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LIBERTY AND LIBERALISM.

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# LIBERTY AND LIBERALISM

A PROTEST AGAINST THE GROWING TENDENCY TOWARD  
UNDUE INTERFERENCE BY THE STATE, WITH  
INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, PRIVATE ENTERPRISE  
AND THE RIGHTS OF PROPERTY

BY

BRUCE SMITH

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"The English themselves, having their eyes open, as I may say, upon their liberty, from their first entrance into life, are perhaps too much familiarised with its enjoyment to enquire *with real concern* into its causes"

DR LOLME (*The Constitution of England*)

"Those *who have and who hold* to that foundation of *common liberty*, we consider as *the true, and the only true, Englishmen*. Those who depart from it . . . are attainted, corrupted in blood, and wholly fallen from their original rank and value. They are the *real rebels to the fair constitution and just supremacy of England*"

EDMUND BURKE (*Address to the British Colonists of North America*)

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"It is of the utmost importance that all reflecting persons should take into early consideration what these popular political creeds are likely to be, and that every single article of them should be brought under the fullest light of investigation and discussion; so that, if possible, when the time shall be ripe, whatever is right in them may be adopted, and what is wrong rejected, by general consent; and that, instead of a hostile conflict, physical or only moral, between the old and the new the best parts of both may be combined in a renovated social fabric."

J. S. MILL ("Chapters on Socialism").

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## PREFACE.

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THE following pages have been written for the purpose of tracing the gradual but sure growth of our civil liberty, from historic times, downward to our own day, and of investigating the great principles which inspired our ancestors, in their efforts to secure that great inheritance to us, their posterity. A further object that I have had in view—and perhaps this latter may be regarded as the more important—is to show the symptoms, which are gathering fast and thick around us, of a new order of things—of, in fact, a distinct surrender of the traditional safeguards of that civil liberty—the “cornerstone” of our great and deservedly enviable constitution.

I have endeavoured to prove that the invaluable principle of individual freedom—which, from the Norman Conquest downward, fired the most noble-minded of our ancestors to rebel against the tyranny of those who won, or inherited, the rights of that conquest—is in imminent danger of being lost to us, at the very hour of its consummation. And I have, I think, further demonstrated that so sure as we depart from those traditional lines, in the endeavour to realise a condition of society, which can only exist in the imagination—viz., a community of people, enjoying *equal social conditions*,—we shall, when it is too late, find that we have lost the substance, in grasping at the shadow.

In order to realise the above perhaps somewhat ambitious purposes, I have enumerated instances to show that the term “Liberalism,” which in its original and true interpretation was

synonymous with 'our own day, lost that genuine meaning, and carrying with it, to the minds of most men, other and quite erroneous significations; and further, that political party-titles, generally, have now ceased to carry with them any clear conception of political principles: having become so inextricably mixed and confused in the meanings which they convey, that it is impossible to deduce, from the fact of their being professed by any individual, any distinct conclusion as to that individual's political creed.

I have then shown that, from the earliest times in the regular history of England, the principle of individual freedom was the one which, paramount to all others, characterised the greatest of England's reforms; but that, in the present day, that time-honoured principle appears to have lost its charm, and the political title "Liberalism," which previously served as its synonym, is being gradually perverted to the service of a cause, which must, sooner or later, be wholly destructive of that very liberty, from which it derived its existence as a political term.

I have also, I believe, been able to demonstrate that this tendency (though the fact is not generally recognised) is clearly in the direction of those conditions or forms of society, known as "Socialism" and "Communism;" and, finally, I have, I think, given sufficient proof, from unexceptionable authorities, of the fact that all practical attempts at such conditions of society, have, whenever and wherever tried, hopelessly failed in their results; and, instead of lifting the lowest stratum of society to the level of the highest, (as was anticipated), or even approximating to it, dragged the whole fabric down to the dead level of a primitive and uncultured existence, sapped the enterprise and independence, as well as stifled the higher faculties of all who have helped to constitute such communities, and ended in placing such as conformed to their principles at the mercy of nature, with

all its uncertainties of season, and different points of production.

I venture to think that there is no part of the civilised world, in which the term "Liberalism" has been more constantly, or with more confidence, misused than in the English colonies, and more especially in the colony of Victoria. Political thought has there been developed and sharpened to an extent, which has scarcely been equalled, certainly not surpassed, in any part of the world—even in the United States; so that, in fact, it affords to the political students of other and older countries, who may consider it worthy of their attention, an invaluable political laboratory for the purpose of judging the merits of many "advanced" legislative experiments. This identical view I expressed at some length in *The Times*, as far back as 1877.

Bearing the foregoing facts in view, I have drawn a great number and variety of my illustrations from the legislative and other public proceedings of the particular colony mentioned.

Side by side with this unusual development of political activity and intelligence, which is specially noticeable in that colony, there has unfortunately grown up a most serious misconception or misrepresentation, as to the true meaning of the political term, concerning which I have more particularly treated; and there is distinctly apparent—there, as in Great Britain—all the symptoms of a return to "class" legislation of the most despotic character; not, as of old, in favour of the wealthy and aristocratic orders, but in the opposite direction, of conferring *positive* benefits upon the working classes—that is to say, the *manual* working classes—at the expense of the remainder of the community. Indeed the extreme Radical party of Great Britain have already acknowledged that "there is scarcely an organic change which has found a place in the programme of *advanced* Liberalism, that has not been accepted, and voluntarily introduced . . . at the Antipodes."

One of the most unfortunate circumstances in connection with colonial politics is the disinclination on the part of the wealthier and better educated classes to enter into competition with the *omnipromising* political hack, for the honour of a seat in parliament. That most constituencies are at the mercy of those candidates who promise most of what does not belong to them, is indeed too true; but there are, one is happy to be able to say, many constituencies in which political morality has not sunk so low as to necessitate a candidate substituting flattery and transparent bribes, for home truths and sound political doctrine. Those constituencies are, however, comparatively few in number. That fact, coupled with the thoroughly unscientific tone of current politics, has, in most of the colonies, left the field open to a class of men, by no means representative of the average education, or of the average political knowledge. It is to be regretted, however, that the wealthier and better-educated classes do not make a greater sacrifice, on patriotic grounds, and thus assist to raise the tone of an institution which they are always too ready to condemn.

Since commencing my investigations, which have extended over many months, and have been carried on during the leisure hours left to me out of an otherwise extremely busy life, I have been brought into contact with a mass of material, evidencing the patriotic "footprints" of a body of men, now doing good work in England, under the title of "The Liberty and Property Defence League." This League has been formed for the purpose of "resisting over-legislation, for maintaining Individualism as opposed to Socialism—entirely irrespective of party politics."

To have become acquainted with the efforts of such an organisation, and to have learnt how great is the success which has attended its efforts, has considerably encouraged my own labours.



I find that, during the last two years, the League printed 54,250 pamphlets and 39,300 leaflets, "pointing out, in general and particular, the growing tendency to substitute Government regulation, in place of individual management and enterprise, in all branches of industry; and demonstrating the paralysing effect of this kind of legislation upon national development."

I find, further, that "these publications have been distributed among over 500 of the chief London and provincial papers, and among members of both Houses of Parliament and the general public;" and that "400 lectures and addresses have been delivered by representatives of the League, before working-class audiences, in London and elsewhere." The annual report for 1884 states that, "reckoning together those who have thus joined through their respective societies or companies" with which the League is associated, in addition to "those who have joined individually, it comprises over 300,000 members."

The council of the League embraces the names of many eminent men, including those of Lord Justice Bramwell, the Earl of Wemyss, Lord Penzance, and the Earl of Pembroke; and it would seem that scarcely any single parliamentary measure is allowed to put in an appearance, in either branch of the British legislature, without being subjected to the most searching examination and dissection, at the hands of that council.

Such legislation as is considered contrary to the principles of the League—which are non-party—is opposed in every possible way; and no money or other means appear to be spared, to prevent such legislation being placed upon the statute-book. The efforts of the League seem, too, so far as they have gone, to have been extraordinarily successful.

I may add that my own investigations were commenced with the simple object of delivering a short lecture; but the materials, which I found necessary to collect, soon grew to

the proportions of a volume, which I have now completed, in the hope that others, who are sufficiently interested to peruse it, may be saved the same research and classification of principles, which are necessary to a complete understanding and grasp of the subject. As far as originality is concerned, I claim no merit, except in the mere arrangement of my work; but the labour has, notwithstanding, been great, and not always encouraging. Indeed, in almost every position which I have taken up in the investigation of my subject, I have, as will be seen, fortified myself with the opinions of the greatest among those who have sounded the depths of political philosophy. Any exception, therefore, which may be taken to the doctrines which I have merely reproduced, will involve a joining of issue with many of the most profound political thinkers of ancient and modern times.

I owe an explanation—perhaps an apology—to many of the authors from whose writings I have thus drawn my numerous quotations, for the constant rendering of their words in italics. In almost every case throughout the work the italicising is my own. I am fully aware of the danger of detracting from the force of language, by the too frequent resort to that aid to emphasis. My only excuse is the unusual necessity for clear distinctions, in the terms and phrases employed.

No apology is, I think, needed for my venturing to draw public attention to the subject itself, with which I have thus dealt. That it is sufficiently important, there can be no possible doubt; and that it is not a settled question, has been fully admitted by no less an authority than Mill, who says: “One of the *most disputed* questions, both in *political science* and in *practical statesmanship*, at this particular period, relates to the proper limits of the functions and agency of governments.” And he adds that it is, as a discussion, “more likely to increase than diminish in interest.” Indeed, it has at various

times been a matter of considerable surprise to me, how little the whole subject seems to have been investigated, or even considered, not merely by the ordinary political delegate (popularly known as a *politician*), but by men, educated in history, and professing to feel an interest in the philosophy which underlies it.

If, in the compilation of the thoughts of others, I should succeed in directing the attention of some of my fellow-men to the great political and social danger which is now impending, and thus bring about a clearer and more correct recognition of the traditional principles which I have ventured to champion, I shall be quite satisfied with the result of my labours.

I am quite conscious of the unpopularity which much of what I have written is calculated to draw upon me from the working-classes, as also from mere work-a-day politicians, concerning whose knowledge of the political science I have certainly not spoken in flattering terms. To have so written has, however, required the more courage, inasmuch as I am desirous, and even sanguine, of yet taking a further and more prominent part in practical politics. But I have ventured to say what I have said, because *I believe it to be true*; and I have sufficient faith in the spirit of manliness and fair play, which, at least, has always characterised our race, to hope that the unpalatableness of my remarks may be forgiven, on the score of their sincerity and good intent.

*June, 1887.*

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Bearing of the chapter on remainder of the work—Relative attitudes of Individualism and Socialism explained—Effect of the latter on human motives—Present constitution of the English legislature—Prospects of scientific legislation—Drift of modern public opinion—Signs of the approaching conflict—French anarchists—Knights of Labour in America—America's reception of John Most, the expelled revolutionist—Socialist Press of New York—London Socialist outbreaks—Mr. Chamberlain's doctrines—The Radical programme—M. de Laveleye's "Primitive Property"—His doctrines—Mill's earlier observations on Socialism and Communism—Aristotle on community of property—Effect on the virtues of liberality and kindness—Christian Socialism—Causes which led to it—Commonwealth of Love—The Poor Saints—The voluntary element prominent in all early experiments—Middle-Ages Communism—Brothers of the Common Lot—Brothers of the Common Life—Apostolici—The Waldenses and the Minorities—The Lollards—The Taborites—The Cathari, Apostolicals, Fratricelli, Belguins, Albigenes, and Hussites—The Moravian Brotherhood—The United Brethren—The Hutterites and the Hutterites—The Unitas Fratrum—Christian Republic of Paraguay—M. de Laveleye's "Primitive Property"—Village communities in Russia—The Russian Mir—M. de Laveleye's reasoning examined—Village communities in Java and India—The Allmends of Switzerland—Social inequalities under the system—Unfair comparisons—The German Mark—Agrarian system of the Irish Celts—Agrarian communities among the Arabs and other nations—The French Revolution—Its effect in producing a crop of social schemes—Element of poetry in almost all ideal theories—Modern definitions of Socialism and Communism—Saint-Simon—His theories—His disciples—François Babeuf and his theories—Charles Fourier and his theories—Etiene Cabet and his theories—Proudhon and his theories—Karl Rodbertus and his theories—Louis Blanc and his theories—Karl Marx and his theories—Ferdinand Lassalle and his theories—Robert Owen; his theories and experiments—American Socialism—Advantages of experiment over theory—The Shakers—The Amana-Community—The Harmony Society—The Separatists of Zoar—The Perfectionists of Oneida—The Aurora and Bethel Communes—The Icarians—Unanimity of Communist leaders as to the causes of failure—Mill's later opinions on Communism and Socialism—Review of the whole work—The outlook and its dangers—The coming struggle 549—683

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