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978-0-521-83934-1 - The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886

Jonathan Parry

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THE POLITICS OF PATRIOTISM

Between the 1830s and 1880s European problems had a profound impact on British politics. In *The Politics of Patriotism* Jonathan Parry examines the effect on the British Liberal movement of the most significant of these, including the 1848 revolutions, the unification of Italy, the Franco-Prussian War and the Eastern question. Dr Parry argues that these European problems made patriotism a major political question: governments were judged not only by their success in promoting British interests abroad, but also by the purity, potency and 'Englishness' of the political values they represented. *The Politics of Patriotism* makes a major contribution towards understanding three important aspects of nineteenth-century British history: British attitudes to Europe, contemporary notions of national identity, and the nature and dynamic of British Liberalism. Setting foreign and domestic policy discussions in a patriotic framework, Dr Parry offers a new analysis of the ideas that influenced the Liberal Parliamentary coalition and the turning-points that affected its vigour and unity as a political movement.

In two previous books Dr Parry has re-examined many of the central tenets of Victorian Liberalism, and its operation as a political force. *The Politics of Patriotism* takes this reinterpretation of the British Liberal movement significantly further, as well as offering a stimulating and original demonstration of the variety of ways in which European events affected British political debate. For both reasons it will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and students of British history.

JONATHAN PARRY is Reader in Modern British History at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Pembroke College. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, Dr Parry is also the author of *Democracy and religion: Gladstone and the Liberal party, 1867-1875* (Cambridge, 1986) and *The rise and fall of Liberal government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1993).

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‘And Do You Find, Sir,’ pursued Mr Podsnap, with dignity, ‘Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World’s Metropolis, London, Londres, London?’

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

‘The Constitution Britannique,’ Mr Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant school. ‘We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know’ (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). ‘The Constitution, Sir . . . We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favored as This Country.’ . . .

‘And other countries,’ said the foreign gentleman. ‘They do how?’

‘They do, Sir,’ returned Mr Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; ‘they do – I am sorry to be obliged to say it – *as* they do.’

‘It was a little particular of Providence,’ said the foreign gentleman, laughing; ‘for the frontier is not large.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ assented Mr Podsnap; ‘But So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as – as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say’, added Mr Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, ‘that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.’

Charles Dickens, *Our mutual friend* (1864–5), book 1, chapter 11

The English [political] system has too precarious a foot-hold in reason . . . is too penetrated through and through with fiction, for any great contest in the western world to be indifferent either to those who revere, or to those who despise and hate it. There is sure to be some side of such a contest with a lesson or a warning for England. We thus fight our battles vicariously in other countries, and hence the otherwise unaccountable warmth and sincerity with which foreign concerns are discussed by the keenest English politicians.

John Morley, ‘England and the war’, *Fortnightly Review*, 8 (1870), 479–80

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Acknowledgments

Perhaps it is fitting that this study, of the insularity that underlay nineteenth-century British international aspirations, owes a very great deal to one small town in East Anglia. It could not have been written without the help of the librarians of the Cambridge University Library. It has benefited enormously from the stimulus provided over the years by the Cambridge University students who took my third-year course on 'The British and Europe, 1815-1906' and more recently my jointly run Special Subject, 'Culture wars in mid-Victorian England, 1848-1859'. My colleagues in the History Faculty, and our graduate seminar, have thrown up many stimulating ideas. The Master, Fellows, staff and students of Pembroke College have provided the ideal environment in which to work, though, perhaps conscious of that generosity, they have also given me a large number of opportunities for administrative distraction from this project. Richard Fisher of the Cambridge University Press has been a magnificently supportive editor.

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It was always my intention to dedicate this book to Maurice Cowling, who died in August 2005. One of its aims is to consider how historians can best capture the complex dynamic of political history and especially the relation between political tactics, languages and ideas. Anyone who was taught by him or became a colleague of his – and I fell into both categories – will know that these issues preoccupied him enormously and that his approach to them was distinctive and sophisticated. In fact it was more sophisticated than he usually managed to convey in print. I have dedicated this book to his memory, partly because he inspired me to tackle these issues, but also, as is often the case in a pupil–teacher relationship, because I really wanted to come up with something that would satisfy him. Maurice was not an easy person to please, and this could be disconcerting to the thin-skinned. Sadly I shall never know what he would have made of it. It has taken me a long time to realise that, for all his trenchant and usually unprintable criticisms of other approaches to political history, he almost certainly never worked out an entirely satisfactory answer to these problems himself. It has taken me even longer to realise that probably there is no entirely satisfactory answer. Still, one can but try.