

FALKLAND 1877

Matthew Arnold, excerpt

Lucius Cory, Lord Falkland, was born in tOw. His father, Sir Henry Cary, the first Lord Falkland, went to Ireland as Lord Deputy in 1622, and remained there until 1629. "The son was bred," says Clarendon, "in the court and in the university, but under the care, vigilance, and direction of such governors and tutors, that he learned all his exercises and languages better than most men do in more celebrated places." In 1629 the father, who appears to have been an able man, but violent and unfortunate, returned with broken fortunes to England. Shortly afterwards the son inherited from his maternal grandfather, the Lord Chief Baron Tanfield, who in his will passed over his daughter and her husband the ex-Lord Deputy, a good estate at Burford and Great Tew, in Oxfordshire. At nineteen, then, the young Lucius Cary came into possession of "all his grandfather's land, with two very good houses very well furnished (worth about £2000 per annum), in a most pleasant country, and the two most pleasant places in that country, with a very plentiful personal estate." But, adds Clarendon:

"With these advantages he had one great disadvantage (which in the first entrance into the world is attended with too much prejudice) in his person and presence, which was in no degree attractive or promising. His stature was low, and smaller than most men; his motion not graceful, and his aspect so far from inviting, that it had somewhat in it of simplicity; and his voice the worst of the three, and so untuned that instead of reconciling, it offended the ear, so that nobody would have expected music from that tongue; and sure no man was ever less beholden to nature for its recommendation into the world. But then no man sooner or more disappointed this general and customary prejudice. That little person and small stature was quickly found to contain a great heart, a courage so keen, and a nature so fearless, that no composition of the strongest limbs and most harmonious and proportioned presence and strength ever more disposed any man to the greatest enterprise; it being his greatest weakness to be too solicitous for such adventures. And that untuned tongue and voice easily discovered itself to be supplied and governed by a mind and understanding so excellent, that the wit and weight of all he said carried another kind of admiration in it, and even another kind of acceptance from the persons present, than any ornament of delivery could reasonably promise itself, or is usually attended with. And his disposition and nature was so gentle and obliging, so much delighted in courtesy, kindness, and generosity that all mankind could not but admire and love him."

For a year or two Falkland moved in the gay life of London, rich, accomplished, popular, with a passion for soldiering, with a passion for letters. He was of Ben Jonson's society at the "Apollo;" he mixed with Suckling, Carew, Davcnant, Walter, Sandys, Sir Kenelm Digby; with Selden and 1-Tobbes; with Rates of Eton and Chillingworth--great spirits in little bodies, these two last, like Falkland himself. He contracted a passionate friendship with a young man as promising and as universally beloved as himself, Sir Henry Morison. Ben Jonson has celebrated it; and it was on Morison's early death that Jonson wrote the beautiful lines which every one knows, beginning

"It is not growing like a tree,
In bulk, doth make men better be."

Falkland married, before he was of age, Morison's sister. The marriage gave mortal offence to his father. His father had projected for the young Lucius, says Clarendon, a marriage which might

mend his own broken fortunes and ruined credit at court. The son behaved admirably. He offered to resign his whole estate to his father, and to rely entirely upon his father's pleasure for his own maintenance. He had deeds of conveyance prepared to that effect, and brought them to his father for signature:

"But his father's passion and indignation so far transported him (though he was a gentleman of excellent parts), that he refused any reconciliation and rejected all the offers that were made him of the estate, so that his son remained still in the possession of his estate against his will, for which he found great reason afterwards to rejoice. But he was for the present so much afflicted with his father's displeasure that he transported himself and his wife into Holland, resolving to buy some military command, and to spend the remainder of his life in that profession. But being disappointed in the treaty he expected, and finding no opportunity to accommodate himself with such a command, he returned again into England; resolving to retire to a country life and to his books, that since he was not like to improve himself in arms he might advance in letters.

From "this happy and delightful conversation and restraint" Falkland was in **1639** called away by "the first alarm from the north," Charles the First's expedition to suppress the disturbances in Scotland. After the return of that expedition Falkland sat in the Short Parliament of **1640**, which preceded the Long Parliament. The "Short Parliament" sat but a few weeks. Falkland was born a constitutionalist, a hater of all that is violent and arbitrary. What he saw in the Short Parliament made a favourable and deep impression upon him. "From the debates which were there managed with all imaginable gravity and solemnity, he contracted" (says Clarendon) "such a reverence to Parliaments that he thought it really impossible they could ever produce mischief or inconvenience to the kingdom, or that the kingdom could be tolerably happy in the intermission of them."

In the next Parliament this faith in Parliaments was destined to be roughly shaken. The Long Parliament met at the end of **1640**. Falkland had a warm admiration for Hampden, and a strong disapprobation of the violent proceedings of the court. He acted with the popular party. He made a powerful speech against ship-money. He was convinced of Strafford's guilt, and joined in his prosecution. He spoke vigorously for the bill to remove the bishops from the House of Lords. But the reason and moderation of the man showed itself from the first. Alone among his party he raised his voice against pressing forward Strafford's impeachment with unfair and vindictive haste. He refused to consider, like the Puritans, the order of bishops as a thing by God's law either appointed or forbidden. He treated it as a thing expedient or inexpedient. And so foolish had been the conduct of the High Church bishops and clergy, so much and so mischievously had they departed from their true province, that it was expedient at that moment, Falkland thought, to remove the bishops from the House of Lords. "We shall find them," he said of the High Church clergy, "to have tithed mint and anise, and have left undone the weightier works of the law. The most frequent subjects, even in the most sacred auditories, have been the *jus divinum* of bishops and tithes, the sacredness of the clergy, the sacrilege of impropriations, the demolishing of Puritanism." But he was careful to add: "We shall make no little compliment to those to whom this charge belongs, if we shall lay the faults of these men upon the *order* of the bishops." And even against these misdoing men he would join in no injustice. To his clear reason sacerdotalism was repulsive. He disliked Laud, moreover; he had a natural antipathy to his heat, fussiness, and arbitrary temper. But he refused to concur in Laud's impeachment.

The Lords threw out the bill for the expulsion of the bishops. In the same session, a few months later, the bill was reintroduced in the House of Commons. But during this time the attitude of the

popular party had been more and more declaring itself. The party had professed at first that the removal of the bishops from Parliament was all they wanted; that they had no designs against episcopacy and the Church of England. The strife deepened, and new and revolutionary designs emerged. When, therefore, the bill against the bishops was reintroduced, Falkland voted against it. Haitipden reproached him with inconsistency. Hampden said, that "he was sorry to find a noble lord had changed his opinion since the time the last bill to this purpose had passed the House; for he then thought it a good bill, but now he thought this an ill one." But Falkland answered, that "he had been persuaded at that time by that worthy gentleman to believe many things which he had since found to be untrue, and therefore he had changed his opinion in many particulars as well as to things as persons."

The king's party availed themselves eagerly of this changed disposition in a man so much admired and respected. They pressed Falkland to come to the aid of the Crown, and to take office. He was extremely loth to comply. He disapproved of the policy of the court party. He was for great reforms. He disliked Charles's obstinacy and insincerity. So distasteful, indeed, were they to him, that even after he had taken office it was difficult to him,--to him, the sweetest-mannered of men,--to maintain towards Charles the same amenity which he showed towards every one else. Compliant as he was to others, yet towards the king, says Clarendon, "he did not practise that condescension, but contradicted him with more bluntness and by sharp sentences; and in some particulars (as of the Church) to which the king was in conscience most devoted; and of this his majesty often complained." Falkland feared that, if he took office, the king would require a submission which he could not give. He feared, too, and to a man of his high spirit this thought was most galling, that his previous opposition to the court might be supposed to have had for its aim to heighten his value and to insure his promotion. He had no fancy, moreover, for official business, and believed himself unfit for it. Hyde at last, by earnestly pleading the considerations which, he thought, made his friend's acceptance of office a duty, overcame his reluctance. At the beginning of 1642 Falkland became a member of the King's Council, and Secretary of State.

We approach the end. Falkland "filled his place," says Clarendon, "with great sufficiency, being well versed in languages, to understand any that are used in business and to make himself understood." But in August 1642 the Civil War broke out. With that departure of the public peace fled for ever Falkland's own. He exposed himself at Edge-hill with even more than his ordinary carelessness of danger. As the war continued, his unhappiness grew upon him more and more.

In this mood he came to Newbury. Before the battle he told one of his friends that "he was weary of the times and foresaw much misery to his country, and did believe he should be out of it ere night." But now, as always, the close contact with danger reanimated him:

"In the morning before the battle, as always upon action, he was very cheerful, and put himself into the first rank of the Lord Byron's regiment, then advancing upon the enemy, who had lined the hedges on both sides with musketeers; from whence he was shot with a musket in the lower part of the belly, and in the instant falling from his horse, his body was not found till the next morning; till when there was some hope he might have been a prisoner, though his nearest friends, who knew his temper, received small comfort from that imagination. Thus fell that incomparable young man in the four-and-thirtieth year of his age, having so much despatched the true business of life that the eldest rarely attain to that immense knowledge, and the youngest

enter not into the world with more innocence. Whosoever leads such a life, needs be the less anxious upon how short warning it is taken from him."

Falkland fell on the 20th of September 1643. His body was carried to Great Tew and buried in the churchyard there. But his grave is unmarked and unknown. The house too, in which he lived, is gone and replaced by a new one. The stables and dovecot, it is thought, existed in his time; and in the park are oaks and limes on which his eyes must have rested. He left his estates, and the control of his three children, all of them sons, to his wife, with whom he had lived happily and in great affection.

Falkland has for the imagination the indefinable, the irresistible charm of one who is and must be, in spite of the choicest gifts and graces, unfortunate,--of a man in the grasp of fatality. Like the Master of Ravenswood, that most interesting by far of all Scott's heroes, he is surely and visibly touched by the finger of doom. And he knows it himself; yet he knits his forehead, and holds on his way. His course must be what it must, and he cannot flinch from it; yet he loves it not, hopes nothing from it, foresees how it will end.

"He had not the court in great reverence, and had a presaging spirit that the king would fall into great misfortune; and often said to his friend that he chose to serve the king because honesty obliged him to it, but that he foresaw his own ruin by doing it."

Yes, for the imagination Falkland cannot but be a figure of ideal, pathetic beauty. But for the judgment, for sober reason? Here opinions differ.

Lord Carnarvon insisted on the salutary example of Falkland's moderation. The Dean of Westminster, who could not go to the Newbury meeting, wrote to say that in his opinion Falkland "is one of the few examples of political eminence unconnected with party, or rather equally connected with both parties; and he is the founder, or nearly the founder, of the best and most enlightening tendencies of the Church of England." And Principal Tulloch, whose chapter on Falkland is perhaps the most delightful chapter of his delightful book, calls him "the inspiring chief of a circle of rational and moderate thinkers amidst the excesses of a violent and dogmatic age."

Falkland himself was profoundly serious. He was "in his nature so severe a lover of justice and so precise a lover of truth, that he was superior to all possible temptations for the violation of either." Far from being a man flighty and unstable, he was a man, says Clarendon, *constant and pertinacious*; "constant and pertinacious, and not to be wearied with any pains." And he was, as I have said, a born constitutionalist, a hater of "exorbitances" of all kinds, governmental or popular. He "thought no mischief so intolerable as the presumption of ministers of state to break positive rules for reasons of state, or judges to transgress known laws upon the title of expediency or necessity; which made him so severe against the Earl of Strafford and the Lord Finch, contrary to his natural gentleness and temper." He had the historic sense in politics; an aversion to root-and-branch work, to what he called "great mutations." He was for using compromise and adjustment, for keeping what had long served and what was ready to hand, but amending it and turning it to better account.

Falkland looked for the best *power* or *purchase*, to use Burke's excellent expression, that he could find. He thought he found it in the Crown. He thought the Parliament a less available

power or purchase than the Crown. He thought renovation more possible by means of the triumph of the Crown than by means of the triumph of the Parliament. He thought the triumph of the Parliament the greater leap into chaos. He may have been wrong. Whether a better result might have been got out of the Parliament's defeat than was got out of its triumph we can never know. What is certain is that the Parliament's triumph did bring things to a dead-lock, that the nation reverted to the monarchy, and that the final victory was neither for Stuarts nor Puritans. And it could not be for either of them, for the cause of neither was sound. Falkland had lucidity enough to see it. He gave himself to the cause which seemed to him least unsound, and to which "honesty," he thought, bound him; but he felt that the truth was not there, any more than with the Puntans,--neither the truth nor the future. This is what makes his figure and situation so truly tragic. For a sound cause he could not fight, because there was none; he could only fight for the least bad of two unsound ones. "Publicans and sinners on the one side," as Chillingworth said; "Scribes and Pharisees on the other." And Falkland had, I say, the lucidity of mind and the largeness of temper to see it.

Shall we blame him for his lucidity of mind and largeness of temper? Shall we even pity him? By no means. They are his great title to our veneration. They are what make him ours; what link him with the nineteenth century. He and his friends, by their heroic and hopeless stand against the inadequate ideals dominant in their time, kept open their communications with the future, lived with the future. Their battle is ours too; and that we pursue it with fairer hopes of success than they did, we owe it to their having waged it and fallen.