THE GREEK THEORY OF THE STATE AND THE NONCONFORMIST CONSCIENCE: A SOCIALISTIC DEFENCE OF SOME ANCIENT INSTITUTIONS

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PREFACE

The Liberal Party has just met with a signal defeat at the polls. Yet no sane man can suppose that this defeat has set at rest for ever the controversy about the House of Lords, about Disestablishment, or on any other of the subjects which the Liberal leaders presented to the judgment of the electors. It cannot be doubted that the time will come when Parliament will again deal with all these questions. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the Liberal Party should think carefully over its position with regard to them. Not, indeed, that any defeat whatever should make the party swerve, even in the smallest measure, from its principles. It would be better that Liberals should remain out of office for fifty years, than that they should, for example, abandon the policy of Irish Home Rule. And, above all, the Liberal Party must never shrink back from the open avowal, which it has made all through the days of Mr. Gladstone's leadership, of the doctrine that in politics considerations of Right and Wrong are to be regarded as supreme, and higher than all considerations, not only of commercial prosperity, but even of national safety. There are those who say that the moral and religious character, which—as the *Daily Chronicle* has well remarked—belongs to the later propaganda of Liberalism, has been the chief cause of the

party's losses. There seems no reason for believing that the majority of Liberals will adopt this view. On the contrary, it may reasonably be hoped that they will always recognise that the chief strength of Liberalism lies in its power to appeal to the religious convictions of liberal-minded Christians. There are, however, many minor matters upon which Liberals may without inconsistency change their opinions. It seems safe to prophesy that the party when it returns to power will not be less Socialistic than it is now; if, indeed, it has not left behind for good the whole of that system of Individualist doctrine which—though, no doubt, it helped to carry many important pieces of Liberal legislation—is, after all, but a theoretical excrescence of Liberalism, and not an essential part of it. It is, therefore, worth while to consider what application Socialistic principles may have to specifically social—as distinct from economic—problems. How, for example, do these principles bear on the questions of a Peerage and an Established Church?

The chief value of any such argument as that which is here attempted on the subject of social equality must be due to its shewing that the reasons commonly urged against the possibility of a general equality of all classes in society prove too much—prove, namely, the impossibility, for any class, of that kind of equality which, in spite of very great differences in wealth, birth, and intelligence, does actually exist in the upper class at the present time.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

WE have become so much accustomed to draw sharp distinctions between the Hebraic and the Hellenic elements in modern thought, that it may at first sight seem strange to associate such a manifestly Hebrew force as the Nonconformist Conscience with the Greek theory of the State or of anything else. It is, however, the purpose of these pages, in the first place to maintain that the famous pronouncement of the English Dissenters on the subject of Mr. Parnell's leadership contained in embryo a theory of the State's function which cannot in its main outlines be distinguished from those which were held by Aristotle and Plato; and, secondly, to indicate some of the ways in which this Hellenic theory