

FIVE BOOKS OF THE MONTH

I

HERBERT A. L. FISHER'S "THE REPUBLICAN TRADITION IN EUROPE"*

In this volume Mr. Fisher, of New College, Oxford, author of *The Mediæval Empire* and *A Political History of England, 1485-1547*, has published his Lowell Lectures of 1910. It is a survey of European history from the fall of the Roman Empire down to the establishment of the present republican government in Portugal, but while it necessarily contains the familiar substance of historical summaries, even of rather elementary manuals, it presents a new and useful arrangement. It gathers for the first time in a single volume whatever pertains to the development of the republican idea in modern times. But its range is not so wide as one might expect, for it does not seek out the remote origins of democratic thought or its sporadic and ineffectual expressions in the Middle Ages. In the course of about sixty pages he says all that he cares to say about mediæval republicanism and the Protestant revolution and thenceforth traces the movement from the rise of the French Republic to the present day. So his survey is virtually limited to the last century and a half.

One thing is brought out very clearly in such a survey and that is how little connection there has been between democratic progress and definite republican programmes. The philosophers of the eighteenth century with few exceptions favoured a monarchical form of government. Turgot held that bad laws can be best attacked under a monarchy, and that progress can be more rapid because the monarch can often act according to the views of the enlightened few instead of waiting for the slow advance of the common mind. Montesquieu held that the conditions precedent of a republic were a small territory, a large supply of public virtue, and an absence of large fortunes. Rousseau believed also that only small and poor states could prosper as republics, and Voltaire, who was at odds with

the Genevan philosopher on so many other points, agreed with him in this. So late as 1789 the aims of the most advanced radicals were not republican. They sought merely a reorganised monarchy, with a better administration and judicial system, the abolition of privilege, of feudal dues, and of the militia, and other practical reforms. The Constituent Assembly was staunchly monarchist. A republic was not desired by the people or recommended by the philosophers; yet within the bare space of three years from that time a republic was established. A small republican group formed itself around the Jacobin advocate, M. Robert, whose newspaper, the *Mercur National*, declared for a republic on October 1, 1790, but the great parties held to their programme of constitutional monarchy and even after the King's attempted flight only a small body of extremists were professed republicans. But along with the contempt which the King's course inspired there arose a belief that since no calamity followed the successive curtailment of his powers the State could get along without him altogether. On September 2, 1792, the Duke of Brunswick captured Verdun. Two days later the Assembly declared war to the death against kings and kingship, and by the time the new Convention had assembled, the radical element in the country was won over to this view of kings as the natural enemies of democracy. On September 21, 1792, the second day of its session, it unanimously decreed the abolition of the monarchy.

The French Republic was a new phenomenon in the history of the world. The republics hitherto known in Europe had either been civic or federal, or essentially aristocratic, or a combination of all three. Milton's ideal republic was an aristocracy, Cromwell's very practical Commonwealth a mixture of aristocracy and dictatorship. The Swiss cantons, the Dutch provinces, the ancient Republic of Venice, were all governed upon aristocratic principles. But the French Republic was very different from these. It was a great unitary democratic State, founded in a sudden involution and by a wonderful manifestation of national energy.

*The Republican Tradition in Europe. By Herbert A. L. Fisher. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1911.

Then follows an outline of the alternating periods of European political history, the "idealism of 1789," the "Terror of 1793," the "compromise of 1799," revolution, excess, reaction, repeating themselves in 1830, 1848 and 1871. The author has imparted no new spirit to the tale, which proceeds in the manner of the usual historical manual, rehearsing the swing of the pendulum, and reducing all events to terms of progress in the present sense of the word. As philosophers have often told us, our old beliefs are not refuted; they are merely outlived. Writers on the recent history of Europe credit us with no curiosity in regard to lost causes and merely report the progress of "liberal" ideas. An English-speaking reader is safe in guessing beforehand that any new treatise on Europe in the nineteenth century will turn out to be not a history but a political tract.

To be sure, Mr. Fisher sums up now and then the arguments of the old order. De Maistre, he says, built up "a compact edifice of shining paradox in honour of Absolutism in Church and State."

De Maistre, the philosopher of the Catholic reaction, argued that States were never the product of an articulate process of deliberation, but that, springing from some hidden root, they grew in virtue of a mysterious organising principle of which no man could render an account. A country was made, not out of calculation but out of patriotism, and lived, not by the lamp of reasoned self-interest, but by the inner glow of a national tradition. Men did not obey written constitutions or philosophies; they obeyed mysteries. Active obedience could only be due to the deep inarticulate call of instinct. The Jacobins put out declarations of the Rights of Man, and established a system of popular government which was, as it always must be, nothing but organised ostracism. In so doing they were, according to De Maistre, ignoring the character of the world in which they lived. They believed that justice could be realised on earth whereas God is unjust in time though just in eternity; they thought that the world was rational, whereas it is a system of profound, solid, and vigorous absurdities; they believed in the existence of Humanity, whereas we can know nothing but individual men.

But he does not often gratify our curiosity as to what the other side had to say for itself, and even here he punctually despatches the unprogressive De Maistre with the flat assertion that "the Jacobins were the blind instruments of God." It is a simple faith, that of the liberal historian, and its results are somewhat monotonous. God desired the modern constitutional state. Political history merely records how He got it. It has little concern with actual men and offers no proof that they were essentially better off at one time than another. It is too busy congratulating God on His progress in constitutional government.

The author devotes his final chapter to proving that since 1870 the cause of republicanism has made no substantial progress in Europe, France being to-day the only great European republic. In Great Britain the kingship is stronger than ever. He quotes the comment of the *London Times* on the death of George IV in 1830.

If George IV ever had a friend, a devoted friend—in any rank of life—we protest that the name of her or him has not yet reached us,

and contrasts it with the national grief on the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and on the death of King Edward in 1910. Hostility to the kingship is on the decline in England. The chief cause, he thinks, is the feeling that the Crown holds the Empire together. That, he says, would be the answer of nine Englishmen out of ten if asked what they considered the chief value of the monarchy. The success of the United States proves only that a republican government is suited to a country that is geographically continuous. As Mr. Balfour said last year:

You could never direct the Empire on that principle simply because, if you insisted on having an elected President in this country, he would be elected by an electorate of this country and not by the electorate of the Crown or of the Crown colonies.

As an instance of the decline of republicanism in Europe in recent years, he cites Norway's choice of the kingship on her separation from Sweden. No country would seem to be better suited to a

republican form of government than Norway. It conformed to Montesquieu's requirements as to size, as to the character of the people, and as to the absence of large fortunes. After breaking away from Sweden she had a free choice among all the constitutional systems. The republican tradition flourished in Norway and there was a republican party headed by the famous novelist, Björnsterne Björnson. The Norwegians as a whole, however, were not opposed to monarchy in itself, but only to unconstitutional government. For a generation the national leaders had been arguing for a constitutional monarchy. They could not consistently now turn radicals. A King with his dynastic alliances would afford a security of peace. Moreover, a republic, it was understood, would be less acceptable to Germany and England. A *plébiscite* was taken and the monarchical cause swept the country, even the republican Björnson advising the acceptance of a king.

The republican movement of Europe reached its zenith in 1848. The Latin world has experienced many subsequent conversions, and the weak monarchy of Portugal has recently been overthrown. Kingship is less secure in Spain and Italy than among the Teutonic, Scandinavian, or Slavonic peoples, and it is a nice question whether the cause of monarchy is more injured by its alliance with Ultramontanism or by its estrangement from the whole clerical connection in Italy. Yet the Republican party in Italy is overshadowed by the Socialists; the Republican party in Spain discredited by its association with anarchical or federalist aims. The accepted formula of political progress seems, if we are to be guided by the recent examples of Russia and Turkey, to be constitutional monarchy rather than republicanism.

He concludes in the words of Castelar:

All that we have defended, the Conservatives have realised. Who sustained the idea of the autonomy of Hungary? A Republican, Kossuth. Who realised it? A Conservative, Deák. Who advanced the idea of the abolition of serfdom in Russia? Republicans. Who realised it? An Emperor, Alexander. Who preached the unity of Italy? A Republican, Mazzini. Who realised it? A Conservative, Cavour. Who originated the idea of the unity

of Germany? The Republicans of Frankfurt. Who realised it? An Imperialist, a Cæsarist, Bismarck. Who has awakened the Republican idea, three times stifled in France? A celebrated poet, Victor Hugo; a great orator, Jules Faure; another orator, no less illustrious, Gambetta. Who has consolidated it? Another Conservative, Thiers.

C. M. French.

II

"THE LETTERS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON"*

The new edition, in four volumes, of the letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, selected and edited by his friend, Sir Sidney Colvin, definitively supplants the earlier editions and requires us to rearrange the Stevenson collections on our shelves. For one thing, the so-called *Vailima Letters*, which formerly were published in a volume by themselves, are now set forth in their proper chronological relation with the other letters emanating from the same period of Stevenson's experience. It is curious to note how this new arrangement adds to the interest, by discounting the monotony, of those monthly budgets of news of his daily doings at Vailima, despatched with regular and somewhat mechanical fidelity to their ultimate editor, as representing the inner circle of his friends in London. Formerly this particular series seemed too taken up with chronicles of local and transitory matters—so full of living as to be a little empty of life—a record more of doing than of being. Of this his friendly correspondent complained while the series was in progress; and the complaint was shared, to some extent, by the wider circle of the public after Tusitala's death. The trouble was that in these letters Stevenson was assiduously writing news; and, even as an amateur, he lacked the inclination of the journalist. His best letters are records not of actions but of moods; they deal not with island politics, and outlandish ceremonials, and wars and the rumours of wars, but with the great mystery of the heart of man as embodied in the ever-fluctuating heart of R. L. S.

*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson. Edited by Sidney Colvin. A New Edition: Rearranged in Four Volumes: With 150 New Letters. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.