

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott
Swift Chekhov Newton



tredition®

tredition was established in 2006 by Sandra Latusseck and Soenke Schulz. Based in Hamburg, Germany, tredition offers publishing solutions to authors and publishing houses, combined with worldwide distribution of printed and digital book content. tredition is uniquely positioned to enable authors and publishing houses to create books on their own terms and without conventional manufacturing risks.

For more information please visit: www.tredition.com

TREDITION CLASSICS

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series. The creators of this series are united by passion for literature and driven by the intention of making all public domain books available in printed format again - worldwide. Most TREDITION CLASSICS titles have been out of print and off the bookstore shelves for decades. At tredition we believe that a great book never goes out of style and that its value is eternal. Several mostly non-profit literature projects provide content to tredition. To support their good work, tredition donates a portion of the proceeds from each sold copy. As a reader of a TREDITION CLASSICS book, you support our mission to save many of the amazing works of world literature from oblivion. See all available books at www.tredition.com.



Project Gutenberg

The content for this book has been graciously provided by Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is a non-profit organization founded by Michael Hart in 1971 at the University of Illinois. The mission of Project Gutenberg is simple: To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. Project Gutenberg is the first and largest collection of public domain eBooks.

The English Utilitarians, Volume I.

Leslie, Sir Stephen

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Leslie, Sir Stephen

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8472-2284-2

www.tredition.com

www.tredition.de

Copyright:

The content of this book is sourced from the public domain.

The intention of the TREDITION CLASSICS series is to make world literature in the public domain available in printed format. Literary enthusiasts and organizations, such as Project Gutenberg, worldwide have scanned and digitally edited the original texts. tredition has subsequently formatted and redesigned the content into a modern reading layout. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the exact reproduction of the original format of a particular historic edition. Please also note that no modifications have been made to the spelling, therefore it may differ from the orthography used today.

THE ENGLISH UTILITARIANS

By
LESLIE STEPHEN



LONDON

DUCKWORTH and CO.

3 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.

1900

PREFACE

[Pg vi] This book is a sequel to my *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. The title which I then ventured to use was more comprehensive than the work itself deserved: I felt my inability to write a continuation which should at all correspond to a similar title for the nineteenth century. I thought, however, that by writing an account of the compact and energetic school of English Utilitarians I could throw some light both upon them and their contemporaries. I had the advantage for this purpose of having been myself a disciple of the school during its last period. Many accidents have delayed my completion of the task; and delayed also its publication after it was written. Two books have been published since that time, which partly cover the same ground; and I must be content with referring my readers to them for further information. They are *The English Radicals*, by Mr. C. B. Roylance Kent; and *English Political Philosophy from Hobbes to Maine*, by Professor Graham.

INTRODUCTORY

[Pg 1] The English Utilitarians of whom I am about to give some account were a group of men who for three generations had a conspicuous influence upon English thought and political action. Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill were successively their leaders; and I shall speak of each in turn. It may be well to premise a brief indication of the method which I have adopted. I have devoted a much greater proportion of my work to biography and to consideration of political and social conditions than would be appropriate to the history of a philosophy. The reasons for such a course are very obvious in this case, inasmuch as the Utilitarian doctrines were worked out with a constant reference to practical applications. I think, indeed, that such a reference is often equally present, though not equally conspicuous, in other philosophical schools. But in any case I wish to show how I conceive the relation of my scheme to the scheme more generally adopted by historians of abstract speculation.

I am primarily concerned with the history of a school or sect, not with the history of the arguments by which it justifies itself in the court of pure reason. I must therefore consider the creed as it was actually embodied in the dominant beliefs of the adherents of the school, not as it was expounded in lecture-rooms or [Pg 2] treatises on first principles. I deal not with philosophers meditating upon Being and not-Being, but with men actively engaged in framing political platforms and carrying on popular agitations. The great majority even of intelligent partisans are either indifferent to the philosophic creed of their leaders or take it for granted. Its postulates are more or less implied in the doctrines which guide them in practice, but are not explicitly stated or deliberately reasoned out. Not the less the doctrines of a sect, political or religious, may be dependent upon theories which for the greater number remain latent or are recognised only in their concrete application. Contemporary members of any society, however widely they differ as to results, are employed upon the same problems and, to some extent, use the same methods and make the same assumptions in attempting solutions. There is a certain unity even in the general thought of any given period. Contradictory views imply some common

ground. But within this wider unity we find a variety of sects, each of which may be considered as more or less representing a particular method of treating the general problem: and therefore principles which, whether clearly recognised or not, are virtually implied in their party creed and give a certain unity to their teaching.

One obvious principle of unity, or tacit bond of sympathy which holds a sect together depends upon the intellectual idiosyncrasy of the individuals. Coleridge was aiming at an important truth when he said that every man was born an Aristotelian or a Platonist. [1] Nominalists and realists, intuitionists and empiricists, idealists and materialists, represent different forms of [Pg 3] a fundamental antithesis which appears to run through all philosophy. Each thinker is apt to take the postulates congenial to his own mind as the plain dictates of reason. Controversies between such opposites appear to be hopeless. They have been aptly compared by Dr. Venn to the erection of a snow-bank to dam a river. The snow melts and swells the torrent which it was intended to arrest. Each side reads admitted truths into its own dialect, and infers that its own dialect affords the only valid expression. To regard such antitheses as final and insoluble would be to admit complete scepticism. What is true for one man would not therefore be true—or at least its truth would not be demonstrable—to another. We must trust that reconciliation is achievable by showing that the difference is really less vital and corresponds to a difference of methods or of the spheres within which each mode of thought may be valid. To obtain the point of view from which such a conciliation is possible should be, I hold, one main end of modern philosophising.

The effect of this profound intellectual difference is complicated by other obvious influences. There is, in the first place, the difference of intellectual horizon. Each man has a world of his own and sees a different set of facts. Whether his horizon is that which is visible from his parish steeple or from St. Peter's at Rome, it is still strictly limited: and the outside universe, known vaguely and indirectly, does not affect him like the facts actually present to his perception. The most candid thinkers will come to different conclusions when they are really provided with different sets of fact. In political and social problems every man's opinions are [Pg 4] moulded by his social station. The artisan's view of the capitalist, and the capitalist's

view of the artisan, are both imperfect, because each has a first-hand knowledge of his own class alone: and, however anxious to be fair, each will take a very different view of the working of political institutions. An apparent concord often covers the widest divergence under the veil of a common formula, because each man has his private mode of interpreting general phrases in terms of concrete fact.

This, of course, implies the further difference arising from the passions which, however illogically, go so far to determine opinions. Here we have the most general source of difficulty in considering the actual history of a creed. We cannot limit ourselves to the purely logical factor. All thought has to start from postulates. Men have to act before they think: before, at any rate, reasoning becomes distinct from imagining or guessing. To explain in early periods is to fancy and to take a fancy for a perception. The world of the primitive man is constructed not only from vague conjectures and hasty analogies but from his hopes and fears, and bears the impress of his emotional nature. When progress takes place some of his beliefs are confirmed, some disappear, and others are transformed: and the whole history of thought is a history of this gradual process of verification. We begin, it is said, by assuming: we proceed by verifying, and we only end by demonstrating. The process is comparatively simple in that part of knowledge which ultimately corresponds to the physical sciences. There must be a certain harmony between beliefs and realities in regard to knowledge of ordinary matters of fact, if only because such harmony is essential [Pg 5] to the life of the race. Even an ape must distinguish poisonous from wholesome food. Beliefs as to physical facts require to be made articulate and distinct; but we have only to recognise as logical principles the laws of nature which we have unconsciously obeyed and illustrated—to formulate dynamics long after we have applied the science in throwing stones or using bows and arrows. But what corresponds to this in the case of the moral and religious beliefs? What is the process of verification? Men practically are satisfied with their creed so long as they are satisfied with the corresponding social order. The test of truth so suggested is obviously inadequate: for all great religions, however contradictory to each other, have been able to satisfy it for long periods. Particular doctrines might be tested by experiment. The efficacy of witchcraft might be investigated like the

efficacy of vaccination. But faith can always make as many miracles as it wants: and errors which originate in the fancy cannot be at once extirpated by the reason. Their form may be changed but not their substance. To remove them requires not disproof of this or that fact, but an intellectual discipline which is rare even among the educated classes. A religious creed survives, as poetry or art survives,—not so long as it contains apparently true statements of fact but—so long as it is congenial to the whole social state. A philosophy indeed is a poetry stated in terms of logic. Considering the natural conservatism of mankind, the difficulty is to account for progress, not for the persistence of error. When the existing order ceases to be satisfactory; when conquest or commerce has welded nations together and brought conflicting creeds into cohesion; when industrial [Pg 6] development has modified the old class relations; or when the governing classes have ceased to discharge their functions, new principles are demanded and new prophets arise. The philosopher may then become the mouthpiece of the new order, and innocently take himself to be its originator. His doctrines were fruitless so long as the soil was not prepared for the seed. A premature discovery if not stamped out by fire and sword is stifled by indifference. If Francis Bacon succeeded where Roger Bacon failed, the difference was due to the social conditions, not to the men. The cause of the great religious as well as of the great political revolutions must be sought mainly in the social history. New creeds spread when they satisfy the instincts or the passions roused to activity by other causes. The system has to be so far true as to be credible at the time; but its vitality depends upon its congeniality as a whole to the aspirations of the mass of mankind.

The purely intellectual movement no doubt represents the decisive factor. The love of truth in the abstract is probably the weakest of human passions; but truth when attained ultimately gives the fulcrum for a reconstruction of the world. When a solid core of ascertained and verifiable truth has once been formed and applied to practical results it becomes the fixed pivot upon which all beliefs must ultimately turn. The influence, however, is often obscure and still indirect. The more cultivated recognise the necessity of bringing their whole doctrine into conformity with the definitely organised and established system; and, at the present day, even the uneducat-

ed begin to have an inkling of possible results. Yet the desire for logical consistency is not one which presses [Pg 7] forcibly upon the less cultivated intellects. They do not feel the necessity of unifying knowledge or bringing their various opinions into consistency and into harmony with facts. There are easy methods of avoiding any troublesome conflict of belief. The philosopher is ready to show them the way. He, like other people, has to start from postulates, and to see how they will work. When he meets with a difficulty it is perfectly legitimate that he should try how far the old formula can be applied to cover the new applications. He may be led to a process of 'rationalising' or 'spiritualising' which is dangerous to intellectual honesty. The vagueness of the general conceptions with which he is concerned facilitates the adaptation; and his words slide into new meanings by imperceptible gradations. His error is in taking a legitimate tentative process for a conclusive test; and inferring that opinions are confirmed because a non-natural interpretation can be forced upon them. This, however, is only the vicious application of the normal process through which new ideas are diffused or slowly infiltrate the old systems till the necessity of a thoroughgoing reconstruction forces itself upon our attention. Nor can it be denied that an opposite fallacy is equally possible, especially in times of revolutionary passion. The apparent irreconcilability of some new doctrine with the old may lead to the summary rejection of the implicit truth, together with the error involved in its imperfect recognition. Hence arises the necessity for faking into account not only a man's intellectual idiosyncrasies and the special intellectual horizon, but all the prepossessions due to his personal character, his social environment, and his consequent sympathies and antipathies. The philosopher has [Pg 8] his passions like other men. He does not really live in the thin air of abstract speculation. On the contrary, he starts generally, and surely is right in starting, with keen interest in the great religious, ethical, and social problems of the time. He wishes—honestly and eagerly—to try them by the severest tests, and to hold fast only what is clearly valid. The desire to apply his principles in fact justifies his pursuit, and redeems him from the charge that he is delighting in barren intellectual subtleties. But to an outsider his procedure may appear in a different light. His real problem comes to be: how the conclusions which are agreeable to his emotions can be connected with the postulates which are congenial

to his intellect? He may be absolutely honest and quite unconscious that his conclusions were prearranged by his sympathies. No philosophic creed of any importance has ever been constructed, we may well believe, without such sincerity and without such plausibility as results from its correspondence to at least some aspects of the truth. But the result is sufficiently shown by the perplexed controversies which arise. Men agree in their conclusions, though starting from opposite premises; or from the same premises reach the most diverging conclusions. The same code of practical morality, it is often said, is accepted by thinkers who deny each other's first principles; dogmatism often appears to its opponents to be thoroughgoing scepticism in disguise, and men establish victoriously results which turn out in the end to be really a stronghold for their antagonists.

Hence there is a distinction between such a history of a sect as I contemplate and a history of scientific inquiry or of pure philosophy. A history of mathematical or [Pg 9] physical science would differ from a direct exposition of the science, but only in so far as it would state truths in the order of discovery, not in the order most convenient for displaying them as a system. It would show what were the processes by which they were originally found out, and how they have been afterwards annexed or absorbed in some wider generalisation. These facts might be stated without any reference to the history of the discoverers or of the society to which they belonged. They would indeed suggest very interesting topics to the general historian or 'sociologist.' He might be led to inquire under what conditions men came to inquire scientifically at all; why they ceased for centuries to care for science; why they took up special departments of investigation; and what was the effect of scientific discoveries upon social relations in general. But the two inquiries would be distinct for obvious reasons. If men study mathematics they can only come to one conclusion. They will find out the same propositions of geometry if they only think clearly enough and long enough, as certainly as Columbus would discover America if he only sailed far enough. America was there, and so in a sense are the propositions. We may therefore in this case entirely separate the two questions: what leads men to think? and what conclusions will they reach? The reasons which guided the first discoverers are just as valid now, though they can be more systematically stated. But in

the 'moral sciences' this distinction is not equally possible. The intellectual and the social evolution are closely and intricately connected, and each reacts upon the other. In the last resort no doubt a definitive system of belief once elaborated would repose upon universally [Pg 10] valid truths and determine, instead of being determined by, the corresponding social order. But in the concrete evolution which, we may hope, is approximating towards this result, the creeds current among mankind have been determined by the social conditions as well as helped to determine them. To give an account of that process it is necessary to specify the various circumstances which may lead to the survival of error, and to the partial views of truth taken by men of different idiosyncrasies working upon different data and moved by different passions and prepossessions. A history written upon these terms would show primarily what, as a fact, were the dominant beliefs during a given period, and state which survived, which disappeared, and which were transformed or engrafted upon other systems of thought. This would of course raise the question of the truth or falsehood of the doctrines as well as of their vitality: for the truth is at least one essential condition of permanent vitality. The difference would be that the problem would be approached from a different side. We should ask first what beliefs have flourished, and afterwards ask why they flourished, and how far their vitality was due to their partial or complete truth. To write such a history would perhaps require an impartiality which few people possess and which I do not venture to claim. I have my own opinions for which other people may account by prejudice, assumption, or downright incapacity. I am quite aware that I shall be implicitly criticising myself in criticising others. All that I can profess is that by taking the questions in this order, I shall hope to fix attention upon one set of considerations which are apt, as I fancy, to be unduly neglected. The result of [Pg 11] reading some histories is to raise the question: how people on the other side came to be such unmitigated fools? Why were they imposed upon by such obvious fallacies? That may be answered by considering more fully the conditions under which the opinions were actually adopted, and one result may be to show that those opinions had a considerable element of truth, and were held by men who were the very opposite of fools. At any rate I shall do what I can to write an account of this phase of thought, so as to bring out what were its

real tenets; to what intellectual type they were naturally congenial; what were the limitations of view which affected the Utilitarians' conception of the problems to be solved; and what were the passions and prepossessions due to the contemporary state of society and to their own class position, which to some degree unconsciously dictated their conclusions. So far as I can do this satisfactorily, I hope that I may throw some light upon the intrinsic value of the creed, and the place which it should occupy in a definitive system.

NOTES:

[1] *Table-Talk*, 3 July 1830.

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

I. THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION

[Pg 12] The English Utilitarians represent one outcome of the speculations current in England during the later part of the eighteenth century. For the reasons just assigned I shall begin by briefly recalling some of the social conditions which set the problems for the coming generation and determined the mode of answering them. I must put the main facts in evidence, though they are even painfully familiar. The most obvious starting-point is given by the political situation. The supremacy of parliament had been definitively established by the revolution of 1688, and had been followed by the elaboration of the system of party government. The centre of gravity of the political world lay in the House of Commons. No minister could hold power unless he could command a majority in this house. Jealousy of the royal power, however, was still a ruling passion. The party line between Whig and Tory turned ostensibly upon this issue. The essential Whig doctrine is indicated by Dunning's famous resolution (6 April 1780) that 'the power of the crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished.' The resolution [Pg 13] was in one sense an anachronism. As in many other cases, politicians seem to be elaborately slaying the slain and guarding against the attacks of extinct monsters. There was scarcely more probability under George III. than there is under Victoria that the king would try to raise taxes without consent of parliament. George III., however, desired to be more than a contrivance for fixing the great seal to official documents. He had good reason for thinking that the weakness of the executive was an evil. The king could gain power not by attacking the authority of parliament but by gaining influence within its walls. He might form a party of 'king's friends' able to hold the balance between the connections formed by the great families and so break up the system of party government. Burke's great speech (11 Feb. 1780) upon introducing his plan 'for the better security of the independence of parliament and the economical reformation of the civil and other establishments' explains the secret and reveals the state of things which for

the next half century was to supply one main theme for the eloquence of reformers. The king had at his disposal a vast amount of patronage. There were relics of ancient institutions: the principality of Wales, the duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, and the earldom of Chester; each with its revenue and establishment of superfluous officials. The royal household was a complex 'body corporate' founded in the old days of 'purveyance.' There was the mysterious 'Board of Green Cloth' formed by the great officers and supposed to have judicial as well as administrative functions. Cumbersome mediæval machinery thus remained which had been formed in the time when the distinction between [Pg 14] a public trust and private property was not definitely drawn or which had been allowed to remain for the sake of patronage, when its functions had been transferred to officials of more modern type. Reform was foiled, as Burke put it, because the turnspit in the king's kitchen was a member of parliament. Such sinecures and the pensions on the civil list or the Irish establishment provided the funds by which the king could build up a personal influence, which was yet occult, irresponsible, and corrupt. The measure passed by Burke in 1782 [2] made a beginning in the removal of such abuses.

Meanwhile the Whigs were conveniently blind to another side of the question. If the king could buy, it was because there were plenty of people both able and willing to sell. Bubb Dodington, a typical example of the old system, had five or six seats at his disposal: subject only to the necessity of throwing a few pounds to the 'venal wretches' who went through the form of voting, and by dealing in what he calls this 'merchantable ware' he managed by lifelong efforts to wriggle into a peerage. The Dodingtons, that is, sold because they bought. The 'venal wretches' were the lucky franchise-holders in rotten boroughs. The 'Friends of the People' [3] in 1793 made the often-repeated statement that 154 individuals returned 307 members, that is, a majority of the house. In Cornwall, again, 21 boroughs with 453 electors controlled by about 15 individuals returned 42 members, [4] or, with the two county members, only one member less than Scotland; and the Scottish members were elected by close corporations in boroughs [Pg 15] and by the great families in counties. No wonder if the House of Commons seemed at times

to be little more than an exchange for the traffic between the proprietors of votes and the proprietors of offices and pensions.

The demand for the reforms advocated by Burke and Dunning was due to the catastrophe of the American War. The scandal caused by the famous coalition of 1783 showed that a diminution of the royal influence might only make room for selfish bargains among the proprietors of parliamentary influence. The demand for reform was taken up by Pitt. His plan was significant. He proposed to disfranchise a few rotten boroughs; but to soften this measure he afterwards suggested that a million should be set aside to buy such boroughs as should voluntarily apply for disfranchisement. The seats obtained were to be mainly added to county representation; but the franchise was to be extended so as to add about 99,000 voters in boroughs, and additional seats were to be given to London and Westminster and to Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and Sheffield. The Yorkshire reformers, who led the movement, were satisfied with this modest scheme. The borough proprietors were obviously too strong to be directly attacked, though they might be induced to sell some of their power.

Here was a mass of anomalies, sufficient to supply topics of denunciation for two generations of reformers, and, in time, to excite fears of violent revolution. Without undertaking the easy task of denouncing exploded systems, we may ask what state of mind they implied. Our ancestors were perfectly convinced that their political system was of almost unrivalled excellence: they held that they were freemen entitled to look down upon [Pg 16] foreigners as the slaves of despots. Nor can we say that their satisfaction was without solid grounds. The boasting about English freedom implied some misunderstanding. But it was at least the boast of a vigorous race. Not only were there individuals capable of patriotism and public spirit, but the body politic was capable of continuous energy. During the eighteenth century the British empire spread round the world. Under Chatham it had been finally decided that the English race should be the dominant element in the new world; if the political connection had been severed by the bungling of his successors, the unbroken spirit of the nation had still been shown in the struggle against France, Spain, and the revolted colonies; and whatever may be thought of the motives which produced the great revolu-

tionary wars, no one can deny the qualities of indomitable self-reliance and high courage to the men who led the country through the twenty years of struggle against France, and for a time against France with the continent at its feet. If moralists or political theorists find much to condemn in the ends to which British policy was directed, they must admit that the qualities displayed were not such as can belong to a simply corrupt and mean-spirited government.

One obvious remark is that, on the whole, the system was a very good one—as systems go. It allowed free play to the effective political forces. Down to the revolutionary period, the nation as a whole was contented with its institutions. The political machinery provided a sufficient channel for the really efficient force of public opinion. There was as yet no large class which at once had political aspirations and was unable to gain a hearing. [Pg 17] England was still in the main an agricultural country; and the agricultural labourer was fairly prosperous till the end of the century, while his ignorance and isolation made him indifferent to politics. There might be a bad squire or parson, as there might be a bad season; but squire and parson were as much parts of the natural order of things as the weather. The farmer or yeoman was not much less stolid; and his politics meant at most a choice between allegiance to one or other of the county families. If in the towns which were rapidly developing there was growing up a discontented population, its discontent was not yet directed into political channels. An extended franchise meant a larger expenditure on beer, not the readier acceptance of popular aspirations. To possess a vote was to have a claim to an occasional bonus rather than a right to influence legislation. Practically, therefore, parliament might be taken to represent what might be called 'public opinion,' for anything that deserved to be called public opinion was limited to the opinions of the gentry and the more intelligent part of the middle classes. There was no want of complaints of corruption, proposals to exclude placemen from parliament and the like; and in the days of Wilkes, Chatham, and Junius, when the first symptoms of democratic activity began to affect the political movement, the discontent made itself audible and alarming. But a main characteristic of the English reformers was the constant appeal to precedent, even in their most excited moods. They do not mention the rights of man; they invoke the 'revolution

principles' of 1688; they insist upon the 'Bill of Rights' or Magna Charta. When keenly roused they recall the fate of Charles I.; and their [Pg 18] favourite toast is the cause for which Hampden died on the field and Sidney on the scaffold. They believe in the jury as the 'palladium of our liberties'; and are convinced that the British Constitution represents an unsurpassable though unfortunately an ideal order of things, which must have existed at some indefinite period. Chatham in one of his most famous speeches, appeals, for example, to the 'iron barons' who resisted King John, and contrasts them with the silken courtiers which now compete for place and pensions. The political reformers of the time, like religious reformers in most times, conceive of themselves only as demanding the restoration of the system to its original purity, not as demanding its abrogation. In other words, they propose to remedy abuses but do not as yet even contemplate a really revolutionary change. Wilkes was not a 'Wilkite,' nor was any of his party, if Wilkite meant anything like Jacobin.

NOTES:

[2] 22 George III. c. 82.

[3] *Parl. Hist.* xxx. 787.

[4] *State Trials*, xxiv. 382.

II. THE RULING CLASS

Thus, however anomalous the constitution of parliament, there was no thought of any far-reaching revolution. The great mass of the population was too ignorant, too scattered and too poor to have any real political opinions. So long as certain prejudices were not aroused, it was content to leave the management of the state to the dominant class, which alone was intelligent enough to take an interest in public affairs and strong enough to make its interest felt. This class consisted in the first place of the great landed interest. When Lord North opposed Pitt's reform in 1785 he said [5] that the Constitution [Pg 19] was 'the work of infinite wisdom ... the most beautiful fabric that had ever existed since the beginning of time.' He added that 'the bulk and weight' of the house ought to be in 'the hands of the country-gentlemen, the best and most respectable objects of the confidence of the people.' The speech, though intended

to please an audience of country-gentlemen, represented a genuine belief. [6] The country-gentlemen formed the class to which not only the constitutional laws but the prevailing sentiment of the country gave the lead in politics as in the whole social system. Even reformers proposed to improve the House of Commons chiefly by increasing the number of county-members, and a county-member was almost necessarily a country-gentleman of an exalted kind. Although the country-gentleman was very far from having all things his own way, his ideals and prejudices were in a great degree the mould to which the other politically important class conformed. There was indeed a growing jealousy between the landholders and the 'monied-men.' Bolingbroke had expressed this distrust at an earlier part of the century. But the true representative of the period was his successful rival, Walpole, a thorough country-gentleman who had learned to understand the mysteries of finance and acquired the confidence of the city. The great merchants of London and the rising manufacturers in the country were rapidly growing in wealth and influence. The monied-men represented the most active, energetic, and growing part of the body politic. Their interests determined the direction of the national policy. The great wars of the [Pg 20] century were undertaken in the interests of British trade. The extension of the empire in India was carried on through a great commercial company. The growth of commerce supported the sea-power which was the main factor in the development of the empire. The new industrial organisation which was arising was in later years to represent a class distinctly opposed to the old aristocratic order. At present it was in a comparatively subordinate position. The squire was interested in the land and the church; the merchant thought more of commerce and was apt to be a dissenter. But the merchant, in spite of some little jealousies, admitted the claims of the country-gentleman to be his social superior and political leader. His highest ambition was to be himself admitted to the class or to secure the admission of his family. As he became rich he bought a solid mansion at Clapham or Wimbledon, and, if he made a fortune, might become lord of manors in the country. He could not as yet aspire to become himself a peer, but he might be the ancestor of peers. The son of Josiah Child, the great merchant of the seventeenth century, became Earl Tylney, and built at Wanstead one of the noblest mansions in England. His contemporary Sir Fran-