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A SISTER'S APPRECIATION

Mrs. de Bunsen writes:

Noel's personality was arresting. No one could be unaware of him when he opened a door. He had about him, together with the charm that radiated benevolence, just that touch of Elizabethan romance in appearance and bearing which draws attention. He had no conventional small talk; he depended on a congenial and responsive atmosphere. Then he was himself inimitable as a companion, quick in response whether to the sad or the gay. Yet, as a man of affairs, he was serious to the core, and you could not be in his presence five minutes before you knew him involved in all the affairs of the day, specially of the last long day of 30 years in which thought was distracted and institutions crumbling.

To Noel, the spiritual world was the mainspring of his life and motive-force. Without his religion, life would have been intolerable, and insipid; as a statesman, lacking in direction and moral force.

His roots were deep and no vital interest of the past and no strong personal influence were ever altogether eradicated. The generations were linked by more than blood. Buxton, the Liberator, his great grandfather, was no mouldering ancestor. His spirit was alive in his descendant. All through his political life, Noel used to visit Buxton's monument in the Abbey, before any critical debate. It was there he wished to

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pray and to commit his cause to God. He had, of course, peculiar ties with the Liberator, for not only did he shoulder his cause in Parliament, as one of the Presidents of the Anti-Slavery Society, and in political journeyings, but his personal tastes in country-life were similar; in planting, cutting and shooting. And when Noel's conscience imposed painful restrictions on the gun, the severed link with his ancestor undoubtedly added to the sacrifice.

Noel never wished to keep things as they were in the sense that the past was superior to the present. A thing must be good in itself - never merely because it was old. Like his ancestor, he was liberal in every fibre of his being, though he never abandoned a certain paternalism in his political outlook. Family ritual and customs made the strongest appeal to him. No doubt he felt the strain of adapting himself to a world which had scant respect for the past nor for the shoulders of those on which it stood. But he genuinely hated class-distinction. He loved order - an ordered life in his home, political order, order in social life. His inner resistance was aroused by violent digressions and revolutions, by sudden disintegration. He preferred adjusting conditions and oiling the wheels to destroying and building again, and this inclined him always to try to discover foundations and to build on them, even if they were not altogether structurally sound. His persistence against subtle opposition and faint praise was

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remarkable. An instance of this was his political mission to Bulgaria in 1914, in which he was ardently supported by Churchill and Lloyd George, and frustrated by Grey, who finally let him down at the crucial moment of bargaining.

Gifted as he was with a tender and scrupulous conscience, he found life no easy problem. The "choses jugées" of the society he belonged to were by no means matter of course to him. With all his sensitiveness to the opinions of others, he met opposition and even derision with remarkable courage and good nature. Such were the ethics of personal expenditure, of landed property, of blood-sports. His scruples involved him in difficult situations. His doubts about shooting, seriously aroused by a visit to Buddhist Japan, obliged him to sacrifice his greatest personal enjoyment. The demands of his conscience brought him into conflict with the policy of the Brewery where he had sought and failed to influence the Directorship to adopt a policy on the lines of the Gothenburg System.

His farsightedness in questions of foreign policy, notably in the last phases of frontier re-adjustments, caused him distressing differences with valued colleagues. He foresaw, all too clearly, not only the tragedy but the explosive quality of the suffering involved in the deportee problem in Western Germany. In face of the Churchillian policy of subserviance to Russian demands and a visionless adherence to the Potsdam Agreement, Noel displayed a moral courage of a high order.

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In the Lords, already stricken in health, he returned to the charge over and over again, against the stiff moral pressure of friends in the highest places.

"Life is difficult enough in any case," he wrote, "it would be impossibly hard without the aid of religion." To the end of his life he held to the daily practice of prayer and meditation. Henry Nevinson used to describe, in his inimitable way, how, as they travelled together to the Balkans in the Orient Express, it was the first concern of each morning; and how, as he started at the head of his dawdling caravan in Asia Minor or Armenia, and had adjusted his saddlebags for the long day's ride, out would come Testament and pipe together, and "we had all got to be silent."

One fundamental faith never left him - that of the prevailing power of God - "My strength is sufficient for thee." That upheld him to the end.