

## The School Houses

### V.—SHAFTESBURY.

Anthony Ashley COOPER was born in 1621, the inheritor of a baronetcy and large estates. He was educated at Exeter College, Oxford and Lincoln's Inn. "His political career started in 1640, when he became Member of Parliament for Tewkesbury, but it is interesting to see that he never sat in the House until 1653 and then for Wiltshire. During the civil wars (1642-49) he appears to have been on both sides, as the tide turned. In 1642 he was with Charles I at Nottingham, but not committed to him : in 1643, however, the year of Royalist successes. he pledged the aid of the Dorset gentry to Charles and raised a regiment. In 1644 he joined the Roundheads and obtained command of their forces in Dorset, storming many royalist strongholds, including Corfe Castle.

From 1653-8 he sat in the House and spent much of his time leading opposition to the dictatorship of Cromwell. In 1659 he was imprisoned as a political suspect, but was released on joining the faction of Monk, who restored the monarchy; In 1660 he negotiated at Breda for the return of Charles II and there he sustained an internal injury in a coach smash.

After Charles' return, his rise was rapid - he became a Privy Councillor, a Baron, and in 1661 Chancellor of the Exchequer, which post he held until 1672. Without his other achievements, his name would be famous, if only because he was a minister of the 'first cabinet' or Cabal formed in 1667. In 1672 he became Earl of Shaftesbury, President of the Board of Trade and Lord Chancellor, in which post he acquired great distinction and honour. His career after 1672 once more becomes interesting. The government had been forced to declare war against the Dutch and, to obtain the necessary supplies, Charles II was forced to revoke his indulgence to men of all religions, in which Shaftesbury believed. Shaftesbury, seeing the House in favour of intolerant Anglicanism, changed sides and resigned the Chancellorship in 1673.

The rest of his career he spent organising opposition to the King, especially attacking James, Duke of York, the Catholic heir to the throne. His political manipulations culminated in the Popish Plot of Titus Oates, for whom he rallied the whole support of the Green Ribbon Club. This club was formed in 1675-at the King's Head Tavern in Chancery Lane by the opposition leaders and counted Buckingham, Shaftesbury and Monmouth among its members. It dominated the London mob, organised frantic electioneering and was the virtual controller of the Whig Party.

In 1678 Titus Oates had accused the Queen and the King's ministers of Popery and, after the engineered murder of the protestant Sir Edmund Godfrey, the country, mad with panic, embarked on a terrible and blind persecution of the accused. In 1679 Charles II. dissolved Parliament and Shaftesbury set himself to win the election by a lavish scattering to the public of beer and gold. After Shaftesbury's success, all went well for the persecutors until Lord Justice Scroggs, plucking up courage, dismissed a case, brought to court by Oates. Shaftesbury at once roused the London mob, as he attempted to do so often, and they assailed the Lord Chief Justice with missiles, throwing a dead dog into his coach. The Whigs, considerably encouraged, bent with fresh vigour to the attack. Shaftesbury organised monster petitions for the removal of James, which the Tories met with equally large petitions. In 1681, the Exclusion Bill defeated, Charles II again dissolved Parliament and called a new one at Tory Oxford, where the blue-ribboned Whigs of Shaftesbury daily fought with the red-ribboned Tories after the election. After one week of disagreement, the King dissolved this parliament, scaring by his resolute action the Whig opposition. Shaftesbury, forced to illegitimate action, projected the rising of the mobs and open rebellion, but, after its untoward discovery in 1682, he was forced to flee to Holland, where he died in exile the next year.

Stated as briefly as that, Shaftesbury's career seems unscrupulous and purely selfish, but, since all along he stood for the liberty of the English people, his vacillations are due to his rigid adherence - a

thing somewhat foreign to the politics of this age - to his idea. His name is tarnished however by his willingness to use both good and bad means to achieve his ends - as in the Popish Plot - and by his 'habit of betraying his friends, if it suited his purposes. Concerning Shaftesbury's character, Dryden is our best authority, for he has depicted him in his contemporary satire 'Absalom and Achitophel' with great justness, considering his political opposition to Shaftesbury. The man depicted is 'sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit,' although 'restless, unfixed in principles and place'; a description which seems to suit Shaftesbury admirably. Dryden accuses him of a personal political leadership, not a dispassionate one, and this may well have been true, but Shaftesbury's willingness to sacrifice office for opposition gives good grounds for doubt. His occupation of the Woolsack (1672-3) is praised because of his scrupulous exercise of fair, honest and swift justice. Dryden attributes his physical deformity and bad health to his great genius, in what are probably the most famous lines of satire on that

" . . . fiery soul, which working out its way  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay  
And o'erinformed the tenement of clay."

History must say that, although Shaftesbury may have been unscrupulous and have had his vision obscured on many occasions, his genius was great and his idealism real.

Like the Cecils and Churchills, the Cooper family also has contributed its famous men. to our history, for it was the descendant of Shaftesbury that early last century promoted legislation to create better Working conditions for the poor.

Members of Shaftesbury House are drawn mainly from the Grays Ward and the House colour is green. .

J.C.T.