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978-0-521-08910-4 - George Joachim Goschen: The Transformation of a Victorian Liberal

Thomas J. Spinner

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*THE TRANSFORMATION OF A
VICTORIAN LIBERAL*

THOMAS J. SPINNER, JR.

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

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TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

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PREFACE

The life of George Joachim Goschen helps to explain how one element of nineteenth-century liberalism became a significant part of twentieth-century conservatism. In his portrait of Victorian England, G. M. Young observed: 'Of all decades in our history, a wise man would choose the eighteen-fifties to be young in.' At the time of the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851, Goschen was twenty years of age. When he entered the House of Commons in 1863, he was a member of the Liberal party. At the time of his death in 1907, he had joined the Conservative party, even though his principles and general outlook had changed very little.

British conservatism has never been dominated by reactionaries; conservatives are often caught in the dilemma of having to administer programmes which they, at one time, opposed. An innovation accepted over a period of time soon becomes a part of tradition and the conservative may find himself arguing that it is wise to conserve what he previously thought so destructive to the social fabric. The situation is equally difficult for the young reformer or liberal who sees his ideas accepted but does not wish to go beyond them. It is only logical that he will begin to find a greater community of interest with those who are now willing to preserve the reforms for which the reformer had previously fought. This helps to explain how Toryism and a satisfied *laissez-faire* liberalism eventually combined to form the modern Conservative party of Great Britain. Though the Tory was much more willing to employ the state for social purposes than the *laissez-faire* liberal, both could agree that society should remain hierarchical and divided into classes.

The British middle class succeeded in transforming the aristocratic state and sought to replace it with a *laissez-faire* market society. But the middle class soon came to fear the demands of

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the working class for Parliamentary regulation, the welfare state and socialism. The central conflict of contemporary history was apparent: the struggle between those with much wealth and property and those with little or none.

Goschen had been in the vanguard of the struggle to destroy aristocratic privilege and to create in its place a liberal state in which each individual would have equality of opportunity and all careers would be open to talent. His belief in a self-regulating market and free trade forced him to reject most proposals for social legislation.

Goschen's 'financial liberalism' was soon overshadowed by his 'liberal realism'. He was repelled by the idea of democracy, for he had no faith in the ability of the lower classes to govern the country and expected to be plundered when they obtained the vote. Democracy, he feared, would lead to equality and equality would destroy the liberty for which the middle class had fought.

It is unfortunate that Goschen is usually 'remembered' – if at all – because of Lord Randolph Churchill's 'forgetfulness'. His career is really of much greater importance: son of an immigrant, youthful merchant banker, member of the House of Commons for over thirty-five years, Cabinet member for sixteen years, Egyptian delegate of the Council of Foreign Bondholders, Special Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, and organizer of the Liberal Unionist party. It illuminates many of the problems confronted by the British in the late nineteenth century. It also demonstrates why one nineteenth-century Liberal entered the twentieth century as a Conservative.

It is a pleasure to record the kindness and assistance which I received while conducting my research in the United Kingdom. One year in Putney and one year in Hampstead have provided memories which my wife and I shall always cherish. Space prohibits me from listing all of the many people who aided me but special thanks are due to several organizations and libraries: the Royal Archives at Windsor, the Institute of Historical Research, the Public Record Office, the National Register of Archives, the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, the India Office Library,

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the Kent Archives Office, the Ipswich and East Suffolk Record Office, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the libraries of the universities of Birmingham, Cambridge, Durham and London, and the libraries of New College and Christ Church, Oxford, and the London School of Economics.

I would like to record my indebtedness to Her Majesty the Queen for her gracious permission to use material from the Royal Archives at Windsor. Thanks are also due to the following individuals who allowed me to work on their family papers and to quote extracts from them: the Duke of Devonshire, the Marquess of Salisbury, the Honourable David Smith, the Earl of Cranbrook, Earl St Aldwyn, Earl Spencer, Viscount Chilston and Hubert Elliot. I would also like to thank the present Lord Goschen and other members of his family for their assistance. Mr D. C. Goschen of Rusape, Rhodesia was especially helpful in providing several bundles of interesting letters. The Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford have kindly permitted me to quote from the Milner Papers.

My work on Goschen began while I was a graduate student at the University of Rochester. I am very grateful to Dr Willson H. Coates, the supervisor of my doctoral thesis, and to the other members of the Department of History at that university. The University of Vermont provided me with a summer grant in 1968 and a magnificent sabbatical in 1969–70. Professor Peter Stansky of Stanford University, the editor of this series, read several drafts of this study and provided me with invaluable advice and assistance. The faults and flaws are, of course, my own. This is the first biography of Goschen to appear since the authorized study prepared by his friend and political associate, Arthur R. D. Elliot, in 1911.

My deepest debt is to my wife and children. My wife has typed and retyped numerous drafts over the past few years as we tried to bring Goschen to the light of day. And in the midst of it all, two children were born. While the book might have been completed much sooner without the appearance of Carolyn and Tommy, it would not have been half so much fun.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BP: Earl of Balfour Papers
ChP: Joseph Chamberlain Papers
CrP: Earl of Cromer Papers
DP: Devonshire Papers
F.O.: Foreign Office
GP: William E. Gladstone Papers
HP: Sir Edward Hamilton Papers
K.A.O.: Kent Archives Office
MP: Milner Papers
P.R.O.: Public Record Office
RA: Royal Archives at Windsor
SP: Marquess of Salisbury Papers

Elliot: Arthur R. D. Elliot,
Life of George Joachim Goschen
(London, 1911)