

INTRODUCTION

'DEBUNKING' the 19th century has become the preoccupation of the 20th. Victorian complacency incites George Bernard Shaw to insert pins; Victorian virtues become a subject for mirth; and a crescendo of abuse descends upon Parliament. Historians, novelists and playwrights conspire to expose the seamy side, the painful past, and futile future of democracy. The Fourth Estate finds profit in laceration of the Third. Fascism and the Corporative State direct the fashionable whirlwind, and fancy they can guide the storm into a planned world. *Aut Caesar, aut nihil* (either Caesar, or no one, either emperor or nothing) leaves freedom without defenders.

It is usual for those engaged in any profession to defend that profession against the world. Only the profession of politics lacks defenders. We are amateurs; we have no Trade Union; fees are bad form. Our mistress is too private to parade before the crowd. Moreover, most politicians are disappointed sooner or later, and rush, on release, to expose the blemishes of that relentless mistress who drew them on to failure. The prizes are glittering but few and uncertain. In politics we can call no man happy till he dies.

Possibly I am disappointed like the rest—probably not, as I have achieved an hereditary seat on the scarlet benches.¹ However, an hereditary sense of duty compels me, in any case, to fight fascism by setting forth the charms and virtues of democracy—or at least of that variety of democracy which is now in question—British Parliamentary Government.

¹ House of Lords. M.S.

With the exception of Mr. Churchill, no one has better qualifications to defend the lady; and I drag in the Prime Minister to substantiate my claim.¹

For more than 60 years I have been soaked in politics. I have seen it all from outside and inside, with the eyes of both servant and master, local and central, from both Houses of Parliament. In many countries I have seen other Parliaments at work; in most I have known intimately those who worked the grand machine of democratic rule. My constituency has constantly re-elected me, whatever my Party label, for 36 years—for the last 13 without a contest and unanimously. To have been so trusted is a great responsibility. I should be ashamed to go down to the great House of Kings without setting out the reasons for my faith in democracy, signed, sealed and delivered as a Testament.

By democracy I mean government by reason and persuasion, the antithesis of fascism, which is government by force. The instruction of the legacy should be: "Respect your Parliament, and see that your politicians are such that you can respect them. If you have not got a Parliament, get one, and remember that it will be what you make it." So I seek to show why the best men in Britain have always wanted to get into Parliament; that actual work in Parliament becomes largely altruistic; that the career of ruler can be both honourable and interesting. I hope to show the pre-eminent advantages of the British Constitution over others: to show its disadvantages; the dangers from fascist attack to which it is open; the curse of Party, destroying independence; the growth of bureaucratic rule, and the methods of controlling bureaucrats.

Reconstruction after the war, or a construction of a new world, accentuate all the present problems of rule. The mid-

¹ See the Prime Minister's introduction, page ix. M.S.

dle way for democracy, between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and fascism—liberty and authority—has to be prospected with especial care.

Truth,¹ which bears me little affection, charges me with arrogance and intolerance. Toleration in these later days, approximates to cowardice; and I hope I may die still utterly intolerant of cruelty, injustice and error. I accept also mental arrogance, and justify on my record. Yet any discussion on government by reason must submit to reason. Therefore occasional debatable points are controverted in footnotes in the manner of Mr. H. G. Wells. These footnotes are by Mr. J. F. Price, best informed on Russia, and by my son, whose resolution and vision are conspicuous.

To Sir Gilbert Champion, Clerk of the House of Commons; to Mr. F. W. Metcalfe, Clerk at the Table; to Mr. P. D. Proctor of the Treasury; and especially to Mr. T. G. B. Cocks of the Committee Office, I owe much kindness, encouragement and elimination of error. They would, however, be unwilling to be associated with deductions, commentary, or any aspirations going beyond the perpetuation of the perfect Parliament.

Lastly, as a salute to my latest peers, I discuss the practice and possible utility of the House of Lords as at present constituted and empowered. In such manner, drawing from my own experience, I state the immortal case for freedom and democracy.

In that spirit I bequeath my sword to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage—and my courage and skill to him that can get it.

WEDGWOOD OF BARLASTON.

4th July 1942.

¹ Magazine published in England whose policy has been unsympathetic toward such progressive ideas as those of the author. M.S.