

rather than in the world of books. Nature seemed to have destined him to lead the Liberal party in the House of Lords. A thorough and genuine Liberal he always was. He belonged to the Manchester school, the school of Cobden and Bright. At the same time his finished manners, his imperturbable temper, and his ready wit, were just the right equipment for the chief of an aristocratic minority. He knew little, and cared less, about the serious study of historical ethics, and historical politics, which was the essential business of Acton's life.

When he was twenty-five, Sir John Acton came to live at Aldenham, his country house in Shropshire, where there was ample room for many thousands of books. At the General Election held in the summer of 1859 he was returned to Parliament. Although Catholic Emancipation was thirty years old, its effects were almost exclusively confined to Ireland. It was hardly possible for a Roman Catholic to find a seat in England, and Sir John Acton sat for the small Irish borough of Carlow, disfranchised in 1885. He was counted as a Whig, and a supporter of Lord Palmerston. But there was no sympathy, no point of contact, between the jaunty Premier and the erudite, philosophical, reflective Member for Carlow. "No one agrees with me, and I agree with no one," said Sir John, with unusual tautology. It was not quite true. During those almost silent years of Parliamentary life he watched with critical and yet admiring interest the career of the illustrious man who was destined to be Palmerston's successor. Although Mr. Gladstone had not time to acquire the learning of his disciple, and upon the negative results of German scholarship was inclined to look askance, he was the best theologian, as well as the best financier, in Parliament, and few men were so well qualified to appreciate the range or the depth of Acton's researches. Acton, on his part, was fascinated by the combination of intellectual subtlety with practical capacity which made the Chancellor of the Exchequer the first man in the House of Commons. It was Palmerston's House, not Gladstone's, and the Derbyites were almost as numerous