The Career of a Great Editor.*

"What a noble record of courage and energy in the highest causes to recall" exclaimed James Bryce, when the news of Mr. Godkin's death reached him, five years ago. And no more accurate characterization of Mr. Ogden's volumes can be given than Mr. Bryce's own words, — "a noble record of courage and energy in the highest causes." Like Carl Schurz and Henry Villard, with both of whom he was to be so closely connected, Mr. Godkin came to America as a young man because he loved the ideals for which the great American republic seemed to stand, and the opportunities which it seemed to offer for working out successfully the great problems of human society and government.

The Godkin family runs back through some eight centuries of residence in Ireland to a little colony of Englishmen who settled in the Barony Forth, on the coast of Wexford, and became Protestants during the period of the Reformation. James Godkin, the father, driven from his Presbyterian pulpit because of his vigorous "Repeal Essays" in support of the Young Ireland movement in 1848, served later as editor of the Londonderry "Standard" and afterwards of the Dublin "Daily Express," acting also as Irish correspondent of the London "Times," and was naturally an untiring advocate of Home Rule for Ireland to the end. No theorist could have devised a better parentage for the production of just such a keenly intellectual and vigorous fighter for reform causes as Edwin Godkin proved to be.

The "singular powers of expression" commemorated by Mr. Bryce in the felicitous inscription composed for his tombstone, together with his keen perception of what was worth expressing, were sufficiently developed at the age of twenty-two to warrant the London "Daily News" in sending him to the East as its correspondent during the Crimean War. From this service Mr. Ogden dates one of the most firmly rooted of his later mental and moral characteristics: "Indelible impressions were gained — chief of them, hatred of war. *He had seen its horrors naked.*" We thank Mr. Ogden for the expression. Some day the time will come when we shall allow a writer with the eye of a Godkin to strip the rags of mock patriotism, mock modesty, and a good many other mockeries, not from war in the abstract, but from some real and present war, and give us a good square gaze at its stark naked body; and then we shall realize that Bellona is not fit company for enlightened and self-respecting people.

Mr. Godkin reached America soon after the close of his Crimean experience, and, as with Schurz, his first impressions were of the rising opposition to the cruelty and anomaly of slavery. He determined at once to see Southern conditions with his own eyes, and his letters to the "Daily News," during a horseback journey which lasted from December, 1856, to the following April, furnish a vivid and instructive picture from which Mr. Ogden has drawn some fifty pages of well-chosen extracts. We clip a bit concerning the Walker "filibuster" episode.

> "While passing over the lake between New Orleans and Mobile I was present while one of General Walker's agents preached filibusterism to the passengers in the cabin. The facility with which these men are, or rather were, allowed to harangue, beat up for recruits, collect supplies and arms, and despatch them to the scene of hostilities, is a curious commentary upon Mr. Marcy's terrible letters to Lord Palmerston. From the high moral tone assumed by the United States government in its correspondence upon the Crampton affair, one can hardly be got to believe that Walker's agents have had recruiting offices open in all the seaports, with flags flying from the windows with offers inscribed upon them of a free passage to, and free farms in, Nicaragua, for more than a year past."

Doubtless then as later, when Mr. Godkin had become a naturalized citizen of the country he had loved long before he had ever seen it, many readers saw in this only a foreigner virulently assailing "American institutions." The majority of us have not yet reached the point where we can appreciate and adopt the higher patriotism which, like wise and benevolent surgery, will build for a more healthful future by fearlessly cutting and cauterizing where cancerous growth or poison has entered. A social or political abuse was to him simply a disease, to be fought as relentlessly as a physical disease in one of his own family, and the untiring energy of the fight was as surely the mark and measure of his love in the one case as in the other.

The keen disappointment which Mr. Godkin felt in the closing years of his life, when he saw the United States, and then England, each engaged in a war which seemed to him easily avoidable and fraught with the gravest danger to fundamental principles of English and American liberty, was closely akin to the bitter sorrow of which Mr. Ogden, with delicate sympathy, has given us a glimpse on the occasion of his loss of a little daughter and later of his wife.

*The Life of Edwin Lawrence Godkin. By Rollo Ogden. In two volumes. New York: The Macmillan Co.

It was this passionate love for free institutions, quickened by keen perception of the abuses by which they were endangered in the one land where they seemed otherwise to have the best chance of full development, that led Mr. Godkin into the movement for establishing "The Nation" in 1865. Readers of THE DIAL do not need a detailed support of the statement that he made of this modest looking periodical, never of large circulation, a power for political regeneration before which more wrongdoers have trembled than before any other single factor in the whole history of American political journalism. The rescue of the government service from the corruption which the Civil War had found bad enough, and left still worse, naturally appealed to him as fundamental to all desirable lines of improvement. It was truly a cry in the wilderness when he began.

"It was, to most people, a strange European whimsey. I remember being invited to a breakfast in Washington, given by Mr. Henry Adams, who was then one of us, to bring together a few friends of the reform and some Congressmen. To me fell the task of explaining to a United States Senator what we aimed at. He knew nothing of Civil Service Reform except the name, and that it was 'something Prussian.' He listened with politeness to my exposition of its merits, but it was evident to me that he considered me an estimable humbug or visionary."

It was not long that any beneficiary of entrenched political abuses was able to regard the writer of the editorials in "The Nation" as a visionary on the side of attack, at least, though many doubtless persuaded themselves that he was deficient on the constructive side. Even people who ought to know better are sometimes hoodwinked into the belief that you have no right to burn the tents of political pirates, squatting on the government preserves, until you have some essentially similar structure ready to put in their place. The subsequent history of the Civil Service movement is clear enough evidence, even if other were lacking, that when Mr. Godkin felt it his part to take up the work of construction his ideas always had live roots in the solid ground of experience and common sense.

We cannot take space to follow him through the various conflicts into which loyalty to principle and unbounded energy led him, first in the columns of "The Nation," and from 1881 in the "Evening Post." Of course he met opposition at many points from thoroughly reputable and disinterested sources. It is not necessary to argue that this opposition was never well taken. If we are to recognize no truly great, high-minded, and loyal leader until he comes to us above the level of possible error of judgment, then we shall never have him in this world at all. This much may be said, however, that when it would have been worth millions to malign interests to break down his reputation before the American people, no enemy ever found it possible to lodge one base or unmanly act or motive at his door. It was this high idealism, inexpugnable integrity, and unsullied purity of motive, that drew and held for his paper so many readers who always felt it necessary to add to their letters of praise for some particular service to any good cause the statement that they often felt obliged to disagree with him. Doubtless approval thus qualified always struck him as the best possible proof that he was succeeding in his fundamental purpose, that of stimulating really vigorous thought on social and political problems in the minds of intelligent men. For the class of critics who would echo the gibe of some exposed rascal that his only dissatisfaction with himself was "the fact that his name had one too many syllables" he could feel nothing but amused contempt. His weapons were reserved for foes of more significance.

The cry of "pessimism" was often raised against him, a word which in recent times has run a neck-and-neck competition with "patriotism" as "the last refuge of scoundrels." The clearness of vision which can distinguish evil from good, the firm belief in the human possibility of intellectual and moral progress, the vivid hope that such progress would follow intelligent effort, the readiness to put his life enthusiastically into such effort,—these were the elements of the "pessimism" of Edwin Lawrence Godkin; and when really intelligent people come to reject this for a style of "optimism" which could see existing evils with the clear eye of a Godkin and still be "at ease in Zion," then the time for a *real* pessimism will indeed have come. That the conditions growing out of the Spanish and Boer wars saddened his declining years is of course known to all; but it was no sadness of final despair, as is well shown by an extract from a letter written from England to Wendell P. Garrison, within less than six months of his death. "Some day I believe civil service reform will have become as obvious in America as it is here; anything else is unthinkable. The anti-slavery fight seemed even more hopeless, yet it was won, and now people wonder that there ever was any fight at all." And it was that other arch "pessimist," Professor Norton, who wrote to Mr. Godkin only two

years earlier, — "when the work of this century is summed up, what you have done for the good old cause of civilization, the cause which is always defeated, *but always after defeat taking more advanced position than before*, — what you have done for this cause will count for much."

To Mr. Godkin's strenuous warfare against injustice and wrong-doing, Professor A. V. Dicey added as his second pronounced characteristic "his extraordinary kindness to his friends." Mr. Ogden's records of this kindness make the most delightful reading. Among those friends were Bryce and Dicey and Leslie Stephen, Lowell and Curtis, Professor Norton and his accomplished sisters, Gilman and Eliot and Andrew D. White, and a host of others whose names are of the very cream of moral and intellectual worth on both sides of the ocean. Nothing could be finer than his respect and affection for his colleague, the late Wendell P. Garrison, whose inestimable services to "The Nation" were noticed editorially in THE DIAL of March 16.

The work of Mr. Ogden on these volumes has been admirably done. With an editorial self-suppression which finds its best parallel in the work of Professor Norton, he has given us Mr. Godkin's story from Mr. Godkin's own pen, supplying only the connecting links without which that story could not be fully understood. If on every educated American's most accessible shelves it could have its fitting place alongside Curtis's "Addresses and Orations," the "Letters of James Russell Lowell," the "Life of William Lloyd Garrison" by his sons, and Bryce's "American Commonwealth," there would be little ground for pessimism as to the future of Democracy in America.

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