

Waiting for the “Liberal Saints” An Assessment of Matthew Arnold’s last Political Essays, 1878-1887

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to study Arnold's attitude to the "Liberals of the Nadir" as demonstrated by his writings of 1878-1887. Ignoring Lowe's real liberal ideal, contemporary liberals fell victims to class interests, a situation which led Arnold to illustrate the disinterestedness of liberty. Though not a politician in action, he found himself indulging in the political controversies of the time, especially when attempting to utilize the "Reasonable Liberals" for the benefit of his broad concept of "Culture." It was his persistent fear of anarchy that brought him in terms with idealist liberals as distinct from the mainstream of middle-class liberalism which foreshadowed the total triumph of chaos, according to him since the late sixties.

Throughout Matthew Arnold's political writings there runs some sincerity that manifests itself in his argumentative style with its warm and persuasive tone on the one hand, and its searching irony and scathing satire on the other. Although making no claims to politics,¹ Arnold's social and political essays present him as a cool politician who, while disarming his opponents by a pretentious self-abasement and ironic modesty, snatches every chance to set their criticism at naught. He appears at best, however, in his critique of the Liberal party as the representative of the middle classes, including trade, business and professions. This critique is the more appealing because of his professed preference for them, a preference which entails for him-as a "man of culture"-a close and thorough questioning of their machinery and objectives. Arnold's criticism of the Liberals, however, carried him so far that by 1887 he almost switched to the Conservatives after denouncing "Cleon (Galdstone) and his democracy." It is the purpose of the present essay to investigate Arnold's political stand as revealed in his writings of 1878-87, and to study the reasons behind his break with the "Liberals of the Nadir" as he preferred to call them in his last essays.² I propose also to demonstrate that Arnold's fear of anarchy and disruption drove him to conclusions that were incompatible with the detached and flexible attitude which he maintained throughout his writings to 1878.

In his essay on "Irish Catholicism and English Liberalism,"³ Arnold describes himself as a "humbel follower of the real Liberal ideal" as defined by Robert Lowe in the **Fortnightly Review** (1877).⁴ Greatly impressed by Lowe's emphasis on the Liberal detachment from "class interests" and care for "the better feelings and higher intelligence of mankind," he joyfully remarks: "Happier words could not well be found; such is indeed the true ideal of the Liberal party" (**CPW**, 8, 325). To Arnold, those who stand for such ideals are the Liberal "saints", also a "saving remnant" in their own way. While hard upon his Liberal friends in "their prosperity," he is called upon now to support them "in their adversity," since their course "is in a general way, at any rate, mine also" (**CPW**, 8, 327).⁵ Although no less critical here of the middle class and its Liberal party than in **Culture and Anarchy**, Arnold still maintains a friendly attitude towards his Liberal colleagues.

But rather than tending to show forth his attachment to the Liberals, the writer aspires to serve them through an assessment of their theory and practice in order to bring their machinery into harmony with their ideals. Thus, upon pointing out their shortcomings as resulting from submission to the narrow-mindedness and prejudice of the middle classes, he finds this practice as falling "a good deal short" of their professed ideal (**CPW**, 8, 327).

Specifically concerned with the impact of middle classes on the Liberals, he argues that instead of wasting their time and efforts in pursuing such minor undertakings as the Burials Bill and the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill - which happened to attract their attention then -, they should work on the establishment of public schools and municipal organizations throughout the country. Of the many examples cited by Arnold to demonstrate the Liberals' submission to the middle class (especially to its strongest portion, the Nonconformist or the Protestant Dissent, which

broke away from the "Established" Anglican Church, disagreeing therefore with its doctrines) this essay will concentrate on the disestablishment of the Irish church and the Irish Catholic university question. Thus, Arnold rightly describes Gladstone's Bill of 1869 to disestablish the Irish church as an example of the Liberals' pandering to the Dissenters' antipathy to establishments. More serious, however, was their rejection of the Irish demand for a Catholic university according also to the Protestant Dissenters' hostility "to the endowment of Catholicism in any shape or form" (**CPW**, 8, 328). Even when realizing the absurdity of condemning religious endowment in the light of the Philistine's likings and dislikings, Gladstone could not oppose the Nonconformists, or the Dissenters whose hostility to both the Anglicans and Catholics represented to Arnold the very middle class narrow-mindedness which he sharply attacked. As such, Gladstone proclaimed a Catholic university precluding theology, philosophy and history from its programme. To the writer, Gladstone's attitude showed him as a tactician who rather cared for the Nonconformists' votes than for the Irish rights. Ironically, it was Gladstone who advocated Home Rule for Ireland at a time when Arnold insisted on the retention of Ireland for the Empire.⁶

Although greatly depressed by the Liberals' disregard of their ideals, Arnold, nevertheless, preferred them to the Conservatives. Indeed, at that time Arnold was concerned with improving rather than decrying the Liberals. The whole point of discussing Irish Catholicism was to demonstrate to his Liberal friends that it needed no miracle to contend against middle class prejudice, a fact which had already been proved by the radical Liberals who voted in favour of an Irish Catholic university. The significance of such a move on the part of radical Liberals like Charles Dilke and Joseph Chamberlain consisted not only in its being so daring as to "set at naught" the prejudice of the middle class and the official policy of the Liberal party, but also in its adherence to the dictates of a disinterested mind which happened to accord with both the Conservatives policy and the sentiments of the upper class. Thus, for Arnold it did signify a great deal of independent judgment and sweet reasonableness:

If the present government, therefore, should show a disposition to do justice to Ireland in this matter, let the advanced Liberals, who have so well begun, steadily support the government in such a disposition, and steadily refuse, in this question, for the sake of sancting a party advantage, to trade upon the baneful fund of middle-class prejudice, which is so easy and so tempting to use even while one despises it.

There will be plenty of other occasions on which the pursuit of the true Liberal ideal must inevitably bring Liberals into conflict with the present government, and with the feeling of the upper class, But on this particular question for a Liberal to thwart the government, if the government were inclined to do what Ireland justly desires, would be to put himself into conflict with truth and nature, and, therefore, with the Liberal ideal itself (**CPW**, 8, 340-341).

Whenever Arnold alludes to the radical Liberals' move, he rejoices: "At all events, few things in politics have ever given me more pleasure than to see the aid courage-

ously afforded to Irish Catholics by this little band of advanced English Liberals" (**CPW**, 8, 326-7).

Apparently Arnold considers the vote for the O'Connor Don⁶ resolution a significant step to narrow the gap between the Liberals' practice and their ideal, and a recognition of the validity of his ideal of culture. Referring to "this little band of advanced English Liberals," Arnold calls them his "benefactors" (**CPW**, 8, 343). Rather than an end, he looks upon their move as a beginning, gradually releasing the Liberals from middle class prejudice and narrowness. While "pouring out (his) heart to advanced Liberals, in (his) joy at their sound and hopeful vote on the O'Connor Don's resolution" (**CPW**, 8, 339). Arnold Supplements his thanks for his "benefactors" with a few suggestions towards the transformation of the middle class. Before discussing these suggestions which are basic to Arnold's evaluation of Liberalism, it is proper to assess Arnold's admiration for the vote in favour of the O'Connor Don resolution.

Besides its immediate significance for Arnold's critique of the Liberal party, the radical Liberals' move was appealing for other reasons.⁷ In the first place, it accorded with his view that a national or religious group or a class should be given the chance to speak for itself and to make its own choice.⁸ Thus, he approved of Gladstone's Third Bill to enfranchise the agricultural labourer as a necessary measure to provide people with every chance to expand their faculties and spirits. Gladstone's Bill won Arnold's support because "it is well for any great class and description of men in society to be able to say for itself what it wants, and not to have other classes. the so-called educated and intelligent classes, acting for it as its proctors, and supposed to understand its wants and to provide for them" (**CPW**, 9, 140).

On the other hand, Arnold is especially interested in Catholicism as a source of beauty and poetry as set against the hideousness of the industrial centres and the mechanicalness and narrowness of Protestant Dissent. In "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism," for example, Arnold says: "I persist in thinking that the prevailing form for the Christianity of the future will be the form of Catholicism; but a Catholicism purged, opening itself to the light and air, having the consciousness of its own poetry, freed from its sacerdotal despotism and freed from its pseudo-scientific apparatus of superannuated dogma" (**CPW**, 8, 334). In comparison with Protestant Dissent. Catholicism can at least satisfy the need for beauty, despite its similarity to Puritanism in its disregard for intellect and knowledge. Influenced by the narrow-mindedness of the Puritan middle class, however. English Liberals saw only "what is priggish, mischievous, impossible in Catholicism" (**CPW**, 8, 329).

Although dissatisfied with their practice, Arnold's attitude towards his Liberal friends is tempered by two considerations. He thinks, on the one hand, that, "The puritan middle class, with all its faults, is still the best stuff in this nation," and that "in its success is our best hope for the future" (**CPW**, 8, 347). On the other hand, he believes that the Liberals with all their shortcomings were preferable to the Conservatives. He even tends to see their faults and failures as remediable. Writing to his sister Jane on the second of April 1880. Arnold said:

Lord B. was demoralising for our people, and the Tories show their bad side more and more the longer they stay in; and then the Tory **Bottles**, the shoddy Conservative, Stock Exchange or Commercial, is terrible. Still the Radical Bottles, and middle-class Liberalism in general-you know my opinion of them at best,- they are in a very crude state, and with little light or help in them at present. But through their failing, and succeeding, and gradual improving lies our way, our only way; I have no doubt of that. But that they will yet fail more than once. and give other chances to the Tories and to future Lord Bs., I think too probable. (Arnold, 1895: Vol, 2, 167).

As this letter to Mrs. Forster demonstrates, Arnold is rather concerned with transforming the Liberals into a well-arganized, flexible and highly cultivated party. As early as 1874 he expressed an earnest desire to see the Liberal party reconstructed along well defined guidelines. He wrote to his sister Jane, "... the Liberal party, it seemed to me, had no body of just, clear, well-ordered thought upon politics, and were only superior to the Conservative in not having for their rule of conduct merely the negative instinct against change; now they will have to examine their minds and find what they really want and mean to try for. I read the **Nonconformist** with much interest now, because there will be a great attempt to reconstruct the Liberal party on the Nonvonformist platform, and from the Nonconformists knowing their objects clearly, and the Liberal party in general not knowing theirs, the attempt has some chances in its favour." (Arnold, 1874: Vol, 2, 112). Nothing happened, however, to satisfy Arnold until 1878 when the radical Liberals voted for an Irish Catholic university against the official policy of their party. The vote revived Arnold's hopes in a possible transformation of the Liberal party into a political, cultural force that could enlighten, educate and lead the Puritan middle class rather than succubm to its prejudece. Thus, he writes in "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism:" "Let us see if this may not even lead us to recast entirely the programme of our practical Liberalism, and to use our present dull times for bringing it more into correspondence twith the true Liberal ideal" (**CPW**, 8, 328).

It is worth noting that Arnold speaks of himself in the foregoing quotation as a Liberal and even as a party man. It is this sense of commitment to the Liberals, therefore, which prompts him to provide the party with suggestions to "recast entirely the programme of our practical Liberalism." Central to Arnold's critique of practical Liberalism as incompatible with the Liberal ideal is its submission to the Puritan middle class, which "Presents a defective type of religion, a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty, a low standard of manners" (**CPW**, 8, 322). Instead of being its followers, the Liberals should lead the middle class towards perfection. Here Arnold resolved to be as practical as his Liberal friends wanted him to be. Instead of more theoretical discourses which caused some disturbance among Liberals and Conservatives alike,⁹ he advanced programme of public education as the only means to cultivate the middle classes and ultimately, to provide the lower classes with better models to emulate.

Arnold's educational system is closely related to his concept of culture as the achievement of the best that has been thought and said, and as the tendency to perfection through a perpetual humanization of the soul. Humanization of man in society, however, cannot be attained unless one works to satisfy certain individual and social needs. On the individual level, man should satisfy the need for conduct, social manners, beauty, intellect and knowledge. On the social level, one should work with the "spirit of society," not against it. "A community with the spirit of society" is, in Arnold's words, "a community with the spirit of equality. (Arnold, 1880: 69). It is in such a society of equals that "man's spirits expand and his faculties work easily and actively" (**CPW**, 2,8), on condition that social equality should be developed along high standards "of social life and manners." (Arnold, 1880: 68). It is only through consistent care for good manners and a well refined social life that societies of equals can escape being **Americanized**,¹⁰ a phrase which suggests emphasis on individualism in the absence of a strong and organized executive. More dangerous than **American**, however, is anarchy. It is inequality which brings about disruption and destruction. The tendency to pursue selfish ends at the expense of others begets troubles and creates, a State of competition and envy. In a society with three classes, like England each class develops its own philosophy or attitude which is defective in one respect:

What the middle class sees is that splendid piece of materialism, the aristocratic class, with a wealth and luxury out of their reach, with a standard of social life and manners, the offspring of that wealth and luxury, seeming utterly out of their reach also. And thus, they are thrown back upon themselves, upon a defective type of religion, a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty, a low standard of manners. And the lower class sees before them the aristocratic class, and its civilization, such as it is, even infinitely more out of **their** reach than out of that of the middle class; while the life of the middle class, with its unlovely types of religion thought, beauty, and manners, has naturally, in general, no great attractions for them either. So they are too thrown back upon themselves; upon their beer, their gin, and their **fun**. (Arnold, 1880: 91-92).

After taking into consideration the natural growth and the increasing needs and expectations of the lower classes in industrial societies, Arnold concludes that in their "irrepressible development" these classes tend eagerly to imitate the middle class; but since the British Philistine "cannot win their sympathy or give them their direction, society is in danger of falling into anarchy" (**CPW**, 2, 26). Thus Arnold associates anarchy with inequality, simultaneously ascribing the defects of the three classes to inequality, which "Materialises our upper class, vulgarises our middle class, brutalises our lower." (Arnold, 1880: 92)

The emphasis on equality in Arnold's writings cannot be separated from his advocacy of a powerful executive. Indeed the two tenets of his political thought before 1880 are equality and State-action. As it is impossible either to eliminate class barri-

ers or to provide a society of equals with good ideals without a strong executive and well designed State-action, Arnold advances his concept of the state as "the collective action of the nation" and its "representative acting power." As our "collective best self" which transcends class interests, the state will neither endanger liberty nor tend to be oppressive, representing as it were no hostile class. On the contrary, the state will provide middle and lower classes with better education and with schools that will "prove notable competitors with the existing public schools" (CPW, 2, 22). Clearly Arnold is concerned with advocating the intervention of the State in education rather than with formulating a consistent well-developed theory. It is because of this specific and limited concern that Arnold's concept of the State seems too thin to support his expectations. His wish to eliminate class barriers and to establish equal rights for all individuals are not wholly provided for in his theoretical discourses. His references to Stat-action in "Democracy," **Culture and Anarchy**, "Equality" and in "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism" demonstrate that Arnold is thinking of a few people whom he personally knows and whom he associates with no class interests. He believes that such people, when working as ministers, will derive their fitness not only from acting on behalf of a nation but also from their grave responsibilities. In case these men go astray, there is a Parliament to control them and public opinion to aid them (CPW, 2, 27). As intelligent men with a deep sense of commitment they deserve to be trusted. In other words, Arnold's sincerity on the one hand and his desire to transform the middle class on the other make him earnestly believe that he and some other honest souls may help to bring about a radical change in Victorian English. Ultimately he tends to neglect the real impact and workings of class interests and to think of the three classes in terms of black and white as far as their likings and dislikings are concerned.

Although it is difficult to speculate on Arnold's grounding in political economy, he clearly pays little attention to the fact that in a capitalist society the dominant upper class is usually concerned with choosing representatives who stand for its interests.¹¹ Thus, for example, though Dilke and Chamberlain voted in favour of the O'Connor Don resolution they were necessarily violating their party interests as Arnold assumes in "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism." There is no doubt that both demonstrated independent judgement in a religious question; but no one carried this independence so far as to transcend the basic interests of the Liberal party, a fact which explains their occupancy of key positions in the Liberal government of 1880-Chamberlain as President of the Board of Trade and Dilke as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

As a social critic and a man of culture, Arnold found it embarrassing perhaps to commit himself to party politics, especially when such commitment entails full adherence to their machinery and interests. While associating himself with the Liberals as a party man in "Irish Catholicism..." his criticism of them reveals his fear of being associated with their shortcomings. In 1874 he wrote to Lady de Rothschild that "Liberalism did not seem to me quite the beautiful and admirable thing it does to the Liberal party in general, and I am not sorry a new stage in its growth should commence, and that the party should be driven to examine itself, and to see how much real stuff it has in mind and how much claptrap." (Arnold's hopes to see the party

examine itself and dissociate its machinery and objectives from immediate class interests never materialized.

Just after the Liberal victory in the general election of 1880, Arnold wrote "The Future of Liberalism," a prelude to Arnold's final break with Liberalism. The men whom he admired in "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism" for their flexibility and independent judgement were to occupy key positions in the Liberal government. Instead of a hearty welcome, Arnold's greeting was a hostile essay in which he frankly dissociated himself from their party politics, describing himself as a "Liberal of the future," a phrase which in Patrick McCarthy's words "has a suspicious air." (McCarthy, 1464: 139). Read in connection with his early descriptions of himself as a "Liberal tempered by experience, reflection and renouncement" (**C & A, CPW, 5, 88**) or as "a humble follower of the true Liberal ideal" (**CPW, 8, 327**), such a phrase means basically that Arnold is disillusioned with "practical" Liberals. The whole tone of "The Future of Liberalism," however, suggests an unbridgeable gap between his ideal and theirs.

Before dissociating himself from the Liberals, Arnold was concerned with expounding the defects in both their machinery and objectives. He saw those defects as a result of the Philistine imposing influence, "with his likes and dislikes, his effusion and confusion, his hot fits and cold fits" (**CPW, 9, 148**). Instead of contending against such unwholesome influence. Liberal orators succumbed to it. Thus, they were never able to criticize the Philistine's worship of trade, production and industry "as a fetish," neither were they able to see that what Liberals or Philistines called industrial centres were only **Hell-holes**, and that their "heroes of industrial enterprise" were only capitalists concerned with increasing their fortunes (**CPW, 9, 146**). It is this free play of mind upon the stock notions of the Liberal party which enabled Arnold to see things as they really were.

In what he meant to be his last publication on politics.¹² Arnold mentioned with some bitterness that instead of working for pervasive public education, a state transcending class interests, elimination of class barriers and endowment of Catholic institutions, the Liberals were rather concerned with trifling objects such as the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill and the Burials Bill. As his essay of 1880 reveals, Arnold was even more dissatisfied with the Liberal foreign policy which, according to him, suffered so many failures that England "lost prestige" (**CPW, 9, 149**).

But if the Liberals suffered from so many weaknesses, how were they able to win public favour three times between 1868 and 1895? Anticipating such questions, Arnold explained that Liberalism appealed to the rising middle class, the strongest body of the nation, because it worked for liberty and expansion while the Conservatives stood for stability and order. He warned the Liberals, however, that although they were preferred to the Conservatives because of their appeal to man's love for liberty, they would soon lose public favour because of their neglect of man's instinct for beauty, Knowledge and pleasing life, for "the human spirit struggles towards the light; and the adoptions and rejections of its agents by the multitude are

never wholly blind and capricious, but have a meaning" (CPW, 9, 141). Reading Arnold's explanation of the veerings of public favour from one party to another against the back-ground of the last third of the century, one cannot escape the impression that he is basically right in his conclusion.¹³ In evaluating Arnold's criticism of the Liberals until 1880 one would perhaps agree with R. H. Super that Arnold's Liberalism "rested on the double conviction that in the modern world democracy was inevitable and that it was the only condition compatible with human dignity. (Super, 1970:36). Although he preferred the Liberals to the conservatives as advocates of liberty and progress, he was clearly disillusioned with their one-sided pursuit of middle class interests. He kept on hoping, however, that they might "turn resolutely round and look their middleclass friends full in the face, and tell them of their imperfections" (CPW, 9, 154). His advice at that time was neither practical nor convincing simply because Arnold never thought of treating the Liberals as a party representing the middle class and defending its interests in the first place. His Liberal friends thought of themselves as representatives of the rising middle class rather than apostles called upon to establish the Kingdom of God in England as Arnold wished. Many of them approved of Frederic Harrison's description of "the man of culture" as "one of the poorest mortals alive" in politics.¹⁴ A few years later, Arnold proved to be otherwise, using all his resources in politics not only to tell them of their imperfections as he saw them, but also to explain his reasons for departing from the camp of Liberalism.¹⁵

Arnold's actual break with the Liberals occurred in 1886 after Gladstone had issued his Irish policy. Two remarks are worth making at this point. On the one hand, Arnold's thought in the eighties is overshadowed by a deep and thorough interest in Irish politics. When reading his essays of 1886-1887 one gets the impression that Arnold was no longer capable of preserving a calm detachment from "the arena of politics," a quality which he ascribed to himself as a Liberal of the future. On the other hand, Arnold's rejection of liberalism as the ideology of liberty, democracy and change, occurred in a decade that witnessed a number of political, social and economic changes. It is only against the background of these changes that a student of the Victorian Age can perhaps understand the true reasons for the defection of so many Radical Liberals to the Conservative Camp, and for the emergence of Liberal Unionism as a tool of imperialistic expansion.

As it is beyond the scope of the present essay to deal with such changes or even to discuss Arnold's political essays of 1886-1887 at length, I shall limit my argument to Arnold's reaction to the "Gladstonian plan of Home Rule;"¹⁶ for his views of the eighties were shaped and colored by his rejection of this plan. Gladstone was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland because, he argued, England failed to rule the Irish properly and, ultimately, the only alternatives left for the British were either to grant Ireland its freedom or to suppress the increasing protest against England. As a "practical Liberal," Gladstone advocated Home Rule in face of a great deal of opposition. Arnold, for one, was outraged by such advocacy. Throughout his articles of 1886-1887 he never referred to Gladstone with respect. The man of culture who advised his Liberal friends to develop a free play of mind could not restrain himself from

using the most inflamed language against Gladstone and the Liberals. In "The Nadir of Liberalism," he wrote: "The have shown about the worst that a party of movement can do, when that party is bounded and backward and without insight, and is led by a manager of astounding sill and energy, but himself without insight likewise." (Arnold, May, 1886: 657). According to Arnold, Gladstone's plan would endanger the peace of England because Ireland as a separate state meant for Arnold "a thorn at Great Britain's side." (Arnold, January, 1887:158). On the other hand, Arnold was worried about the Protestant minority of Ulster which would never escape the danger of civil war as he predicted. (Arnold, May, 1886: 657) Thus, he appealed to "the quiet, reasonable Englishman" to defeat Gladstone's plan: "... we had yet in Ulster a bit of Great British, we had a friend there, you propose to merge Ulster in Celtic Ireland! you propose to efface and expunge your friend was there ever such madness heard of?" (Arnold, May, 1886: 654).

Prompted by a sense of urgency and by increasing fears that Gladstone's captivating eloquence and ingenuity would lead to the passing of the Home Rule Bill, Arnold exerted his ingenuity to defeat Gladstone's scheme. In language inflamed with anger he ridiculed the Liberals' argument that since the Irish wanted Home Rule, they should have it. With all his penchant for satire, he remonstrated: Let the Irish have what the majority of them like. It is the great blessedness for man to do as he likes; if men very much wish for a thing, we ought to give it them if possible. This is the cardinal principle of Liberalism; Mr. Fox proclaimed it. (Arnold, May, 1886: 653).

Whenever the subject of the Irish claim for independence was brought into discussion, Arnold ridiculed the claim as an expression of a defiant temper that should be quelled. Instead of referring to the Irish in general, he selected a few inflamed phrases from the speeches of some Irish leaders to justify his conclusion that those who advocated separatism were only terrorists who should be suppressed, and "suppressed firmly, not in a hesitating and fumbling manner. (Arnold, May, 1887: 318). Thus, he stood firmly in support of the Crimes Bill as the only alternative left to deal with Irish radicalism, since "the ordinary law cannot be enforced it needs strengthening. (Arnold, May, 1887: 316). Although he realized that such advocacy was violation of political freedom, Arnold nevertheless stood wholeheartedly for any measure to curb agitation. He ridiculed people who continued to believe in freedom of action and speech as "fanatics." (Arnold, January, 1887:159) Consequently he called for strong measures against O'Brien's **United Ireland**, and recommended administrative action rather than "recourse to proceedings at law. (Arnold, January, 1887: 159-160) Arnold was frankly against democracy in his last years, for democracy is "by its nature featherbrained" and "naturally thinks restraint a curse, and doing as one likes the height of felicity. (Arnold, May, 1887: 316).

Before discussing Arnold's own suggestions to defeat Gladstone's plan it should be remarked that the Irish problem drove him to think that England itself was in danger of anarchy; for England, according to Arnold's reasoning, was threatened by a dangerous "Parliamentary tactician and party manager" who would never refrain from encouraging anarchism to win the favour of the masses. Arnold even

thought that proletarian support for the Home Rule Bill and opposition to coercive measures reflected the distaste of the populace for a strong executive. Clearly the man whose calm was ruffled by the riots of the sixties was outraged, bewildered and shocked by the increasing power of the working class. As his references to the Trafalgar Square riots and "our weak dealing with them" indicates, Arnold wanted to remind his readers of the eighties that "our polyful giant" --- as he called the working class in **Culture and Anarchy**----- was to bring about the destruction of England, unless "fire and strength" were to be used to keep it under control. (Arnold, May, 1886: 647-661).

By the end of the decade, the electorate witnessed a 67 percent increase as a result of the enfranchisement of the agricultural labourer. As the new power could, among other things, ensure the passing of Gladstone's plan, Arnold, like many Victorians, was so overwhelmed by apprehension that he saw in organized labour a source of danger. The man who stood wholeheartedly for the enfranchisement of the agricultural labourer developed an attitude towards Trade unionism similar to those which Gladstone had already criticized. Anticipating such fears at the time of the second Reform Bill, Gladstone asked the Liberals not to look upon it "as some Trojan horse, approaching the walls of the sacred city, and filled with armed men, bent upon ruin, plunder and conflagration."¹⁷ Arnold, for one, looked at "our powerful giant" with dismay, telling his reader that the "circumstances are such that desponding and melancholy thoughts cannot be banished entirely. After all, we may sometimes be tempted to say mournfully to ourselves, nations do not go on for ever. (Arnold, May, 1886: 661) In the sixties he was worried mainly because of the Philistine's tendency to do as he liked, in "1880 he saw that the populace wished to protect its penchant for 'tumultuously' what it liked. And like the middle class before it, the populace now had the 'complicity of the Government'".¹⁸

Disturbed by the rising power of the working class Arnold was driven to an attitude which he would never have entertained under other circumstances. His later attitude was the reverse of what he had once advocated. The "neat," "trimly dressed" and "elegant creature" whom the **Daily Telegraph** criticized for expressing "surprise at our want of coolness" was himself "heated with rage and extreme toil" after the "battle" with the Gladstonians. (William, 1958: 125) Indeed the whole account of Arnold's criticism of the working class demonstrates his surrender to the stock notions of his class. As Raymond Williams convincingly argues, "The organizing, and at times demonstrating, working class was not, on any showing, seeking to destroy society as such. It was seeking by such methods as were available to it, to change the particular ordering of society which then prevailed. Often, indeed, it sought only remedy of some particular grievance. For Arnold to confuse the particular, temporal ordering of interests, which was indeed being threatened, with human society as such, is the confusion which else where he so clearly analysed: 'the confusion between 'machinery' and 'purpose.'"¹⁹ The confusion is nowhere more apparent than in his latter comments on the working classes. At the time when Gladstone expected the labourers' support for British Colonial plans and when Engels thought that the British working classes shared "the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies,"²⁰ Arnold insisted on seeing the growth of

the working class and the accidental Trafalgar riots as a threat to the peace of England.

The increasing influence of the working classes and the Gladstonian Home Rule plan were signs of radical change which Arnold apparently feared in his last years. His last essays on Irish affairs reveal an obsession with "reason" and "stability" as a bulwark against anarchy. For Arnold, "reasonableness" assumes new connotations of immediate relevance to the situation in England and Ireland. It means restraint and respect for stability and order which were threatened when "Cleon" began his campaigns the country to win the favour of the masses. He looked upon Gladstone's plan as dangerous since it meant for him a surrender to the Irish radicals and an unwholesome scheme to disrupt the Empire.

To be fair to Arnold, however, he was not against the Irish, but against the idea of a separate state; hence he supported the suggestion to form two provincial assemblies one each for the Catholic South and the Protestant North. (Arnold, May, 1886:654) The serious inconsistency in Arnold's argument to redress the grievances of Ireland and to remove the Irish exasperation against England lies in his rejection of the concept of Ireland as a nation. From a racial viewpoint he tends to see the Irish as incompetent, backward and ultimately inept in practical affairs.²¹ It is only through the retention of Ireland for Great Britain that Ireland can be enriched with the culture of a greater nation. Clearly Arnold here contradicts his early conclusions about the right of each minority to speak for itself. In commenting on Arnold's position, one may find no better words to express his thoughts than Patrick McCarthy's:

To an age when free men give glad assent to self-determination, Arnold speaks with the voice of a discredited colonialism. He had written of the belief that "one class is capable of properly speaking for another" as "the last left of our illusions," but there was another illusion that he didn't see. (McCarthy, 1964: 163).

But no matter how we tend to look upon Arnold's response to the Irish question, he ardently believed that either England should redress the grievance of Ireland so as to defeat the advocates of Home Rule or "the democracy will burst irresistibly in, bearing Mr. Gladstone in triumph back to power, and Home Rule along with him. (Arnold, May, 1887: 637) To defeat Gladstone would not be an easy task unless the "reasonable Liberals" would join the Conservatives, the advocates of stability and reason, for on "the reasonableness of the Conservative party our best hope at present depends. In that Nadir of Liberalism which we seem to have reached, there are not wanting some signs and promise of better things to come." (Arnold, May 1886: 661)

The change in Arnold's political thought makes itself manifest in his language and method of argument as well. Outraged by Gladstone's Home Rule plan and by his warm appeal to the middle and working classes, Arnold could no longer refrain from attacking his opponents using "forcible and picturesque expressions" to which he had previously objected.²² His keywords in the eighties were not "disinter-

estedness" and "sweetness and light" but "suppression" and "reason." Indeed, reasonableness is a source of happiness and beauty. "To be a quiet, reasonable person," says Arnold, "always answers, always makes for happiness. (Arnold, September, :324) addressing a "saving remnant" in his last essays, he asked for the support of "reasonable people" and of "the country as a whole." What bothered him in the tendency towards democracy and of the middle class" but the tendency towards democracy and leniency. But despite the occasional loss of his temper, Arnold was always able to "return upon himself" and to see that he was too old to be sorry for departing from the camp of Liberalism:

Sir George Trevelyan adheres to his passionate love for the Liberal party, his passionate grief at its not being in power. I am too old for these romantic achievements. Sir George Trevelyan himself confessed that 'it is impossible for young politicians to have an idea of the half-heartedness of the Liberal politics of the past.' I confess I am not sanguine about those of the near future. Why then should be so very eager to take up again with the tubemacle of Moloch,' Mr. Gladstone's old umbrella, or 'the star or our god Remphan,' the genial countenance of Sir William Harcourt, merely in order to pass forty years in the Conservative Government will quell anarchy in Ireland, give us a sound plan of local government there, we may be well satisfied to allow them the lease of power requisite for this and I believe the country will let them have it. (Arnold, May, 1887:643)

But to conclude this essay with the foregoing quotation from Arnold's "Up to Easter" would not be fair to the apostle of culture; for in spite of all his professed attachment to the Conservatives under the leadership of Lord Salisbury, he nevertheless explained that he would practise the same free play of mind regarding the Conservatives' machinery and purpose. (Arnold, May, 1886:658) Preoccupied with an overwhelming fear of anarchy and political disruption and looking with distrust upon radical attitudes, Arnold developed a growing taste for stability, distrusting therefore his liberal friends for any suggestions regarding Home Rule for Ireland. Thus, his "saving remnant" of the sixties might well be some Liberal saints whose reasonableness would assist in their guidance of the middle classes. In the absence of such saints, however, Arnold moved to the conservatives camp, proposing there as well a message of reasonableness and restraint. Arnold, however, did not live long enough to fulfil his promise; but had he lived Longer, he would surely have shown the same free play of mind which he demonstrated as early as 1864 when he delivered his lecture on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time."

Notes

1 — In "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism," for example, Arnold says: "I do not profess to be a politician, but simply one of a disinterested class of observers." See R. H. Super, ed. **The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold**, Vol. 8, 327. Hereafter cited as **CPW** and put with volume and page numbers at the end of each quotation.

2 — See, for example, "The Nadir of Liberalism," in **The Nineteenth Century**, 19 (May 1886), 645-

662; "The Zenith of Conservatism," *The Nineteenth Century*, 21 (Jan. 1887), 148-164; "Up to Easter," *The Nineteenth Century*, 21, (May 1887), 629-643, and "From Easter to August," *The Nineteenth Century*, 22, (Sept. 1887), 310-324;

- 3 — Arnold's article appeared in *Fortnightly Review*, XXX (n.s. XXiv, July 1878), 26-45.
- 4 — In "A New Reform Bill," Robert Lowe wrote: "The ideal of the Liberal party consists in a view of things undisturbed by the promptings of interest and prejudice, in a complete independence of all class interests, and in relying for its success on the better feelings and higher intelligence of mankind." Quoted by Arnold in "Irish Catholicism...", see *Complete Press Works*, 8, 325.
- 5 — The reference is to the Liberals' defeat in the general election of 1874 and their being out of power until 1880.
- 6 — O'conor Don Resolution refers to Charles Owen O'Connor's presentation which reads as follows: "...in the opinion of this House (of Commons), the present condition of University Education in Ireland is most unsatisfactory, and demands the immediate attention of Parliament with the view of extending more generally and equally the benefits of such education." Thus, the O'Connor Don's resolution affirms the claims of Ireland to a Catholic university.
- 7 — It is perhaps more accurate to say that Arnold supported the Irish demand for a Catholic university in accordance with two views which he strongly held up to 1886. As a nation Ireland should have the right to establish its own institutions, thus the Irish Catholic majority was entitled for Catholic schools. On the other hand, he asked for the endowment of Catholic institutions as part of his advocacy for State education in England and Ireland.
- 8 — In "up to Easter," for example, Arnold points out the absurdity of middle class prejudice which governed the Liberal policy towards Ireland: "But how reasonable and permissible a thing, how entirely a thing within the fair scope of a community's wishes, to have in a part of Ireland, where the vast bulk of the community is Catholic, a Catholic training school with public aid; and how irritating to find that in Great Britain there are ednominational training schools with public aid, because the community wishes it; them!" *The Nineteenth Century*, P. 21, see also Super's note, *CPW*, 8, 465.
- 9 — In *Friendship's Garland* Arnold makes references to people who criticized him for his description of the middle class as lacking in education and culture. See *CPW*, V, 3-4. Indeed Arnold's emphasis on culture "seems to be largely responsible for the common English hostility to the word;" for, as Raymond Williams remarks, there was "no hostile derisive reference" to the word before 1860. See *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 126.
- 10 — **Although Americanization** is not equal to anarchy in Arnold's terminology, it still suggests too much emphasis on individualism and expansion. It is a system based on the separation of democracy from a strong and well organized executive. Such a system distrusts State-action because it represents people lacking in ideals and culture. In a society with no old traditional aristocracy to set up ideals of dignity and refined manners, the State-action is the only source for providing such ideals through public education. See *CPW*, vol.2, 16, 18, 25, and *CPW*, vol. 5, 11. See also *Mixed Essays*, p. 68. Arnold, however, cannot escape contradictions in this respect. In *Friendship's Garland*, For example, he admires Americans' care for ideas and their "vivacity and play of mind," qualities that make them superior to the Philistine who worships trade "as a kind of fetish." Americans in his opinion never neglect culture: "... all our best books, which are read only by the small educated class, are in America the books of the great reading public. So over there they will advance spiritually as well as materially" (*CPW*, 5, 30). But despite all his admiration he thinks that democracy was vulgarised in America.
- 11 — For contemporary commentaries on Arnold's politics, see note 23, 24.

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- 12 — Arnold promised John Morley to write for the **Fortnightly** on the future of Liberalism, adding that this might be his last publication on political and social matters. See Super's note **CPW**, 9, 370.
- 13 — Up to 1880, the time of writing "The Future of Liberalism," the Liberals governed from 1868 to 1874, followed by the Conservatives from 1874 to 1880. He anticipated later alternations when the Liberals ruled from 1880 to 1885, followed by the Conservatives from 1885 to 1892, who were then defeated by the Liberals, who ruled from 1892 to 1895. The Conservatives came back to rule from 1895 to 1905.
- 14 — Arnold cited Harrison's words in **Culture and Anarchy**. See **CPW**, 5, 87. In its number of 20 July, 1867, **The Saturday Review** described Arnold as an apostle of culture who "may, roughly speaking, be said to represent the ... spirit of cultivated inaction. 'Instead of working to eradicate social evils, such a spirit as Arnold's 'Produces philosophers and critics full of antipathies against the rougher and coarser movements they see on all sides of them.' See volume XXXIV, 78-79. For references to different reactions to Arnold's view of culture, see Super's notes, **Culture and Anarchy**, **CPW**, V, 417, 422-425.
- 15 — Arnold himself was aware of his difficult position among politicians and men of the world who "are apt to resent the incursion of a man of letters into field of politics," but many of his suggestions concerning education were gladly considered, and no few of them were put into practice. The Liberal Minister A. S. Mundella advocated State education, so did Joseph Chamberlain and others. See W. H. G. Armytage, "Matthew Arnold and a Liberal Minister, 1880-1885," **Review of English Studies**, XXIII (1947), 356-357, and 357, n. 2.
- 16 — According to the "Gladstonian plan," as described by Arnold in "From Easter to August," Irish members were to be withdrawn from Westminster and their establishment as a representative national power in Dublin with an independent executive of their own. The Liberal Unionists, whom Arnold admired, opposed the plan, suggesting instead the retention of the Irish members at Westminster and the establishment of two provincial assemblies in North and South Ireland. (P. 310).
- 17 — Quoted by Herbert Tingsten, **Victoria and the Victorians** (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), P. 188.
- 18 — Patrick McCarthy, **Matthew Arnold and the Three Classes**, P. 153. It is worth noting that no matter how prejudiced Arnold seems against the working classes, his remarks in the eighties are consistent with his attitude in "Democracy" and **Culture and Anarchy**. In both works Arnold argues that the working class in its irrepressible growth will seek models to emulate from among the middle class; as the latter can offer nothing of importance in its present condition, the working class will tend to rely, on "its fun and gin." Consequently, Arnold associated the sudden growth of organized labour with the "Trojan horse" in the eighties.
- 19 — Cited by Super from its number of July 2, 1867, P. 6. See the notes to **Culture and Anarchy**, **CPW**, 5, 423.
- 20 — Cited by Helen M. Lynd, **England in the Eighteen-Eighties: Toward a Social Basis for Freedom** (New York, Oxford, 1945), P. 237.
- 21 — See, for example, "Up to Easter," p. 321.
- 22 — See, for example, his objection to William Cobbett's impassioned temper and to his Liberal friends' "forcible" expressions in "The Future of Liberalism," vol. **CPW**, 9, 137, 139.
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