

be a good thing, or it may not; but it is certain that Sir John will move but cautiously in that direction; and it may well be that the logic of events will deter him from moving at all. If his action be left free, he will still have great difficulty in retaining about him the men who have placed him in power. To himself the forecast of the future cannot be full of promise.

In summarizing the character of Sir John A. Macdonald it will have been noticed that Ambition is at once its strength and its weakness. In its strength it enables him to rise above the petty greeds of office, and—as we have seen—to project his vision and purpose into the future. But in its weakness his ambition blinds him to the beauty of a pure morality, and makes the end appear to justify even doubtful means. Very noticeable has been his life-long faculty of making and retaining friends. The loyalty of his followers is remarkable. Hundreds of them can see no fault in him. Even in regard to a weakness which need here be but lightly touched, his own *mot* was true when—coming victorious out of one of the old party conflicts—he declared that “the country preferred John A. drunk to George Brown sober.” This loyalty of his friends is only partially explained by his courteous geniality towards even the dunder-heads and incubi of his party: his unselfishness has left him free to forward the interests of adherents, and even to reward those who came to him from the enemy. A warm and constant friend, he has been ever ready to receive a former foe who came in friendship. And not many friends has he lost by want of thought or want of effort.

As a speaker, Sir John A. Macdonald cannot claim the highest rank, if style be considered. Ready, impulsive, energetic, he makes his points, and makes them well: but he has no graceful faculty of weaving a pretty web of oratory out of nothing. With something to say, he can say it with abundant and choice language, with ready wit, and with great energy and directness; though with much uncultured gesticulation, and a passion which frequently destroys the mere verbal coherence of his speech. But the fact that he always speaks with a purpose, and that his words are weighted with good sense and meaning, hushes the house to silence when he rises. As a constitutional lawyer, Sir John has few equals: as an organizer and leader, he has no superior. Should he learn to master the faults of earlier years, he may yet leave a name which shall be respected and cherished by Canadians of every party, when the harshness of partizan conflict shall be softened by the mellowing touch of time; and its discords shall be hushed in the distance of the centuries.

GRAPHITE.

THE MORALITY OF GREAT MEN.

Success in the history of the world has so often been achieved unscrupulously and used badly, that cynical persons may be tempted to ask whether any great men have ever been thoroughly moral. No doubt they constantly have a conscience of their own, and conform more or less regularly to its injunctions; but what is thought is, that the whole moral code of heroic personages is laxer than that which obtains among their Liliputian contemporaries. A certain school of philosophers even become indignant with anybody who pokes too inquisitively into the privacy of the illustrious dead, to see whether or not they conformed strictly to the Ten Commandments. They consider such invidious criticism as a sort of discreditable snuffing about in the dirty places of the past, and the “doggeries” is a term invented by Mr. Carlyle to express his disgust at the people who rake up scandals about the moral conduct of great men. It is remarkable, indeed, how very slight importance posterity attaches to certain of their failings; even where similar default on the part of the living would not be easily tolerated. When men arrive at a considerable degree of eminence and power, the world seems to throw aside its usual tape and measure, and to take down from the shelf exceptional standards of morality by which to judge them. Famous monarchs, statesmen, generals, and to some extent famous authors too, are dealt with on broader and larger principles than ordinary. Historians do not set themselves to praise or condemn them according as they are faithful or unfaithful to their wives, or with reference to their veracity, or any other quality which in private life is so rigidly canvassed. Anybody who reaches the position of a Napoleon, a Duke of Wellington, or a Cavour, is estimated irrespectively of the cardinal virtues. The more he falls short of great notoriety, the more fiercely his personal deficiencies are blamed, till, when we come down to those who in station and influence are on a level with ourselves, we fall back into our former moral method, and begin again to regard temperance, soberness, and chastity as matters of primary importance. This laxity is most of all shown in our judgment of great diplomatic or political successes. We admire and quote as great, the man who has produced a great event, without pausing to reflect strictly whether he acquired his ends by treachery or dissimulation or lying. Perhaps if the nature of the means he used was strongly pressed upon us, we should admit that they were indefensible. Still, we soon return to our old position of admiring the end, and forgetting all that constituted the means. Whether or not Cavour told falsehoods to Napoleon III., or Napoleon III. to the French Assembly before his *coup d'état*, are questions about which those do not trouble themselves, who, looking to the results obtained, regard the one as the greatest of modern Italians, the other as the greatest of modern French politicians. Cavour will go down to future times as the bold political gamester who staked the unity of Italy on a happy throw, and won it. And the Emperor Napoleon would be forgiven the dishonesty of his *coup d'état*, and the war with Germany, even by French journalists, if he had succeeded in making France the mistress of the Continent. Possibly it may be true that most statesmen have been liars, on an emergency. What King David said in haste about his species, he might have said upon reflection about monarchs and diplomatists,—himself included. There have been, of course, exceptions; but no candid critic can admit that scrupulousness, honesty, and unflinching veracity have been common characteristics among the great notabilities and leaders of the past.

It is, of course, very shocking to think that an accusation so sweeping should stand any chance of being even approximately true, but it seems still more shocking that history should make so little of all the vices and immoralities of its heroes. At first sight it appears as if society, by such untoward leniency to wicked men, placed itself in a dilemma. Either, one might argue, morality

does not really matter so much as society pretends, or else it is most deplorable that irregularities and crimes should be publicly condoned wholesale. If morality means anything at all, we have no business, we shall be told, to weigh famous characters with false weights. Intemperance or unchastity are vital questions with respect to the conduct of Brown and Jones, and they cannot have been a bagatelle in Cæsar or Alexander. Is it only when we get to the case of notabilities that we are immediately to find out that flesh is weak, and must not be too severely scrutinized? All at once we are willing to make allowances. Kings, emperors, and statesmen, we suddenly discover, have special temptations. And thus the moralist altogether, when he becomes an historian, ceases to be a moralist altogether. No doubt such contrarieties in our system of criticism stand in need of explanation. They are, as we have observed, at first sight inconsistent and unintelligible. There is, however, something to be advanced in their favor; and though we are far from saying that an increase of moral severity on the part of historians would not be a benefit to the world, yet, on the whole, it will be found that history could hardly be written at all except on principles somewhat akin to those of which strict ethical judges seem to have a title to complain.

In the first place, it is to be remembered what are the paramount interests of society with respect to the historical examination and criticism of the lives of great or powerful people. Society is principally concerned with the question whether, on the whole, their vast opportunities have been employed for the general happiness of the community. This is a matter that touches mankind more nearly than the problem whether or not the private conduct of such persons has been sinful or the reverse. The domestic vices of the great, when they become notorious and flagrant, are public evils, because they are an injury done to the cause of virtue; but they are far less of public evils than bad government, or tyranny, or persecution. Nero's bestialities would have been of minor consequence to the race, if life had not become insecure under his rule; and, at the present moment, whenever it can be shown that his cruelties affected only the select few, and that the great mass of the Roman people were happy and thriving under him, a democratic age would soon consent to treat even his persecution of Christians and of senators as a peccadillo. The first thing needed is to protect the multitude who are weak against the mercilessness and rapacity of the strong. History feels this, and though it has generally been written in the interest of the educated, rather than of the lower classes, still, the canon it applies is meant to be a broad one, and kings and statesmen are condemned or praised according as they are thought to have rendered those dependent on their tender mercies happy or unhappy. And posterity, accordingly, when it discusses the character and posthumous reputation of a conqueror or a king, visits with its severest censure those who have been guilty of lawless violence or cruelty. Did he plunder or ravish, and how many people did he put to death? were his subjects miserable during his reign?—such are the broad inquiries it makes about the famous great men in former times. It is of the most serious consequence to the world that those who have unlimited power should use it well. History is society's weapon of defence against the powerful; and a primary, though unconscious, instinct of self-preservation leads us, in criticising the past, to attach the utmost weight to such vices and defects as would be wholly intolerable in the present. In comparison with these transcendent questions, little curiosities and scandals about vices of a private sort are trivial, or beside the mark. What one cares chiefly to know is whom a tyrant beheaded, or to how many women he had made love. His illegitimate children, his bottles of wine, his gambling tastes, unless his conduct was in open defiance of all decency and decorum, are things about which posterity troubles its head very little. It is not affected by them, nor is its own existence and comfort dependent on its success in frightening great men into domestic virtue. History, in a word, does not write its criticisms from a domestic point of view. It does not excuse Robespierre because he was chaste, nor refuse to recognize the political genius of Talleyrand because of his amours, his lies, and his devotion to himself.

History has, indeed, scarcely got at its command the resources which would enable it to act on any different plan. It may be doubted whether society would lose far more than it gained by a system of rigid scrutiny into the private vices and virtues of the dead. Except in the case of the few who outrage all propriety, it is not easy for the outside world to know much about a man's inner life. We are at the mercy of rumor and gossip, and all of us know by every-day experience how monstrous is the inaccuracy of scandal-mongers when great reputations are at stake. As common report could not be trusted, history, if it were to attempt to turn itself into a tribunal of pure ethical criticism, would soon descend to the level of private chronicles and scandalous historiettes, and alternate between piquant truth and gross libel. Its real work, however, is not to educate the rising generation in moral virtue, to show by example and illustration what merits and demerits affect the progress of countries and races on a large scale, and only to touch private affairs when they are inextricably interwoven with public. There is, of course, one way in which this limit must be often transgressed. In the delineation of the character of great men it is desirable to be complete and accurate, and anything that throws light on their nature or habits is so much valuable matter for the future. But when all this matter has been collected and added to the great man's biography, history and popular feeling come back again to the broadest standard, and weigh him, not by his conjugal or parental excellence, but by his merits as a public man. No heresy, however, can be so mischievous as that which teaches that there is, for different degrees of genius, a different moral code. Moral distinctions are a barrier erected by society between itself and danger, assiduously inculcated by legislators and educators to that end; and this barrier is nowhere needed more than in the case of genius. Great intellectual or material strength, unaccompanied by moral sensibility, is an enemy to mankind's happiness, quite as much as a wild beast is to the repose of an African village. For society to treat genius and power as if they had nothing to do with ethical rules, is to abandon ethical rules where they are most imperatively wanted. All ethical rules, however, are not alike, nor are they all of equal moment in the eyes of an historian. Historians have principally, if not solely, to do with such of them as constitute a safeguard to the world against the aberrations of the powerful. They can afford to pass over others cavalierly; but there is a portion of the moral law which they should enforce as inflexibly in the case of the great as in the case of the small.—*Saturday Review.*