

COUNT CAMILLE BENSO DE CAVOUR,  
SARDINIAN PRIME MINISTER.

It is scarcely too much to claim for Count Cavour that to him is mainly owing the extraordinary success of the constitutional or representative form of government in Piedmont, with a population who were believed to be unfitted by temperament for the exercise of such functions, and who certainly, during the earlier years of their Parliamentary system, did their utmost to fulfil the prophecies of their enemies. For, if Count Cavour, as a Minister, is not exactly the man whom a cautious people like the English would place at the head of affairs, more especially of the finances, he is of a temper of mind exactly that which was required in the comparative infancy of the Piedmontese Parliament, when boldness, firmness, energy, and tact, were required, in order to control the State, yet would have only provoked opposition, if not known to be allied with a strong sympathy for the wants, the wishes, and even the foibles, of the people.

Count Camille de Cavour assisted at the very birth of the Piedmontese Parliamentary system. The late King Carlo Alberto had resolved — seeing the tendency of the times — to bestow on his subjects a constitutional form of government, rather than find himself ungraciously forced to make such a concession. Still, it was but the resolve, not the execution—for which, indeed, a more astute and enlarged mind than that of Carlo Alberto might have been puzzled to find a safe form.

At this moment he received, among other requests of the same kind, a deputation from certain citizens of Turin, praying for the grant of a Constitution. The deputation presented itself to the Count Avet, Minister of Grace and Justice; and, the King having demanded to know the names of those of whom it was composed, it appeared that they were Brofferio (with whose name the public are familiar in the debates of the Piedmontese Parliament), Count Santa Rosa (afterwards Minister), Col. Durando (now General and Minister of War and Marine), and the Count Camille de Cavour. It is said that when the King heard this last name mentioned he at once saw that the matter was serious and worthy of attention. The consequence of this was that the King finally resolved to perfect his idea. He called around him the most able men on the Constitutional side, and in the end there came forth what was called the "Statuto"—a term equivalent to the French "Chartre"—which, however, was but a crude and imperfect work, little more than a copy of the French Charter of 1830, which, at the very epoch of the appearance of its Sardinian prototype, was about to be trampled under foot by the Republicans of February, 1848.

And why did the late King of Sardinia thus pay respect to the name of Count Camille de Cavour? In the first place, there was the fortunate accident that he lived in the Royal memory. Of an ancient and wealthy family of Piedmont, and connected with the most noble houses of that country, the young Cavour had been appointed, while yet a mere youth, a page at the King's Court. Here the causticity of his wit and the independence of his character soon distinguished him, though in a manner not to render him a favourite of courtiers. He left the Court for the Military Academy, where he obtained the rank of Lieutenant of Engineers. But, although of a high and wealthy family,

he was but a cadet; and in Piedmont military promotion was at that date almost the sole privilege of the more favoured children of birth and fortune. Nor had he made friends at the Court. The result was, that he gave up the military career; and, leaving his country, he resided at Geneva for some time, and afterwards in England. Those who have followed his subsequent career will not be surprised at its events, when they consider in what atmosphere the

youth and early manhood of the statesman were passed.

In 1847, at the period of the recognition of the Count's name by the King, he had already made himself a political notability in Piedmont, by becoming editor of the *Risorgimento*, a journal of daringly Liberal tendencies, yet pervaded by the aristocratic spirit as regarded the tone of its articles.

To return, however, to the Count Cavour. He took no part, as Minister, in the first organisation of the new Constitution, but held a distinguished position in the Senate. His attitude, like his character, resembled somewhat that of our Earl Grey, the first Reform Minister. A rather haughty independence was mistaken by the multitude for hostility to popular claims; but his unquestionable talent commanded respect even from those who dreaded his aristocratic spirit. So long as D'Azeglio was the Minister of Victor Emmanuel, Count Cavour confined himself to a temperate opposition in public, while counselling the King in private. In October, 1850, Count Cavour was called upon to take office under that Constitution which he had been so instrumental in bringing into the world. He succeeded Count Pierre

Derossi de Santa Rosa as Minister of Agriculture and Commerce. His ability was at once recognised, both by his colleagues and by the public, and he took a lead alike in the Ministry and in the Chamber. Uniting with the popular sympathies the discipline of the aristocrat, he speedily took a position of command, although his influence did not yet place him in the highest rank as a Minister. From October, 1850, to May, 1852, when, for a moment, the King wavered in his struggle with the Papa See, Count Cavour continued the life of the Ministry. After the latter epoch he endeavoured, though unsuccessfully, himself to form a Government, by a species of "Coalition," composed of the more moderate men of his own and other parties. He failed; but in the following year he was more successful, and ever since he has been Prime Minister. During the interval between his first appointment, on the death of Santa Rosa, and his accession to the Premiership, he has successively filled the offices of Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Commerce, Minister of Finance, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and President of the Council. His present post is that of President of the Council, with the functions of Prime Minister, to which he adds those of Minister of Finance.

Count Cavour appears to be exactly the man required by Piedmont in its present condition—able to conciliate the people, yet holding firmly the reins of power; strong in will, yet politic and conciliatory in action; deeply imbued with those ideas of progress which rest upon the self-development of nations rather than on the efficacy of special political dogmas. He has invigorated the whole administrative system of his country, while launching her in new ways of commerce and finance; and it is due to him to say that all his plans are distinguished by foresight and grandeur. He owes his success to his mind alone, for he is not one of the most attractive of orators.



COUNT CAMILLE DE CAVOUR, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF SARDINIA.