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TWO RADICALS OF THE OLD SCHOOL.[1]

Bentham was described by John Stuart Mill as one of the most seminal minds of his generation, and the truth of the remark has been exemplified by the recent publication of the biographies of two of his disciples, Francis Place and John Arthur Roebuck. Bentham died in the year of the first Reform Act, and of those who moved within his circle there can be no one living now; yet the echoes of his voice have not completely died away. He has been compared, indeed, to Samson, who perished in the wreck of the building he destroyed, but the influence that he once wielded is not even now entirely spent. It may, therefore, be found interesting to observe the operation of his influence over the lives of two men who were among his most notable disciples, to see his abstract principles thus embodied in the concrete, and to consider how far and why those principles have been rejected or approved by later generations.

Francis Place, the elder of the two disciples, died in 1854. More than forty years have therefore passed before any adequate account of this remarkable man has been given to the world. To many, to most perhaps, even his very name will be unknown; yet the story of his life is worth recording. His great collection of manuscripts, a veritable treasure-house of history, now in the British Museum, would alone have entitled him to be remembered by posterity. He was, to use an expression which Mr. Gladstone applied to the Earl of Aberdeen, one of the most suppressed characters in history; he kept himself as much as possible in the background, yet in all the political and social movements of his time he played a very influential part. He loved quiet power, which, it must be freely admitted, he used often for beneficial ends, and always with excellent intentions.

The story of his life may be very briefly told. Born in 1771, in the course of a long career he witnessed many changes. As a young man he felt the influence of the French Revolution, and of such books as Paine's "Rights of Man" and Godwin's "Political Justice;" in middle life he became a devoted admirer and disciple of Bentham and

[1] 1. "Autobiography and Letters of the Right Honorable J. A. Roebuck." By R. E. Leader. London, 1897.

2. "The Life of Francis Place." By Graham Wallas. London, 1898.

James Mill; he played an active part in the events which secured the passing of the Reform Act; he helped to start the Chartist movement, and saw its perversion and collapse; he witnessed the abolition of the Corn Laws. No one could have begun life under less auspicious circumstances than this unprepossessing-looking person, with his short, thick-set figure, his sallow skin, his black hair and bushy beard and whiskers, who lived to associate with some of the most powerful thinkers of his day, and whom members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers were not above consulting. The son of a brutal father, who was turnkey of a debtors' prison in the vicinity of Drury Lane, he received a wretched education, and when quite a youth was apprenticed to a leather-breeches maker. In this trade, from strikes and other causes, he suffered great privations, and though a strong constitution enabled him to survive them, the iron entered into his soul in a way that he was never able to forget. But from the first he had an ardent love of learning, and by dint of great industry and a naturally vigorous understanding, he contrived to teach himself an amount of knowledge which, all things considered, was amazing. It was during this early period of his life that he began to show his natural bent to political organization, by actively engaging in the meetings and discussions of one of the first of working men's political associations, the London Corresponding Society, an association which was suspected of treasonable practices, and gave rise to some famous state-trials. But Place did not neglect his trade: he made leather-breeches well, as he did everything else to which he turned his hand; and in 1799 he had enterprise enough to open a shop for himself at Charing Cross. So well did it succeed, that in twenty years he was able to leave it with a fortune. Rarely has a man so completely surmounted the bar of circumstance.

In 1807 he made his first appearance as an active electioneering politician. The constituency of Westminster, within which Place resided, had, for those days, an unusually democratic basis; it was a "scot and lot" borough, where every rate-payer had a vote. Then it was that Place taught the voters to form committees and to organize; and he succeeded in securing the return of Sir Francis Burdett, "Westminster's Pride," as he afterwards was called, one of the first thorough-going Radicals who entered the House of Commons. This was by no means the least of Place's achievements, for he set the fashion of that systematic organization of the voters which both parties now consider indispensable. He is in the main responsible for what may be called, in general terms, the introduction of the caucus-methods into English politics, and he might not unfairly be described as the lineal ancestor of the National Liberal Federation. At any rate, for many a year in Westminster politics the influence of Place was very great; "such influence," to use Sir Samuel Romilly's words, "as almost to determine the elections for Members of Parliament." That was certainly an extraordinary feat for a leather-breeches maker, who had become a master-tailor.

Soon afterwards there occurred what may be called the intellectual crisis of his life. In 1808 he was introduced to James Mill, and through him, in 1812, to Bentham. With both writers his friendship became intimate and lasting; they taught him their philosophy, and he, an excellent man of business, in return performed for them many a useful service, and brought them into closer contact with the world, with which, living, as they did, the contemplative life, they might have failed to keep in touch. The picture is a curious one: the tailor, on his way to leave a parcel at a customer's, calling at Queen's Square Place where the philosopher resided; or again, at Ford Abbey, the splendid mansion which Bentham rented for a time, the philosopher, with his long, white hair hanging down his shoulders, either writing in his library or "circumgyrating" round the

garden; while James Mill was putting his children through a course of rigorous instruction, and Place was walking round the park with a Latin grammar, or some work on economics, in his hand. Never, surely, did any country-house shelter such a devoted band of students. The affectionate terms in which Place and Bentham lived together may be gathered from their letters: "My dear old father," and "Dear good boy," were the terms in which they addressed one another.

It was rather later, in 1824, that Roebuck, then a young man fresh from Canada, became acquainted with the Mills and so through them with Place and Bentham, both of whom admired his youthful ardor and saw in him the making of a valuable recruit. By this time Place's position in the world was fairly well established, and he was enabled to carry out the main objects of his life. What then were his principles of action, and what did he accomplish? His activities found a vent in many different channels. As a practical politician, as a propagandist of the Benthamite principles of government, as a political economist, as an active participator in almost all educational and other social movements—in all these ways he made his influence strongly felt. He refused to enter Parliament, but he had much to do with getting other persons there, and still more with their conduct when they got there. In his house at Charing Cross he formed a very useful and interesting library of books and pamphlets on political and economic subjects; and the Civic Palace, as it was called, became a kind of rendezvous for members of Parliament and others who wished to prosecute inquiries, or to consult the owner, whose practical acquaintance with the facts of life among the working-classes was certainly unrivalled. No one knew better the current of events, or how to turn that current in the direction he desired. The way, for instance, in which at the time of the reform agitation he managed to control the more violent section of the demagogues, and to prevent the Duke of Wellington from forming a government, by causing a dread of a run for gold upon the Bank of England, was masterly in the extreme. Though he had a contempt for Parliament, which he spoke of as "rascally" and as an "atrocious assembly," he wielded, by his influence over individual members, an authority there almost as great as if he had been actually present in his own person. The case of Joseph Hume, that indefatigable denouncer of extravagance, who made himself a kind of self-appointed auditor of the national accounts, is typical. He owed everything to the political tutelage of Place, to whom, in 1812, he was introduced by James Mill. This is what, some years afterwards, the tutor said about his pupil: "Mill fixed him upon me some twenty-five years since. I found him devoid of information, dull and selfish. Our intimacy brought obloquy upon us both, to which he was nearly as callous as I was. He was taunted with the 'tailor, his master,' without whom he could do nothing. I was scoffed at as a fool for spending time uselessly upon 'Old Joe,' upon the 'apothecary.' Hume showed his capabilities and his imperturbable perseverance which have beaten down all opposition." But this parliamentary tuition was not the limit of Place's practical activities; in the repeal of the Combination of Laws, in the reform agitation, in the drafting of the People's Charter, in the establishment of popular schools, in the abolition of the newspaper stamp, he played a leading part. As a thinker he was not so much original as a disseminator of other men's ideas. He was, however, a great collector of statistics, which served him well in his study of political economy, though even here he was little more than an ardent follower of Malthus. He had no natural literary gift, though his pamphlets and journalistic articles were written in a terse and vigorous style. Again, no one did so much to introduce the thoughts of the Benthamite philosophers to the masses of the English reading public; he reprinted cheap editions of some of James Mill's

most striking articles, and, in particular, the famous article on Government, which originally appeared in the supplement to "The Encyclopædia Britannica." He also brought out, with the assistance of Wooler (a now forgotten personage, but one notorious as the editor of *The Black Dwarf*), Bentham's plan of Parliamentary Reform in the shape of a catechism. It is, indeed, not too much to say that if it had not been for Place, the enunciation of the Benthamite principles of government would have failed to some extent for want of a proper publication. *The Westminster Review*, which was established in 1824, was an admirable organ of philosophic Radicalism, but it appealed only to a very limited class of educated persons.

The Right Honorable John Arthur Roebuck was thirty years younger than Place, and, living until 1879, he may be said to have almost linked together the beginning of the century and the end. He stood, at any rate, between a former and a later age, "giving a hand to each." To have talked with Roebuck was to have talked with one who was intimate with Bentham, who had been an Oxford undergraduate when George the Third ascended the throne. The chief incidents in his life may be very briefly told; for though he made a larger figure in public than Place, his actual accomplishments were not so great, nor his influence so deep and wide. He was taken to Canada when a child, but returned to England in 1824, with nothing in his pocket, but with a high-hearted resolve to make his own way in the world. Coming to London, he was introduced by Peacock to John Stuart Mill, who, as Peacock said, belonged "to a disquisition set of young men." Very naturally he attended the debates of the Utilitarian Society which John Stuart Mill had founded, and which met at Bentham's house. In this way he became acquainted with Bentham himself, and the other members of his circle, among them Francis Place. It is no wonder that the impressionable young man, thrown among surroundings such as these, became an extreme Radical. In 1832 he entered Parliament, where he soon made himself notorious by his assaults upon the Whig government, for which he expressed supreme contempt. Though insignificant in stature, and though his voice was harsh and shrill, he won the attention of the House by the violence of his language. Even Disraeli, who did not care to waste his epigrams, taunted him with his "Sadlers Wells sarcasms," and his "melodramatic malignity." Outside the House his energy was not in the least abated, and in 1835, with a view to a contest over the question of the newspaper stamp, he established his "Pamphlets for the People," which were so extreme that even Grote, sound Radical though he was, refused to identify himself with such "ultra and shocking reforms," or to give the project his support. These tracts, in which appeared some of Place's most characteristic work, and republications of some of James Mill's articles in the *Westminster Review*, had a wide circulation and produced a great effect. Of the Chartist movement, in its inception, Roebuck was the most earnest parliamentary advocate; and he also pleaded the cause of popular education, and of self-government for the colonies. But his mental infirmities and caprices went far to ruin his career; and Bentham prophesied truly when he said that his temper would do him more harm that his intellect would do him good. With his fellow Radicals, both in and out of Parliament, he was frequently at issue. With Grote he quarrelled; from John Stuart Mill he was estranged for nearly a life-time; Joseph Hume he stigmatized as obstinate or silly; and Cobden he called "a poor creature," overborne by Bright, "the pugnacious peace-talking Friend;" a remark which recalls to mind the saying that Bright must have been a prize-fighter if he had not been a Quaker. But this constant recrimination was more than even Roebuck, who gave as much as, and sometimes more than, he got, was able to endure. "I am," he said, "heartily sick of my friends. My

opponents I expected would abuse me, but I have ever found that the most bitter of all my violent abusers were my intimate friends." As time went on, he, like so many other men of his stamp, recanted many of his earlier opinions. Speaking in 1869 of the Radicals he said, "Of these I was one, but I have seen the error of my ways." Again, with reference to the extension of the suffrage he remarked: "The hopes of my youth and manhood are destroyed, and I am left to reconstruct my political philosophy." So too of the House of Lords, which he had formerly described as consisting of "a few ignorant, irresponsible, interested peers," he admitted that when a youth he could not see "the great advantage which now, I think, arises from the existence of that assembly." But though change of circumstances might, to some extent, account for Roebuck's changes of opinion, he never attained to the *mitis sapientia* of age; he retained to the last much of that cynical asperity and habit of ill-considered censure, which was so strongly characteristic of the Philosophic Radicals among whom his early life was cast. As Kinglake said, "he appointed himself to the office of public accuser."

Place, the self-made working-man, the sturdy and consistent Radical, and Roebuck, the brilliant but wayward parliamentary orator, though very different men, were both Radicals of a class that has long since passed away. They had a common tie that brought them closely into contact: they both drank from the same source of inspiration, the Benthamite philosophy; and it is in their relation to the remarkable group of men who taught that philosophy, and did so much to mould contemporary thought, that they will most interest succeeding generations. Who then were the Benthamites, the Philosophic Radicals, or Utilitarians, of whose principles Place and Roebuck were the living and active incarnation and embodiment?

In a letter written in 1802 to his friend Dumont, we find Bentham naïvely asking, "Benthamite! what sort of animal is that? I can't find any such word in the dictionary." That Bentham should have felt surprise at the existence of the word was natural enough; for, so far as he was concerned, there was never any oral teaching, nor any esoteric school that hung upon his lips. His influence was entirely derived from the publication of his writings, and he thus obtained an audience fit though few. He rarely invited more than a single guest at a time to dine with him, and he conversed for relaxation merely. Sometimes, indeed, a person who wanted to consult him would not await an invitation; as was once the case with Brougham, who wrote him the following extraordinary note: "Grandpapa, I want some pap; I will come for it at your dinner-hour." That Bentham never formed a school, in the proper sense of the term, is expressly stated by James Mill. "It is also," he said, "a matter of fact that until within a very few years of the death of Mr. Bentham, the men of any pretension to letters who shared his intimacy, and saw enough of him to have the opportunity of learning much from his lips, were, in number, two." These two were Mill himself, whom Bentham called his spiritual son, and Dumont, who deemed Bentham's work of such immense importance to the world that he devoted a life-time to making it known to the French-speaking world.

It was in 1808 that James Mill was introduced to Bentham, who then was sixty ears of age and only in the beginning of his fame, so far as England was concerned. The friendship of the two men was very close, and Mill and his family were sometimes the guests of Bentham at his country residences, Barrow Green House or Ford Abbey, for many months together. Though Mill was a vigorous and independent thinker, he accepted Bentham's doctrines in the main, and made them known among his own admirers, such as Ricardo, Grote and Place. Thus Mill became a kind of living bridge between the recluse philosopher and the world, and in no other sense than that of ac-

cepting the philosophy of Bentham was there any such thing as a school of Benthamites at all. It would, indeed, be much more true to say that a school was formed by Mill, who, by his earnestness and dialectical skill, obtained an extraordinary ascendancy over the minds of the young men who came to hear him. Of Mill in this capacity Grote has drawn for us an admirable picture: "His unpremeditated oral exposition was hardly less effective than his prepared work with his pen. . . . Conversation with him was not merely instructive, but provocative to the dormant intelligence. Of all persons whom we have known, Mr. James Mill was the one who stood least remote from the lofty Platonic ideal of Dialectic—'τοῦ διδόναι καὶ δέχεσαι λόγον' [the giving and receiving of reasons] —competent alike to examine others, or to be examined by them on philosophy." It is therefore to James Mill that the gradual formation of the group of thinkers known as Benthamites must be ascribed. After the year 1824, when John Stuart Mill began to introduce his own friends into the circle, it underwent a change; for the younger men, especially John Stuart Mill himself, whom Mrs. Grote spoke of as "that wayward intellectual deity," upon some questions did not hesitate to take up an independent standpoint. The very word Utilitarian, which gradually came into use to designate the Philosophic Radicals, was applied by John Stuart Mill himself. Nevertheless, Bentham was the sun around which the other constellations clustered.

Such then were the Benthamites. But what were the essential characteristics of that philosophy which so deeply tinged contemporary thought, so captivated men like Place and Roebuck, and was the strongest influence, of a purely speculative kind, which has ever been brought to bear on English politics? The range of that philosophy, including, as it did, politics and morals, political economy, metaphysics and analytic psychology, was very wide; but there is only one branch of it, that dealing with the principles of government, that is relevant to the subject of this essay. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of Benthamism generally; its ethical basis of self-interest; its dry and dusty method of rigorous analysis; its pitiless exposure of many fondly cherished fallacies; its war upon the feelings and emotions; its purging language, as it was said, of the affections of the soul; its stoical indifference to all pleasures but that derived from the approbation of the conscience; and the curious mixture in its professors of narrow class-prejudice with limitless philanthropy. But upon the Benthamite principles of government a few words may be said, because it was upon those principles that Place and Roebuck, and all the thinking Radicals of the earlier portion of the century, were nourished. To understand those principles, in their essential elements, and to apprehend the manner in which they were disseminated, is to see how widely the Radicalism of that time differs from the Radicalism of our own.

The growth of Radicalism in Bentham's mind has a very curious history. Beginning life as a Tory, and an admirer of the English Constitution as the perfection of human wisdom, he gradually worked his way to the principle of Utility, or that of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In 1776 he published his "Fragment on Government," in which he showed that the Constitution was not so perfect as was commonly supposed. The work was admired by those few who had the intelligence to appreciate its merits, and he owed to it his friendship with Lord Shelburne. But to Bentham's great astonishment and chagrin, it was utterly neglected by those who were in power. In 1828 he published a second edition with a lengthy introduction, which is one of the most curious and interesting bits of autobiography in literature. It would appear that Bentham's Radicalism was in no small degree due to personal causes, to slights, either real or imaginary, which he received from eminent lawyers

whom he met when Shelburne's guest at Bowood; and he tells us that by 1822 he had arrived at the conclusion that the English governing class deliberately maintained abuses out of purely selfish interests; that, in a word, he had discovered the principle of self-preference in government. In brief, that principle may be described as follows: that the only security for good government lies in an identity of interest in the governors and the governed. It was this principle that James Mill took and worked out in detail with extraordinary skill. As a reasoner upon the ultimate principles of government, indeed, Mill was much superior to Bentham, who excelled in quite another field; and it is to Mill that the first definite exposition of Philosophic Radicalism must be ascribed. His famous article on Government, written in 1820 for the Supplement of "The Encyclopædia Britannica," and afterwards reprinted by his friends, and his still more famous article which appeared in the first number of the *Westminster Review*, in 1824—an article which he considered to be the greatest blow ever struck for Radicalism—contained the kernel of his teaching. Starting from the premise that self-love is paramount in politics, he argued that there could be no security for good government without an identity of interest in the governors and the governed; that there could be no such identity except in a democracy; and that the English government, in particular, was nothing but an oligarchy whose interest it was to oppress the lower classes. Upon the aristocracy, who filled the House of Lords and who, at that time, were the patrons of two-thirds of the seats in the House of Commons, with its two props, as he called them, of the Church of England and the lawyers, he waged unrelenting war. Such were the principles which Place and Roebuck adopted and believed in with all their heart and soul; and it is only by bearing this in mind that the asperity, not to say ferocity, of their attacks upon the aristocracy and the landlords, and all that tended to support them, can be faintly understood. That aristocracy was to the Philosophic Radicals, who stepped forward as apostles or crusaders, what Carthage was to Rome.

A moment's reflection will discover a wide difference between the Radicalism of Place and Roebuck and that which is in vogue to-day. In the first place, any discussion upon the ultimate principles of government would excite but very little interest in these days, and it is difficult to realize the excitement which was formerly aroused by the brilliant sparring between James Mill on the one side and Macaulay and Mackintosh on the other. It was well remarked by Burke that a propensity to resort to theories of government was a sure sign of an ill-conducted State; and it is a certain proof of the progress of the people that any such discussion as that on the identity of interest in the governors and the governed would be thought now entirely futile. In these days men prefer to discuss individual measures on the more limited, and perhaps more useful, ground of practical expediency. Secondly, since Mill wrote, the world has enlarged its experience. It has, in fact, discovered that monarchs and aristocracies have often acted, and do constantly act, in the interests of the governed; that identity of interest in the governors and the governed is not necessarily a security for good government at all; that the governed do not always know their true interest, nor pursue it when they know it. James Mill's reasoning was, as has been shown by later thinkers, one-sided and misleading, and both his premises and deductions were far too absolute in character. It is true that in his days the state of the mass of the people was very bad: there were scarcity and poverty, ignorance and leaden-eyed despair; and the governing classes did not always consider the best interests of the people. But the world possesses now an experience of democracy and representative government which it was impossible for Mill to have; and it is no exaggeration to say that, out of England, the represent-

ative system has proved itself but very moderately successful. For extravagance and corruption, some modern, democracies have been as bad as any oligarchy ever was. A democratic form of government demands more courage, integrity and intelligence than Place and Roebuck ever dreamed of. But if the matter of the doctrines of Radicalism has changed, much more so has the manner of their teaching. In this age of easy tolerance it is difficult to realize the violence of the language in which the Radicals indulged towards the Whigs and Tories, and even towards one another. Some excuse may, indeed, be found for men who were looked upon as Ishmaelites, and were disowned by their aristocratic friends; but it was a weakness from which the best were not exempt. James Mill's asperity and anger towards the governing classes was such as to astonish even the indulgence of his friends. Bentham described his Radicalism as arising rather from his hatred of the few than his love of the many; and Grote said that he had "a scorn and hatred of the ruling classes which amounted to positive fanaticism." Roebuck said even worse; that he was "a severe democrat in words" who "bowed down to wealth and position." The Benthamites, in short, were still living in an age when a certain ferocity in politics had not entirely died away. In the time of the Tudors or the Stuarts, a man who took a strong line in politics ran some danger of a State-trial, the Tower and the scaffold. Of a later age Macaulay said that it was as dangerous to be a Whig as to be a highwayman. By degrees the ferocity was mitigated, but it still lingered up to the time of the first Reform Bill.

In one very important way the old school of Radicals differed from the new; for, whereas they then strove to strike off the fetters, unnaturally imposed, which clogged the energies and industry of the individual person, they now tend more and more to invoke the interference of the State. Of this fact, whatever view may be taken of it, the lives of Place and Roebuck are a striking illustration. They were both of them sturdy individualists. From his own personal experience, Place was perfectly acquainted with the conditions of the lives of the mass of the laboring population; yet he never falsely flattered them, nor weakly implored the protection of the State. "All legislative interference," he said, "must be pernicious. Men must be left to themselves to make their own bargains; the law must compel the observation of compacts, the fulfilment of contracts. There it should end. . . . No restrictive laws should exist. Every one should be at liberty to make his own bargain in the best way he can." And a similar spirit animated Roebuck: "The plain fact is," he said, "we meddle too much with one another." Though, for instance, he believed that it was the duty of the State to educate the people, he thought that in the matter of religious instruction allowance should be made for differences of opinion: "So believing," he said, "I shall certainly support every plan for the education of the people by the State which does not interfere with the religious feelings and opinions of the parents and guardians of the children to be educated." In the same spirit he attacked the extreme temperance and Sabbatarian parties; he called them "canting hypocrites," and "two muddy streams," which, after running some distance side by side, "had at last united their waters, and now they formed one foaming, muddy river, which it was difficult to stem, and very disagreeable to see and smell." That seems strong language to employ, but he believed that the temperance and Sabbatarian advocates would deprive the working classes of those enjoyments which the rich would be permitted to retain. His attitude on the question was, at any rate, characteristic of the man. No Radical now has the earnest faith with which Place and Roebuck were inspired, or if he has, he does not show it. The old Radicalism was easy to define; it could almost be reduced to a syllogism; to

say in a few words what modern Radicalism means would be a task beyond the wit of man.

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