

# Doran Book Chat

IN the course of reading two volumes I called POINTS OF VIEW, collected papers by Viscount Birkenhead, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, I was delighted to come upon a chapter which is really nothing but a magnificent book review of Lady Gwendolen Cecil's LIFE OF ROBERT, MARQUIS OF SALISBURY. I have for some time been of opinion that Lady Gwendolen Cecil's biography of her father is too little appreciated. Birkenhead made me feel again how good the two volumes on Salisbury are where he says:

"Lady Gwendolen Cecil's treatment of her massive subject-matter undoubtedly grows upon one in the course of reading. The effect of a treatment which is both detached and penetrating is cumulative. And suddenly one realizes that the figure on the canvas, hitherto nebulous and a little elusive, is assuming the precision of a finished portrait."

Undoubtedly Robert Cecil, Marquis of Salisbury, is the most interesting statesman of those who were nearly great. For he was not great in the sense that Disraeli and Gladstone were great; but he approached greatness — and he lasted long, and he was very powerful. However, I find the careful contemplation of such a man as Salisbury rather more interesting than the study of indisputable greatness. What was the secret of Salisbury's mysterious and not altogether creditable detestation of Disraeli? Was it jealousy or conviction or mere temperament? A great deal of subtlety and penetration is called for in the consideration of a man like this Cecil of Hatfield House. Salisbury is certainly one of those men who are made by their marriages. It is a most amazing thing that the wretched youngster whose boyhood was one prolonged misery at the hands of his fel-

lows, and whose physical constitution seemed indifferent or worse, should have become the feared and then venerated leader of one of the great English political parties. Those "blazing indiscretions" of Salisbury's also call for nicety in estimating the inner man. Some light is thrown by the fine speech on Salisbury included in the two volumes of Lord Rosebery's MISCELLANIES — LITERARY AND HISTORICAL (full of variety, charm and eloquence! Do you like to read speeches? Well, I mean, *such* speeches! As finished as essays; and there are essays in the volumes, too). But I meant to say that, though these two volumes carry the life of Salisbury only to 1880, I am glad I didn't wait years for the remaining volumes before tackling these.

To return briefly to Birkenhead's POINTS OF VIEW, no doubt the paper entitled "Should a Doctor Tell?" holds the greatest interest for the greatest number. It deals, of course, with the question of professional confidence and knowledge in conflict with the legal demand for evidence that may be necessary to procure the ends of justice (I state it clumsily, I'm aware). But like everything Birkenhead writes about, legal or otherwise, the paper is beautifully clear, simple, reasoned and convincing, so that any layman can follow his points and applaud not only his wisdom but his gift for imparting that wisdom.

To read Birkenhead, or the Life of Salisbury, or Rosebery's book is to enjoy the exceptional feeling of having passed into a region where life recovers its poise and sanity and where literature is an admirable art, worthily practised for an amply sufficient end.

Donald Ross