

**THE LIBERAL
MOVEMENT IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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The liberal movement in English literature by William John Courthope

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WILLIAM JOHN COURTHOPE

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MOVEMENT IN
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THE
LIBERAL MOVEMENT
IN
English Literature

By WILLIAM JOHN COURTHOPE, M.A.
AUTHOR OF 'THE PARADISE OF BERDIA' ETC.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
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So tenacious are we of our old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution, that very little change has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, adhering in this particular, as in all else, to our old settled maxim never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these institutions on the whole favourable to morality and discipline, and we thought they were susceptible of amendment without altering the ground. We thought they were capable of receiving and meliorating and, above all, of preserving the accessories⁷ of science and literature as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the groundwork), we may put in our claim to as ample and early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature which have illuminated the modern world as any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers.

BURKE, *Reflections on the French Revolution.*



P R E F A C E.

THE following papers appeared in the 'National Review,' and, with the exception of a few paragraphs, I have thought it best to republish them in their original form. Their issue at set monthly intervals has given me the advantage of observing the kind of judgments likely to be pronounced on them: on the other hand, it has necessarily prevented my critics from considering them with reference to the argument as a whole. Various and conflicting objections have been made to the opinions expressed in them. I might, of course, reply to these in detail, but, as the papers are now grouped in a volume, I prefer to present them without comment to the impartial consideration of the reader, only adding a few words on a point on which

my intention seems to have been very generally misunderstood.

It has been suggested to me that I prejudice my cause by giving to a literary subject a title necessarily carrying with it political associations. I might, indeed, have called the series 'The Romantic Movement in English Literature,' but this would not have expressed all that I had in my mind. Art is the ideal reflection of national life, and owes much of its development to the social and political causes that determine the course of a people's history. Even, therefore, if I had simply intended to illustrate from the poetry of the present century the political effects of the great democratic movement since the French Revolution in 1789, I could, I think, have provided myself with historic materials not irrelevant to the subject. But is it correct to limit the use of the word 'Liberalism' to politics? to associate it simply with the events that produced the change in the Poor Law, the extension of the Franchise, the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and the Emancipation of the Press? Is it not rather the case that these are only the external mani-

festations of a spirit working in the mind of the people, which has assumed a particular aspect in politics, but which has produced analogous results in the spheres of religion and art? So, at least, it has appeared to others beside myself; and if any are still inclined to question the propriety of my title, I may appeal to the example of so great a master of the English language as Cardinal Newman, in whose 'History of my Religious Opinions' the word 'Liberalism' is employed over and over again to denote a movement in the region of thought.

I have not used the words 'Liberalism' and 'Conservatism' in any invidious or party sense. By 'Liberalism' I mean the disposition which leads men to seek above all things the enlargement of individual liberty: by 'Conservatism' that which makes them desire primarily to preserve the continuity of national development. Between these two principles I can see no essential contradiction, nor do I think that they can be safely separated. At the same time it is perfectly easy to consider each by itself; and indeed, it is sufficiently obvious that, under our