Literature

Life of Cecil Rhodes

THERE has not yet been time since Cecil Rhodes passed from the stage to form the historic estimate of his character and influence on the development of the British Empire. Elements of greatness there surely were in his nature; but whether he will finally find his place among statesmen or among politicians; among empire-builders or among buccaneers; among the promoters of civilization or among the enemies of true progress, can only be determined after many more years have passed over his work than have elapsed since his death in 1902. Sir Lewis Michell in his biography* makes no attempt to weigh impartially the merits of his hero. He states, at the outset, that his intention is to "portray the real man as he appeared to his personal friends and to his political opponents"; but affection and admiration—amounting almost to hero-worship—color the picture. Sir Lewis Michell can hardly be trusted to treat fairly those who differed in opinion and policy from Rhodes. He is ready with a sneer at the mention of men such as the Rev. John Mackenzie, Mr. Labouchere, and even Mr. Gladstone, when their ideas of native rights, or of colonial management, differed from those of Rhodes. As executor and trustee of Rhodes, Sir Lewis Michell has had access to all his papers, private and official, and he gives in these two volumes much of the actual sayings and writings of Rhodes, along with an account of his work which frequently becomes little more than a chronicle of events. To this material Sir Lewis Michell adds a copy of the Rhodesian Charter and more important still, as a revelation of character, a verbatim copy of that most remarkable historic document—the last will and testament of Cecil Rhodes. All this is first-hand material from which the reader is able to form his own estimate of the man who added an immense state to the British Empire and who, while occupying the responsible position of Prime Minister of a self-governing British colony, risked embroiling his country in war by allowing a hostile expedition to be organized under his eye, and to carry war into a neighboring country with which Great Britain had no open quarrel.

The most contentious events in Cecil Rhodes's career—what was termed in England his attempt to buy the Liberal party in 1891, and his connection with the Jameson Raid of 1895-6—are both treated frankly and fully by Sir Lewis Michell. The English election incident is perhaps the most illuminating so far as concerns the light thrown on Rhodes's character. In his correspondence with Mr. Schnadhorst, the Liberal party manager, over the donation of £5,000 to Liberal campaign funds, as later in his will, Rhodes showed a naïve belief that by the use of a little of his money he could control the course of events and make history flow in the channels he had marked out. In sending the subscription to Mr. Schnadhorst, Rhodes made two stipulations—first, that the Irish Home Rule bill should provide for Irish representation at Westminster, and, second, that the English should not evacuate Egypt. If either of these conditions should be violated, the money was to be returned or devoted to some charity. Irish representation at Westminster was embodied in the Home Rule bill of 1893, and the English have not yet evacuated Egypt; but it would be somewhat humiliating to the pride of British statesmen if it had to be acknowledged that the money of Cecil Rhodes—a paltry £5,000—had controlled British policies in these two matters. It was nevertheless Rhodes's opinion that by making this subscription he was ensuring the adherence of the Liberal Government to the lines of policy he had mapped out for it.

The same faith in his opinions and theories, and the same determination to rivet them on the world by means of his

*THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE RIGHT HON. CECIL JOHN RHODES. 1853-1902. By the *Hon. Sir Lewis Michell*. New York: Mitchell Kennerley. 2 vols. Pp. xiii-359; x-357. $7.50.

money, are visible in the last will of Cecil Rhodes. This remarkable document runs to twenty-six of Sir Lewis Michell's pages. The best-known clauses of this will are those relating to the foundation of the Rhodes scholarships, and the conditions — especially the twice-repeated condition that "the students who shall be elected shall not be merely bookworms" —under which these scholarships are to be enjoyed. But quite as interesting as revelations of the character of their author, are the clauses relating to the Suffolk estate of Dalham Hall, which he bequeathed to his brother with the intention of founding a territorial family in England. This estate he entailed to the full limit of the English law. Then follow the clauses explaining his intentions:

"Whereas I feel that it is the essence of a proper life that every man should during some substantial period thereof have some definite occupation and I object to an expectant heir developing into what I call a loafer. And whereas the rental of Dalham Hall estate is not more than sufficient for the maintenance of the estate, and my experience is that one of the things making for the strength of England is the ownership of country estates which could maintain the dignity and comfort of the head of the family, but that this position has been absolutely ruined by the practice of creating charges upon the estates either for younger children or for the payment of debts, whereby the estates become insufficient to maintain the head of the family in dignity and comfort. And whereas I humbly believe that one of the secrets of England's strength has been the existence of the class termed the country landlords who devote their efforts towards the maintenance of those on their property. And whereas this is my own experience."

The will then proceeded to direct that if the life tenant of the estate attempted to assign any charge, or to incumber his interest in any manner, he was to forfeit all right to the estate. It also provided that no heir could inherit unless he had either been engaged consecutively for ten years in some profession or business or within one year after reaching the age of twenty-one he should engage in some profession or business and so continue for ten years; and also that if the profession were neither the army nor navy, the heir to the estate must become a member of some militia or volunteer corps.

This attempt of Rhodes to found a family in his brother's line, and to fasten upon at least one corner of England in perpetuity a perfected example of what in his opinion an English territorial family ought to be, has yet to stand the test of time. It is evidently out of harmony with the present tendency of the English people to revolt against the massing of land in great estates, and the perpetuation of feudalism in the persons of the great land-owners. But Cecil Rhodes—altho he strongly asserted the right of every civilized man in South Africa—black or white—to the exercise of the franchise—was at heart no democrat. He was too autocratic, too eager for short cuts to dominion, to wealth, and to civilization, to be content with the slow, blundering, but secure progress of democracy.