THE MEMORIALS OF LORD SELBORNE.*

The concluding instalment, in two sizable volumes, of the late Earl of Selborne's "Memorials" is mainly a restatement of the author's views on the major public questions which arose during the period covered (1865–1895), and an explanation of his professional and official course regarding them. Some of the chapters are rather freely diluted with matter that will interest Lord Selborne's relatives and closer friends rather than the public at large; but the volumes on the whole may safely be pronounced solid and informing, if not especially animated or graphic, additions to the large and growing stock of reminiscences of Victorian times. Lord Selborne's gifts and temperament were hardly such as to qualify him to shine as a writer of memoirs of the lighter personal and reminiscential order, a species of writing in which many a social trifler equipped with a lively pen and a taste for gossip might easily have excelled him. Of chat about notable contemporaries, therefore, the volumes will seem to many readers to contain disappointingly little.

That Lord Selborne, where the subject was an imposing one and where his sympathies were deeply engaged, was no mean hand at painting a portrait and defining a character, his strong and refreshingly independent characterization of Gladstone conclusively shows. Now that Mr. Lecky has, in a recent preface, calmly pronounced "the texture of Mr. Gladstone's intellect" to have been of the "commonplace" order, we may confidently look to see the inevitable reactionary tide of disparagement of the Grand Old Man of liberalism and parliamentary manœuvre fairly set in. Much evil has of course been spoken of Mr. Gladstone in the past by his political foes, who, not content with attacking his policy, have impugned his motives, and even attempted to injure his character by the foulest aspersions. But detraction of that sort is politics, not criticism; and we suspect that the recent verdict of Mr. Lecky himself regarding the quality of Mr. Gladstone's intellect is tinged by his known opinion of the quality of Mr. Gladstone's measures, more especially his Irish agrarian measures; for it is difficult for even a philosopher to admit that a fruit he happens to personally dislike can spring from any but an inferior and weakly tree. Lord Selborne disagreed pretty sharply with Mr. Gladstone on some points, almost from the first years of their connection; and he was very far from keeping pace with his early oracle and paragon in the latter's dramatic yet gradual and deliberate advance from the one extreme to the other of British opinion. This advance (the term is perhaps open to criticism as a question-begging one) Lord Selborne, who had himself gathered caution and conservatism with ripening years in the usual and normal way, must have inwardly regarded as a sort of intellectual and political Rake's Progress on the part of the once "rising hope" of all that was venerable and established in England. Nor does he refrain from using language of some bitterness when he comes to speak of the closing phase of Mr. Gladstone's career. If it be true, says Lord Selborne, that down to the end of June, 1886, Gladstone "kept the great controversy on the heights," it was certainly not long afterwards that he ceased to do so, his power of self-persuasion affecting his moral judgments in a way that would have been deemed impossible in earlier years. In the constant stress and turmoil of electioneering since 1886, in which he played the leading part, there was little to remind men of the Gladstone of old, save the old eloquence, energy, and dauntless courage, qualities more remarkable than ever when displayed by the man past eighty.

> "A new 'transmigration of spirit' came over him; he accepted it with as much alacrity and apparent self-satisfaction as if it had always been so; he invested it with the authority of his age, his name, his character; and under its influence the statesman was transformed into the demagogue. Mr. Parnell became, for four years, until he himself broke the spell, the special object of his admiration; and other violent spirits of the 'League' were glorified as heroes and martyrs. . . . He became the apologist of the methods by which his new allies carried on their warfare against landlords and the law in Ireland. . . . All sorts of schemes for parliamentary interference with rights of property, and with the freedom of capital and labor, budded and blossomed under the capacious shelter of the new Liberal 'umbrella,' not without a sanguine hope that, in the good time coming, they would be entertained by the great leader 'with an open mind': and there was no 'plain speaking' to discourage that hope. What the final issue of these things may be, cannot be foretold; but if it should be the decay and degradation of British statesmanship, and the triumph of anarchical forces, hostile to the life of freedom, 'while they shout her name,' Mr. Gladstone will have contributed to it more than any other man."

Searching history for a parallel to Mr. Gladstone's peculiarities as a statesman, Lord Sel-

*MEMORIALS, PERSONAL AND POLITICAL, 1865–1895. By Roundell Palmer, Earl of Selborne. In two volumes. With portraits. New York: The Macmillan Co.

borne hits, not infelicitously, upon the Emperor Joseph II., as drawn by Mr. Lecky.

"Ambitious, fond of power, and at the same time restless and impatient, his mind was to the highest degree susceptible to the political ideas that were floating through the intellectual atmosphere of Europe; and he was an inveterate dreamer of dreams. Large, comprehensive, and startling schemes of policy, — radical changes in institutions, manners, tendencies, habits, and traditions,— had for him an irresistible fascination."

Impatient of opposition to his opinion of the moment, Mr. Gladstone's opinions were in a constant and continuous state of flux and decomposition. His view of any given question of importance was changing, even while he was maintaining it with the zeal and apparent conviction of a prophet. "With great appearance of tenacity at any given moment, his mind was apt to be moving indirectly down an inclined plane." Mr. Gladstone could be quoted against Mr. Gladstone on almost any leading or fundamental public question whatever. To find a powerful and convincing plea against what Mr. Gladstone was urging to-day, you had only to turn back to what Mr. Gladstone was urging yesterday. Agrarian schemes that yesterday were stigmatized as "rapine" and "plunder" were extenuated and even justified to-day as quite excusable and useful moves in a patriotic Plan of Campaign. "Boycotting," that in 1882 was denounced as "combined intimidation, made use of for the purpose of destroying private liberty of choice by fear of starvation, — inflicting ruin, and driving men to do what they did not want to do, and preventing them from doing what they had a right to do," became, after 1886, under the magic of Mr. Gladstone's faculty of self-persuasion and matchless dialectic, mere "exclusive dealing," or a form of trades-unionism that was "the only available weapon for the Irish people, in their weakness and poverty, against the wealthy and powerful."

It would be easy to go on quoting from the tale of Mr. Gladstone's thousand and one "magnificent inconsistencies" (as his hardier admirers called them) in proof of the, to our thinking, not very damaging fact that the author of them was as different as could be from the more common type of man who goes through life a complacent slave to the faith he was born in. But Lord Selborne's strictures clearly go deeper than the charge of mere inconsistency. If we are to accept his view unreservedly (which we do not), Mr. Gladstone became in his later years of political activity "a demagogue," an inflamer of popular animosities, of class hatreds and class cupidities, — all this for the sake of personal popularity and party advantage. He degenerated into a sort of "Sand Lots" haranguer of genius, the more dangerous because of his genius. He was not honest, either with himself or with others.

"He had a wonderful power of not seeing what he did not like. He was a master of the art of throwing dust into the eyes of those who were proper subjects for that operation; and he could practise it not less skilfully upon himself."

Let us turn for a moment to the lights of Lord Selborne's by no means altogether or intentionally disparaging portrait of his former chief. The secret of Mr. Gladstone's great popularity he finds in the opinion generally entertained of the purity of his motives, the elevation of his character, in his sympathy with the people and desire for their good, rather than in his energy, eloquence, and intellectual gifts. Humanity turned to him naturally, as to a friend, as to one who felt more than other men of like gifts and station the common kinship of all.

"His private life was indeed without a flaw. . . . He preferred misconstruction to missing opportunities of doing good. . . . His interests were wide and cosmopolitan; his acquirements were multifarious, and all at his command. He was a lover of music, poetry, the drama, and the fine arts. . . . He spoke more than one European language almost as easily as his own. He was very high, if not first, in the first rank of modern orators; — an orator of the diffuse florid kind, Ciceronian rather than Demosthenic, lofty when dignity was necessary, and at all times fluent and animated; abounding in illustration and metaphor; every word in the right place, every sentence well turned."

American readers will be particularly interested in Lord Selborne's account of the "Alabama" arbitration. He was consulted professionally by his government during the negotiations prior to the Treaty of Washington, and he acted as counsel for Great Britain before the Geneva Tribunal. The maltreatment of this country by the British authorities during the Civil War, in the matter of the Confederate privateers, is now *res adjudicata* and admitted and deplored matter of history. But Lord Selborne, with an advocate's obstinacy, still endeavors to put America in the wrong. If we won our case at Geneva it was mainly through our bluster and chicane, through the bias of arbitrators, through the generous forbearance of Great Britian, — that is the spirit of his contention. He intimates that our negotiators at the outset felt the importance of "either complicating the question by irrelevant issues, or to some extent prejudicing it by the terms of reference." He hints darkly at the "wiles and subtleties" of the American law-

yers, at the "loaded dice" with which America was allowed by the Rules to "play the game of hazard." With a wooden insensibility to the essential fact that in the eyes of America the trial at Geneva was symbolic, — that America stood at the bar of the Tribunal, not as a mere claimant of so many dollars and cents in a suit for damages, but to demand moral satisfaction and moral reparation in the sight of the world for a great wrong, — Lord Selborne sneers at the feeling injected into the American "Case." Its tone, he complains, "was acrimonious, totally wanting in international courtesy." Perhaps it was. Perhaps the American "Case" was essentially such that not to state it in strong language would be tantamount to not stating it at all. Perhaps a nation still smarting under the recollection of the jeers, contumely, and material damage inflicted upon it by a "neutral" power, while its own hands were tied by civil war, was justified in revealing a sense of wrong even in a formal statement of its grievances. The question is often asked, "Why does America dislike England?" and ingenious explanations are offered. But there is a plain and sufficient answer to that question, and that is, "Because England has shown in the past so often and so offensively that she disliked America." She never showed it so conclusively as during our Civil War, when our difficulties absolved her from the immediate need of caution. The "Alabama" incident was but a flagrant episode in the painful story of the attitude toward us of the British Government and the British cultured and influential classes during that period. Russia alone stood our friend, our friend in need; and to forget that now would be the blackest ingratitude.

What was the "Alabama"? Let us answer that question in the words of a distinguished Englishman, Mr. W. E. Forster, the friend and colleague of John Bright, who stood the eloquent champion of the North, while Mr. Gladstone was complacently proclaiming that Jefferson Davis "had made an army, had made a navy, and, more than that, had made a nation." Said Mr. Forster: "The 'Alabama' was a British ship, built by British ship-builders, and manned by a British crew; she lured prizes to destruction under a British flag, and was paid for by money borrowed from British capitalists." All the logic-chopping and learned technicalities of Lord Selborne at Geneva could not obscure those facts. During her two-years cruise the "Alabama" took some seventy Northern vessels, and literally drove our commerce from the seas. As an English historian says:

"She went upon her destroying course with the cheers of English sympathizers and the rapturous tirades of English newspapers glorifying her. Every misfortune that befell an American merchantman was received in this country with a roar of delight."

Let us add that when the "Alabama," in her first encounter with an antagonist of anything like her own class and armament, was shot to pieces after a brief engagement, her fate was mourned sincerely and patriotically by a chagrined British public. It was the last action between a British and an American vessel.

The student of the questions of church and law reform dealt with in these concluding volumes will find Lord Selborne's reflections thereon of no little value. The correspondence with which the work is freely interspersed is of fair interest, and the author's occasional deviations from the dignified, if somewhat diffuse, exposition of his own political views into the lighter paths of reminiscence will be welcomed by the average reader. The editing has been conscientiously done by Lady Sophia Palmer, Lord Selborne's daughter and literary trustee. The volumes are notably well made and contain several portraits. E. G. J.