

Messenger and Visitor.

THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER,
VOLUME LX.

Vol. XIV.

ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 1898.

{ THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR,
VOLUME XLIX.

No. 23.

Gladstone's Influence on the Century.

Graduation Essay, by Mr. A. H. Whitman, of the Class of 1898 of Acadia.

In estimating the influence of the man who, for a large part of this century, has controlled the destinies of the British Empire, we are confronted at once with the magnitude of the task. A career comes up before us stretching in unbroken activity from the Reform Act of 1832 to the Home Rule Bill of 1894. Mr. Gladstone has, as one of his opponents has said, "touched everything and disturbed everything." His influence has been far-reaching, affecting not only the interests of the British Empire, but also has been a powerful factor in moulding the thought and feeling of the civilized world. No man, no matter what his political or religious opinions may be, can but affirm that William E. Gladstone, England's grand old man, has exerted a mighty influence on the age in which he has lived, and has given a new tone to English national life and thought. Our purpose is to consider briefly the strength he has imparted to the pursuit of politics, to what large ideas he has linked it, to what great heights he has lifted it, how he has imparted to it a tremendous moral force, how he has stood by the principles of liberty and justice to all; how he has recognized the noble ideal of national altruism, how he has constantly advocated and introduced much needed measures of reform, thus making his name the greatest by all odds in English political life during the present century.

In the first place Mr. Gladstone has been the people's uncrowned King, the great exponent of English democracy. His early career, however, did not indicate a leaning towards democratic views. At the close of the first fifty years of his life—that is at the end of 1859, anyone who had prophesied that his career would prove the most potent stimulus to the democratic movement in England in this century would have been received with general ridicule. Mr. Gladstone was at that time one of the most conservative members of the newly formed Liberal government. About this time he offered a strenuous and eloquent resistance to Lord Palmerston's law of divorces, and earlier his opposition to the Ecclesiastical Titles Act and his condemnation of the papal aggression, gained for him the reputation of great courage in stemming the waves of popular fury. All the symptoms were of conservative type and promised anything rather than a great democratic career. But the change was coming, and it was not long before he became the head of the greatest Reform government of the century. It was fortunate for England that, when the centre of political power was being quietly shifted from the aristocracy to the democracy, it possessed a man of Mr. Gladstone's combination of qualities. If the power of the democracy was suddenly increased, to him belongs no responsibility for the change, but what does belong to him and what may be attributed directly to his influence is, that he deprived it of the dangerous and rebellious element which was in it. The people believed in him; they believed in his integrity of purpose and this confidence afforded one of the best guarantees of the peaceful progress of the nation. Mr. Gladstone had a hold on the hearts of the people which no statesman of our generation has rivalled. He was the one man of the century who had that singular power of awakening popular enthusiasm without appealing to popular passion, and because of this he gave stability to democratic institutions.

In the next place let us consider the great moral and religious influence that Mr. Gladstone has exerted on the century. He has proved himself to be a statesman of the noblest type. No one can say that he has stooped to the position of a paltry demagogue or a political wire puller. His life has been a splendid example of integrity of purpose, of loftiness of aim, of confidence in the right. With him politics ceased to be a game, and he has shown to the world that the pursuit of politics is not incompatible with deep religious fervor, and loyalty to conscience and to God. Religion was with him the living and inspiring motive of every thought and action. Every question was raised from the low platform of selfishness to the lofty platform of principle. The political life of England has been elevated and purified by the influence of his splendid character, yet the life of the world has felt the influence of the mighty moral force which he exerted so powerfully on the century. "No life," says Owen Meredith, "can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife and all life not be purer and stronger there-

by," and Mr. Gladstone's life has been a life essentially pure in its purpose and strong in its strife, and all life has been made purer and stronger by his life. One English writer says, "He has taught us all to think a great deal less exclusively of our own selfish interests than we ever thought before, and a great deal more sympathy with the interests which we supposed to be inconsistent with our own." As he said in one of his speeches his grand purpose was not to hold power but to serve the truth, and all those acquainted with his career know how this statement has been verified. He ever sought the truth, he lived the truth, he loved the truth. He spoke among the people of his generation and no one could fail to be convinced that "it was the man who spoke who never sold the truth to serve the hour nor paltered with Eternal God for power."

Again, consider the influence he has exerted on great international questions, and how, through him, England has maintained peace with the world. Perhaps the one fixed idea of his whole career has been that all international questions should be based upon generous ethical principles, and that the moral law should be applied in all dealings between nations. When we contrast his foreign policy, notwithstanding its failure at times, with that of Palmerston or Disraeli, we can see the result of this principle of national altruism. Diplomats have laughed in their sleeves at Mr. Gladstone's cosmopolitanism. In many great international questions he has used the language more of a cosmopolitan than of a patriot. In the Crimean war, in the Afghan war, and in the Chinese war, he held firmly to the principle that, if he was in the wrong, he was bound as an Englishman, no less than as a citizen of the world, to say so. We think that it must be conceded, no matter how idealistic this principle may appear, that it is at times of the greatest practical use for nations with foreign policies. The jingoism or narrow patriotism, which is no patriotism at all, and which is disposed to ignore the existence of all other nations in the world and to maintain a pugnacious attitude towards them, is one of the worst things with which any nation can be afflicted. If France could have rid herself of this narrowness she might have been saved from the disaster of 1870. If Pitt could have kept back the patriotic passion of his countrymen England would not have been dragged into the French wars. Gladstone, by applying his principle of national altruism, has been of incalculable service to not only his own nation but to the world. His life was made for peace. He was not always successful in restraining the popular clamor for war, but the statesman who can point to the Alabama Treaty, the cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece, the restoration of the Transvaal, as amongst his achievements, has shown to the world that, to use the words he uttered in the House of Commons forty-four years ago, "he has recognized with frankness the equality of the weak with the strong, the principle of brotherhood among nations and of their sacred independence." By his example and courage a large portion of that abhorrent jingoism has been suppressed and the English nation has learned to respect the interests of other nations and to maintain a becoming dignity when provoked, when at other times, under less unselfish leaders, she would have rushed in to war, and as a result of Mr. Gladstone's efforts the cosmopolitan idea is stronger in England than ever before.

In the next place let us consider Mr. Gladstone's influence as a great reformer. As the great champion of English democracy he has ever been on the alert as to the needs of all classes within the Kingdom. His great reforming energy has been felt everywhere. He weakened the claims of property, especially of property in land. He shifted large burdens of taxation from labor, to rent and interest. He practically remodelled the English financial system. He helped to drive the Turk from Europe. He attacked the House of Lords and caused that ancient peerage to tremble. He established and confirmed free trade, and thus enabled industrial England to live. But a large part of this reforming energy was expended on Ireland. Ireland's need was great. In one of his speeches Mr. Gladstone said that the Irish peasantry had three branches, viz., the State Church, the Land Tenure system and the system of National Education, and he determined to hew them all off if possible. Braving a perfect storm of opposition he set himself to the task of carrying out these much needed reforms. He attacked and overthrew the State Church, thus enforcing the principle of religious equality. He overthrew the Land Tenure system and by so doing, the tenants' condition was greatly ameliorated and the back of landlordism was broken. He first and alone amongst the great political leaders, saw Ireland's real need; he first thought the Irish problem through to the end; he first had the courage and ability to formulate a scheme by which Ireland could be given religious and civil liberty. Whatever view men may take as to the practicability of Home Rule for Ireland, they certainly must admit that the influence exerted by its great exponent has done much to awaken sympathy and interest in Ireland's welfare. England knows Ireland's need today as she has never known it before and Ireland may thank the grand old man for this increased knowledge on England's part. The Home Rule Bill itself was rejected by the House of Lords, but the grand principles of liberty and justice which it embodied and for which Gladstone fought so nobly and so long will live forever. They are

now enthroned in the nation's heart and their absolute and ultimate acceptance is but a question of time. But it was not only in Great Britain and Ireland that the influence of the great reformer has been felt. Wherever men were oppressed with tyranny and wrong he would work and plead on their behalf. His voice and his pen were exerted against the government of Naples and the condition of the Neapolitan prisons. The letters which he wrote in 1851, thrilled the civilized world and contributed in no small measure to the downfall of an iniquitous despotism. And when in 1895 and '96, the world was horrified by the rapacious cruelty of the insolent Turk, when massacres were being carried on with a high hand in Armenia by Turkish soldiers, when the powers of Europe hesitated as to what course should be taken, the voice of Gladstone which had ever been exerted against wrong and oppression, which exposed the condition of the Neapolitan prisons in 1851, and which had aroused the world over the Bulgarian horrors in 1876, was again heard pleading the cause of a persecuted people enlisting the sympathies of the Christian world and, to use his own words, urging "that one general shout of execration, directed against deeds of wickedness should rise from outraged humanity and should force itself into the ears of the Sultan of Turkey and make him sensible, if anything could make him sensible, of the madness of his course."

Now we wish to add a few words in Mr. Gladstone's defence. He has been charged with inconsistency and instability and some urge that these have impaired his influence. Such charges against him come from those who do not fully understand his character. If consistency means that a man stick to a wrong course or a wrong policy all his life, after he has been convinced that it is wrong, then Mr. Gladstone has been very inconsistent. If on the other hand consistency means a determination to ever follow the lead of right and truth, then Mr. Gladstone has been one of the most consistent of men. We are inclined to favor the latter view of consistency. Changes and contradictions it is true have occurred in Mr. Gladstone's career, but these can be explained by his stern regard for right, that when he found himself in a position which he considered wrong, it was his duty to change as quickly as possible to the right. In our opinion it is to Mr. Gladstone's everlasting credit that he changed with the changes of the century and his influence has been tremendously increased because he has ever kept himself free to conviction and conversation. There are few characters so unamiable and untrustworthy in private or in public life as the men whose set opinions nobody can change. The one great evidence of Mr. Gladstone's broadmindedness and unselfishness is the fact that he has so often changed his point of view. He has shown to the world that true consistency does not consist in conforming forever to old established customs regardless of their adaptation to present surroundings and conditions but it consists in a determination to discover present needs and to suit the governmental policy to those needs.

Recently the "final lesson and the final trial" which is common to all men came to him. After a life of unswerving loyalty and devoted service to his Queen and country, he has been called to the higher service, for we believe "for one so true there must be other nobler work to do." No words can adequately express the splendid achievements of that glorious life. No eulogy can be too high for such a character. He who praises him most praises him best. But he is gone, and Englishmen no longer hear his voice, as of old; they no longer gather together in massive crowds to do honor to his worth; they no longer listen to the "rapt oration flowing free from point to point with power and grace." He has retired from the "maddening crowd's ignoble strife" but that influence which he has exerted will never die, that country for which he has so willingly given his life, will not soon forget his splendid example, the world which has felt the pulsations of his great heart, will be animated to better service because of his life. Well could Justin McCarthy say: As long as the world produces such men as Gladstone, the sentiment of loyalty, the habit of trust, the fervor and force of enthusiasm will not soon die out." To him the same words may be applied as were applied by Tennyson to another great Englishman, Gladstone has shown that—

The path of duty is the way to glory,
And that he that walks it, ever thirsting for the right,
And learns to deaden love of self,—before his journey
Closes he shall find the stubborn thistle
Bursting into glossy purples,
Which outtreden all voluptuous garden-roses.
He that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart, and knees, and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun;
Such was Gladstone—but he is gone—
Gone—who was so great,
Gone—but nothing can bereave him
Of the force he made his own, being here,
And we believe him something far advanced in State,
And that he wears a truer crown
Than any wreath that man can weave him.
Honor, honor, honor, to him,
Eternal honor to his name.