who remained inveterately blind to the deeper implications of institutions and to the broad trends of thought and activity in his life. In Lombard Street he revealed an accurate knowledge of English banking, of the human characteristics of the "Street", and of the psychological basis on which the financial structure of industry is very largely erected; in The Depreciation of

34. "The Principles of Political Economy", Works, VIII, pp. 188-232; "The Late Mr. Mill", ibid., IX, pp. 117-21.

Silver he exhibited a detailed if unrewarding knowledge of the inferior medium of exchange and of the problems it had recently provoked; and Economic Studies, although only a fragment in a larger design, convinces us of his elaborate knowledge of and critical insight into the actual working of economic institutions. But if we consider for a moment the history of economic thought in England, we are immediately aware of the obvious fact that students of the subject read Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, and J.S. Mill, but scarcely give more than a passing glance to Bagehot. And the explanation is certainly not hard to find: the great classical economists surveyed the whole field in its normal context of human nature and man's environmental problems, while he looked at a portion of it with little more than the attitude of the banker. What is the difference, after all, between a great philosopher and a poor one? Simply this, that the curiosity of the former embraces the widest range of phenomena; consequently, before he lays down rules of conduct and principles of evidence in detail, he has at least attempted to see dispassionately the whole picture into which he must fit his special conclusions. In a phrase, Bagehot was afraid to take a chance. A lover of fact, he was yet unable to distinguish between the important truth and the unimportant, nor could he see the profounder generalizations which logically belong with the important truths.

His quarrel with the classical political economists is re-

ducible to a single criticism, to wit, that they were abstract while he proposed to be concrete. But the most empirical scientist must announce principles, for it is with principles that the human mind deals; any "industrious blockhead" - to use Theodore Roosevelt's epithet for the members of the American Historical Society - can accumulate evidence, but evidence, to have meaning, must be rationally understood. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote, it is the peculiar province of man to invent general theories - although we hope, of course, that the generalizations are based on an adequate foundation phenomena. The works of men who are afraid to invent theories often die with the death of their bodies, nor is there much additional value in the mere borrowing of the theories of others. Yet Bagehot did little more than this. The basic assumptions of classical economics were a priori dogmas with him: he simply took over the broad doctrine of laissez-faire, in spite of the fact that his critical approach to Adam Smith and his followers was backed by some plausible conclusions of his own on the cost of production, price, rent, population, and the transferability of labor and capital. Here, however, we must notice an important difference between the borrowed and the formulated conclusions: the doctrine of free trade, for example, is a plan of action; cost of production, on the other hand, is a statement designed to make ideally understandable a group of related facts. The latter may be tested by action, but it was not consciously designed toward that end. In the sociological sciences,

however, the end is usually, if not always, the improvement of human welfare. The truth is that there is little that is really constructive in Bagehot's additions to economics.

Fundamentally, the Economic Studies, even in intention, was only designed to bring a little more order into the understanding of the existing commercial and industrial organization of society. As in politics, its author exhibited a combination of liberalism and conservatism, with a considerable philosophic bias in favor of the latter. Bagehot advocated no changes in the status quo; as a believer in laissez-faire, he was convinced that the economic relations of his own day or any time were simply the manifestations of a kind of natural law, quite able to take care of itself without rational guidance on the part of mankind. It is a curious and melancholy fact, probably the result of long and increasing prosperity, that no English social thinker in the latter half of the nineteenth century seems to have heard of Marx, and this even though Marx got most of his ideas from the works of English economists or from the observation of English industry. A little understanding of the immense role played by economic activity in the whole conduct of society and government - the understanding which contributed so much to the greatness of Marx - was something that Bagehot and many of the classical economists sorely lacked. Their primary weakness was an insufficient understanding of the economic organization of society and of the

fact that the evolution of society is most often determined by that organization; consequently, if a conscious discipline is to be exercised in morals, religion, and politics, an equal discipline must be an element of economic activity. Absolute freedom in the methods of gaining a living, that is, of getting and holding a measure of economic power, is as absurd as the equalitarian democracy of Rousseau, with its notions about the goodness of man. Economic freedom presupposes an equality of opportunity and ability, equal distribution of natural resources, a constant equilibrium between supply and demand, an enlightened view of the subordinate position of individual to social needs, a limitation of the incentive to the accumulation of wealth, and a number of lesser characteristics; - it must presuppose these things if it may claim any moral justification. Yet none of them exists in society. But what is more important, society tends always to reconstruct itself according to a certain rigid pattern, each compartment of which is more or less special, none of them enjoying equality in any activity with the others; and this pattern of relationships is very largely determined by the ways in which men make a living. Definite organization and freedom of enterprise are fundamentally incompatible.

A doctrine is true, of course, until it is proved false, and we usually accept it as true as long as it works. Laissez-faire in nineteenth-century England worked admirably for a while; but no economist was aware of the fact that even in its

great day, freedom of enterprise actually existed within the context of a particular social organization, which it continued to strengthen as time went on. There is no need to describe the economic history of the world in the past century in order to review again the immense complexities and the evolutionary pattern that proved so often the inadequacy of complete non-interference. We have pointed out a few of the important generalizations which help to explain the economic organization of society and the influence of that organization on the other cultural phenomena of the community. Bagehot did not go deeply enough into economics, no more than he did into politics. There are certain fundamental questions which ought to be answered before one attempts the analysis of an institution or a practice, and perhaps the most fundamental of all is the question, why does it exist? Economic enterprise exists to create wealth, as Bagehot understood, but antecedent to that is the fact that the creation of wealth is contributory to the happiness of mankind. If economic activity in the context of a certain organizational pattern does contribute to the benefit of man, it is sound - in other words, it "works"; but when it does not, the thing itself is weak, perhaps even false, and acceptance of it is subject to question. We may conclude by saying again that there was much shrewd understanding in Bagehot of the facts before him, trade and money, in this case, but the imagination to see the fact in its total setting he did not have. Economics

was the "dismal science" in England because it took the economic characteristics of individual men and isolated them, thus distorting them by removing them from their true setting. As the manysided humanist, Bagehot realized this limitation and attempted to rise above it; he was not too successful.

Chapter VI
The Sociologist

1.

If Walter Bagehot had written nothing else besides Physics and Politics, he would still be one of the major figures of Victorian thought and a sociologist of the very first rank. Indeed, his reputation as a critic and a biographer has steadily declined, while his stature as a social thinker and a political analyst has, if anything, increased. The book is unquestionably his magnum opus, written at the climax of his curiosity and enthusiasm and power. And the amazing thing is that the immense preparation for it and the business of composition itself were accomplished during the busiest years of his life. When he began his reading in evolutionary biology and anthropology we can only guess, but it was probably not long before he started to write, toward the end of 1868. One might suspect that his time and energy would have been more than absorbed by his tasks as editor of the Economist, London manager of Stuckey's Bank, contributor of critical and biographical essays to the leading contemporary reviews, and host at numerous brilliant gatherings in his home, as well as attentive husband and dutiful son-in-law. Nevertheless, he contrived to find time for careful study of a number of the most profound books written during the nineteenth century, a few of them standing among the greatest books of any literature. A minimum of reading for

Physics and Politics must have embraced the following works: Buckle's History of Civilization, Sir Henry Maine's Ancient Law, the scattered writings of Sir Edward Taylor and Sir John Lubbock on anthropology (the latter was primarily a mathematician and astronomer), Coleridge's Church and State, John Stuart Mill's Representative Government, and probably Spencer's Social Statics and First Principles. There were undoubtedly other works on the fundamentals of the sociological sciences, especially Huxley's Elementary Physiology and Maudsley's Physiology and Pathology of the Mind, and, of course, everything that he read was made to fit into the context of a wide and accurate knowledge drawn from the observation of political societies and institutions around him. This massive but thoroughly digested learning began to appear in the fall of 1868, through the medium of John Morley's fortnightly Review, as a new treatise on the history of social organizations. Its composition was completed in 1870, and it was published as a book in 1872.

The title of Physics and Politics is unfortunately misleading; the subject matter is concerned with biology, anthropology, and ethnology, and how Bagehot came to think that he was dealing with physics, or anything remotely touching that science, is inexplicable. Actually, the matter of psychology became the most useful tool in his analysis and exposition, as it was to be in Lombard Street and the Economic Studies. We may regard Physics and Politics as the application of extensive learning in the new scientific discoveries and a wide observa-

tion of phenomena to a consideration of the growth of politically organized societies. What its author learned from the varied sources he examined is not hard to discover, although it would be impossible to trace specific connections between the ideas of one man and those of the book itself, except in a few clearly indicated places. The basic attitudes and fundamental theories of Darwin, Maine, and the anthropologists became the groundwork of Bagehot's book, the context of knowledge, so to speak, out of which the work grew and took shape. Darwin obviously supplied the sine qua non of both fact and theory; indeed, Physics and Politics may be thought of as very largely the application of the Origin of Species to the problem of social evolution. And it is, moreover, the first important work in that field. Hutton thought that Bagehot had discovered the connection between politics and Darwin's theory through his observation of the conservatism of politically strong societies like the English, and the erratic instability of weak societies like the French.¹ The theory of the survival of the fittest animal forms, that is, those which best adapt themselves to environmental conditions, is plainly at the bottom of all the important premises of Physics and Politics.

Maine's Ancient Law supplied Bagehot with a picture of the rules of conduct, customs, superstitions, and religious convictions of primitive societies, from which evidence he worked out the notion that a primitive society must sacrifice all individual ambitions and desires, if not a great many social needs,

simply to secure the unity or disciplinary cooperation necessary to the very survival of the community. Lubbock is cited for his description of the contemporary savage mind, which Bagehot attempted to correlate with that of modern man's prehistoric ancestors.² To Buckle, Bagehot was indebted for the idea of a kind of social evolution, or philosophic basis on which to establish an analytical attitude toward the growth of communal organization. From Mill's Representative Government came the explanation of the presence of arrested or static societies, the early advantages of slavery, and the relationship between government and the development of the social organization. Whether Spencer's two early works supplied important material, or any at all, for that matter, is a debatable question. Their significance in connection with Physics and Politics lies in the fact that they contain, at least in embryo the theory of social and organic evolution which he was later to formulate at length in The Study of Sociology and The Principles of Sociology, both published in 1876, several years after the publication of Bagehot's book; and the existence of Spencer's theory of social evolution, however fragmentary, prevents his

1. Hutton, "Memoir", Works, I, p. 37.

2. The source of Lubbock's contribution here is obscure: a bibliography of his works contains no anthropological writings, only treatises covering astronomy, meteorology, and mathematics; yet Bagehot writes as though Sir John had indulged in considerable research into the fields of anthropology and ethnology.

amateur contemporary from being the pioneer in the field. But on the other hand, it may have been Spencer who suggested, if unconsciously, the context of phenomena in which he would be working, or more than that, the structure of the doctrine itself. At any rate, a brief review of the theories of the author of the Synthetic Philosophy not only serves to explain the medium into which the other man projected his thinking, but also helps to summarize the vast breadth of knowledge drawn from earlier works that went into Physics and Politics.

The doctrine of evolution as applied to the growth of political organizations was employed by Spencer, and by Bagehot as well, to make a "case" for everything, to find a rational justification for every institution, custom, and mannerism that one finds in any social group, on the ground that if there were no such justification, it would not exist. We must assume this, although any scientist today worth his salt knows that the assumption is highly questionable. Spencer's whole aim, in fact, was to justify, or more specially, to synthesize, all phenomena, and in the sphere of biological evolution he sought to find the simple laws on which he thought that the progressive diversification of organic existence is based. Bagehot approached a much more limited field, but at bottom he was trying to do virtually the same thing, to prove that a general basis may be found for specialized diversity. In its simplest terms, organic evolution means that the historical pattern of life is determined by a number of conditions external to it, in such a way that the successful survival of any one branch of existence depends on its capacity for adapting itself to any

given set of conditions. We must understand, of course, that life is plastic and ever-changing, never fixed in a single rigid pattern. The initial assumption, backed by an overwhelming mass of evidence, is that organic life begins with the simplest form capable of surviving in the presence of what we might call a generalized environment, and that it experiences a spontaneous process which might be said to resolve itself into a twofold growth: first, the adaptation of any single form to its environment, and second, the progressive diversification of forms into an increasingly greater variety living in a greater variety of environmental conditions. In the course of evolution, an initial form seems to follow a completely generalized pattern, but as time goes on, environmental complexity and change induce a constant specialization as diversification proceeds. The curious fact seems to be that extreme specialization is an indication of approaching extinction, probably the result of an attempt at adaptation in an environment changing too rapidly for certain animals to survive in it. And along with the concordance of specialization and failure goes the usual phenomenon of generalization and success; in other words, the early generalized form survives, whereas the late specialized form does not. Man, for example, is a highly generalized animal, but the biological significance of this fact cannot be determined at so early a date in the history of the species.

Spencer's evolutionary doctrine, as originally announced, is an oversimplified, though still forbidding, congeries of mechanical laws applied to organic life. In First Principles, published in 1862 (probably about the time Bagehot first started

reading in the field), he formulated three primary and four secondary laws, all of them belonging to the science of mechanics, but all applied to biology. The primary set embraces certain well known principles of mechanical physics: the persistence of force (Spencer paid a kind of mystic devotion to this law, regarding it as the infinite existence of an ultimate cause which transcends knowledge); the indestructibility of matter; and the continuity of motion. The secondary group includes these: the persistence of relations among forces, that is, the uniformity of interaction among them; the indestructibility but transformability of force; natural spontaneity as the following of the line of least resistance; and the cyclical pattern of motion (which may include almost anything). So far there is little here that could have aided Bagehot, but Spencer at this point has merely shown that the organic and inorganic worlds pursue the same general laws that explain matter in motion. Now a combination of any or all of the above factors indicates that with the integration of matter, motion is dissipated, while with its differentiation, motion is absorbed. Without following the logical pattern in all its details, we may proceed to Spencer's conclusion that evolution of a form follows the above laws of mechanics in the transition from an "incoherent homogeneity to a coherent and definite heterogeneity".³ And here we have arrived at a theory which approaches closely to the underlying thesis of Bagehot's work, namely, that society moves from a state in which radical

3. Barnes, Harry Elmer, "Some Specific Contributions of English Sociology to Political Theory; Part I: Herbert Spencer" (all the following specific citations are from this general series), American Journal of Sociology, XXVII (Nov. 1921), p. 296; see also ibid., pp. 294-96.

impulses, though strong, are ruthlessly sacrificed to maintain the maximum homogeneity, to one in which such impulses are disciplined so that the maximum heterogeneity may exist without destroying the social fabric. In spite of the use of the term "physics", however, it is Bagehot who employs biology and psychology to reach his conclusions, while Spencer uses the mechanical sciences.

Unquestionably, much of the value of Physics and Politics rests on the fact that its author considered the intellectual and emotional products of the spontaneous forces acting on society as well as their biological and physiological manifestations. The American sociologist, Professor Harry E. Barnes, has said that the book "was not only one of the first extensive and successful attempts at a psychological interpretation of society, but it also embodies...most of the leading psychological postulates which have since been offered in the interpretation of social processes".⁴ And he adds the further comment that Bagehot dealt with "the fundamental psychological foundations of group action", and that his psychology was so broad that subsequent discovery has detracted little from the value of his work.⁵ He had come upon an extremely important doctrine, and one which Spencer would not admit, namely, that man's emotional and intellectual characteristics are not only products of spontaneous evolution, but are in themselves also forces determining the nature and direction of that evolution. It was on the basis of Physics and Politics that a well known editor and student of social questions in the

4. "Walter Bagehot and the Psychological Interpretation of Political Evolution", loc. cit., XXVII (Mch. 1922), p.574.

5. Ibid., p. 579.

United States, Mr. Max Lerner, has regarded its author as the leading Victorian sociologist.⁶ It is a mistake, of course, to suppose that Bagehot became a sociologist overnight and only for the length of time necessary to read for and compose his book, after which he turned to banking and money. Evidences of a sociological viewpoint may be found in all the major works: in the Letters on the Coup d'Etat it manifests itself in the opinion that French government cannot be a parliamentary organization because the characteristics of French society make it unsuitable for free discussion among law-makers; in The English Constitution, with its emphasis again on the facts that social traits determine the type of government, that government is a receptacle for the traditional culture of a people, and that the teaching and criticizing functions are proper activities of a legislative body; and finally, we see it in the social psychology which underlies the various theories of credit in Lombard Street. For most of his mature life, Bagehot was at home in the context of sociological ideas, primarily because his own existence embraced ideally so much of the society around him, and because the catholicity of his interests made him aware of the interrelation and interdependence of all human activities and institutions.

2.

Before attempting to discover what Bagehot had to say in Physics and Politics, it is well to note the fact that he dis-

6. "Bagehot", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, I, p. 385

criminate, as Professor Bristol has pointed out, between race-making and nation-making in the evolutionary process. The former is largely confined to prehistoric times, and of it he wisely speaks with caution and brevity; for the latter he could turn to recorded history and to the studies of primitive customs in works like Maine's Ancient Law. For the most part, then, we might characterize the book as the application of Darwin's theories to the process of national growth.⁷ The opening pages of the work are devoted to a preliminary discussion of the value of new scientific research in discovering the nature and progress of mankind, and of the fruits of that research in teaching us the effect of heredity and environment on the individual. It is here that Bagehot lays down significant although highly questionable premises, namely, that history is a continuous series of casual relationships, presenting an even color which gradually changes its shade as mankind improves, and that the primary causes in social growth are intellectual and moral, the tendencies created by mind acting on the will down through the generations, tendencies manifesting themselves in the processes of inheritance. The former marks Bagehot as a typical product of the Victorian evolutionists, who were all highly optimistic; and the latter reveals his steadfast conviction of the existence of a profound and innate moral sense. In the beginning, of course, these characteristics were very obscure: animal impulse and uncontrolled passion marked man at the dawn of his history; the most essential things (sic) were lacking, that is, morality, law, government, and group organization.⁸ The exact origin of the commonwealth

7. Bristol, L.M., Social Adaptation, p.178; quoted in Irvine, op.cit., p.266.

or "polity" is dubious, but Bagehot temporarily accepts Sir Henry Maine's "concentric" theory, that the social unit started with the patriarch, grew progressively through family, house (collection of families), tribe, and finally to the state.

But there is no difficulty in answering the question as to how political organization was preserved once the rudiments of it had been established. The first and greatest need was for obedient cooperation, and to this end, any rule, bad or good, was better than no rule at all. To exact this absolute obedience, on which the very survival of the group depended, there had to be an absolute identity of government, religion, and social censure, the end being to create the "cake of custom" or "hereditary drill" without which the tangential impulses of the group would soon destroy it. Ancient states reveal this "incoherent homogeneity" with an absolute monarch at the head; where they had such a characteristic, they survived; where they lacked it, they perished (as in the case of democratic Athens, for example). The ancient state, then was marked by rigid obedience which provided the conscious impression, unconsciously inherited today, that curbs human impulses and makes liberty of the individual possible. The aim of government was formerly to exact perfect obedience for survival; today its aim is the welfare or happiness of mankind. This celebrated doctrine of the "cake of custom" was the first of the important theories proposed by Bagehot in his view of the evolution of the state. The next question is, How may we explain the rise of a national or "period" character?

8. The period in question here is the age of events in Homer's epics, from which works he gets most of his evidence; the long tenure of man before that time he largely overlooks, for reasons pointed out above.

The answer to it is the second of the fundamental postulates on which his whole structure is based. Some predominant character appeared in an individual or in a group which seemed more impressive or more useful than the others; the imitative instinct in men led them to copy it, and from family to family it spread throughout the community. In the primitive commonwealth the political structure and the social problems were always perfectly identified; consequently, men saw government as the most impressive thing, imitated it and obeyed its laws. Thus we see that the first prerequisite of communal existence, unity enforced by custom, having grown up through imitation and maintained by persecution is dependent upon psychological characteristics in human beings.⁹ The discovery of the primary one, the tendency in man to imitate, is as old as Aristotle.

When we have discovered that the early societies had first to secure absolute unity through enforced obedience, we are confronted with the immediate problem as to how the rigidity of the primitive group gave way to a certain measure of flexibility, so that cultural growth, or progress, could follow; for we clearly recognize that certain societies change radically within a long period of time, while others seem to remain stationary, among them a few that once reached a high plane of cultural development. It is here that the value of conflict manifests itself, and for an explanation of that value Bagehot goes to the basis doctrine of animal evolution. There are three basic principles on which progress depends: first, the prevalence of the strong over the weak, and the fact that the strong tend to be best in

9. "The Preliminary Age", ch. I, Physics and Politics, Works, VIII, pp. 1-27.

all ways, physical, intellectual, and moral; second, the prevalence in a particular group of the most "attractive" character, who also is in general the best; and third, the tendency of extrinsic forces to intensify intrinsic characteristics in potentially progressive nations. The application of natural selection to human beings, however, does not destroy man's religion impulse, nor does it render meaningless his moral sense and his freedom of rational control over the elements of conduct. Since this point is not pursued beyond the bare statement, we are left with a perfectly defensible right to assume that progress does depend on the amoral and irreligious impulses in men - "natural" impulses, although Bagehot plainly did not mean to imply such a doctrine. We shall examine this extremely important question later.¹⁰ At any rate, the discussion of progress is devoted entirely to the cultural characteristics of society other than the religion, and there is little emphasis on individual or even social morality.

The most important factor is that of competition among nations, the best evidence for which is that man has made greater and more continuous progress in the military arts than in any other. Progress in the technique of war arose chiefly from the fact that men in the strong societies devoted most of their energies to the conquest of their weaker neighbors; on the other hand, the weak groups had to devote energy and ingenuity to defending themselves. The result, of course, was that all social organizations had to form a character suited to war-making. Prior to the pattern of military conquest, however, is the fact that one group does seem from the beginning to be stronger than a number of

10. See infra, ch. vi, sec. 4, and ch. vii, sec. 2.

ability through the resulting heterogeneity of stock. And finally, provisional institutions like slavery provide men with leisure for discovery and reflection. But the basic pattern of society is still military, for war stimulates certain fundamentally necessary virtues, such as valor, loyalty, and discipline. Religion aids war by providing what Bagehot calls a "high concentration of steady feeling".¹² The end of the purely military society, however, is in sight: the primitive group, even when it begins to show signs of progress, is first concerned with the creation of an organized and coherent social unit, and to this end war is most conducive. War, Bagehot concludes, is for "nation-making"; peace is for "nation - changing". This dictum became an elaborate doctrine with Spencer, who found the whole history of social organization to be divided into two major aspects, the military and the industrial, the first to aid in the establishment of the organization, and the second to enjoy the fruits of organized existence. War and nation-making, then may be thought of as existing in a casual relationship.¹³

The whole process of nation-making, Bagehot thinks, can be discovered in the multitude of smaller causes which are constantly altering nations already established, and among the most important are imitation, which is the strongest propensity in man, and its

11. There is an amusing digression here in which Bagehot takes a shot at Matthew Arnold's plea for an English Academy: "Academies", he writes, "are asylums for the thoughts and ideas of a past age" (Phys. and Pol., Works, VII, p. 39).

12. Ibid., Works, VIII, p. 50.

13. "The Use of Conflict", ch. ii, ibid., Works, VIII, pp. 27-53.

concomitant impulse, persecution. Thus we believe with the society around us because unconsciously we imitate it, belief being simply the intellectual manifestation of the imitative impulse. But imitation usually starts somewhere; almost always it arises from the desire to imitate a great or accomplished person, and is more intensely exhibited in the shrinkage from and persecution of an unpopular character. In fact, survival may often depend on the quickness and accuracy of the imitative power, for it is strongest in the untutored mind, which most needs the support of the social organization. Persecution is equally strong, but the two forces do not conflict. Change really acts on only a few congenial men, whom the rest of the community imitate, perceiving in their ways the best chance of survival (which is probably true); persecution falls on those who do not agree with this accepted way, where agreement is plain good sense. In summary, Bagehot again emphasized the psychological keynote when he writes that "the national character is formed by the confluence of congenial attractions and accordant detestations".¹⁴ We can now understand those characteristics of primitive societies which led to progress and those which resulted in stagnancy and retrogression. The great age of race-making covering the long period of prehistoric man was the age in which those characteristics necessary to group existence were being formed; but once that group existence is established, other characteristics begin to appear which make for change and growth within the social organization. Progress, then, is the manifestation of differentiation in the animal form, on which Spencer thought so much depended. Between the stagnant and progressive groups is the cast society,

14. Ibid., VIII, p.68; "Nation-Making," ch.iii, ibid., VIII pp.53-72

which holds to rigid discipline while making use of variability, having pursued differentiation only to a limited degree. But as we shall notice, the completely differentiated society is rare among civilizations for reasons which, unfortunately, Bagehot cannot discover.¹⁵

He is sure that the change in societies from the primitive status of fixed custom to the modern one of growth, change and progress came only with the foundation of government by discussion, the subjects to be discussed, curiously enough, being abstract principles. The allowance of debate among law-makers (and, ipso facto, among the members of the community) was an admission that a principle or plan of action is not fixed and cannot be settled by established rule, thus presupposing a free choice among men; further, it means that there is no inviolable authority, for everything may in time be exposed to popular deliberation. Discussion is perhaps the best incentive to progress, placing, as it does, a premium on intelligence. But the rational consideration of problems on the part of the people can be successful only if it establishes tolerance, which gives the libertarian state the "equanimity" that every state must have, and toward the end of which the "cake of custom" must be formed. The true aim of discussion is to lead men into speculative thought and to the skeptical examination of ancient traditions; but there is considerable insistence on the assumption that, if it is to be an agent of elevation, the subjects must be great, and what is

15. "Nation-Making", ch. iv, ibid., VIII, pp. 72-101. Most of this chapter is devoted to a description of primitive societies and to a more detailed survey of their evolution. Its most interesting aspect is Bagehot's turning to the experiences and characteristics of childhood to find illustrations of primitive traits, undoubtedly a sound psychological and biological device, since the history of the individual frequently rehearses the history of the species.

more important, the leaders of thought at the time must be great men. Bagehot would have agreed with Justice Holmes: "If a man is great, he will inspire others with his greatness". A brief survey of the history of ancient Greece, Judea, and of Europe during the Middle Ages is offered to support these contentions. But there were many other forces aiding the free flow of ideas, particularly trade, colonization, religious wars like the Crusades, invasion, and the remains of Roman law in medieval Europe.

The important question, why a few peoples were able to establish free government while the rest could not, Bagehot cannot answer, although he offers the characteristics prerequisite to the growth of government by discussion. There are three basic requirements; first, strong family life; second, the gradual aggregation of families into "clans", and of clans into nations;¹⁶ and third, the gradual enlargement of the area of subjects open to free discussion, and of the number of participants. Free intellectual consideration of problems is of immense value in ridding mankind of the two worst inheritances from their prehistoric state, namely, the tendency to immediate and unthinking action, which is mitigated by the requirement that at least the law-makers talk about a thing before they do it, and the excessive increase of the population, to support which doctrine Bagehot quotes from Spencer's dubious evolutionary biology to the effect that highly intellectual men are nervously more refined and sensitive, and hence produce fewer children. In summary, the age of discussion stimulates the growth of man's most valuable traits: "animated moderation----life with measure,----spirit with reasonableness".¹⁷ They are excellent epithets for Bagehot himself.

16. Sir Henry Maine's "concentric" theory of the rise of nations.

The concomitance of progress and debate further emphasizes the necessity for and use of intellectual leadership, which in turn suggests that evolution in the direction of human ambitions may depend for the most part on an adequate supply of "great men". This is one supposition which Bagehot offers as a possible explanation of the presence of retrogressive, static, and progressive nations; the problem is more complex, however, than such a facile theory suggests, and a more elaborate set of causes must be found. To begin with, he believes that progress is as Spencer defined it: the increasing adaptation of man to his environment, or in other words, the adaptation of internal desires and abilities to the external conditions of life. But progress is not simply a biological phenomenon; as we have seen, it is psychological more than anything else, and because of the imitative instinct, it depends on the existence of "Progressive" men, who act best according to the conditions imposed by environment. England may be chosen as an example of the nation which has come most closely to Darwin's state of perfected adaptation, since it exhibits the three basic superior attainments: the broad and sure command over the powers of nature; the general soundness of the average individual's body and mind; and his marked ability to employ all three to gain his ends. The curious aspect of this conviction is that the psychological interpretation of nation-making seems to have given considerable ground to the biological. But the final summary offered in answer to the question of what characteristics the progressive nation possesses which are not shared

17. Phys. and Pol., Works, VIII, p. 130; "The Age of Discussion", ch. v, ibid., VIII, pp. 101-32

by others, is less marked by the logical weakness which appears from time to time in Physics and Politics.

The nation which is to go furthest in adapting ambitions and powers to the conditions of its environment must have at least six basic qualifications before any others equally useful can be acquired: first, cooperation among men; second, sufficient similarity among the members of the group to insure cooperation, that is, group homogeneity; third cooperative groups within society originally cemented and disciplined by the fixity of custom; fourth, a relative isolation among nations to prevent any impediment to the growth of native custom; fifth, a later competition of customs through conflict to eliminate bad customs; and sixth, the growth of military virtues in response to the self-preservative instinct of society during the period of competition. But progress begins only when all these disciplinary characteristics break down as visible social bonds through the rise of government by discussion; the inner habits which they have formed, however, must be maintained in the individual to prevent a recurrence of the anarchy of tangential impulse. In this way inventiveness through liberty is able to cooperate with the previously established discipline, and the rough military virtues give way to the qualifications of peace, industry, and art. In the dichotomy devised by Spencer, the first or war-like period of social growth gives way to the second or industrial period. If society is to be organized toward the ends of peace, it must be organized first along the lines of cooperative effort. What results is the "animated moderation" which makes for civilization.¹⁸

18. "Verifiable Progress Politically Considered", ch. vi, ibid., VIII, pp. 132-45.

Before we indulge in a critical examination of the doctrines set forth in Physics and Politics, it may be well to consider briefly how those doctrines fared in the later course of the science of sociological evolution. In a field which has come to assume so much importance in the present-day attempts to understand the origin, nature, and problems of man in society, it would be absurd to treat Bagehot's book as a study in vacuo. It would probably be most intelligent to regard it as a pioneer work along with Spencer's early writings, in the history of social organization, for it had a considerable direct influence in England on its immediate followers, and its chief ideas enjoyed an extraordinary currency on the Continent and in the United States. The whole piece is built around certain basic theories and in this it follows the pattern of virtually all Bagehot's writings, which are elaborations of fact and inference built around a few leading doctrines. In the case of Physics and Politics, these are the theories of the "cake of custom", the imitative impulse in man, the uses of great men, and the rise of progress following the breaking of external discipline and its retention as an inner control. Along with these but subsidiary to them are the conflict of customs, the early dominance of the group over the individual, the spirit of cooperation as an essential prerequisite of progress, and the eventual giving way of physical to intellectual conflict. Sociologists in England, American, and on the Continent found these ideas provocative and sound, for each of them became in some cases the foundation of a whole treatise. We are in no sense concerned here with writing a history of social theory, but as we have said previously, there can be a poor understanding at best of a great book which is regarded as an isolated cultural phenomenon.

3.

The fact that many of the ideas in Physics and Politics later enjoyed such a wide circulation among Continental and American historians of social organization attests to their fertility and to the vigor of Bagehot's mind. His theory, Professor Barnes has written, rests on the "psychological modification of Spencer's doctrine of evolution through integration and differentiation", but in expanding and elaborating it, he "anticipated most of the interpretations since advanced".¹⁹ There can be little question that the work had a direct and immediate effect on subsequent evolutionary thought in England, as certain later writers plainly show; that it was read on the Continent, however, and thus became the particular progenitor of kindred treatises there, cannot be taken as a fact. Certainly it was known, but men who made use of ideas which occur first in it may be found from Moscow to Paris, and we are hardly at liberty to suppose that they were all familiar with the sociological works of the editor of an English financial journal. Following the publication of the Origin of Species in 1859, there were no end of new and extremely fertile ideas based on evolution literally "in the air", and to be adopted by anyone with sense enough to incorporate them within his stock of learning. Spencer accumulated a great many, and with them set out to conquer the whole field of phenomena; Bagehot was a little more careful, and consequently his pioneer attempt to see social growth in terms of biological evolution stands up much better under the test of years. And the directions which the latter pointed out seem also to have been considerably

19. "Walter Bagehot and the Psychological Interpretation of Political Evolution", loc. cit., p. 580.

more fruitful in the minds of a cosmopolitan variety of sociologists at the close of the nineteenth and in the early part of the twentieth century. It is not necessary to suppose that Physics and Politics was read and its leading notations deliberately adopted by social theorists in all the civilized nations of the western world in order to make a case for the book. What we can say in this: among the ideas stimulated by the publication of Darwin's great work, Bagehot was the first to select and to give a new interpretation to those which have since proved soundest and most conducive to further speculation in the same direction.²⁰

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Bagehot's treatise inspired several important contributions to English thought, and we may assume that Spencer exploited it to some extent in the writing of his Principles of Sociology, the first part of which was published in 1876. Thomas Huxley's celebrated Romanes Lecture of 1893 showed indications of having grown from the earlier work. It was here that the leading proponent of evolution in the field of letters admitted that the Darwinian theory, in its strict biological sense, could not be used to account for the moral and intellectual progress of mankind, nor could it be depended upon, as Spencer implicitly believed, to lead humanity onward and upward forever toward the light. Now Bagehot implies plainly that man must do his conscious part; everything may be automatic and spontaneous save the presence in the community of a sentient effort not only to reach out into the world, but to understand and to make use of what the world

20. There is no record that Physics and Politics was ever translated; only The English Constitution appeared in another language, in this case German.

has got to offer. Man has a large measure of freedom rationally to choose one thing or another; choice implies intelligence, and intelligence suggests the possibility of a certain measure of conscious control over environmental phenomena. The imitation of great or "favored" men may be an automatic response, but the great man must distinguish himself by doing something which indicates the presence of a virtue not possessed by others; moreover, imitation itself may be the outgrowth of a capacity for rational choice. This may not be scientifically accurate, but at least Bagehot believed it. There is plenty of evidence that he found no conflict between the determinism of evolution and the freedom predicated on religious faith and moral responsibility. And Thomas Henry Huxley was too good a philosopher to suppose that the whole of man's tenure on earth could be understood in the light of a few mechanical and biological principles.

The same year in which "Darwin's Bulldog" delivered his Romanes Lecture, Charles Henry Pearson's National Life and Character was published. This gloomy prophecy of the conquest of western civilization by a barbarian horde from Asia and Africa actually has little in common with Bagehot's objective and philosophic work. The accurate predictions, however, such as those of the rise of state socialism, the collapse of the church, and the tyranny of industrial organizations, attest to the soundness of Pearson's understanding. His basic method was comparable to that employed in Physics and Politics, being a sociological examination of the characteristics which have contributed to the progress of the English nation, and of those which are potentially a retarding influence; he bases his predictions of the general outcome of civilizations on a thorough examination of the envir-

onmental factors touching each branch of it. While following Bagehot's thought on the rise of discussion as contributing most to the evolution of man, he nevertheless arrives at opposite conclusions. Discussion and industry can be carried too far, and man will suffer a serious biological weakening because of his tendency to let machinery do his work and because he does discuss instead of act, - such was the fatal end to which Pearson's thought carried him.²¹ Benjamin Kidd, in his Social Evolution (1894), followed the same line of reasoning, but in this case ending with a completely different and highly indefensible conclusion. His theory was that group constraint is the basic factor in social progress, while freedom of individual initiative is the disintegrating force which constantly endangers society. Thus evolution may be seen as the product of a struggle between the rational individual and the "socializing" forces on which progress depends. A kind of super-rational "social principle" must, therefore, always prevail over the individual, and Kidd feels that religion fulfills the requirements of such a principle. The rest of his argument is even more absurd. Bagehot, we remember, felt that the necessary domination of the group over the individual came through the "cage of Custom", but that progress came only when this tyranny was broken and free discussion established.²² Many other English sociologists followed later where Bagehot had first cut the way, notably Leonard T. Hobhouse, undoubtedly the greatest of all, Alexander Sutherland and William McDougall, psychologists, Wilfred Trotter,

21. See Murray, R.H., "Bagehot's Seminal Mind", Studies in the English Social and Political Thinkers of the Nineteenth Century, 2 vols., London 1929, vol II, pp. 267-73.

22. See Barnes, H.E., "Benjamin Kidd and the 'Super-Rational' Basis of Social and Political Processes," Amer. Jrn. of Sociology, XXVII (Feb. 1922), pp. 581-87, and Murray, Op. cit., pp. 255-67

who elaborated the "cake of custom" into the "herd instinct" theory, and Graham Wallas.²³

In the United States the suggestions advanced by the author of Physics and Politics reached their best known exposition in William Graham Sumner's Polkways (1907). His belief was that social evolution is automatic and cannot be altered by human effort, but nevertheless progress follows, at least in its initial stages, the outline proposed by Bagehot. Man has built up certain group habits conducive to success in the struggle for existence through imitation and through a crude process of trial and error. These group habits function primarily on the subconscious level; when raised to the conscious and supported by group authority, they become what Sumner called mores, which determine right and wrong conduct. Believing that the individuals composing society could always handle group problems, Sumner, a thorough determinist, cared little for disciplinary theory and stoutly defended laissez-faire.²⁴ America's most brilliant contribution to social theory, and one which grew ultimately out of Physics and Politics, was Lester Ward's doctrine, proposed in Pure Sociology, (1903), that the conscious method of rational control is superior to the unconscious, which is provided by the spontaneous forces of evolutionary growth. Thus Bagehot's theory of discussion eventually realizes itself in the profound doctrine that the mind of man is itself a social force, but one which can

23. See Barnes, "Some Typical Contributions of English Sociology to Political Theory" (Specific citations are from this series), Amer. Jrnl. Soc., XXVII (Jan.1922), pp.442-85; (May 1922), pp.737-41 742-57; XXVIII (Jul.1922), pp.49-66; (Sept.1922),pp.179-204.

24. See Barnes "The Doctrines of Sumner and L. F. Ward", Amer. Jrnl. Sociology, XXV (July 1919), pp.1-23.

change the direction and degree of other forces.²⁵ The principle of the conflict of customs in furthering social progress appeared in Albion Small's view that the growth of a society is largely determined by the emergence, conflict, and commodation of human interests as they are manifested in group customs; on the other hand, cooperation depending on homogeneity, the identity of interest, and the imitative instinct were best elaborated by Franklin Giddings in the doctrine of "consciousness of kind", which is largely generated by mutual suggestion, example, and imitation.²⁶

On the Continent the ideas voiced by Bagehot found an even wider currency, although, as we have said, we are not at liberty to suppose that they came directly out of Physics and Politics. In fact, Continental sociologists probably arrived at them independently, but the fact that they arrived at the same place certainly reveals the fertility of the pioneer work. The first extensive use of the theory of imitation was that made by the French criminologist, Gabriel Tarde, who regarded society as a collection of individuals exercising a mutual influence on each other, and the extent and nature of this influence very largely determines the pattern which the group follows. Chief of these "persuasive forces" is that held by the great or "favored" men over the members of the community, who, in turn, follow the leaders because of the imitative instinct. Tarde goes on to expand his views into a philosophy of "social rhythm", but at

25. See Barnes, ibid., loc.cit., XXV (May 1920), pp. 150-70

26. See Barnes, "Walter Bagehot and the Psychological Interpretation of Political Evolution", Amer. Joun. Sociology, XXVII (Mch. 1922), p. 581, and the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, "Giddings" and "Small".

bottom it is the imitative factor which motivates the processes of group activity. Imitation, among other characteristics, leading to the constraining pressure of the group on the individual, became the central thesis in the theory of the great French philosopher and sociologist, Emile Durkheim, the justifiable successor of Auguste Comte. A profound ethnologist, Durkheim assembled a mass of evidence to support his view that institutional factors such as religion, law, ethics, value judgements, and the like, are imperative for the individual because they are collective, that is, the group represents itself collectively through a union of separate consciences. Almost any doctrine opposed to the atomic structure of society, such as Durkheim's may be seen to bear a fundamental resemblance to Bagehot's theory of primitive homogeneity established through the "cake of custom."

Moving now to the question of the uses of conflict, we find that the competition of customs growing out of the mixture of groups as a determinant in the formation of powerful and despotic states is the central element in the social theory of two mid-Continental sociologists, the Austrian, Gustav Ratzenhofer, and the Pole, Ludwik Gumplowicz. The former expanded the doctrine of conflict until it became the primary factor in the establishment as well as the progress of social organization. In fact, the state emerged only after one group, through a superiority of the military virtues, gained dominion over one or several others. The differentiation of social structures followed, growing largely out of trade and commerce. Socialization arose from necessity, expressing itself either in voluntary submission to the end of group welfare, or through force imposed by an alien interest. As Bagehot held, Ratzenhofer concluded the "conquest" state always

gives way to the "cultural"; there is a cyclical pattern, however, according to which evolution may be defined as an alternation between differentiation leading to conflict and socialization paving the way for harmony. The notion that history may be seen as an unending struggle was an element in the philosophy of Marx, and a foundation for the whole theory of Gumplowicz, whose disciple Ratzehofer was. That the Pole borrowed from the author of Das Kapital, as well as adopted ideas which were prominent in Physics and Politics, is manifested by the view that the social conflict goes on first between racially distinct primitive groups, next between states formed by physically dominant groups which have conquered and absorbed the weaker, and ultimately between classes within the state.

It is interesting to note that Bagehot could never emphasize one characteristic of the social process at the expense of the others, as the sociologists just considered placed their emphasis on conflict. Moving further to the east, we find that the early Russian evolutionists who employed ideas identical with those in Physics and Politics exhibited an almost pathetic taste for the contributions of peace. Perhaps the sharpest critic of the narrow post-Darwinian conception of growth as conflict - survival of the fittest, as though men were solely animals of prey - was the pacifist, Yakov Novicov, who held that there were four levels of conflict which indicate, in the progress from one to another, the gradual elimination of violence from the growth of human organizations; these were the physiological, the economic, the political, all implying violence, and finally, the intellectual, without force or exploitation. This doctrine is little more than Bagehot's insistence on the need to break

the "cake of custom" in order to substitute intellectual for physical struggle. The spirit of mutual cooperation as the essential prerequisite for progress is the central point in the writings of the famous Russian anarchist, Prince Petr Alexeyevitch Kropotkin, an exiled wanderer, a strange and rather tragic spirit. With no belief in the efficacy of government, he devoted a lifetime to the search for scientific and philosophic justification of the view that evolution is the growth of a spontaneous and disciplinary cooperation among individuals, each being the master of his own fate, but each necessary to the survival of the others. Kropotkin lived in London from about 1900 to 1917, when he returned to Russia after the Revolution. In the British capital he undoubtedly read Bagehot, for his best work, Mutual Aid; a Factor of Evolution, published in London in 1902, bears many traces of contact with the older book. The same doctrine, the spirit of cooperation, was further elaborated by the Belgian sociologist, Guillaume de Greef.²⁷

Scientists and philosophers in all civilized lands have found a wealth of material in Darwin's great contributions to humanity's understanding of the world and of itself, and, among those who first applied the doctrine of evolution to the growth of man, Bagehot surely stands high. We have seen that he pointed out many paths, all of which have led to a deeper understanding of society and man's place within it. In Physics and Politics he approached most closely to the stature of a philosopher: he was not merely assembling evidence, nor was he simply offering personal opinions; he was drawing rational conclusions from the study of the discoveries of others, and from the observation of men and institutions around him. Every philosophy, of course,

is born of the cultural context of which its author lives; the ideas which are "in the air" at the time are those which make their way into the works of thinkers and critics, and the book we are considering here is no different from the rest. Several of the now obsolete attitude of the Victoria era entered into it, as we shall note later; the logic of inference, the concentration of analysis, and the whole unity of style and tone are not up to the standard achieved in the English Constitution, or perhaps even the separate chapter of Lombard Street. Bagehot covered an immense breadth of material; ideas from many sources, rapidly assimilated, are thrown together to offer support for extensive conclusions; the coherence and organization and style of the book have suffered as a consequence, but what it lacks as a literary product is redeemed by its richness as a philosophic contribution. This is not to say, however, that Physics and Politics is not good reading; its looseness of structure does not affect its fundamental virtues. It is science written in a journalistic genre; the humor and spontaneity of the early biographical essays has given way to a more exact and informative manner, but much of the same easy irreverence toward words, the same bright and conversational tone are there. After all, however, it is the kind of literature designed to say something, rather than be something. Bagehot does not talk when he does not know; hence what he says about human nature is basically true - so far as we are privileged to see the truth.

27. The foregoing review of Continental social theory was assembled from the following expository material: Bares, "Walter Bagehot--" Amer. Journ. Sociology. XXVII (Mch.1922), pp.580-81; Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, under the names of the various sociologists; Ellwood, C. A., A History of Social Philosophy N. Y., 1938, pp.409-52; Lichtenberger, J. P., The Development of Social Theory, N. Y., 1923, pp. 279-84, 355-464

4.

Literature in vacuo is always unrewarding; the history of ideas alone is important. Thus we are always absorbed in watching a stream of thought that has traveled far from the springs out of which it issued, and in noticing the terrain through which it flows. It may pursue its way into the sea of general culture, mingling so thoroughly with other steams that although still existing, it has become lost; again it may dwindle away into nothing in the desert of rejection or misunderstanding; always, however, it picks up and carries along as a sort of suspended sediment the ideal accretions with which it comes in contact. In the geology of human thought, no river of knowledge has followed, in so short a time, the fascinating course of the theory of evolution. A work like Physics and Politics provokes an almost endless array of questions, the more important of which we must try to answer if we are attempting to comprehend its real significance. The theories of the development of social organization, all predicated on the initial concept of organic evolution, have taken since the publication of Bagehot's work three clearly marked directions, depending apparently on whether the theorist associated with any one thought man had fared well or ill. To begin with, the doctrine flowered into the optimistic determinism of Spencer, Fiske, and Sumner, the first of whom persuaded himself that on the basis of a few understandable principles, the whole growth of man, along with that of every other animal, could be predicated. Since it was determined by the natural process that man follow this pattern, it could be assumed that he would follow it in accordance with the perfected plan of natural economy. In the end, then perfected adaptation for man must mean the perfection of intellectual and

moral attributes as well as physical, for Spencer was sure that all human characteristics could be explained on the grounds of biological growth. As a result, we could hardly expect a political, legal, or ethical institution to do a better job than nature herself; ergo, the spontaneous and uncontrolled expression of human impulses is best. Fiske and Sumner, among other less important, were constrained to agree.

On the other hand, there were those like C. H. Pearson who felt that all human values might be subject to destruction without nature's incurring any real loss. A true pessimistic determinism is extremely uncongenial to the mind of man; it has appeared from time to time, often in a religious garb, but never to survive very long. The evolutionary variety reached a rather pathetic end in the inability of Henry Adams to discover anything worthwhile in the world around him, although he remained convinced that the path then followed by the human microcosm could never be left. The famous application of the laws of thermodynamics to human history may be regarded as an extreme view of natural law operating in man's evolution. There is no need here to point out the errors of which Adams was guilty; in the end, we can readily understand why his position is completely untenable. Man can always avoid despair by realizing that even if a complete pessimism be justifiable, he can never act on such an assumption, for the impulse to live is vastly stronger than the impulse to think about the end of life. The truth may be tragic, as Santayana once suggested, but that does not destroy the significance of our own cultural pattern. The stars may change their courses, they often do, but that fact does not alter extensively the fabric

of life here below. It is a tribute to Bagehot's intelligence that he found nothing to fear in the natural scheme of things, for new ideas served to strengthen his mind, to enrich his understanding and hence the whole business of existence; although they worried the weak-minded Tennyson until he overlooked them and went back to God, drove the youthful Arnold to the extremes of melancholy, and plunged Arthur Hugh Clough into a lifetime of childish and pathetic despair. Truth and its meaning for man probably form a dichotomy, and to Bagehot the meaning for man is the significant thing.

Between the two extremes of optimism and pessimism, we may place the more rational school of evolutionary doctrine which has come to flourish today and to which the author of Physics and Politics may be said to belong. The greatest thinker in the middlestream, scientist, sociologist, and philosopher, was unquestionably Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse; much of modern political and social thought may be traced to him, but ultimately we can find Bagehot occupying the same intellectual position, though hardly of the same intellectual stature. He failed to see the importance of what he had believed, as he always seemed to miss the profounder philosophic implications within his understanding of institutions or in phenomena themselves. But he certainly avoided the errors to which Spencer's extreme position had carried him, without at the same time having to cling to old dogmas. The creator of the synthetic philosophy has come to seem not a little ridiculous to those of us today who have seen a long and disastrous war repeat itself in the space of one generation. Bagehot, being cautious and not having the sort of spirit that dares to lay down great principles, retreated to a safer position

where he has stood up fairly well under the passing of years. Three points in his work indicate a real attempt to reconcile evolution with certain aspects of an older philosophy of man's life, not because he was a weak spirit who clung to ancient platitudes, but because he was a pragmatic fellow who found some use in them. These are, first, that the superior character has a useful value in conjunction with the imitative faculty; second, that natural selection in no way invalidates ethics or religion; and third, that verifiable progress depends on the intelligent discussion of the problems of existence. The implication here is plain enough, although the importance of it seems insufficiently realized. Man is not a completely helpless animal before natural energy; he himself is capable of and ought to exercise a certain measure of wise control.

A number of other aspects of Physics and Politics tend to weaken the excellence of its general philosophic viewpoint. At no place does Bagehot state clearly the nature of religion and morality, nor does he tell us that the superior man is such because of virtues consciously acquired, or because he cannot help the fact that he has been endowed with qualities not granted to others. He seems to suggest that man, on his own efforts, has discovered and made use of various devices to improve his own lot, chief among them being religion, morality, and knowledge, that is, the methods of control over the tangential forces at play in the life of man. In order to prove this he points out a continuous improvement in the welfare of certain peoples over a period of twenty-five to thirty centuries, and a parallel stagnancy or even

retrogression on the part of certain others. Such an attitude seems to imply that the necessary characteristics for evolution (which is progress in man) are conscious acquisitions on the part of those intelligent enough to find and make use of them. In other places, however, he directly states that evolution is increasing adaptation to environment, and as such is largely a spontaneous growth. The whole structure of his thought is further invalidated by his using too short a period of human history to illustrate his ideas. In the space between the Siege of Troy and the Reform Ministry of Lord Beaconsfield very little happened to change the fundamental nature of man, and what has happened seems to have been neither continuous nor progressive. One feels that Bagehot was safest when he went to childhood experiences for illustrations of primitive existence, for we are now quite sure of the amazing fact that the life of the individual usually reflects the total life of the species.

At this point we are confronted with the question of the continuity of progress, or for that matter, of any evolutionary pattern. In the history of man, Oswald Spengler has demonstrated effectively that there is a cyclical pattern which cultural growth generally though irregularly follows. When life is good, when art, invention, industry, and science flourish, thoughtful men usually consider it a time of progress or the culmination of such a time, and some of them think it but another step in an endless ascent. But there have been periods in human history when nothing flourished save ignorance and intolerance, and the appearance of such an era we characterize as a retrogression. Where the record of civilization exists, we have found too many

of there alternations to regard them as accidents or coincidences. Bagehot's attitude toward the continuity of progress was too much colored by almost instinctive Victorian prejudices. The poet Browning went so far as to find belief in the existence of evil a mere superstition; only such anachronistic fellows as Ruskin and Carlyle failed to see that the world was heading for perfection. Actually, the simple truth is that progress among men is shifting and unstable, as evolution in the whole organic world is sporadic and halting, marked by vast destructions and retrogressions, along with the periods of growth and harmony. The simple pattern of incoherent homogeneity shading into disciplined and cooperative heterogeneity may be true of any one stage in the life of a particular species; for the great realm of living matter, however, the picture is almost hopelessly complex. Bagehot is guilty of a distorting oversimplification: evolution is not the continuing adaptation of an organism to a static environment; it is the complicated process of adaptation on the part of a host of inter-related and constantly changing organisms to a dynamic environment. And man is not excepted from this everlasting struggle.

It may be that the cyclical pattern of his growth has impressed upon man the sense of having and being able to do his bit toward making harmony a dynamic reality rather than a static ideal. Pure determinism is always revolting to him: conscious of his powers, he dares to flout the edicts of the gods, and insists on doing things his own way. How far he can go in shaping his course, no two philosophers have ever agreed upon; today, however, on the basis of a great quantity of scientifically established evidence, a certain unanimity of opinion manifests itself. We have seen

that Bagehot was no believer in evolutionary determinism, for he implies that man consciously erects religious and moral sanctions to improve his own situation, and his progress is intimately associated with the purposive use of the learning which the natural faculty of reason enables him to acquire. This "middle road" in theories of the growth of social organization seems to approach most closely to what we can understand of man's life. It is no automatic and uncontrollable segment of natural energy that was called upon to substantiate the thesis of Physics and Politics, which Franklin Giddings called the first "credible explanation of the paradox that a ruthless struggle for existence yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness".²⁸ Man enjoys a certain measure of freedom in the use of his most highly specialized organ, the brain; and Lester Ward, the first to announce scientifically the extremely important theory, has taught us that the free use of mind is itself a natural impulse, but unlike all others, reason is the controlling and harmonizing force. Reputable scientists today, usually paleontologists, adhere strictly to the doctrine that no animal, not even man, can sentiently direct the course of his own evolution. Now there is a fundamental basis of truth in this precept, but it is of the kind that Santayana would regard as tragic. That man, through his own efforts, is able to shape the destiny of his species and to speed it on its course no one seriously believes. He recognized that what nature gives him it also takes away, and on its mercy, which

28. "Darwinism in the Theory of Social Evolution", quoted in Irvine, op.cit., p. 264.

does not exist, he must ever depend; for he knows that it can destroy himself and his habitation with little effort, or at least so distort his environment and his adaptability that all his proud works will be meaningless. But we have said before that man is not personally concerned with such cosmic matters; he has a job before him, and with the free use of his powers, he can accomplish it.

Bagehot did not make enough of this: progress came too easily to the Victorian thinker. In our own day, we have finally been convinced that what we might call the "exploitative" faculties of man far outdistance his disciplinary powers. In the realm of expansive or creative achievement, he is capable of unbelievable triumphs: by breaking the atom he has divided the indivisible; by pushing back the bounds of the universe he defines the indefinable; everywhere he seeks the ultimate knowledge, and almost reaches it. In industry and science, invention, and discovery, technology, in art, philosophy, and the accumulation of learning, he achieves heights undreamed of and plumbs depths unimagined. The very quantity of creative genius that is poured each year into the forms of industry alone has made our age perhaps the most fascinating in the history of mankind. Industry is our art, and alone among the arts, it is universal and dynamic. Yet in the realm of control we are pathetically primitive; we are children groping blindly in the dark, stumbling over the works we ourselves have created, terrified by the machinery which was to be our slave. Our politics, ethics, education, and economic planning are woefully inadequate, miserably out of touch with real phenomena. It was always thus, we know; in the

early Middle Ages, for example, the elements of control far outweighed those of exploitations, and man accomplished nothing, living, as he did, in a prison. Today we exist from moment to moment, pouring out our energies in an immense variety of tasks, collectively tasting life with a passionate abandon, but without the depth which gave truth to Justice Holmes' striking and dramatic apostrophe: "Death plucks me by the ear and says 'Live - I am coming'." But we will not even live - in the civilized sense of the word - if we do not radically strengthen and reform our governments and laws and moral codes, - if we do not plan more before we act.

A great biologist, Mr. Julian Huxley, has said that all creatures on earth save one, in their present shapes and with their present characteristics, have reached the limit of their adaptability to environmental conditions, but that this one exception is man. Through his unique ability of conceptual thought, that is, the capacity for establishing harmony through rationalization according to images acquired by and retained in the mind, his growth is not and may never be completed. But man must use that ability freely, consciously, and purposively; he knows that he cannot direct the ultimate ends of his evolution, yet he also knows that here below, given the conditions that students on the earth's history have found usually to exist, he can discover and make an effort to follow the best paths leading to his destiny, whatever it might be. Aside from its garb of twentieth-century rationalization, this is what Bagehot partly discovered in his view of the teachings of Darwin. The Victorian, at peace and surfeited with prosperity, did not perceive the full implications

of such a discovery. As in politics, he failed to see the need for a state whose agent exercises a positive but rational control over the manifold aspects of social existence, that harmony instead of chaos may be maintained. It is part of man's nature to make an effort toward establishing a conscious discipline over the factors of his life, as it is natural for him to eat, sleep, make war, and reproduce his kind. Nature still endows him with all that he possesses, but among those possessions are creative and controlling faculties, which enable man to work in harmony with the energies on whose bounty he depends.

Evolution, for the most part, has taught the best thinkers this median attitude between pure freedom and pure determinism. On their claims to truth, the historian, Mr. Charles Beard, has poured the acid of his irony in the statement that assumptions about man's total existence are absurd because no history is truly knowable, as the laws of chemistry and physics are knowable, through laboratory experiment; on the other hand, philosophy does not ask to be presented with all the facts so long as it understands the visible life around it. The record of past events is surprisingly complete to one like Walter Bagehot, who is thoroughly at home in the phenomena at play about him, and who comprehends a considerable portion of them through the catholicity and tenacity of his intelligence. And after all it is the business of man to theorize. His constant experimentation with life, his seeking to understand it and come to terms with it, his trying one scheme after another in the hope of reaching the settlement necessary for the equilibrium which all nature seeks but never reaches, - this is one of his priceless heritages.

Chapter VII

Faith in an Age of Science

1.

The corrosive skepticism of Victorian science offered no problem to Bagehot's religious temperament - if we can speak of the religion of a man whose faith was born of a kind of agnostic rationalism applied to questions of theology. Actually, he was too cool and objective in his reasoning, too much the practical analyst and good-humored skeptic to place much emphasis on the realm of gods and devils, however important he might think it. Yet, from a handful of brief essays, particularly "The Ignorance of Man" and "Bishop Butler", the two best works on the subject, it is possible to formulate a coherent and clearly recognizable religion which we might call an agnostic Unitarianism; and we may even detect a curious inclination toward mysticism, especially visible in the earlier writings. But the temperament that nourishes faith was not strong in him; he seemed to take for granted a transcendentalist conviction that there is a real foundation to the universe which is distinct from its external appearance. There was a strictly intellectual basis for this faith, and it became stronger though less frequently announced as he grew older. There can be little doubt that he recognized and believed in a divine Judge, a moral Being more than anything else, but also a kind of eternal existent Substance which presents a final intellectual authority. Within the moral realm, at least, he regarded man as essentially free; and, as we have noted in the review of Physics and Politics, the doctrines of evolution and the mechanico-biological nature of life did not invalidate liberty of moral choice, if only because

the individual will moves within limits too narrow to be referred to universal principles such as these.¹ He felt almost as a matter of necessity that we must believe in a perfect Being; moreover, he was quite convinced that evolution strengthens this belief. It is an agnosticism, however, for he never thought it possible to see or otherwise grasp the concept of God.²

Of the nature of belief in general, whether secular or sacred, Bagehot had some illuminating remarks to make, all of them set forth in an interesting little essay, "On the Emotion of Conviction", published in 1871. The burden of this single contribution to the formal science of psychology came mostly from a well known book by the Scotch psychologist and utilitarian, Alexander Bain, entitled The Emotions and the Will. The process, Bagehot thinks, is roughly as follows: facts are sifted and arguments are weighed, the results of which investigation the intellect perceives and assents to, and an emotion succeeds which supports and completes the intellectual conviction. The "emotion of conviction" may be the most intense feeling of which man is capable, but its intensity is not a sign of its truth. Real belief, as Bain showed, is the determining factor in action, although it does not necessarily follow, as he maintained, that readiness to act is always an index to belief. Conviction is independent of ideal concepts, being based chiefly on the clarity, intensity, and universality of the thing believed, and growing as the mind itself expands. In childhood every state of consciousness is believed because

1. Physics and Politics, Works, VIII, p.10.
2. See Hutton, "Memoir", Works, I, pp.15-20

clarity, intensity, and universality are the chief characteristics of all of them. Doubt is "hesitation produced by collision", that is, what results when an erroneous belief comes into contact with fact. By repetition a "context of conviction" is built up, the emotional intensity of which supports the memory, gives readiness to mind and confidence to action, and increases consistency of character. A religious belief follows the same process, for through experience the elements of faith are seen to possess the properties necessary to carry conviction. It is important in religion, however, as in any other field of belief, always to bear in mind the degree of evidence on which a conviction is based; otherwise it may become a false but ineradicable feeling.³

Ultimate truths of religion exist, but their individual significance varies with each mind, and the methods of reaching them differ; consequently, different convictions about the nature of God and His judgements, the separate doctrines of religious organizations, are not an indication of the falsity of beliefs. A perfect freedom of discussion, then is as necessary in religion as in politics and learning: no individual is as wise as society, where the perfect transmission of ideas is possible, and thus ultimate conclusion about religion can be brought within reach of all by allowing everyone to participate in the collective opinions of society. Coercion of any kind and insistence on the infallibility of supposedly divine revelation are wrong and useless because the truth, as Milton long ago taught, eventually survives and error is soon or late found out. This is not argument for the overthrowing of standards and the destruction of ecclesiastical authorities, both of which are the

outward manifestations of the inward discipline of civilized man. Religion, however, is an affair of the individual spirit, as all final conviction must be.⁴ The Church ought to represent all the various aspects of religious conviction if it is to survive; in other words, it must be the medium in which the discussion of religious ideas takes place. Vigorous and independent thought on the part of a minister is as necessary as the same qualities in a statesman; clergymen must be leaders, not followers of common opinion. The pulpit in the Church of England can be a forum for the meeting and sifting of religious opinions: the Church prohibits its ministers from announcing a few particular ideas, but it never prescribes what they cannot say; ergo, the Church, and any religious organization, will survive as long as it can absorb the variety of religious convictions confronting it and can supply the leadership which the random give-and-take of ideas must have. To Bagehot this was an end to be desired in itself.⁵

It is evident that religion occupied a permanent and important place in Bagehot's world, that it was a human revelation of eternal and actually invisible truths, and that it manifested itself to man in a variety of ways, all of which are found so far as they fulfill the demands of the individual conscience. Thus he combined a perfect tolerance with a positive set of convictions. Religion survived in his temperament largely because of a congenital distrust of the world, as a result of his feeling that one cannot always count on man. In this attitude he was everything but an optimist, for he had wholly resigned himself to the presence of pain and evil on earth. If there be any truly pain-

4. See "The Metaphysical Basis of Toleration," *ibid.*, VI, pp.219-37.

5. See "The Public Worship Regulation Bill", *ibid.*, VI, pp.247-54

ful fact about the world", he once wrote, "it is that an intellectual and indolent happiness is wholly denied to the children of men."⁶ He was convinced that in the real test reason is weak and altruism a luxury for the days when things are going well: passion and selfish ambitions, behind so much man-made evil on earth, are too strong for the controlling factors of human existence. The indulgence of purely secular impulse may produce material progress, but that is not moral progress; in other words, it does not permanently improve the true happiness of man. He wanted less action in order that the product - the inner spirit and the outer work - might be more beneficial and lasting.⁷ There is plain evidence here of the ancient doctrine of the moral dualism of man's nature, which we discovered at the core of most of the essays in literary criticism. Man's life, he thought, might be resolved into a struggle between his subversive appetites, the blind impulses of existence, and the conscious effort to improve himself by virtue, that is, by morality, religion, and reason. We have seen that variations on this attitude form the foundation of virtually all that Bagehot wrote on politics and the evolution of society. In addition to custom, tradition, law, and leadership, the factors of control in the group, there had to be religion and a morality sanctioned by faith. The otherwise impeccable logic of his belief, however, is seriously marred by the conviction that the average lot

6. "William Cowper", *ibid.*, II, p. 13.

7. See "Lord Brougham", *ibid.*, II, p. 323, and Hutton, *op.cit.*, *ibid.*, I, p. 38.

of man on earth justifies a simple and orthodox ethic. We recall that in writing of the Waverly Novels, he found that Sir Walter's bourgeois sense of poetic justice was quite sound; it is for the most part true that the wicked are punished and the good are rewarded.⁸

The dualism in man and in the world lay at the bottom of Bagehot's religion, but the problem was to determine the nature and place of that faith in the secular world of the nineteenth century. He approached it in his own typically British manner: he looked for a solution in compromise, in the choice of a medium between two extremes. "The best of us", he wrote, "strive---to make the best of both worlds", the visible and palpable, and the invisible.⁹ To be absorbed in the invisible realm to the exclusion of all else seemed to him as bad as the complete denial of its existence; he hated the "fugitive and cloistered virtue" of monasticism and the morbid introversion of Calvinism; religion ought to come down to earth, to assert itself in the face of the practical sagacity that life demands.¹⁰ There is no reason why faith cannot add its ingredient to the other factors which produce the balanced happiness of an intelligent existence, of the active life joined to the aesthetic, the moral, the religious, and the intellectual. But the "practical" value of religion is not to be confused with the unseen world of which it is a revelation; it is completely separate from the

8. "The Waverley Novels", ibid., III, pp. 55-56.

9. "Mr. Clough's Poems," ibid., IV, p. 116.

10. See ibid., IV, pp. 120-21, and "William Cowper", ibid., II, p.26

world of science, and neither of them has any right to infringe on the other. The older he became, the more was Bagehot impressed by the discoveries and potentialities of science, but he never seemed to have forgotten the Kantian dichotomy of the two aspects of the universe.¹¹ It is interesting to note, however, the frequency with which he applied the methods of science to religion, especially in his notion, like Huxley's, that man's conception of God has followed an evolutionary pattern.¹² We have noticed that he regarded differences of opinion in religion as natural, for on the human level it shared many of the characteristics of science, but at the same time he was sure that there was fundamental agreement at the top.¹³

Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, lived during the highly secular Augustan Age of English history; in the midst of rationalism, worldiness, and skepticism, he devoted his energies to re-establishing the truths of religion as an antidote to the corrosive materialism of Hobbs, Locke, and Shaftesbury. The old Bishop was a pious and austere figure set down in an age of hedonism and reason; one could hardly imagine a temperament more opposed to Bagehot's, yet the latter learned almost everything that he wrote about sacred matters from Butler. In an essay on Butler, which is at once an excellent

11. See Hutton, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, I, p. 18.

12. "Mr. Clough's Poems", *ibid.*, IV, p. 115.

13. See "Bishop Butler", *ibid.*, I, p. 290, and "The Ignorance of Man", *ibid.*, IV, p. 111.

character study and a curiously complex and forbidding piece of theological reasoning, he discussed the two fundamental types of faith and attempted to glean something of practical value from both and to combine their particular virtues.

The distinction, suggesting Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism", is between natural and supernatural religion, from which arise two separate and opposed conceptions of the nature of God.

The former variety is born of a sense of presence, of a transcendental life which suggests a living oneness in the universe. We receive this impression from looking at the beauty and color and prodigality of nature; the feeling is intuitive and poetic, never strictly metaphysical, never the tragic awareness of worldly suffering, nor the humble sense of man's depravity.

The God of natural religion is a cheerful and comforting being, characterized by an easy and tolerant mercy. Bishop Butler's religion, however, is the supernatural variety; there is no poetry in it, no sense of the color and ease and melody of life, no response to the beauty of the world; it is Hebraic, born of conscience, erected out of the fear of God and the sense of humility before the sinful nature of man. God for such a faith becomes a jealous and austere Preceptor, an awful Judge, who has little patience with the transgressions of humankind. The former is a God of love, and latter a God of fear; one brings happiness and peace, the other imposes toil and passes judgment. Before the God of fear Conscience becomes an innate moral sense, born of a congenital dread of wrongdoing. Life is a trial, a preparation for death; moral judgement is a

characteristic offered and inspired by God to force us to select the path He deems the right one. How are we to reconcile the God of fear and the God of love and beauty?¹⁴

Bagehot's answer is that they are one: God is infinitely perfect; consequently, He can perfectly express himself through these two primary attributes, as He can through all others. On the basis of a highly questionable theology, we are told that we accept this pronouncement as an absolute truth, since we can never test it. Religion ought to be a compound of both fear and the sense of beauty and love; there should be enough of "conscience" and humility to keep ever before us the depravity of our natures, and we ought at the same time to be always aware of the beauty and goodness in men and phenomena. God, within His own Being, is the reconciliation of the two parts of the dichotomy: He is at once within ourselves and outside us; He is the Helper and the Conscience, the real world and the supernatural.¹⁵ There follows a great deal of complicated rhetoric devoted to a criticism of Butler's theology; from it, however, we can discover a few illuminating points about Bagehot's faith. In considering the Bishop's proof of the existence and the nature of the Deity, he rejects all rationalizations which rest on the notion that nature and Revelation seem to contain impenetrable problems and incredible paradoxes only because of man's ignorance. Actually, the infinite goodness of God is revealed in our own intuitive

14. "Bishop Butler", ibid., I, pp. 273-74.

15. Ibid., I. p. 278.

moral sense, not in any grand explanations of the "moral" scheme of the universe. Moreover, we are interested in what is practically good for man's conduct; the rest we may take on faith. Thus the moral sense in man presupposes a moral Providence; in other words, a conscience is all that is necessary to apprehend God, for conscience exists because God exists;¹⁶ One could scarcely imagine worse reasoning; it is amazing that a man learned in the works of Darwin, J. S. Mill, Bain, and Spencer could have resorted to so old a sleight-of-hand to prove that God is in his heaven and all's right with the world. On the basis of Physics and Politics, however, we must assume that moral sense is subject to the evolutionary process.

An elaboration of this faith forms the burden of the best work on religion which Bagehot wrote, a brief but soundly organized essay entitled "The Ignorance of Man" (1862). It was prompted by a volume of the Reverend Adam Farrar's addresses, collectively known as Science in Theology; but actually the title and subject matter come from one of Butler's sermons, in which the Bishop offered the doctrine that ignorance of the fundamental nature of the universe is good because it is nobler to act virtuously with little knowledge and no prospects of reward, to have faith in Him of Whom we comprehend little, to believe in the justice which passes our understanding, than it is to live always on the belief that every good we do gets us a little nearer to heaven. It is a simple and dignified creed, and it is the thesis which Bagehot develops, although of course

16. Ibid., I, pp.283-310.

his concern is with conduct on earth, not with the divine kingdom. Much that he had said in "Bishop Butler" about the moral sense and the argument by design is here repeated. The perplexing question, whether moral conduct is not selfish in the last analysis because of the expectation of reward or punishment, suggested by the author of the Analogy, is the important consideration. The answer seems to be that there is really no disinterested attitude in moral action. But religion cannot swallow morality: faith is dependent on it for its origin and continuance; we accept an ethical and retributive religion because it grows out of the primary assumption of our moral consciousness that virtue must prosper and vice must fail. Again the dilemma is resolved by compromise: "The extrinsic motive to goodness (which religion reveals) must absorb the intrinsic motives to goodness (which morality reveals)...The second revelation is contingent upon the first; ...those only have a substantial ground for believing the extrinsic motive who retain a lively confidence in the intrinsic".¹⁷

It is good that man is ignorant. The physical world is a non-moral theatre for ethical action. By being separated from the Author of all justice by this amoral "screen", man is set free; his moral actions become unselfish because he is not forever faced with the prospect of immediate divine reward for good, and of punishment for evil. But there is a visible discipline supplied by the external show of phenomena

17. "The Ignorance of Man", ibid., IV, pp. 100-101

and made manifest to man as physical and legal morality; thus an excess of physical indulgence is punished by ill health, and a transgression of social decency is punished by law. In this way the true spiritual ethics are taught by the moral task-masters of physical nature and human organization. We know, however, that virtue is not always conducive to happiness, that sin does not always lead to pain; consequently, our faith must be inspired by an absolute moral force, that we may in time rise above the earthly code of law and nature. The characteristics of the perfect morality are not apprehended by all men alike; as there are differences of opinion in science and politics, requiring discussion before the ultimate truth can be reached, so are there different customs and attitudes toward moral conduct. The Utilitarians used this fact to prove the absence of an innate moral sense; Bagehot, going back to the Miltonic view that truth must inevitably triumph, regards it as another manifestation of the existence of such a sense. The ethical characteristic in man, like aesthetic taste and political ability, follows an evolutionary pattern, and in the individual it is a "developable" sense. Thus, as society progresses, the good Victorian optimist has persuaded himself that differences in morality and religion, along with differences in government, will eventually disappear. Faith and the ethical sense, then, are natural instincts, everywhere the same.¹⁸

Bishop Butler was not the only spiritual monitor that Bagehot had, although he was the most important. We have al-

18. Ibid., IV, pp. 88-112

ready commented on the strange fact that this Hebraic spirit, full of a sense of sin and bowed down in humble piety before God, should have attracted a worldly and successful Victorian banker and editor. Yet he was early drawn to another spirit who seems equally alien to his temperament, Cardinal Newman. The man whom so many Englishmen regarded as an apostate exercised over the youthful Bagehot a considerable influence that lasted until his death, in spite of his distrust of the Catholic Church.¹⁹ When he was twenty-four, he wrote a poem after the manner of Newman's pieces, entitled "To the Roman Catholic Church". It is shoddy stuff compared to the Cardinal's work, but the thought is clear and vigorous. It comes from the pen of one who is plainly impressed by religious faith and by the strength of authority which maintains that faith - fundamentally his own - throughout the vicissitudes of history. His friend, Richard Hutton, has summed up his attitude pretty well: "It is obvious...that what attracted Bagehot in the Church of Rome was the historical prestige and social authority which she had accumulated in believing and uncritical ages for use in the unbelieving and critical age in which we live, - while what he condemned and dreaded in her was her tendency to use her power over the multitude for the purposes of low ambition".²⁰ The intelligent tolerance and cool balance of such an attitude is unquestionably admirable, and even a completely irreligious spirit - apart from questions of the soundness of the Catholic philosophy - would have to subscribe to it.

19. See especially "Cardinal Antonelli", ibid., IX, pp.218-21, and the Letters of the French Coup d'etat, ibid., I, p.108.

20. Hutton, "Memoir", ibid., I, p. 15.

Bagehot would never have followed in Newman's footsteps, yet there was a greater spiritual identity between them than we would at first glance imagine. Like the Cardinal, he distrusted human intelligence, not so much because it could not accomplish great things, as because it was possessed to a superlative degree by so few. Man, he thought, was for the most part an imaginative, credulous, superstitious creature, frequently devoid of any desire to rise above his original station. In a world that demands intelligence and understanding, religion is a necessity where such faculties are rare. The rational skepticism of the imaginative virtues is interesting in this context. Bagehot was not a truly religious spirit, otherwise he would have been aware of the great part that imagination plays in forming the temperament and attitude of a leader in faith like Cardinal Newman. Yet his conviction that a moral sense proves the soundness of faith is comparable to Newman's view that conscience is the mind's sanction of religion. Belief in God was a moral reality to Bagehot, a kind of logical faith which provided a plan of action as well as salvation of spirit. It was a natural feeling that rose to its greatest heights in the moral self. Religion to him belonged in the world, although one gets periodic glimpses of an otherworldliness in his character.

One rarely associates mysticism with a well-paid banker and the editor of a leading financial journal, yet in his early years as an essayist, Bagehot exhibited now and then a clear tendency toward the conviction that the world is unreal, a shadow of the true existence, which covers it like a veil, that

it is a far-off echo of the real voice. The insanity of his mother and the dark days of melancholy following his graduation from University College may have been contributing factors. Certainly, his sympathy of understanding for pathetically delicate spirits like Hartley Coleridge and William Cowper indicates his early leaning toward their characteristic other-worldliness. The extraordinary description of young Coleridge's existence in a world peopled by his own fancy and by nothing else, of his childish sense that the dream is real and reality the dream, attests to Bagehot's understanding of the mystic temperament. He seems to have felt the incredibility of the world, and in an impressive passage he transmits to us that feeling. "We go into the street", he wrote, "and see it thronged with men, and we say, Is it true, are there these men? We look on a creeping river, till we say, Is there a river? We enter the law courts: we watch the patient Chancellor: we hear the droning wigs: - surely this is not real, - this is a dream, - nobody would do that, - it is a delusion. We are really...but 'sensations and impressions'...that float up and down; or...phantoms and images, whose idle stir but mocks the calm reality of the 'pictures on the wall'. All this will be called dreamy; but it is exactly because it is a dream that we notice it."²¹ This feeling and attitude is not religion, but rather the description of a phenomenon very common in childhood experience, and it is one of the factors that serve to make religion real. That faith occupied, quantitatively, a small part of Bagehot's life, but it was impressive to him,

21. "Hartley Coleridge", ibid., I, pp. 191-92.

and sincerely felt. He knew that he had nothing fresh or original to say on the subject; he held that his reward was the tribute he paid to Bishop Butler: "It is much in every generation to state the ancient truth in the manner which that generation requires; to state the old answer to the old difficulty;...to translate into the language of the living, the truths first discovered by the dead".²²

2.

Whether Bagehot, or the old Bishop of Durham, for that matter, was transmitting to his fellow men an ancient truth in a language which they might understand is a question that we will never be able to answer. So long as a man's religion does not interfere with the secular pursuits of his neighbors, it is as unchallengeable as the color of his hair. We can never test it pragmatically because faith is not designed to work; we can never evaluate it on the basis of what we understand about phenomena because it must deal with unknowable things, or it ceases to be a faith. But when a belief in God and in the dualism of man and nature is laid down as a logical faith, we can at least criticize the soundness of inference; when that faith is described, we can at least characterize it and relate it to the personality of its author. Professor Irvine's descriptive summary of Bagehot's religion (which he calls "An Old Religion in a New World") could hardly be improved, and we can serve our own purpose best by offering it here. That faith, he writes, "though deep and genuine, could scarcely be called exalted and mystical. One has only to com-

22. "Bishop Butler", *ibid.*, I, p.284. For an excellent and more extensive summary of Bagehot's religion, see Irvine, *op.cot.*, ch. xi; again the present survey is indebted to him for its general organization.

pare him with such men as Burke and Newman. There is no talk of angels in Bagehot. There is no vision out into the Empyrea, no speculation above the stars, no sovereign contempt of the world. Moreover, having no intense and absorbing image of God, no oppressive sense of His omnipotence, Bagehot has none of the mystic's harsh insistence on the naked and shivering weakness of man. Compared to Burke he seems almost confident of human nature; he seems rather at home in the world; his religion seems almost comfortable and easy. In general Bagehot's is a religion not so much of exalted meditation as of wise and moderate conduct. It is a religion of balance and sanity, rather than of poetry and intensity".²³ In conclusion, we might say that he clothes the austere Hebraism of Bishop Butler in the garb of Victorian liberalism, emerging with a stern and exacting faith made comfortably acceptable.

The secular writings of Bagehot reveal every characteristic which the author of the Analogy would have either condemned or considered petty and ephemeral. There is a worldly pride, a plain insistence on the superiority of those who think and do, and a contempt for the ignorant and the vulgar; there is the penetrating and inexhaustible curiosity of a lover of phenomena and a believer in their real existence; and at bottom there is a little of that defiance and ambition which always moves man to dare the sovereignty of unseen things, to be guilty of the ancient sin of aspiring to the godhead. The

23. Irvine, op.cit., p. 228.

man who wrote Physics and Politics and The English Constitution, who married the daughter of an esteemed public servant, who loved the city because he found there the exciting drama of life, - this man was not only worldly, he was a keen lover of the world and of everything in it. He had none of the humility of the scientist and the philosopher; none of the almost tragic awareness that one can never say the last word on anything and that knowledge teaches among other things, how little we actually know. For the most part and on any subject, he wrote boldly and confidently. But one finds in him a little too much insistence that there is a right and wrong way to think about arts and institutions. Yet when dealing with sacred matters, he revealed something of the humble piety that is traditional in Christian faith, in spite of the fact that most of his energies were devoted to a rational attempt to reconcile opposing views on the nature of God. About the Deity he could become eloquent in the ancient and accepted manner. In "The Ignorance of Man" he wrote, "We must not be invited to approach the Holy of Holies without being made aware, painfully aware, what Holiness is. We must know our own unworthiness were we are fit to approach or imagine an Infinite Perfection. The most nauseous of false religions is that which affects a fulsome fondness for a Being not to be thought of without awe, or spoken of without reluctance".²⁴ Sincere humility and worldly pride are both present in this very passage.

Now there is no demand that a man intrude his faith into the other six days of the week, which would be useless and pretentious for the ordinary tasks of life. We cannot quite escape,

24. Works, IV, p.107

however, from the feeling that Bagehot's religion was intruded to fill out the picture. The religious essays were written relatively early in his journalistic career, and after their publication there is nothing on the subject of faith save for the passage in Physics and Politics to the effect that evolution does not invalidate our belief in sacred matter. It is unjust to accuse him of easy rationalization in an attempt to resolve a difficult dilemma; but the application of a rational method to one of the chief problems that confront the faithful in the latter part of the nineteenth century leaves him open to serious criticism. To begin with, we are asked to assume, according to Bagehot's taste for dichotomies, a dualism in man between moral and animal characteristics; in the universe between its visible or natural and invisible or supernatural parts; and in God between stern and impatient Judge and cheerful Helper. Today the evidence is so overwhelmingly against an instinctive moral sense in man, apart from the rest of his nature, that one can hardly take the orthodox pronouncement with any seriousness; in fact, in the Victorian era itself Utilitarians like John Stuart Mill and Alexander Bain (to say nothing of Bentham long before them) had well-nigh annihilated the old dogma. We know that Bagehot had little taste for their ethics, and at one place he said that the younger Mill was equipped to be almost everything but a moral philosopher.²⁵ The twofold division of the universe is, of course, beyond proof or refutation, since we can never see the invisible half. It would seem, however, that so far as man is concerned - and that concern may be ideally

25. "The Principles of Political Economy", ibid., VIII, p. 188.

unlimited - a visible universe is enough; we have not begun to conquer it. The extension of Hebraism and Hellenism to the nature of God may seem a little strange; but if God exists, He can plainly partake of all the characteristics assignable to Him.

We have discovered that according to Bagehot the existence of God is manifested to us positively only through our moral sense, which is a separate and absolute quality. It is on this basis that he attempts the reconciliation of an orthodox view with Darwin's hypothesis. The question of free will is easily disposed of; the larger problem of theology is more difficult. What he had first to do was simply to deny all arguments by design and all pantheistic heresies. God may be an Infinite Perfection, but he has nothing positive to do with the world which is revealed to us through our physical senses. Whether Bagehot had mystic illusions or not, he was almost forced to retreat into a vaguely Platonic attitude. The visible world is simply a non-moral "screen" ultimately designed, we must admit, to keep man's moral conduct virtuous through disinterestedness. The whole question of man's being and his relation to God revolves around the "moral sense" hypothesis; the Deity becomes a strictly moral quality; and man's worldly transgressions are punished through natural and social laws to remind him of what he can expect on the higher plane. God in this theology is considerably limited in comparison with the conception of Him in the orthodox Christian philosophy: He is not the universe; he is not even its Creator; in fact, He seems to have little more than a special concern with man's moral self. There is no talk of heaven and hell in Bagehot, no belief

in the literal truth of Holy Writ; he does come down to earth, and he faced with quiet courage the great religious problem of his day. We have got to accept his belief in a moral instinct as man's godly attribute, and in the moral nature of God, if we are to go along with his faith; but weak as his assumptions are, we see that his mind is far stronger and more flexible than Tennyson's or Arnold's, that his view was definitely superior to Browning's easy optimism, and, of course, that beside him Clough is a child crying in the dark. It may be charged here that we are attacking Bagehot on the basis of twentieth-century agnosticism, criticizing him, in other words, for something he could not have been. The charge is true; we are interested in him, as we are in all thinkers, for what he has to teach. With the possible exception of Reinhold Niebuhr, not many philosophers in our own day would find much help in the division of man's being into a natural self, which contains a "developable" moral sense to fit the visible world and the pattern of evolution, and a fundamental, God-given moral instinct, which is our sole justification for belief in and action according to the existence of an infinitely perfect moral Being.

Chapter VIII

The Civilized Englishman

While a schoolboy at Bristol College, Bagehot wrote an essay bearing a typically academic title, "The Comparative Advantages of the Study of Ancient and Modern Languages". This is no unimportant example of his abilities at the age of sixteen. Its conclusion served him for a lifetime in a variety of ways: the exclusive knowledge of one class of languages or another is unsound; the aim should be to discover a mean between two extremes, to realize to the best of one's ability the most valuable fruits of each.¹ Few people in the age of science and technology have tried so diligently to avoid a limited preoccupation with one avenue of thought or activity; few have bent such efforts to the task of learning about, understanding, and making the best use of the maximum number of phenomena in the human world. To take an extreme position on any matter would have been impossible for Bagehot. He consistently avoided submergence in the mere details of existence, and just as consistently tried to address himself to significant aspects, each in its proper place, none emphasized to the exclusion of another. The eighteenth-century ideal of balance and moderation, of the knowledge compounded of men and books, found in him one of its best realizations. Not only did he maintain a breadth of learning in the disciplines of thought, covering literature, history,

1. Works, VIII, pp. 233-39

politics, economics, and sociology, but he also understood well that in the last analysis books are what Robert Louis Stevenson once called them, "a bloodless substitute for life"; and consequently, he moved with equal sensitiveness among men, in the marketplace, at conversational gatherings, through legislative halls. He was a good businessman with an enviable income; he was a good husband with a pretty and fashionable wife; he was a man of learning who could write of books and philosophies; he was a witty talker who enjoyed the company of many friends; and he was a searching analyst of institutions who borrowed his philosophical attitudes that he might not be distracted from facts. He possessed a strong character made impatient by moral and intellectual weakness, and aside from a brief interlude of despair, he was marked by a sanguine temperament which always persuaded him that the world is good.

Bagehot's life in general, as in any particular work, we find the same tendency to establish the fact before making a pronouncement, to look at all aspects of a situation, and then to steer a middle course among them, taking care always to carry along some valuable cargo from every point of call. But Bagehot was in no sense an eclectic, and far from timid and cautious in making judgements. A good memory and a capacity for hard work saved him from superficiality; a careful search for and an elaborate compilation of facts, together with a stylistic "momentum", gave his conclusions considerable driving force. Yet his rational objectivity, the cool and down-to-earth cynicism of his temperament, were in themselves something of an

excess. Imagination, the faculty for seeing a thing whole and then rising ideally above it, was needed to complete the balance of his mind. Imagination is the ability to comprehend all the facts, to see them in the actual context to which they belong, and finally, to build them into a coherent spiritual whole which, as a philosophic judgement, is somehow far greater than the sum of its component parts. The mind of man, of course, seeks its own level; but the strong mind always lives in the rare atmosphere of understanding, where the light of intellect gives the phenomenal picture its intelligibility, without which the picture must ever remain a mere collection of colors and shape, random marks on the surface of the world. A real comprehension of the significance of facts requires breadth and profundity of imagination, as it requires the full use of the other faculties. It makes no difference whether the domain of phenomena be science or art, philosophy or politics, literature or industry; for a just knowledge of all of them the same virtues must be brought to bear.²

2. Professor Irvine makes much of imagination and Bagehot's lack of it; for his viewpoint, considerably different from this one, see op.cit., pp.277-84. As a complement to our present-day evaluation of Walter Bagehot, we point out the sources of contemporary and posthumous opinion of him, most of it laudatory, which may be found in the following writings: Baumann, "Walter Bagehot" Fortnightly Rev., CIV (Aug.1911), pp.324-33; ibid., loc.cit., n.s. XCVIII (Sept.1915), pp.568-74; Birrell, "Walter Bagehot", Collected Essays and Addresses, 3 vols., London, 1922, col. II, pp. 213-35; Giffen, Sir R., "Bagehot," Encyclopedia Britannica, lith ed., vol.III, p. 198, and "Bagehot as an Economist", Fortnightly Rev., n.s. XXVII (Apr. 1880) pp.549-67; Grant-Duff, "Bagehot" National Rev., XXXIV (Dec.1899), pp532ff; Morley, Recollections, 2 vols., 3rd ed., London 1918, vol. 1, pp. 86ff., 125; Saintsbury, A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe, 3 vol., N.Y., 1906, and The Peace of the Augustans, London, 1916, pp. 126ff; for a compilation of obituary notices and miscellaneous contemporary reviews, see Irvine, op. cit., pp 290-91. The interesting point is that most of the men who knew Bagehot personally or lived during his life thought of him as an economist, banker, and political analyst; whereas his sister-in-law, Mrs. Barrington, in

The lack of philosophic imagination in Bagehot makes it difficult to understand why his spiritual and intellectual mentors were men like Edmund Burke, Bishop Joseph Butler, and, to a lesser extent, John Henry Newman, and why he was antipathetic to philosophers like Locke, Bentham, and J. S. Mill. Perhaps understanding men are like the atoms of different elements, which are attracted when the electronic deficiency of one is exactly offset by the excess charge of the other, and repelled when their charges are identical. In the soaring imagination of Burke and the austere otherworldliness of Bishop Butler, the hard-working editor of the Economist may have found what he missed in his own character. But he was not wholly lacking in the imaginative faculty: his persistence in seeing so much of government as a symbolic institution, his ability to resurrect childhood fancies and experiences, to describe the sense of unreality of Hartley Coleridge and the primitive temperament for Physics and Politics, his criticism of Disraeli for having a romantic imagination instead of a philosophic one, - these and other illustrations reveal that there was an ability in Bagehot to see things other than in the terms of their perceptible outlines. Perhaps this faculty

2.(Cont) her life of him does her best to prove that he was given always to high literary thoughts, far above such pedestrian things as banking and government. She preferred not to think that he was the author of his greatest works, Lombard Street, The English Constitution, and Physics and Politics.

best exhibited itself in politics, where much that he wrote possesses its value because of a broad conception of the traditions, ideals, and cultural habits that lie behind every government, and particularly behind a vague institution like the English Constitution. Again, imagination reveals itself in his style: in the early works it is brilliant, flashing, epigrammatic, the product of a broad cleverness supported by wit and a malicious sense of humor. As we approach the longer and more solid works, the iconoclasm, usually designed to shock like a rapier-thrust, gives way to a firmer and quieter technique: a prosaic sobriety becomes the keynote; the end is persuasion through letting the substance speak for itself. The writing is always lively, the humor never far-distant, but the tone is now that of serious thought rather than wit and cunning. In all conscious literary artists of any stature, the thought, the personality, and the style form an ultimate unity. So it was with Bagehot, and this in itself suggests imagination.

The profounder insight, however, that comes with the wider range of vision he did not possess, and that shortcoming prevented him from acquiring certain characteristics the absence of which as we have tried to point out, seriously detracts from some of his works. The limitation imposed by a too scrupulous attention to facts, paradoxical as it may seem, was partly responsible for his inability to throw off Victorian prejudices, obsolete even in his own day. He is marked by anti-democratic instinct, by optimistic faith in the moral justice of general

existence, by unquestioning assumption that the ethical character of man is a revelation of divinity in him and in the universe, by denunciation of Sterne for his "indecenty", and by what amounts to a worship of laissez-faire economy. First of all, he had to borrow his philosophy and his theology; in politics he writes on the basis of an a priori conviction that Burke is right; in political economy he believes that the state of commerce is his own day demonstrates the infallibility of the doctrine of non-interference; in religion he takes Butler's forbidding Hebraism for granted. From the standpoint of fact he has much to teach, but we have seen in the course of the discussion how even the best works are weakened by his unqualified adoption of the doctrines of another. Bagehot was really afraid to take a chance, with the result that he could not formulate a philosophy of his own on the basis of the phenomena he had observed. A sound critic in detail and a careful analyst, he could set almost anything clearly before one, and he could make a "case" for almost anything. But even criticism and analysis require some comprehension of the significance of institutions to man and of their place in the main stream of cultural growth. There was in him a deficiency of both breadth and depth in seeing the world. The most emphatic illustration of the poverty of his thought, without the arcana of fact which usually went with it and redeemed it, is his criticism of the American Constitution at the beginning of the Civil War. Of all men, Bagehot should have appreciated the fact that an institution can be criticized only in terms of the cultural con-

text out of which it has come and which has helped to give it its peculiar stamp and color. Philosophies cannot be too simple when reality is so complex.

He seemed to have had little conception of the multiplicity and intricacy of the world; he lacked especially the comprehension of the difficulties, aspirations, predicaments, and sufferings of mankind. One does not have to be a sentimental humanitarian to possess this faculty; indeed, as Burke proves in a certain measure by contrast, an emotional sympathy for the lot of man is an obscuring factor, covering the true vision of life around us. Since he was a disciple of the great conservative, we would suppose that the author of the English Constitution might have seen the range and depth of humanity, which observation gives whatever greatness there is to Burke's political philosophy. In this work, as in Economic studies, The Letters on the French Coup d'Etat, "The History of the Unreformed Parliament", and even Physic and Politics, there is little revelation of the awareness that vital problems were appearing in the mid-nineteenth century through the rise of industry, problems which were radically changing the life of man and the pattern of society. Immense forces are always at work, altering what we think is permanent, distorting old truths, and baffling the makers of the new. If liberalism is one way of the world, as are traditionalism and conservatism, then we must admit that in it there is also a considerable element of radicalism. Man's life is a precarious existence; there is danger in it, and a need to gamble on tomorrow. Some power is always ready to take away what he

has fought and died for; if he is not alert to the ways of nature in him and about him, he may perish. The cultivated intelligence that described the cost of production and the transferability of labor, that traced the growth of man from primitive tyranny to modern freedom, that pointed out the virtues of the eighteenth-century Parliament, - that intelligence seemed completely confident of the ability of men to hold what they had, to follow certain paths laid down by the wise, and to maintain a steady progress of mind, body, and morality. His was not the optimism of a Browning; it was the more philosophic variety which grows out of a taste for the world and a mistaken notion that most of it will always be good because it seems so sensible and rewarding at the moment. We catch a glimpse of tragic insight in Bagehot's religion, but no more; the world, though merely a screen, is fair.

If he was not a deep spirit, he was, in his way, a comprehensive one as far as the surface of things extended. Whatever he thought about life, he saw it in an extraordinary variety of aspects before he considered it in detail. He was a banker writing about literature, an ironic wag describing the great dead; he was a literary wit, outraging Queen Victoria by parading the English Crown as a show to fetch the vulgar; his shrewd insight into human nature was devoted to writing about trade and finance. On any particular aspect of a cultivated society he brought to bear the light of all other aspects; the complete body of interests within him was always focused on the special interest at hand. Like all fully developed minds, his seemed to search out what was missing in a thing before it fell to

considering what was present. When a good memory and a well-trained intelligence proceed to the conquest of one discipline after another, it becomes increasingly easier to gain understanding of any one of them. We may think that a man who dares to write authoritatively about a multitude of different phenomena - art, science, banking, religion, anthropology - has more vanity than sense. In Bagehot, however, this is not the case. Three fundamental characteristics are necessary to the development of such an intellect: curiosity, enthusiasm, and memory; and where they are present, the intelligence finds conquest an almost unconscious process. It picks up and retains innumerable ideas from chance conversations, a moment of desultory reading, from a passing glance at the mere shape and color of things. After a certain measure of concentrated study has enabled the thinker to comprehend a certain group of phenomena, it soon discovers that it is at home in the whole range of them. Curiosity and understanding grow by playing each with the other; and where the observing and rationalizing faculties exist in their full power, the universal intellect is born. Bagehot was no Leonardo or Goethe, but his universality serves to explain something of that particular type of character.

There is another facet to the phenomenon of breadth of mind. Those who are constantly preoccupied with one avenue of thought or activity, although they are not conscious of it, have wasted most of their opportunities by concerning themselves with a host of unimportant and irrelevant details. The comprehensive mind has learned early in its existence to differentiate between what is important and what is meaningless. It always sees the larger points; it knows that true knowledge is not skill or efficiency

or a memory store with a haphazard collection of facts, but that it is the state of being "at home" in a field, that it is the understanding of basic assumptions in that field and its significance in reaction to the rest of knowledge and accomplishment. The best teachers of mankind are those whose curiosity first insists on their comprehending the universe before they lay down ethical or political precepts for a part of it. The golden age of Greek philosophy was "golden" for just that reason. We are not expected to be an Aristotle or a Democritus, but - to resurrect a hackneyed proverb - we can at least notice the forest before we examine the trees. The pedagogue, let us say, who is an expert in the etymology of Greek intransitive verbs is wasting his time; he will die without understanding anything. A man like Bagehot, on the other hand, will have acquired an enviable knowledge of literature, banking and finance (for which people are willing to pay him), politics, biology and anthropology, history and biography; further, he will be an excellent husband, a generous host, a brilliant conversationalist, and a warm friend. Specialization in industry, science, and technology is necessary in a civilization like ours, but a specialization in thought and in the disciplines that rules out any other field is futile. To help us avoid this error is one of the chief contributions of Bagehot.

What is the virtue of universality in learning? We may find the beginning of an answer in one of Bagehot's last Economist articles. The subject in question is history, but

the discussion has a far wider application. We are asking, in effect, what is the value of all learning? It is useful, first, simply to enlarge the mind, if man finds his fullest expression in reason, the broader his rational faculties are, the richer will be his life. Further, education reveals the continuity of social and political institutions, of all cultural phenomena; it reveals to men that their own little worlds are narrow and dull. Actually, for his best happiness, education serves to make the individual a microcosm, reflecting in his individual life that of society.³ True learning which involves reliance upon reason as well as fact, enables us to escape from the petty and ever-contracting circle of our own experiences into the wide world beyond us; it is escape from what is little and irrelevant into what is great and beautiful and significant. George Santayana, in a memorable passage of Character and Opinion in the United States, has said that wisdom counsels us to be philosophers because the universe is good in the measure that we understand it, and, we might add, in the measure that we consciously control it through understanding of the factors touching our existence. But learning toward this end must be broad, composed of ideas drawn from many fields. Only then will it serve as a true liberator of the spirit; only

3. "Mr. John Morley on Education", Works, IX, pp.201-05. Bagehot's quarrel with the leading English universities, especially Oxford, was that they paid no attention to inculcating knowledge of the practical world. A graduate of Oxford, he said, is excellent in theory, for he is learned in such things as Aristotelian logic, but poor in the practical understanding and use of the phenomena about him. See the following essays: "Oxford" (1852), ibid., I, pp.138-86, and "Matthew Arnold on the London University Bill" (1868), ibid., VII, pp. 286-97.

then will the life of reason be more than an intellectual exercise, and become a real adventure of the spirit.

Forces left out of the final settlement of reason, and death itself, may wreck all the fairest hopes of man; but this fact is relatively unalarming. We have said before that life entails chances, and that we must take risks unafraid. Adventures, however, to be more than rash daring, must involve an understanding of the experiences they produce, for they are meaningless to man unless they can be reborn as ideal conceptions. In Bagehot's variation on Bishop Butler's religion, there is some sense of the tragedy of man, yet in the world at large he approached all things with the gusto of one impressed by the rich fabric of existence. A restless curiosity, a searching analysis of institutions to the end that he might conquer them and make them a part of understanding, servants and not masters, - these formed the substance of his universality. In the end, it does not much matter that his assumptions and conclusions are subject to question and are growing obsolete; the important thing is that he is an advertisement of man's deepest pleasure, which he finds in the play of facts, not in the fancies of romance. Real imagination, a genuine cultivation of the mind, reveals that the actual texture of the world - dull and prosaic only to dull minds - provides us with the most exciting drama. When any activity becomes a spiritual adventure, it becomes a good, like beauty or truth; and that is why banking and finance and the unreformed Parliament assume lively and fascinating proportions in Bagehot's hands. But they reach this status only when what we know of them can be fitted into a pattern of the rest of phenomena. Curiosity must range widely, if not

deeply, before we can begin to see things in their proper perspective.

Learning such as this is not an end in itself, as Bagehot, for example, did not read books for their own sake. He approached them with the question of what they had to teach him. Genuine knowledge, of books and of the rest of life, always has a utilitarian function, a practical value which cannot be neglected. Reason, enriched by the comprehension of facts and ideas, is a guide to the conduct of existence and to man's place in the universe. What it brings to him may be myths and dreams, but at least they are records of what he thinks exists about him, and experience teaches that he must act as though they are records of truth. We may define civilization as the profound appearance in man of this characteristic. His adaptation to the conditions of environment is partly the result of natural forces operating spontaneously outside, partly the conscious direction through understanding of natural energies within him. Both must work in harmony, and reason is the harmonizing agent. But before one can harmonize divergent impulses, there must be a knowledge of more than one, since it is a multiplicity of forces which is brought to play upon and within a single being or object. We return once more to our original question: for learning to be "practical" in the sense we have suggested above, it must be broad; those who deal in ideas have not discharged their obligations to the community unless they have succeeded in seeing life whole, thus giving to each aspect of it proper emphasis.

Great discoverers and philosophers are men of far vision, as well as men of broad observation and profound intelligence.

It is vision, after all, that flowers into the atomism of Democritus, the heliocentric solar system of Copernicus, and the law of gravitation of Newton; it is vision that sends Columbus forth in a little ship to brave the unknown terrors of the sea; and it is vision that produces the Republic of Plato and the Divine Kingdom of Christ. England has had her share of the great dreamers; poets like Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton; philosophers like Bacon and Hobbes; statesmen like Henry II, and Simon de Montfort, Pitt and Burke, Disraeli and Churchill; scientists like Newton, Harvey, and Herschel. This characteristic, after all, made the nineteenth century one of the richest in English history; it was philosophic grasp and depth of comprehension that marked achievements like The Principles of Geology and Origin of Species. In addition to producing men of this first order, England has also produced, more than any other country, a large number of those, lacking perhaps in vision, but assured of a certain immortality because they have attained to what we might call a high competence; in a word, because they are civilized. Among these stands Walter Bagehot. He was not a genius, not a man of vision, but he was superbly civilized.

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