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Professor Blackie on Scotch Liberalism.
A writer in a recent number of the London Quarterly attempted to show that the Liberalism of the Scottish people is due to the growth of the Evangelical party in the Church. The article in question was evidently written in the interest of the Conservative party, and with a view to consolidate the ranks of the Moderate party against the Liberals in the approaching election, and while containing a grain of truth, is, as a whole, a gross misrepresentation of the whole question. Prof. Blackie, in the letter, which we give below, puts the matter in its proper light, and coming from such a source, will be read with great interest:—
College, Edinburgh, November 6.
Sir.—Your remarks on this subject in your issue of Monday last possess great interest not only for the politician, but for every lover of his country, and every student of political history. As a person who has for more than fifty years been in the constant habit of wandering about the country, and associating with all classes of the community, I take the liberty of sending you my conclusions on the subject, which, I hope, may not be without interest to all who take an interest in such matters, without any special regard to the politics of the hour:—
1. The Church of Scotland is a democratic Church—democratic in its constitution, cherishing lay influences and extending bishops; democratic in its spirit, and widely democratic in its action. The Scotchman, a religious people; their particular type of religion and Church government they fought out for themselves in a long and obstinate and ultimately successful struggle against the Crown; their traditions as a people, and their habits as a religious people, combine to impress a decidedly democratic type on their representative men. The normal Scot is a Presbyterian; for whatever advances may later have been made in the way of converting the upper classes to what is looked on as the proper religion for a gentleman, the backbone of Scotland is and will remain Presbyterian. Episcopacy is only her dress coat.
2. In perfect harmony with her ecclesiastical temper, the schools and colleges of Scotland are essentially democratic. The parochial school system, unknown in England, working effectively for three hundred years, laid a broad foundation of intelligent individualism all over the country; while, at the same time, the higher or middle schools were so neglected, degraded, and starved, that they ceased to afford that style and grade of education which the upper classes and the aristocracy naturally demanded. In harmony with this, the teaching of the higher learning in the Universities was sunk so low, that academical Greek in Scotland came to be looked upon only as a stepping-stone to high scholarship in Oxford; as, indeed, it will remain, so long as the Scottish people, following out the leveling tendency of all democracy, forego to erect any platform, either in school or church, for the maintenance of an aristocratic element in education. The style of our teaching in Scotland, as well as the character of our academic population, as contrasted with that of England, is essentially popular and plebeian; with a very few praiseworthy exceptions, having withdrawn themselves from the Scottish middle schools and Universities as from an element in which they did not feel themselves at home, and where they could find no field for the assertion of their social superiority which they naturally conceive to be theirs.
3. In addition to the strongly democratic character of the Scottish schools and colleges, I must specialise two elements as contributing indirectly to the same result—the Calvinistic theology of the popular Catechism, and the severely Puritan observance of the Sabbath. For whatever objections may be made to the Calvinistic dogmas (and it must be remembered that the most prominent of them are not peculiarly Scotch, but are found everywhere in the Western Church from St. Augustine downwards), it is certain that the principles on which they proceed are profoundly metaphysical, and cannot be seriously dealt with—as they are wont to be by Scottish youth—without supplying a very potent stimulant to the thinking faculty. Taking as overhead, as contrasted with the English, I think it may be said that we are characteristically a thinking people; and of this thinking faculty, the Calvinistic Catechism and the metaphysical classes in the University, I cannot but think that so much disparaged strict observance of the Sunday is the nurse. For in Scotland, certainly, the rest of the Sabbath implies with the great majority, not idleness, but sermon-hearing and Bible-reading—exercises both of a kind to stimulate thought and to encourage moral speculation. As certainly as a light and frivolous way of spending the Lord's Day will encourage levity and frivolity in the great mass of the people, so certainly will strict Sabbatarianism, when combined with a wide range of popular intelligence, the result of good and popular schools and colleges, tend to produce a certain gravity and thoughtfulness in the general mind; and I need not say that, while Conservatism can be maintained, and has often been maintained, on a mere basis of blind unthinking tradition, that ideas from which Liberalism springs have

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their root in the strong assertion of certain moral principles worked out by the reflective faculty of the individuals composing the community.
4. The Scot is hard-faced, hard-working, and essentially hardy animal. The soil on which he lives is comparatively thin, and does not yield its produce except to severe exertion and skilful handling; and upon this soil he is bred and grows up, not as a fat, smooth, lazy, and complacent animal, but as a stout, weather-beaten, wiry creature, who has to push his way in the world, with well-developed tone and well-pronounced muscle, at every step, and who owes his advancement altogether to his personal exertions. Now, all this extraordinary manifestation of sturdy individualism is in its nature essentially democratic; and whosoever has pushed his own way and made his own fortune in this working world, as the Scotch have been accustomed to do, is in his whole attitude and inspiration essentially a Liberal. No doubt, if he is a socialist, your moneyed man, after making his fortune, may become an aristocrat; but what I say is true in the main; the spirit that creates wealth in our great industrial centres is in its nature Liberal. Your genuine aristocrat is a made man from his birth; the Liberal makes himself.
5. There are some peculiarities in the character and position of the Scottish aristocracy which make their influence in Scotland less powerful than the influence of the English aristocracy in England. The English aristocracy is altogether English, the Scotch aristocracy is far from being altogether Scotch. On the contrary, let me only know that any given person in this country belongs to the aristocracy of the land, and the presumption in my mind will immediately arise that he is altogether an Englishman in his ideas, or, at all events, has a great deal less of what is characteristically Scottish in his character than if he had been bred on a lower platform in the social scale. The causes that have produced this unnatural relation between the aristocracy and the great mass of the people of Scotland are many and various; but the fact is certain; and no less certain the result, that the popular party in Scotland, from want of sympathy with their natural leaders, are often driven into a position of antagonism. The aristocracy of Scotland, as already remarked, are not bred in the same schools and colleges with the people. An increasing number of them, more from fashion and English connection, I believe, than from conscientious conviction, have left the Church of their fathers, and openly joined the ranks of a Church, which, whatever its merits (and I have no desire to deny them), is in Scotland a mere sect, antinational in its traditions, and not popular in its character. Add to this that not a few of our aristocracy have exercised, and still exercise, the immense power which their gigantic properties naturally clothe them with in a way which, however allowable within the strict limits of law, and however justified by a certain narrow school of political economy, has a strong tendency to make the aristocracy unpopular, and to widen the breach between the few who possess the land and the many who are excluded from its enjoyment. I allude, of course, here to the gross exclusiveness and selfish vanity of our monstrous entail laws (now breaking down, thank God, inch by inch, on all sides), to the habit which certain great proprietors indulge of refusing to grant fees or leases on their property, that they may keep the whole population under their thumb, and another the growth of any study popular independence or vigorous moral manhood within the sacred rigor of their slowness. Furthermore, while they have shown a remarkable zeal in the preservation of the game on their estates, they have often been utterly indifferent to the preservation of the people—any cleared whole districts of the native population in order to make provision for so absentee Dumfries farmer, and to save themselves the trouble of performing their natural social duties to the district of which they are the head; and even go so far as, in their engrossing pursuit of deer-stalking, to shut up whole glens against the foot of the intelligent tourist, and to fence round with iron interdicts those broad fens from whose breezes our jaded citizens used to draw in the best restoratives of their health, our poets the best spirit of their inspiration, and our men of science the most real elements of their knowledge.—I am, &c., JOHN S. BLACKIE.

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