

THE RELUCTANT CONSERVATIVE

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I often think it's comical . . .
How Nature always does contrive . . .
That every boy and every gal,
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a little Liberal,
Or else a little Conservative! . . .

"Private Willis' Song," *Iolanthe*, Act II

PPRIVATE WILLIS, the philosophical sentry, sang this chorus about British political parties, and therefore he sang the musical equivalents of a capital *L* and a capital *C*, but his generalization would have been equally sound in lower case. In essence, conservatism is caution; liberalism, adventure. Whatever the geneticists or the psychologists may say, it does appear to the ordinary observer that some people are naturally cautious, while others are born adventurers. Even though most of us combine these qualities in different proportions, one or the other invariably predominates, and we all perforce bear witness to the acuteness of Private Willis' observation.

In a second chorus the doughty private hailed political predestination as one of Nature's wisest contrivances. He called it a shield against the perils of independ-

ent thought on the part of dullards like some of the members of Parliament who passed his sentry box. He was thinking, obviously, of the common weal rather than the happiness of individual predestinees. To be born a little liberal presages at least an interesting life, but how unfortunate is the boy or girl who is born a little conservative! Nothing like that should happen to anybody. Conservatism ought to be an acquired taste and ought not to be acquired too early in life. A man should acquire it gradually, after an apprenticeship in liberalism, perhaps after an excursion into radicalism. A man should also become a conservative reluctantly, for, if he does not, he is almost certain to lack the qualities that make conservatism useful and conservatives bearable. The same things are true—if anything, truer—in the case of a woman. Your eager conservative, male or female, stands greatly in the need of prayer.

A wide acquaintance among conservatives may well be all that is needed to generate the reluctance I bespeak. By no means all conservatives are bores, nor is it literally true that all bores are conservatives; but conservatism and stuffiness have an undeniable affinity, and without doubt there are a good many conservatives whose company any sensible person will avoid. Such are the Podsnaps, the George Apleys, the Colonel Blimps, and the Colonel McCosmics of novel and cartoon. Let us look briefly at some of their kinsmen among our own contemporaries before we seek the deeper reasons why conservatives seldom have good public relations.

Here is Battle, a successful manufacturer who started his business career without a penny. Battle has none of the minor vices and only the economic virtues. He gets

to his office by seven-thirty every morning, stays until six or later in the evening, and often eats his lunch at his desk. He has not had a vacation in forty years. People nowadays, in Battle's opinion, are getting soft, what with their five-day weeks, their holidays, and their sick leaves. When he was a boy, workmen were glad to toil ten hours a day, six days a week, and they considered themselves lucky to earn fifty cents an hour. In fact, says Battle, what we need is a good depression to bring everybody down to earth again.

Battle's blood brother, Scratch, is also extremely well heeled and unlikely short of revolution or invasion to be troubled for the price of a meal, but he deplors the obsession of the younger generation with security. Scratch believes that security undermines initiative in the cases of all but a few incorruptibles like himself. He boasts that his company has no pension plan and scoffs at applicants for employment who inquire about such a plan. If they want security, he snorts, let them work hard and save their money, as he has done, and, if by some mischance, they do not save enough, let their children take care of them in their old age. That, Scratch feels, is (or was) the American Way.

Battle and Scratch have few friends, but among those few none is more faithful than Scragg, a counter-rabble rouser, so to speak, of considerable repute in ultra-conservative circles. Scragg goes from luncheon meeting to dinner meeting lauding free enterprise and glorifying competition. He becomes almost apoplectic as he dwells on the power of organized labor to lay tribute on consumers, but he sees nothing wrong with those intimate gatherings at which businessmen agree not to be beastly

about prices. Such meetings, he recognizes, have lately become a little dangerous, but to Scragg danger has always been a stimulus rather than a deterrent—and, anyway, he thinks “the heat will soon be off,” as he puts it. Scragg believes in protective tariffs, too, and is able to distinguish them clearly from supports for farm prices and other economic windbreaks that he calls “socialistic.”

You recognize these people, do you not? Every one of you knows some of their kind. If all conservatives were like them, there would be few additions to the flock, except by birth, as Private Willis suggested. Yet the distaste they arouse is only a superficial aspect of that deep-seated reluctance which, I think, never ceases to beset conservatives of the right sort. These conservatives, I am convinced, regret that they feel compelled to believe as they do, not only because they find little to admire in most of their fellow believers, but also because of the very nature of their beliefs.

What is it, then, that conservatives believe? No short and at the same time complete answer to this question can be given. Conservatism as a social and political philosophy has its roots in the caution that characterizes the born conservative, but it is much more than mere inertia or stubbornness or miserliness. Its basis is a discriminating respect for the wisdom of one's ancestors. The substance of this concept I owe to Russell Kirk, who, in turn, gives credit to Stafford, Hooker, and Edmund Burke. I have not checked all of these sources, but Kirk, at least, omits the word “discriminating,” although I am sure he would consider it, as I do, an essential modifier of respect for anything human.

Few people are born respecters of the wisdom of their ancestors. Such a point of view is abnormal during childhood and youth, but experience tends to develop it. In time a man comes to realize that prevailing customs would probably not have come into use had they not once served a purpose and would probably not have endured had they altogether ceased to serve that or some other purpose. If he is wise, he recognizes that these are only probabilities, that institutions can outlive their usefulness, and that some things are still done only because they were done in the past. Even so, before he joins those who would abandon a custom or an institution, he inquires whether it does enough harm to justify the disturbance that change will involve and whether any available substitute will in fact be any better. These, indeed, are truisms, and no adult would admit that they do not guide his thinking; yet the extent to which they actually guide it will determine whether he is a conservative, a liberal, a radical, or simply a fool.

Conservatism that is intellectually respectable boils down to the conviction that existing institutions, customs, rights, privileges, and the like are a closely inter-related whole, reflecting the experience of many generations, and that, by and large, they are good rather than bad. The conservative looks upon this structure much as he would look upon a fine house that had been in his family since Colonial times or, if he were a European, perhaps a castle dating back to the Middle Ages. Such a dwelling place can be replaced or remodeled only at considerable expense, but it can be kept habitable and even comfortable for a long time by judicious repairs that will not unduly strain the current owner's budget. Some

things, however good in other places, cannot be fitted into an edifice of this sort. Mount Vernon would hardly be improved by a modern wing, nor would tall white pillars suit the façade of Hatfield House. Some inconveniences, too, are inseparable from a building that has had a chance to age. A log fire in an open fireplace, though cheery, will create drafts, and air-conditioning cannot always readily be installed. Still, one may prefer one's old house, with all its imperfections, to something wholly new, or one may be unable to afford anything else and may therefore be obliged to make do with what one has.

The thoughtful conservative, though he admires the sometimes awesome achievements of human reason as much as any liberal, is unwilling to submit himself entirely to the guidance of his own reason or the collective reasoning of his fellows. He has remarked the withering effect of time on the fruits of reason—the disturbing frequency with which a scheme that appears reasonable one day seems less so the next and quite unreasonable a week or a month or a year later. He has also observed the churlish behavior and the sterile lives of many people who purport to be governed solely by reason and to make no concessions to sentiment or tradition even in small matters. The thought of a whole society thus directed makes him shudder. Reason, he is sure, needs to be held in check, at least temporarily, by tradition, instinct, perhaps occasionally by wholesome prejudice, though he knows it must not yield its essential functions to these mentors. Paradoxical as it may seem, he believes that the very faculty of discriminating should be used with discrimination.

For similar reasons the conservative doubts the capa-

city of any man or group of men to devise wholly new social arrangements that can be introduced successfully on a prearranged date. He looks skeptically at any system that springs "full panoplied from the brow of Jove"—in fact, at any sort of social planning. He may plan his own life to a degree, but he wishes no one else to do so, and he assumes that others feel as he does about such matters. He recognizes that changes are bound to come, but he wants them to come one at a time, and he holds that at any particular time the familiar should preponderate over the novel.

When a conservative does not know what to do, which is often, he is apt to do nothing, and in many cases nothing is the best thing to do. W. S. Gilbert, in the piece that gave me my theme, reminded his audiences that

When Wellington thrashed Bonaparte,
As every child can tell,
The House of Peers throughout the war,
Did nothing in particular,
 And did it very well;
Yet Britain set the world a-blaze
In good King George's glorious days!

He also predicted that those glorious days would continue as long as

. . . the House of Peers withholds
Its legislative hand,
And noble statesmen do not itch
To interfere with matters which
 They do not understand. . . .

These are sentiments that conservatives in every age have shared. Undoubtedly, the conservatives of King George's time admired the self-effacing peers who left the conduct of war to others. Still earlier, many an Elizabethan conservative must have nodded his head in approval when he heard how adroitly Speaker Popham had turned aside royal displeasure over prolonged inactivity on the part of the Commons. This story, originally told by Sir Francis Bacon, was revived in Mrs. Bowen's excellent book, *The Lion and the Throne*. The substance of it is that Queen Elizabeth—herself the most conservative of innovators—asked the Speaker what had passed in the lower house, and Popham replied, "If it please your Majesty, seven weeks."

I hope I have not made responsible conservative views seem so fusty that some of you will reject them out of hand, instead of accepting them reluctantly, as I advise. I am sure, however, that at least a few of you will find such views congenial and will ask why I think you should scruple to hold them. The reason is, basically, that it is impossible to conserve anything good without also conserving something bad and that for such a course necessity is the only justification. Freedom cannot be granted without risk of its abuse. Order cannot be maintained without resort to sanctions that gentle people find distasteful. The safeguards of a federal system can be had only by sacrificing efficiency. Free enterprise cannot yield the benefits of which it is capable without creating substantial inequalities and at least occasional distress. In these and countless other instances one has to decide what, on the whole, is good and accept it, with all its drawbacks, until something better can be found.

Specific examples of hard choices come readily to mind. Lincoln was at one time willing to tolerate the evil of slavery in the states where it existed in order to preserve a union whose destruction he considered a greater evil. The justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, when they concluded that the Constitution forbids racial segregation in public schools, did not order that the practice instantly cease, but recognized that they could exact nothing more than deliberate speed toward the prescribed end. We and our allies do not interfere with Soviet oppression of the satellite states of eastern Europe because we can end that oppression, if at all, only by resort to war. Even in the case of Cuba, where we could probably oust Castro by military means without undue risks if we chose to do so, we have chosen, no doubt wisely, to do little more than express our disapproval and hopefully wait and see.*

As long, then, as the world remains as it is, the conservative point of view will necessarily include a substantial element of pessimism—justifiable pessimism, if you will, but pessimism nonetheless. Conservatives must recognize and assert that the conditions of life cannot be improved in a hurry and that some of them probably can never be changed. This conclusion, when squarely faced, is a profoundly discouraging one. How, then, can any right thinking person accept it joyfully? Ought not such a person to be reluctant in the extreme to embrace so negative a creed?

In point of fact, all too many conservatives, far from speaking evil reluctantly, take the utmost delight in proclaiming unpleasant truths. They deride every ex-

* This paper was read on March 6, 1961.

pression of faith in the capacity of man to achieve better things. They declare with zest over and over again that human nature cannot be changed and therefore that folly, poverty, and war will always be with us. It is impossible to deny that there is much in what they say, but, even if they are wholly right, why do they have to be so happy about it? Life's discipline is harsh enough for everyone without seeking out the hair shirt or the bed of nails and particularly without recommending them with gusto to other people.

Conservatives, too, never cease to glorify the profit motive. Here they perform a needed service, but they mistakenly proclaim their warnings as good news. If it be true, as by and large it is, that human beings will not exert themselves unless forced or induced to do so, and that for this purpose rewards are more effective than punishments, is that anything to be proud of? Would it not be creditable to humanity if pleasure rather than necessity were the mother of invention? Do we not admire people who labor energetically toward good ends without hope of personal profit, provided they stop well short of fanaticism? What successful money-maker commands the universal esteem that has been accorded such men as Father Damien and Albert Schweitzer or such women as Florence Nightingale and Jane Addams?

Conservatives are equally eloquent about the sacredness of property. Few catch phrases are shallower than those that contrast human rights and property rights, for nothing can be property unless it is the property of a human being; but the conservative who talks about property without regard to those who own it and the uses they make of it invites demagoguery of this sort. It

has been said that Edmund Burke wanted to conserve property because he considered it an almost indispensable support of personal liberty, a genuinely spiritual thing. That the possession of property is very nearly an indispensable support of personal liberty seems to me quite true; that property is itself a genuinely spiritual thing, somewhat of an exaggeration. Did not One whose spiritual insight has never been surpassed characterize the love of money as the root of all evil?

The word "spiritual," incidentally, appears more and more frequently in conservative writings. Conservatism, we are told, emphasizes spiritual values such as freedom of the individual, personal integrity, and devotion to the common good, as contrasted with the materialism and the justification of means by ends that Communists openly espouse and into which liberals are said to be drifting. In the broadest sense, such values, whatever name may be given them, are not the exclusive property of either liberals or conservatives. They underlie all sound attitudes toward life. Nevertheless, for conservatives, who by and large are a prosperous lot, to belittle material comforts and urge people to think more of spiritual things smacks of hypocrisy. We must take care that our message does not become a modern variant of the old notion that those whose lot on earth is hard should accept it with resignation and console themselves with the prospect of a reward beyond the grave. We should not forget that in this world, at least, spiritual values can be exemplified only by the living and that, with the dubious exception of a few ascetics, the cultivation of those values is not encouraged by starvation or grinding poverty.

Equally offensive and currently all too prevalent is

the prostitution of religious forms for business or political purposes. No power plant or police station can be put to use without a ceremony of dedication, and the politician who does not frequently call upon God can hardly hope to be elected. Advertisers use pictures of parents and children kneeling in prayer or gazing in rapt attention from the family pew as a means of inducing the purchase of whatever wares such hucksters may have to sell. These breaches of good taste have no essential connection with conservatism, but they tend to become identified with it because those who indulge in them are commonly conservatives. Actually, no conservative who knows his catechism would be guilty of such sacrilege. His reaction to it would resemble that of the contractor who sat with his competitors to await the opening of sealed bids for a municipal construction project and loudly demanded the return of his own proposal when the members of the city council filed in and the mayor opened their meeting with prayer.

To an unfortunate degree contemporary conservatism seems to be little more than nostalgia on the part of traditionally affluent groups for times that were more favorable to them or their kind. Many of these people appear to resent the narrowing of the gap between themselves and those heretofore less privileged. Such feelings, while understandable, are hardly commendable. As a rule, they are not openly expressed, but they come out in one way or another, and, I suspect, they do not altogether escape the notice of those toward whom they are directed. To some extent they are well founded, for diffusion of wealth has been accompanied by distressing vulgarity, and we have learned that the amenities of life can-

not be acquired entirely in the public schools but must be absorbed from an environment that has not long been open to large numbers of people. Yet surely it is only the undesirable consequences of the narrowing of the age-old gap that deserve criticism, not the narrowing itself.

The intellectual is also the butt of much conservative sarcasm. I have never known exactly what the term "intellectual" means, and I suspect that most people use it inexactly. We all have a fairly clear conception, however, of the sort of person whom the average unreluctant conservative dismisses contemptuously as an "egghead." In the case of the egghead the "native hue of resolution" that glows in the countenance of his conservative critic is commonly "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." If the egghead is not like that, he is apt to be something many conservatives deem worse, that is to say, a wit like Adlai Stevenson, who notoriously lacks that sense of the deadly seriousness of matters political with which the presidential rivals of 1960 were so generously endowed. In any event, the egghead is a disturbing fellow from the point of view of those conservatives for whom, to borrow an observation from Professor Hearnshaw, again by way of Russell Kirk, "it is commonly sufficient for practical purposes if, without saying anything, [they] just sit and think, or even if they merely sit."

Still another object of conservative mockery is the so-called "bleeding heart"—the man or woman who is more shocked by the penalty than by the crime and too readily accepts an unhappy childhood or an unfavorable environment as an excuse for delinquency. Misplaced sympathy of this sort undoubtedly does great harm, but should not every heart nevertheless bleed at the sight of

unhappiness—even deserved unhappiness—as much as it can bleed without ceasing to supply blood to the brain? Indeed, should not the hearts of conservatives bleed a little more than those of liberals, since liberals have their faith, however deluded, in better things to come, while conservatives are pretty sure these things will not come, at least not in the foreseeable future?

Conservatism and xenophobia are likewise frequent co-tenants of the same mind. The foreigner, whether in his own country or ours, can be made to bear a great deal of blame that we do not like to shoulder. We pour out our treasure to aid him, but he is not grateful. He can easily see that our way of life is superior to his, but he will not adopt it. He wears the wrong clothes, gesticulates in unseemly fashion, and kisses ladies' hands and sometimes even men's cheeks. He has other "ways that are dark" and "tricks that are vain," such as underselling us in the markets of the world and all too often even at home. If he has the sense to forswear his fatherland and become a citizen of ours, he clings to his alien ways while he steals the jobs of our less energetic workers and votes at the behest of politicians with whom one simply does not associate. All in all, the native-born unreluctant conservative finds the foreigner thoroughly offensive, excludes him from God's country if he can, and visits him abroad only to confirm the superiority of all things American—or British or whatever else may be native to such a conservative.

Historically, conservatism has often taken the form of an obstinate and by no means reluctant defense of the worst features of the existing order. The abolition of slavery was earnestly resisted, not merely on the defen-

sible ground that it could not immediately be accomplished without bloodshed, but on the false premise that slavery had been ordained of God and was therefore a positive good. Crusty though doubtless well-meaning naval officers argued in the nineteenth century that it was necessary to flog sailors in order to maintain discipline. The seventh Duke of Marlborough envisioned the breakdown of church and state alike if a man were permitted to marry his deceased wife's sister. Imprisonment for debt, torture of suspects, and the burning of widows—even cannibalism, according to Michael Flanders and Donald Swann—have all had their impassioned advocates who in this respect were by definition conservatives. There has seldom been a reform, however sensible, to which some conservative has not found plausible objections that other conservatives have solemnly and eagerly embraced. Indeed, when conservatives oppose the projects of dreamers, they tend to be scornful, and to attack even the dream, as though instead of considering it impracticable they fear that it may indeed come to pass.

When all else fails, the born conservative takes refuge in the argument of the entering wedge. If he is forced to admit that a proposed reform will not of itself be harmful, he opposes it because it may lead to other things less desirable and so eventually to that vaguely conceived but terrifying state of affairs known as chaos. This argument is akin to the theory that a boy should never take even a single drink because he might become a drunkard. Dickens satirized it in his account of a conversation between the young law clerk, David Copperfield, and the senior partner of the firm of Spenlow and Jorkins on the subject

of the Prerogative Office, which in those days was the place of deposit for original wills. Copperfield complained of the inefficiency of the establishment and the enormous fees that its principal registrar received for doing nothing. He finally went so far as to suggest that the Prerogative Office was a pernicious absurdity whose survival was attributable solely to its obscurity. Mr. Spenlow, though obliged to confess that the system might not be perfect, nevertheless pointed out that "nothing *was* perfect" and that "what he objected to was the insertion of the wedge." "Under the Prerogative Office," he said, "the country had been glorious," but, he continued, "insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious."

The conservative who adopts and adheres to his conservatism reluctantly has a different point of view. For him, the liberal's dream of a better world never ceases to have a fascination that is almost—but not quite—irresistible. His belief in gradualism does not mask indifference to social evils or a secret liking for them. When someone suggests that such-and-such a step will hasten the realization of a desirable end, he examines the suggestion sympathetically and rejects it only if he is convinced that he must. His skepticism about the early advent of the millennium does not deteriorate into a cynical assertion that nothing can be done about anything. His conservatism is not a vote of "no confidence" in the human race.

Such a man does not oppose a change in existing arrangements merely because it may have a more or less adverse effect upon himself. His conservatism is not merely a rationalization of his own interests. It is so difficult,

however, to avoid confusing one's own interests with ultimate truth that one ought to inquire frequently and searchingly whether one's announced reasons for objecting to something are one's real reasons. Can any of us be sure that our objections are anything more than the reflex actions of organisms whose comfort has been disturbed? If our views about political, economic, and social questions never fail to coincide with our private advantage, that can hardly be a true coincidence.

Today, for example, most businessmen are conservative in politics, but that has not always been true. In the Middle Ages, the merchants who sought to become independent of feudal overlords were the agents of change. Then and for a long time thereafter conservatism was associated with a landed aristocracy of military origin whose members looked down on anyone who was "in trade." In time, however, the men of commerce won recognition and built up a cozy system of guilds, monopolies, navigation acts, and other regulations designed to protect their pre-empted markets from intrusion. This scheme of things they sought to conserve, not against advocates of greater controls, but rather against forces let loose by the Industrial Revolution which eventually made the doctrine of *laissez faire* the basis of political and economic orthodoxy, even though in many respects no more than lip service was paid to it. Only when *laissez faire* was challenged in its turn, and the state once more undertook to control the conduct of business, did conservatism become identified with that exaltation of the rights of individuals and that opposition to governmental interference in economic affairs which now constitute its trade mark in most eyes.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to explain my use of the word "liberal" in this paper. I have tried to use that word to describe a forward-looking point of view which an intelligent conservative can share when it is not carried to extremes or pressed with unseemly haste. I have been unable, however, to avoid altogether the unfortunate connotations that have come to be associated with liberalism in the twentieth century. A hundred years and more ago a liberal was a man who sought to strike off the shackles of arbitrary power and leave people free to develop their potentialities to the full. Such a liberal tended to regard the state much as he would regard morphine, that is to say, as a remedy to be used sparingly and only of necessity. Gradually, this point of view was lost, and those who wanted to improve the condition of the people began to feel that the objects of their concern had to be shepherded to happiness by the state. In time reformers of that sort appropriated the word "liberal" and wholly distorted its original meaning. This, I realize, is a favorite cliché of present-day conservatives, but when it is uttered sorrowfully, and not with malicious glee, I think it rings true.

The change in the respective positions of liberals and conservatives as to the proper function of government illustrates a historical sequence that is apparently inescapable. Permanence is not a characteristic of the universe, much less of human society. Accordingly, unless conservatism succeeds in producing the kind of stagnation that existed for centuries in China or that stilled the intellectual ferment of the Arab world, it must necessarily attach itself to different things at different times. In this respect it is much like my personal reaction to any

proposed change of residence. Each time such a suggestion is made, I resist it as long and as firmly as I can, and then I move, only to become equally attached to the new abode. The thoughtful conservative will not overlook this characteristic of his faith. As he reflects, he will see that few things can be conserved forever and that in most cases conservatives can do no more than fight delaying actions.

Conservatism thus becomes a counsel of practicality against impatient idealism, a belief that the existing order should be handled with care, not shaken well before using. In this respect the conservative is Sancho Panza to the liberal Don Quixote. Even the most unreluctant and obnoxious of the breed serve that purpose to a degree. How much better would it be served by conservatives whose human sympathies and consequently genuine reluctance were evident to all! Sancho Panza, I need hardly remind you, loved his Don Quixote.

One may or may not accept past or current presidential estimates of the number of Americans whose clothes, food, or houses are to be considered "substandard," as the phrase goes, but their numbers are by no means negligible, and for them to embrace conservatism requires a long view of their interests. They can hardly be blamed for rising to the bait of the welfare state and forgetting about the hook and line to which that bait is attached. If they are to be convinced that they will ultimately benefit more from conservative measures than from radical panaceas, I believe that the convincing will have to be done by conservatives of the sort I describe as reluctant. Conservatism that is no more than a howl of anguish at the income tax will never win adherents among

the many whose circumstances are different. As Coleridge wisely said, "No assailant of an error can reasonably hope to be listened to by its advocates who has not proved to them that he has seen the disputed subject in the same point of view and is capable of contemplating it with the same feelings as themselves."

Excessive praise of things as they are will usually be self-defeating—if for no other reason, because everybody knows better. An honest man, though he may greatly admire many things that are, cannot admire everything. Such a man will not go up and down the land telling people that all is well—or would be but for the New Deal or the Fair Deal or the New Frontier or this man or "that man." If he sings "Oh beautiful for spacious skies," he will sing on at least through the line, "God mend thine every flaw." And if he is sincere, he will not leave the mending entirely to God but will set about it himself in ways that he deems practicable, not allowing himself to be too readily satisfied that it is impracticable to do what his conscience tells him ought to be done.

A sensible conservative will also avoid concerning himself with nonessentials. Falkland, though perhaps the wisest and noblest of the Cavaliers, overstated the conservative case when he said, in the House of Commons, "Mr. Speaker, when it is not *necessary* to change, it is necessary *not* to change." Some things are matters of indifference, others of mere preference, and some can be endured but were better avoided. To cling to any of these things with the same or even greater fervor than one displays in behalf of a truly important principle identifies one as a born conservative, not a reasoned but reluctant convert.

That a majority of conservatives will ever enter the fold reluctantly is not to be expected. Even the most conscientious of the minority will on occasion take a conservative position because of emotional bias or self-interest and without the slightest reluctance. We may anticipate, however, that as time goes on the reluctant elect will fall from grace less frequently and their numbers will increase to a point where their influence, if it cannot make conservatism glamorous, may at least make it more palatable to the world at large than it is today. Only as these things come to pass can conservatives hope to moderate the headlong rush of a revolutionary age without resorting to totalitarian methods whose use on the Right is much like their use on the Left.

Reluctance, of course, does not mean apology. A conservative who has to apologize for his conservatism should abandon it. This he will have no occasion to do if he has adopted and adhered to his principles in the spirit I have urged. A conservative mind tempered by a liberal heart will deliver him alike from complacency and from intolerance. Freed of the traits that make the born conservative repellent to his fellows, he need not and will not hesitate to proclaim vigorously, whenever and wherever appropriate, the common sense that his conservatism represents.

Not even "reaction" is necessarily a bad word. Some things are indeed worth going back to. The trouble is that they may no longer be where they were or, for that matter, anywhere else. In this respect the people of Great Britain have been unusually fortunate. They were able in the seventeenth century to restore their monarchy after a dozen grim years of the Puritan Commonwealth

and in the twentieth to bring about a change of government before it was too late to denationalize their steel industry. Our own experience with prohibition was perhaps more typical. Repeal was reaction of the right sort, but the false reform had done so much harm while it lasted that the situation which preceded it could never be wholly restored, much less used as a starting point for progress toward something better.

To the sincerely reluctant conservative there ought also to be allowed, by way of consolation if for no other reason, a full measure of nostalgia for those aspects of the good old days whose continuance or resumption can do no harm to his fellows. Let him indulge freely whatever taste he may have for such old-fashioned things as formal clothes, courtly manners, tuneful music, representational art, comprehensible or even rhyming poetry, novels about respectable people, and delicacy of speech in the company of ladies. Let him take or leave television and togetherness as he may prefer. It may be true, as Browning said, that "the best is yet to be", but that does not mean that nothing good has yet been or now is. There has been good in the past and there is good in the present. All this our ideal conservative will cherish and keep alive as long as it continues to be good but not, unless he must, one single moment longer.

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