

MACAULAY
VS.
JEFFERSON.

In the year 1857
Hon. H. S. Randall,
of New York wrote
to Lord Macaulay,
the great historian

of England, sending him a copy of the life of Thomas Jefferson, which had just appeared from the press. Lord Macaulay replied at length in one of the most remarkable letters that has ever been written on the subject of American representative government. This letter has only been read by a very few of the millions of American people, as it is not included in any of Lord Macaulay's collected works. It is the most terrible arraignment of representative government that was ever penned, and, in the light of present developments in this country, is almost in the nature of a prophecy.

In an address delivered before the literary societies of Western Reserve college at Hudson, Ohio, on July 2nd, 1873, Gen. Garfield quoted the letter almost in full and commented upon it at some length. It is peculiarly interesting just now, and below is given a transcript of it.

"Holly Lodge, Kensington, London, May 23, 1857. Dear Sir: You are surprised to learn that

A Forecast.

I have not a high opinion of Mr. Jefferson, and I am surprised at your surprise. I am certain that I never wrote a line, and that I never in parliament—a place where it is the fashion to court the populace—uttered a word, indicating an opinion that the supreme authority in a state ought to be trusted to the majority of citizens told by the head; in other words to the poorest and most ignorant part of society. I have long been convinced that institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization, or both. In Europe, where the population is dense, the effect of such institutions would

In France.

be almost instantaneous. What happened lately in France is an example. In 1848 a pure democracy was established there. During a short time there was reason to expect a general spoliation, a national bankruptcy, a new partition of the soil, a maximum of prices, a ruinous load of taxation laid on the rich for the purpose of supporting the poor in idleness. Such a system would, in twenty years, have made France as poor and barbarous as the France of the Carolingians. Happily, the danger was averted; and now there is a despotism, a silent tribune, an enslaved press. Liberty is gone, but civilization has been saved. I have not the smallest doubt that, if we had a purely democratic government here, the effect would be the same. Either the poor would plunder the rich and civilization would perish, or order and prosperity would be saved by a strong military government, and liberty would perish. You may think

United States Not Exempt.

that your country enjoys an exemption from these evils; I will frankly own to you that I am of a very different opinion. Your fate I believe to be certain, though it is deferred by a physical cause. As long as you have a boundless

extent of fertile and unoccupied land, your laboring population will be far more at ease than the laboring population of the old world; and while that is the case the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without causing any fatal calamity. But the time will come when New England will be as thickly settled as Old England. Wages will be as low, and will fluctuate as much with you as with us. You will have your Manchesters and Birminghams. And in those Manchesters and Birminghams hundreds and thousands of artisans will sometimes be out of work. Then your institutions will be fairly brought to the test. Distress everywhere makes the laborer mutinous and discontented, and inclines him to listen with eagerness to agitators, who tell him that it is a monstrous iniquity that one man should have a million while another cannot get a full meal. In bad years there is plenty of grumbling here, and sometimes a little rioting; but it matters little, for here the sufferers are not the rulers. The supreme power is in the hands of a class, numerous indeed, but select—of an educated class—of a class which is, and knows itself to be, deeply interested in the security of property and the maintenance of order. Accordingly the malcontents are gently but firmly restrained. The bad time is got over, without robbing the wealthy to relieve the indigent. The springs of national prosperity soon begin to flow again; work is plentiful, wages rise, and all is tranquillity and cheerfulness. I have seen England pass, three or four times, through such critical seasons as I have described. Through such seasons the United States will have to pass in the course of the next century, if not of this. How will you pass through them? I heartily wish you good deliverance. But my reason and my wishes are at war, and I cannot help foreboding the worst. It is quite plain that your government will never

A Majority.

be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority. For, with you, the majority is the government, and has the rich, who are always the minority, absolutely at its mercy. The day will come when, in the state of New York, a multitude of people, none of whom has had more than half a breakfast, or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a legislature. Is it possible to doubt what sort of a legislature will be chosen? On one side is a statesman preaching patience, respect for vested rights, strict observance of public faith; on the other is a demagogue, ranting about the tyranny of the capitalists and usurers, and asking why anybody should be permitted to drink champagne and to ride in a carriage, while thousands of honest folk are in want of necessities.

Forecast of Bryanarchy.

Which of the two candidates is likely to be preferred by a workman who hears his children cry for bread? I seriously apprehend you will, in some such season of adversity as I have described, do things that will prevent prosperity from returning; that you will act like people who should, in a season of scarcity, devour all the seed corn, and thus make the next year not one of scarcity, but of absolute famine. There will be, I fear, spoliation. The spoliation will increase the distress. The distress will produce fresh spoliation. There is nothing to stop you. Your constitution is all sail and no anchor.

As I said before, when a society has entered on its downward progress, either civilization or liberty must perish. Either some Cæsar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand, or your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman empire was in the fifth—with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman empire, came from without, and that your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your country by your own institutions.

Thinking thus, of course I cannot reckon Jefferson among the benefactors of mankind.

Yours Respectfully,
THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY."

Gen. Garfield admitted that this letter contained much food for serious thought. He says:

"It would be idle to deny that Macaulay has pointed out what may become serious dangers in our future. But the evils he complains of are by no means confined to democratic governments, nor do they, in the main, grow out of popular suffrage. If they do, England herself has taken a dangerous step since Macaulay wrote. Ten years after he wrote she extended the suffrage to 800,000 of her workingmen, — a class hitherto ignored in politics. Whether for weal or for woe, enlarged suffrage is the tendency of all modern nations."

All the earlier presidents, in their inaugurations, expressed themselves in doubt as to the permanence of the institutions that were

Doubters.

founded upon the declaration of independence. They solemnly and piously invoked the guidance of Almighty God as they took up the burden of executive management of the infant republic. But as the decades have gone by, and the great civil war has resulted in cementing the sections together, it has been pretty generally conceded that there is nothing that can seriously jeopardize our constitutional liberty. It is probable that the attacks of demagoguery, taking the form of anarchy and socialism, are to be the most serious strain that the nation has ever had to withstand.

Jefferson, himself, was more fearful of the growth of cities than of any other thing. He

Large Cities.

could, by no possibility, have imagined the wonderful impetus that has been given along this line since he vacated the presidential office. He insisted, on various occasions, that the cultivators of the soil are the true patriots, on whom the future permanency of the republic rested.

It is today perfectly apparent that there is a large portion of the voters of the American republic who do not know, and still others who do not care, what are the fundamental principles upon which our government rests. Socialism, with its insidious claims, has taken possession of the populist party. The democratic party, led by men full of misinformation and personal ambitions for place, seems to have adopted and appropriated to itself many of the insidious and dangerous dogmas.

Clearheaded statesmanship and true wisdom are requisite in the present critical epoch of this republic.