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Beaconsfield

Beaconsfield, Benjamin Disraeli
(For Private Circulation.)

Earl of

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THE ALLUSIONS IN "LOTHAIR."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION :

SIR : An edition of Disraeli's novels has been brought out by an American firm with a key to the personal allusions officially furnished by the late Lord Rowton, Disraeli's secretary and literary executor. Probably I am the last survivor of the set, so that, in saying a word about my own case, I may be helping to clear the memories of some of the rest.

The names generally are pseudonyms. Canning is "Mr. Charlatan Gas"; Dickens is "Mr. Gushy"; Bright is "Jawster Sharp"; but I am plainly designated as the "Oxford Professor." I am described as "a social parasite," overpowered at finding myself in company with a lord. This was not published when I was in England, where I may safely say it would have fallen flat or recoiled. It was published when I was in the United States, where I was unknown and the slander, stamped with Disraeli's name, might tell. Once only had I met Disraeli. I never interchanged a word with him. I lived in a circle entirely different from his, and one in which, if there were fewer high titles, there were at least as many great names.

I am described as being brought to the New World by dreams of wild vanity which the New World could alone realize. The truth was that I had settled for life on my professorship at Oxford, and built a house there. I was called away and obliged to resign my chair by a sad domestic duty, in the performance of which I had to spend a year and a half. Then, having no special employment, and being much in need of change, I gladly accepted the invitation of Mr. Andrew White to help him in the foundation of Cornell University for the special benefit of poor students. Having lectured at Cornell for two years, I came to reside with the branches of my family settled before me in Canada.

It happened that, at the time of my leaving England, I had before me an offer of the nomination of my party for a Parliamentary constituency in which it had a sure majority. I had a similar overture after settling here. Had I ever desired it, a political career was open.

Intercourse with European patriots such as Garibaldi and Mazzini I do not think it necessary to excuse. I will not shelter myself under Disraeli's "Revolutionary Epick." Mazzini, let me say in passing, assured me that he had never taken part in an assassination plot.

Disraeli twice attacked me very personally in the House of Commons. On the first occasion it was for advocating the cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece. He charged me with wanting to break up the Empire. We now know that he told Lord Malmesbury in confidence that the colonies were millstones round the neck of England; and this language, his great friend, Sir W. Gregory, tells us, he held in private to the end of his life. His second attack was for advocating the abolition of entail.

This practice of libelling under color of fiction surely is cowardly and mean. It may lend impunity to the vilest slander. Generally recognized as the allusion may be, the person traduced, if a pseudonym is used, cannot right himself without seeming to put the cap on his own head.

Yours faithfully,

GOLDWIN SMITH.

Toronto, April 7, 1905.

Since my letter appeared in *The Nation* I have been told that a key to the personal allusions in "Lothair" was furnished by a friend of Disraeli, a man of high rank, to the late Queen, whose son and heir had been for sometime a pupil of the person most malignantly traduced. This rather increases my wish that the truth should be known to my friends.

I may as well at the same time brush a speck of dust from another reputation, also traduced by Disraeli, and of incomparably more importance than my own.

It was reported that Peel wanted to challenge Disraeli and the report has found its way into the memoir of Disraeli by Froude. That Peel should have wanted to challenge Disraeli was impossible. Peel held in his hands proofs of Disraeli's character and motives, and could have crushed him if he had chosen.

It was to Lord George Bentinck, not Disraeli, that Peel wanted to send a challenge for an aspersion cast in debate on Peel's connection with his friends, a subject on which Peel was excessively sensitive. My informant was the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Lincoln as he then was, whom Peel wanted to carry the challenge. When the house was up, Peel called Lincoln to him and asked him to wait while the customary letter was written to the Queen. He then took Lincoln's arm and walked with him towards his own house in Whitehall Gardens, telling him by the way that he wanted him to carry a challenge to Lord George Bentinck. Lincoln remonstrated; Peel insisted. They walked up and down till the work-people began to pass on their way to work. Peel then consented to go in and rest, Lincoln promising to return. Returning, Lincoln found Peel still bent on sending the challenge. At last Peel gave way to the argument that if anything serious happened it would greatly afflict the Queen.

Lincoln represented Peel as saying to him that if he would not carry the challenge Hardinge would. In this the Duke's memory failed him. Hardinge was in India. But Hardinge had acted for Peel in a previous affair, and to this no doubt Peel referred.

Disraeli, at his entrance into public life, tried more line than one, radicalism among the rest. But seeing the Tory star in the ascendant he finally attached himself to that party, and in his "Letters of Runnymede" fawned upon Peel and furiously abused the Whigs. When he was elected for Shrewsbury, he announced the event to Peel in a letter implying political attachment. When Peel came into power Disraeli wrote the letter asking for place. Peel had to decline, but he did it with perfect courtesy, and when Disraeli made his first and unsuccessful speech, Peel encouraged him by marked cheers. Disraeli's first attacks on Peel were probably intended to force his way to place; for he afterwards made up again to Peel, protested against being struck off the roll of Peel's party, and asked Graham, Peel's colleague, for a place for his brother, which Graham, on account of the attacks, refused.

Then came the split of the Conservative party on the Corn Laws. Disraeli grasped his opportunity, made up to Bentinck, fanned Bentinck's furious animosity to Peel, and used him as his tool. The charge against Peel of dishonourable conduct to Canning, which, after Bentinck's death, Disraeli carefully fathered on him, can be pretty clearly shown to have been Disraeli's own concoction infused into the receptive mind of his friend. Disraeli had declared himself a Free Trader, had represented Free Trade as the tradition of the Tory party, and satirised the Protectionist squires. This did not prevent him from embracing protection for the purpose of his cabal, with the intention, no doubt, of afterwards getting rid of it, as he did and as the opportune death of Bentinck enabled him to do.

I naturally asked Lincoln why it was that Peel was so much stung by the coarse attack of Bentinck when he had cared so little for the keen invectives of Disraeli. In answer Lincoln told me that Peel had shown him the letter suing for place, the existence of which Disraeli had denied in the House of Commons. The letter is now to be read in Mr. Parker's "Peel," volume II, page 186. Its concluding sentence is, "I confess, to be unrecognized at this moment by you appears to me to be overwhelming, and I appeal to your own heart—to that justice and that magnanimity which I feel are your characteristics—to save me from an intolerable humiliation."

I then knew the real character of the man who was making his gambling table of my country."