

## DISRAELI AMONG THE PROPHETS

IT has taken two editors and six volumes to complete the biography of Disraeli. The last two volumes enjoy the advantage of the freedom which the war has brought to those who search the faded purples and tinsels of the Victorian ash heap. The love letters of a Premier are not generally disclosed forty years after his death. However, as Lady Beaconsfield was dead, Catholics need only smile at his septuagenarian infatuation for Lady Bradford, illustrated in letters which outcloy even his coy adulation of the Queen. Lady Bradford he could not marry because Lord Bradford lived, and Lady Chesterfield her sister refused to marry him, though they were single, while the Queen, who was both single and devoted to Disraeli, could not have married him without putting Gladstone into office and perhaps their hate of Gladstone was their strongest bond.

Bishop-making is always a fascinating pursuit, even more for the makers than for the made. That Anglican Bishops are elected by the Grace of God and the favour of Downing Street has always added to the piquancy of the pursuit. During the seventies it became a gamble between High and Low Church, according as Gladstone or Disraeli lived at Downing Street, a sort of *rouge et noir* on which candidates could calculate their chances with tolerable accuracy at each General Election. Through Lord Palmerston, Lord Shaftesbury, "a vain maniac" according to Disraeli, had long chosen Bishops as he would choose domestic chaplains according to his Puritan conscience. Disraeli frankly chose them with a view to parliamentary expediency. But his failure in Church policy was due to an attempt to unite Toryism with Low Church Erastianism, with the result that he divided the Church

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vote by his cynical attack on Ritualism. He had calculated that a Bill to put down "the Mass in masquerade" would carry the Protestant public. He remembered the No-Popery delirium of 1851, but forgot that he was striking the friends of his own party. It was a miscalculation which only a foreigner could have made. He was quite right in saying that Queen Caroline and Cardinal Wiseman typified the occasions when the British public lost its head, but he was wrong in expecting it would lose its head a third time for his benefit. Instead he was swept from office.

Irish Disestablishment aroused all Disraeli's political instincts. Church defence could be made a Conservative plank. A disestablished Church of England, he wrote to the Queen, "will become either an *imperium in imperio* or be absorbed by the tradition and discipline of the Church of Rome." He understood and appreciated the Catholic Church much more than the Anglican, so that possibly it was not merely Low Church fervour which stimulated his policy. He disliked the well-meant sham of Ritualism, and his attitude had some effect in converting Lord Ripon, who could not stand seeing an agnostic Jew making the English Bishops. To Disraeli it fell to make St. Albans a Bishopric and to enmitre the proto-martyrdom of England, which from his hands was as comforting to the High Church as Lloyd George's telegram to the new Archbishop of Wales. When it was necessary to give Cornwall its first Anglican Bishop he wrote, "Cornwall is full of Dissenters like a rabbit warren. And any high jinks there would never do." But he chose Benson, whom Gladstone afterwards sent to Canterbury. Disraeli's own nominee for Canterbury was Tait, a Low Church Erastian. By deliberately keeping Samuel Wilberforce out of London and Canterbury, Disraeli harmed the Church he thought he was serving by serving his personal spite.

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He told the Queen that Wilberforce was "more odious than Laud!"

As a pure electioneering bid he made the violent Protestant McNeile a Dean, and he declined to make High Church appointments because women had no votes to show their approbation of church millinery. Only the interference of the Queen induced him to take Magee from the Deanery of Cork and place him at Peterborough. It is far more difficult for an Irishman to obtain an Anglican Mitre than a seat in the Sacred College. Never was a ring more guarded and insular. The Sacred College is only half-Italian, but it takes a Scotsman to climb on to the Anglican Bench. Disraeli's policy was warfare against "the common enemies, Rits and Rats." Rationalists he associated with Socialism and Ritualists with Gladstone! The most he would do for the High Church was to send Christopher Wordsworth to Lincoln as a consolation for not promoting Wilberforce to London. There was perhaps a subtlety in his description of Bishops as "*graceless patronage*." Disraeli was responsible for keeping so distinguished a preacher as Liddon off the Bench owing to his views on the Eastern Question more than to his adhesion to a "finical and fastidious crew." Liddon and the High Church were in favour of Russia rather than the Grand Turk. Lord Carnarvon, who with Salisbury stood for the High Church in the Cabinet, was "a weak enthusiast dreaming over the celebration of High Mass in St. Sophia," which was indeed to be one of the dreams of the Allies. In time to come Salisbury recognized that Disraeli had "backed the wrong horse" in Turkey, though neither lived to see the tragic development. Salisbury had "sacerdotal conviction and wished Russia in Constantinople," whereas the gracious Defender of the Faith informed Disraeli that she would abdicate if that event came about, to attempt which

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thousands of British lives were to be thrown away a generation later. To checkmate Russia Disraeli, with a curious perversion of prophecy, was proposing "a military occupation of the Peninsula of Gallipoli." As for the unfortunate Christians under Turkish rule for whom British arms and propaganda have been so mightily waged, the Queen was against "this mawkish sentimentality for people who hardly deserve the name of real Christians." She was ecclesiastically largely under Disraeli's influence and even alluded to the Turks as "our poor allies." In this case he was surely not on the side of the Angels! Gallant little Serbia making war on Turkey he accused of "headstrong audacity," which shows how politics alter circumstances as well as Bishoprics. But the climax in Disraeli's ecclesiastical audacity was his note to the head of the House of Cecil, the family which almost invented and patented High Anglicanism, "can you suggest a good High Church Dean who is not a damned fool?" Salisbury answered according to his interlocutor's cynicism that this was "a formidable restriction." He kept his temper, and by supporting Disraeli against the grain lived to succeed to his episcopal wand and to make plenty of High Church Bishops who washed all traces of Disraeli off the face of their Anglican mother!

*Lothair* will always keep Disraeli's memory among the Churches, for there he sketched Religion in the seventies as no hand has touched subsequent decades. The impersonation of Manning as Cardinal Grandison is a masterpiece, with little missing save the right colour of his eyes. When Mgr. Catesby's name is misprinted once Capel, Disraeli shewed inner knowledge as well, as in the Cardinal's words, "the publication of the Scotch Hierarchy at this moment will destroy the labour of years." How could Dizzy have known about a scheme which did not mature for eight years

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unless he was using secret information from agents in Rome? Less brilliant was his prophecy that Cardinal Nardi, who appears as Mgr. Berwick, would succeed Antonelli. Disraeli used all his secret information as to Rome and Fenianism acquired as Premier. Manning must have communicated his dream to Disraeli for the latter to write "I would purchase some of those squalid streets in Westminster and clear a great space and build a real Cathedral where the worship of heaven should be conducted in the full spirit of the ordinances of the Church." This was in 1870! How much of Manning's talk is embalmed in the novel! "I do not eat and I do not drink," or "Perplexed churches are churches made by Act of Parliament, not by God," ring authentic. But the duel between Cardinal Manning and Bishop Wilberforce for the soul of Lothair was based on their struggle in real life for the conversion of Archdeacon Robert Wilberforce. Dr. Littledale seconds the Bishop and Mgr. Capel the Cardinal. There is nothing quite like the moment when the Cardinal turns the Bishop's flank by preaching in his episcopal See while the Bishop pays one of the week end country visits Samuel Wilberforce was so fond of. However much *Lothair* shocked, it remains a "Roman" tract and the best *ex-tempore* picture of the times of the Catholic Revival. For every dig he gave Rome he gave Canterbury two. After fifty years Mr. Buckle's amazing Biography gives the episode new life and leaves Disraeli among the Prophets, albeit a mocking one.

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